A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF

WOMEN IN MURALS IN KWAZULU-NATAL

By

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Submitted inpart fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters in Arts, in the Department of Fine Art and History of Art in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Durban-Westville.

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DECLARATION

The Registrar (Academic)
UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

Dear Sir

I, Miss Sharlene Khan

REG. NO.: 9505112

Hereby declare that the dissertation/thesis entitled
'A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN IN
MURALS IN KWAZULU-NATAL'
is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not
been submitted in part or full for any degree or to any other
University.

Sharlene Khan   November 2002
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 (Signature)   **Date**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PERSONAL NOTE

This M. A. (Fine Art) course has been a long, often frustrating, journey, one which has challenged my thinking, and laid the foundation of a new consciousness. Initially, like many others, I rejected the notions of feminism, firstly because I didn't understand it well and secondly because it seemed to contradict some of my fundamental cultural and religious beliefs.

However, reading books by bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins initially had a major impact on me. hooks and Collins, with their black feminist perspectives, made me identify with feminism in my context. Even though I am an Indian, living on the African continent has subjected me to the same problems experienced by African men and women (as well as some unique to a displaced Indian), and I have thus been able to identify with an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Applying some of the principles advocated by these two women, my mind began to identify many of the stereotypes that I was portraying in my own work, and stereotypical thinking that I was subject to.

During the course of this study, I criticise various examples of mural imagery, co-ordinators, muralists and projects in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). I would like to caution that these criticisms don't mean that I don't like these murals or the individuals who planned or executed these projects. Although Community Mural Projects (CMP) may seem to come under a lot of criticism, this is only because of the many projects that they have done throughout the region of KZN. CMP 's vital contribution to the mural scene in Durban cannot be overvalued as they are responsible for the flourishing of murals in Durban, specifically, and the South African mural scene at large. Their role in job creation, by giving many artists the opportunity to participate in a mural, get paid and gain experience, has been recognised by the Durban Metro Council. Any criticism of them or any other muralist (myself included) is offered as critical insight that is hoped will bring awareness to the reader and, most of all, other artists, to the messages we send when we subconsciously recycle stereotyped imagery. It is hoped that this critical insight will not serve as a barrier to the appreciation of these murals.

ABSTRACT

Since the inception of feminism, much research has been and continues to be done on the representation of women in various fields. This research project contributes to research on women, by conducting a critical analysis of the depiction of women in murals in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Murals have flourished tremendously in the 1990's in South Africa, and though murals have been documented in various ways, there continues to be a lack of critical research into this public art form.

The majority of images painted are those of African men, followed by African women, as murals are generally aimed at previously disadvantaged communities. Mural teams are predominantly made up of African males, who negotiate the roles of women in murals. Murals have been used extensively to represent issues of the 'new' South Africa, but here, the roles of women have been secondary to issues of national rebuilding. Men are still seen as the active participants of the liberation struggle, while women are depicted as having played a passive role in the past and in post-apartheid society. The depiction of women tends to follow sexist modes of representation, and are usually cast in stereotypical roles. This is partly due to the use of popular culture media (e.g. magazines, advertising and books) serving as inspiration for muralists. Patriarchal thinking, prevalent in both African and Western society, informs the popular media, which use generalised stereotypes to communicate with their audience. Muralists in turn, use images from popular media, thus contributing to the recycling of sexist, patriarchal values and ideologies about women.

This thesis finds that murals are influenced by Western dualistic thinking. This either/or thinking sets people apart as opposites, and with regard to women, it usually sets one set of female characteristics against another. An Afrocentric feminist epistemology, however, advocates a both/and thinking, which recognises that identity is fluid, and that women are multi-faceted people, who can embody various, often seemingly, contradictory characteristics.

There are few black female muralists, and this is partially due to the fact that many black women have not been given enough exposure to gain experience in mural-

making. However, one finds that female muralists have also perpetuated stereotypes of women, and this is primarily due to a lack of critical awareness among muralists. This research project suggests that it is thus essential to make muralists aware of their role in the perpetuation of stereotypes, for stereotypes and ideologies about women to be challenged and re-addressed.

GLOSSARY

BAT - Bartel Arts Trust

CFAD - Centre for Fine Art, Animation and Design

CMP - Community Mural Projects

H.R. - Human Rights

KZN - KwaZulu-Natal

R.D.P - Reconciliation and Development Project

SABC - South African Broadcasting Corporation

S.A.P.S - South African Police Services

UDW - University of Durban-Westville

MURAL SITES RESEARCHED

UMLAZI TOWNSHIP:

1. 'Umlazi Station Mural' (1996 – 1998): Umlazi Station. Umlazi, Durban. Co-ordinator: Stembiso Sibisi
2. 'KwaMnyandu Station Mural' (1993): KwaMnyandu Station. Umlazi, Durban. Community Mural Projects
3. 'KwaMnyandu Station Mural' (1997): KwaMnyandu Station. Umlazi, Durban. Community Mural Projects
4. 'Ogwini Mural' (1994/1995): Ogwini Comprehensive Technical School. Umlazi, Durban. Community Mural Projects

LAMONTVILLE TOWNSHIP:

Mural on a Fence: date and muralist unknown

KWA-MASHU TOWNSHIP:

5. 'Thembalihle Station mural' (1997): Tembalihle Station. KwaMashu, Durban. Co-ordinator: Maphoyisa Maphosa
6. 'Crèche mural' (1999): Private crèche. KwaMashu, Durban. Khehla Ngobese

LADYSMITH:

7. 'Women's Wall' (1995): Windsor Secondary School. Ladysmith. Co-ordinators: Lallitha Jawahirilal, Vedant Nanackchand, Vukile Ntuli with UDW Fine Art students
8. 'Windsor Nameplate' (1995): Windsor Secondary School. Ladysmith. Co-ordinators: Lallitha Jawahirilal, Vedant Nanackchand, Vukile Ntuli with UDW Fine Art students
10. 'Ladysmith Provincial Hospital mural' (1997): Ladysmith Provincial Hospital, Ladysmith. Co-ordinators: Lallitha Jawahirilal, Vukile Ntuli with UDW Fine Art students

ESCOURT:

11. 'Escourt Station Mural': date and muralist unknown
12. 'Escourt Fence Mural' (1996): muralist unknown. Fence leading to market place in Escourt

TONGAAT:

13. 'Blue Ribbon Murals': date and muralist unknown
14. 'Anandben Creche': Shrimati Anandben Desai Pre-school. Cynthia Nair, Vaneda Pillay, Geeta Ramparsad, Sharlene Khan

CENTRAL DURBAN:

15. 'Nomkhubulwana Mural' (1994): Early Morning Market. Warwick Ave, Durban. Community Mural Projects
16. 'Nomkhubulwana Mural' (2001): Early Morning Market. Warwick Ave, Durban. Community Mural Projects
17. 'Medwood Garden Mural' (1993): Medwood Garden, facing Pine Street. Durban. Community Mural Projects
18. 'Blue Lady Mural' (1993): Public facility. Sydenham Road, Durban. Community Mural Projects
19. 'Khanya Building Mural': date and mural unknown. Carlisle Road, Durban.
20. 'Broad Street Mural' (2000): Broad Street Police Station. Durban. Students from Centre for Fine Art, Animation and Design
21. 'Bat Centre Mural' (1995): Bartel Arts Centre. Victoria Embankment, Durban. Community Mural Projects
22. 'Bat Africolor Mural' (2001): Africolor Design Shop at the Bat Centre, Durban. Lalelani Mbhele
23. 'S.A.P.S Mural' (2001): South African Police Services Emergency Room, CR Swart, Stanger Street, Durban. Clement Dube, Raksha Gorbadan and Ivan dos Santo Serra

24. 'Human Rights Mural' (1993): left hand side of prison wall. Durban. Community Mural Projects
25. 'Human Rights Mural' (1997): right hand side of the wall facing Walnut Road. Durban. Community Mural Projects
26. 'Technikon Natal Mural' (1989): Technikon premises, Berea, Durban. Clive van den Berg with Technikon Natal Fine Art students
27. 'Technikon Natal Mural' (1990): Technikon premises, Berea, Durban. Students from Technikon Natal's Fine Art department
28. 'Kwa-Muhle Museum Mural' (1998): Kwa-Muhle Museum. Ordinance Road, Durban. Community Mural Project
29. 'Durban Magistrates Court Mural' (1997): Durban Magistrate's Court, Somtseu Road, Durban. Co-ordinator: Vukile Ntuli with UDW Fine Art students
30. 'UDW Aids Mural' (1999): University of Durban-Westville premises, Durban. Apt Artworks with UDW Fine Art students
31. 'UDW R.D.P Mural' (1995): University of Durban-Westville premises, Durban. UDW Fine Art students
32. 'King Shaka Arts Centre Mural' (2001): King Shaka Arts Centre, Greyville, Durban. Khehla Ngobese

INTRODUCTION

In gender studies in South Africa the roles, depiction and representation of women in many areas have come under scrutiny in the last decade, in their relation to men, other women, and past and present South African circumstances and society.

Likewise, cultural studies in post-apartheid South Africa are a vibrant, constantly changing area of study. Post-apartheid society is filled with many challenges and cultural studies enters this challenge by trying to examine the formation of identities in terms of the contemporary configurations of gender, sex, class, power, nation, and race (Thornton, 2000: 25). Cultural studies concentrates on 'the culture of the popular, the ordinary, the everyday, and the "normal", seek[ing] to show how these practices discipline and shape our existence' (ibid.: 39). Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (1999: 3-4) define cultural studies as the study of 'meaning-making practices'... at the 'heart of all cultural production and consumption', and situate visual culture within the area of cultural studies. According to Evans and Hall, the image is the central point of contemporary visual culture and is often presented as a simple, substantive entity which has the capacity to reference things, people, places and events of the 'real' world in irreducible, unquestionable ways. Visual culture studies seek not only to question images, but the institutions that create these images and invest them with meaning (ibid.: 4).

Extensive studies have been done abroad on the representation of women in the visual fields of television, film, the print media, as well as the many forms of art ('fine art', music, drama). This trend has also gained momentum in South Africa in the 1990's. This study focuses on the area of public art, murals specifically, and the representation of women in this public forum. Murals in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) have flourished tremendously since the early 1990's. The overwhelming majority of murals examined in this research project were painted during the 1990's. According to Sabine Marschall[1] (2002) there were only a comparatively small number of community murals produced in South African cities and townships during the 1980's and early

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[1] Marschall has done extensive work on murals since 1997, culminating in the book *Community Mural Art in South Africa* (2002), which is bound to become a seminal work in mural studies in South Africa.

`90's. Due to the impermanent nature of murals, most murals from this period have not survived, although some are known through documentation. This research combines the areas of gender, cultural and visual studies in its critical analysis of the depiction of women in murals in KwaZulu-Natal.

The overwhelming majority of images painted of women in murals are those of African women. Thus, this research focuses more on issues pertaining to African South Africans, while also examining issues that could be seen as relevant to women of all races.[2] During the course of this study, many parallels are drawn between the socio-economic and political circumstances of African-American women in the United States and black women in South Africa. The reasons for this are that the current socio-economic situation of black women in South Africa bears much resemblance to that of African-American women in the United States during the 1950's - 1980's. Pauli Murray's comparison between the status of black women and white women in the U.S. bears much in common with black women in South Africa currently:

> When we compare the position of the black woman to that of the white woman, we find that she remains single more often, bears more children, is in the labor market longer and in greater proportion, has less education, earns less, is widowed earlier and carries a relatively heavier economic responsibility as family head than her white counterpart (Murray quoted in hooks, 1981: 147).[3]

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[2] Racial terminologies in South Africa are contentious. The model I have employed is that general references to people who are non-white are termed 'black'. Distinctions though are necessary: white, Indian, Coloured. Indigenous/'native' people (Bantu speaking people and the Khoisan) are termed 'African'. Where the term 'black' is capitalized ('Black'), it is because it is a direct quote, as presented by the author/s.

[3] There are, of course, major differences between African-American women and black women in South Africa. For instance, in America, whites form the overwhelming majority (Collins, 2000: 101), while in South Africa, it is Africans who form the majority, but are among the poorest in the country. There have been significant rises in literacy rates among African-American women since the 1970's, while South Africa still has a high illiteracy rate, especially among rural African women. Thus, although there are similarities between African South African women and African-Americans, there are also marked differences in their situations.

Besides these problems, women, especially black women in South African society, also experience daily problems of illiteracy, racism, sexism, violent crimes against them and their children, as well as the effects of the rampant Aids epidemic. This study also often draws on cultural stereotypes and attitudes towards African-American women found in U.S. cultural productions, as they are also applicable to representations of black women in South African popular cultural productions. South African popular media have largely been influenced by U.S. culture (especially since the 1980's), and this hegemonic hold of U.S. popular culture on South African society (especially on the youth) have been criticized by many (e.g. Flockemann, 2000: 145; Jamal, 2000: 198; Robins, 2000: 421).

It is generally agreed that contemporary South African society is a patriarchal one, where men dominate women in many spheres – be it religious, economic or socio-political (Mabandla, 1995: 67). Patriarchy, quite simply, suggests that priority and bias are given to one sex, i.e. the male, in areas of legal, political, economic and even cultural activities (Minor, 1994: 152). Academics disagree however, whether patriarchy is a strictly colonial influence or whether it has traditional African roots as well. Many people think that most African societies have traditionally been patriarchal where women were subordinate to men (Collins, 2000: 260). Christine Qunta (1987) argues that many pre-colonial societies in Africa were matriarchal, and that traditional African societies have been misinterpreted as being patriarchal due to academics using Western standards to evaluate the importance of African women in their societies. Qunta (1987a: 80) believes that European colonization of South Africa had a dramatic negative effect on the lives of African women who were respected members of their society with valued economic, social and political roles. Qunta says that African women were reduced to 'landless farm labourers, domestic servants and perpetual minors', by the mindsets of the colonizers and the subsequent legislature that followed (ibid.).[4]

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[4] Qunta (1987: 37) does concede however, that prior to colonialism, there was already changing family dynamics. According to Qunta, in primitive communalistic African society, men and women were of equal status and a division of labour existed that did not privilege the one over the other. In the communal household the management of the household was as socially necessary as the provision of food by men. Qunta suggests that relations between men and women were altered with the emergence of different classes in society that coincided with domesticating animals and breeding of herds. With the surplus over and above the cost of maintenance, the man responsible for the procuring of food and

Collins' (2002: 260) instead argues that women were and continue to remain subordinate to men within traditional African communities and this was confirmed during the constitution-making process in South Africa during the early 1990's (Mabandla, 1995). There were intense debates over traditional rights versus human rights, when female activists validated the constitutional rights of traditions and customs but also maintained that some of these customs violated women's rights, especially that of women's equality to men (ibid.). Many African female activists have acknowledged the immense influence Western patriarchal thinking has had on African societies, but also recognize that even within traditional pre-colonial African societies elements of patriarchy did exist.

It is agreed upon however, that Western patriarchal thinking is still very influential in South African society today and perpetuated in various fields and disciplines, including the field of cultural productions. Various feminists seek to point out the 'masculinist bias' found in cultural productions and to show that this gender bias is not a 'natural, common-sense way of deciphering the world' (Minor, 1994: 154), but is in fact constructed through various means. Murals too are reflective of patriarchal attitudes. For instance, men are depicted in a variety of roles compared to women and while there may be some images of men in stereotypical roles, most of the images of women conform to stereotypical representations of women found generally in popular media. It can be suggested that the patriarchal values of male muralists (who often represent the experiences of women) has an influence on the portrayal of women. Thus this study seeks to expose the continued influence of Western patriarchal thinking on the representation of women in murals.

When discussing women, their experiences and lives, the issue of identity becomes pertinent. This issue of identity is also crucial to the context of women and murals. With the freedom of South Africa achieved officially in 1994, it became the goal of many to assert, reconstruct and explore the range of identities of the country.

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implements necessary came to own these. This was the beginning of the dominance of man, as a result of his physical ability to capture animals. The woman's task within the household lost its public character. It was no longer the concern of the society; it became a private service.

Apartheid served to 'fix' spaces and identities (Nuttall and Michael, 2000c: 6), using differences to segregate people and whole communities. In post-apartheid South Africa this redefining of national, racial, gender, class and ethnic identities has become exploited in the media, arts and even in murals. Many academics believe that in terms of the formation of identity, a constructivist model is appropriate as it is believed that identity is constructed through various factors and influences. Marschall (2002: 167) argues that in South Africa murals can play an important role in negotiating identities, challenging stereotypes and presenting new value systems - this is partly due to the high rate of illiteracy. A study of murals can thus reveal how identities, specifically those of women, have shifted and changed. The issue of identity with regard to the depiction of women will be dealt with in chapter two.

This study will show that both popular media and murals often portray and disseminate patriarchal ideologies and stereotypes about women and that mural imagery of women is often informed by popular culture imagery (and occasionally 'fine art' images). This research project intends to analyze the inter-relationship between the popular media and murals, and 'fine art' and murals, as well as the patriarchal values that are evident in all these cultural forms. It will be shown how these inter-linking factors affect the representation of women in murals.

The initial chapter explains and expands on feminism and Afrocentric feminist perspectives as the primary theoretical perspectives that have informed this study, their relevance to the depiction of female imagery in murals and the people who create these murals. The second chapter discusses issues of female identity and the stereotypical representation thereof in the South African context, examining specifically the depiction of women with regard to South African history and multiculturalism in the 'new' South Africa. This chapter also examines the influence of the popular media on murals looking at similarities and differences between these two cultural productions.

The third chapter deals with the influence of Western dualisms on mural imagery, firstly examining the mother-type image and then comparing it with the seductress-type image. The dualism of male activity versus female passivity, influenced by early

Greek thought about masculine/feminine attributes, is shown to still influence patriarchal ideas about men as agents and women as passive beings. The last part of this chapter examines the association of women with nature to the extent of using women as an allegory for nature. It is also seen that most often, white muralists tend to associate women with nature, whereas black muralists associate women with tradition. This study will conclude by suggesting that more awareness by muralists in their role in perpetuating and even constructing stereotypes is needed to effect change in mural depictions of women.

This study is primarily an iconographic study – an examination of the symbols, images, subjects and themes associated with women in murals in KZN. This study will seek to determine the symbolic and allegorical meanings of these female images in these works of art. More than this though, it will attempt what is properly termed as iconological analysis, in terms of trying to situate the works of art within its historical, socio-political contexts, as well as judging the sources that contribute to stereotypical representations.

Erwin Panofsky in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (1955) distinguished between iconography and iconology, with iconography being the identification of subject matter in art, while iconology was the analysis of historical conditions, specific themes and concepts expressed by the rendered objects and events. This type of analysis is important in trying to explain the significance of symbolical and/or allegorical subject matter such as women being used as allegories for elements of nature. According to an anonymous source online[5], iconographic objects have disappeared in the modern period due to the individualistic nature of art. This source concedes however, that movements like Cubism's and Dadism usage of everyday objects such as newspapers, soup cans, photographs and comic-book figures are reflective of modern culture and therefore can still be viewed as iconographic symbols. This statement is contentious, as iconographic symbolism and allegory still exist today in various guises, and this study will seek to show that traditional Western beliefs about women and their roles still exist in thinking and society today. In murals

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[5] Website: "Iconography," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000. http://encarta.msn.com

like the Umlazi Station Murals, certain images are suggestive of societal behaviour and codes that may not be understandable to all communities but largely by the community for whom it is created. This therefore does not diminish the iconographic potential of the image.

Due to the scope of this research report, the study of the representation of women in murals in KZN has been limited in certain ways. The portrayal of women in other media and disciplines has not been engaged with extensively. Only specific popular media representations (advertisements, magazines) have been compared to mural representations, as similar stereotypes were evident in both these media and murals. Moreover the above mentioned popular media representations may have been used as source material for some of the mural images of women and therefore had a direct influence. Hence such media have been discussed in order to trace the origin of certain stereotypical representations of women in murals. This study has not been able to present statistical analysis in the form of questionnaires and responses gauged from either the mural audience or all the muralists. Instead only selected muralists and/or mural co-ordinators where chosen to respond to questions regarding the meaning or symbolism pertaining to specific mural imagery that they were involved in executing or (at times) were familiar with its origin. I am also aware that I have privileged my reading of certain images over different viewers' readings or what may have been the intended meaning of the images. Associations that I make are also influenced by my background and education and may not have been intentional or conscious associations made by the artists.

Panofsky's methodology of iconographical study incorporated different aspects in order to interpret symbols and representations (Turner, 1996). A correct identification of artistic motifs needed to examine the historical context, the history of style, the history of types and the history of culture[6] (ibid: 91). Panofsky's concept of iconology

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[6] The definition of Panofsky's concepts are explained in *The Dictionary of Art* (Turner, 1996: 91) as:
History of Style: 'the manner whereby, under varying historical conditions, objects and events were expressed in forms';
History of Types: 'the manner whereby, under varying historical conditions, specific themes or concepts were expressed in objects and events';
History of the Culture: 'the manner whereby, under varying historical conditions essential goals of the human spirit were expressed in specific themes and concepts'.

is not uncontentious though. In the 1960's and 1970's, with the rise of a more sociologically orientated art history, other aspects became pertinent in art historical analysis. The function of a work of art with regard to its meaning, as well as the role of the public became equally influencing factors (ibid.). Thus any study that engages in iconographical analysis of works needs to consider many different aspects. The scope of this dissertation has limited the analysis to that of an examination of the iconography without considerations of style. The physical location of the work in a specific space has only been examined in terms of how the demographics of the audience may have had an effect on the portrayal or removal of certain representations.

Initially though, some terms of reference that are relevant to an examination of the inter-relationship between murals, 'fine art' and popular media must be clarified in this introduction - i.e. questions of ideology, values and the role of the viewer in popular culture. It is imperative though to briefly define murals and give an indication of their function in South African society.

Murals – definition and function:

Murals (as used in this context) are painted images found on walls. Murals can be painted by individuals or structured groups[7] and could be school or government-funded projects, or commercial ventures. Murals have been seen by artists and various organizations as an effective means of bringing art into communities. Commercial enterprises too, have used murals for advertising and as a means of contributing to community upliftment. This study examines murals in the KZN region only

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[7] In Durban, the mural scene was given its impetus by Community Mural Projects (CMP), under the direction of Terry-Anne Stevenson and Ilse Mikula and various muralists who worked with them. Many of these artists went on to work (and co-ordinate) other independent mural projects. Apt Artworks, a Johannesburg based mural movement, under Ashley Heron and Nicky Blumenfeld, have, in conjunction with the Department of Health, been responsible for a number of HIV/Aids murals around KZN (and South Africa in general). The University of Durban-Westville (UDW) mural team predominantly painted the murals in the Ladysmith area. The UDW mural team has also been involved in a number of murals in Durban. Leonie Hall, an individual muralist, has also organised a few murals in Durban, as well as Bronwyn Findley, who does more commissioned commercial murals. These are not the only groups that have participated in murals in KZN, but the muralists from these various groups/institutions have been responsible for the vast majority of murals in the province.

(specifically Ladysmith, Escourt, Umlazi, Lamontville, KwaMashu, Pietermartizburg, Tongaat and Durban), and this is partially due to my own experience of working on quite a few murals in this province.

One of the primary functions of murals is the beautification of urban landscapes (especially degenerate areas), with many muralists enjoying the decorative elements of painting murals and taking up the challenge of relating them to their immediate environment. Various muralists and mural project co-coordinators were interviewed to gauge their perspectives on mural imagery in general, as well as imagery they had specifically executed.[8] The use of the artists' statements is not meant to be the final reading of any subject matter but as stated earlier, only to present the perspectives of the artists.

One of the main attractions of mural-making to artists is that most murals are completed in the eyes of onlookers. Ordinary people can observe the tedious, unglamorous reality of painting which hopefully removes the mysticism of 'fine art' painting. They can also get to express their opinions on the painting in progress and are even occasionally allowed to take up a paintbrush. When co-coordinators allow this interaction to take place, they are usually trying to encourage the idea that the mural belongs to these ordinary people and the community it is painted for. After all, it is supposed to be 'their' mural and if people feel they have had some input into the mural, then the community is believed to accept it with pride.

Many muralists said they enjoyed the social aspects of mural-making the most, i.e. the collaboration that occurs between the various artists; the ability to teach people about the visual arts with the aid of murals; and the ability to represent various South African identities (Blumenfeld, 2001; Jawahirilal, 2001; Ngcobo, 2001; Ngobese, 2001; Nkosi, 2002). As opposed to murals from the apartheid era, which Annette

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[8] Interviews were conducted in 2001 with: Sandhia Bansi (2001), Simphiwe Belle (2001), Aubrey Boshoga (2001), Nicky Blumenfeld (2001), Clinton De Menzes (2001), Bongi Dube (2001), S'busiso Duma (2001), Bronwyn Findley (2001), Leonie Hall (2001), Ashley Heron (2002), Nkosinathi Jali (2001), Lallitha Jawahirilal (2001), Mmabatho Letseli (2001), Vaneda Pillay (2001), Langa Magwa (2001), Bongani Mbete (2001), Sunthieran Munsamy (2002), Patience Ngcobo (2001), Khehla Ngobese (2001), Gabisile Nkosi (2002), Pitika Ntuli (2001), Vukile Ntuli (2001), Clive Sithole (2001), Avitha Sooful (2002), Terry-Anne Stevenson (2001), Asiya Swaleh (2001).

Loubser in her essay 'Mural Art For South Africa' (1989: 72) says had functions of resistance, protest, celebration, challenge and reconstruction, murals in the 1990's have rarely been used as a site of resistance, protest and challenge against social ideologies or political systems. Their function has been predominantly to depict the celebration of the diversity of the 'rainbow nation' and to deal with a few social problems of the new South Africa. Murals in KZN documenting current relevant issues, have usually tended to focus on issues relevant to all South Africans, male and female e.g. HIV/Aids, crime, human rights, voter education, etc. Issues specifically affecting women have almost never been dealt with (with a few notable exceptions) and although the above themes are relevant to women as well, deeper aspects of these themes could be explored. The potential of murals as a site of resistance against dominant ideologies will be discussed in chapter two, with respect to the relationship between popular media and murals.

Role of the Viewer:

The role of the viewer in visual culture is a complex one, with widely differing theories. 'Mass culture theory' is criticized as seeing the viewer as too passive, exploitable, vulnerable and resistant to intellectual challenge (Strinati, 1995). Proponents of 'cultural populist theory' argue that the reader plays a much more active role than often accredited with and is able to appreciate and interpret cultural consumption in a different way from what the industries which produce them intended.

Seeing that murals are considered part of the public art domain, placing an artwork into a public space opens it up to many interpretations as well as criticisms. Audience responses can be as varied as the murals themselves - images have been repainted or painted out by artists due to negative responses from individuals, the community or funders (e.g. Durban Magistrate's Court and Nomkhubulwana '94 murals). On the other hand, people have actively sought to protect murals from being vandalised because they value their presence in the community (e.g. the Umlazi Station (fig. 3) and the Tongaat crèche murals).

There are of course, different views on whether, if at all, these murals have any impact on the people and community for whom they are supposed to be painted. Marschall (1999), in her study on the impact of community murals, suggests that some murals have little impact on the community and that there is a superficial or very little critical reading of these works by the people for whom they are painted. For example, most people didn't recognise the Zulu goddess image in the Nomkhubulwana `94 mural at the market in Durban (Fig. 1).

Artists on the other hand, feel that murals definitely impact on the community in a positive way. Marschall (1999) has argued that some murals only gain attention during the painting process and are afterwards largely ignored. Although there is a lot of validity to this observation, practical experience leads me to believe that the impact a mural has during the painting process cannot be overvalued and is worth the money, time and effort spent painting the mural. Seeing ordinary African, Indian and white men and women participating in these mural projects, have made ordinary people realise that mural-making involves a few people that can paint, and many who contribute in other important ways.[9]

Post-structuralism has showed that various factors affect the way texts are read. All images or texts according to Barthes (1999b: 37), are polysemous – containing many signifiers, of which readers choose some and ignore others. Despite how a muralist intends his/her image to be read, the muralist has little control over how the viewer will eventually interpret the imagery. For instance, while murals attempt to depict members of different racial groups in society, it is not certain which images are supposed to represent Coloured people. Images of Coloured people are usually read as white or African. Some artists have used this ambiguity in a positive way. For example, the female speaker in the 1997 Human Rights Wall (henceforth called 'H.R. `97 mural') is ambiguously painted, i.e. it is unclear whether she is white, African or Coloured. Hence, the viewer is at liberty to determine the race and meaning of this image.

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[9] During UDW weekend mural trips to Ladysmith (1995 – 1998), many people participated in the projects by housing racially mixed students, feeding them, and even visiting them on site, learning terms like 'subject matter' and 'tones' by the completion of the project. They realised that their 'social' input into the mural was an extremely valuable contribution to the project as a whole.

Barthes (1999b: 37) argues however, that every society develops techniques to fix the 'floating chain of signifieds' in such a way as to counter 'the terror of uncertain signs'. One of these techniques is written text. Written texts (wording) in murals, like those found in many community awareness murals in KZN, help to create a 'recognisable' image. The primary function of written text is to direct a reader towards a chosen meaning (Barthes, 1999b: 37 – 38).[10] Nonetheless, the contribution of the viewer still remains equally important in selecting a meaning, and there are many factors that affect the viewer's perceptions.

Ideologies and Values:

One of the major influences on viewer perceptions is thought to be ideology. Ideology, according to Keyan Tomaselli (1996: 43 - 45), is the code of representations through which we are able to build up a picture of the world around us. Tomaselli goes on to say that ideology exists both in practices and representations and like reality it does not exist 'out there', but is rather a set of semantic rules. Studies based on semiology and Althusser's theory of ideology, contend that ideologies perform definite functions and are capable of shaping people's attitudes and actions. Critics of this perspective argue that this is too simplistic a view, not taking into account that if texts are polysemic, they will surely restrict the effect and power of ideologies on a varied audience. As Barthes has argued though, different institutions have different ways of sifting out meanings and today, it is cultural institutions like popular media that have 'popularized' certain ways of looking, creating 'preferred meanings', which is often referred to as 'dominant ideology' (Tomaselli, 1996: 43).

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[10] The perfect example to explain the effect of written texts in murals is the Nomkhubulwana `94 mural. The image of Nomkhubulwana was not obviously recognisable to the African majority for whom it was painted (Marschall, 1999), the story of Nomkhubulwana having been passed down through Zulu oral traditions. CMP alleviated this problem by having a graffiti artist write 'Nomkhubulwana' above the image, thereby creating a recognisable image. CMP have subsequently removed the wording from the Nomkhubulwana `01 mural, but the image has become recognisable as such. CMP have thus created a 'recognisable image'.

Various factors – be they social, political, economic, cultural and religious - contribute to the construction of ideologies. These factors have an evaluative character, i.e. they attribute certain values to certain ways of thinking and behaviour. Texts and images are also invested with these values. Robert Thornton (2000: 35), in trying to define the field of cultural studies, recognises that 'texts' are reproduced or practised in relation to some system of power that makes selections, imposes values and morality, 'and thus determines their truth and goodness'. With regard to murals, it is the muralists who represent this system of power (within a certain limit), who get to decide what messages are pertinent to the community (and to themselves), and what values are promoted. Muralists' personal values are in turn influenced by a number of sources, one of which is the popular media. Some muralists see murals as very similar to popular media (Nkosi, 2002) because some murals have been used for advertising and the fact that murals are also accessible to a mass audience. Other muralists though vehemently disagree that murals are a part of popular culture (Jawahirilal, 2001; Stevenson, 2001), comparing murals more to the 'fine arts' because of their educational potential and ability to critique society.

Popular Media/ Murals/Fine Arts:

The positioning of murals, with regard to popular cultural production and the 'fine arts', needs further clarification. Cockcroft, et al. (1998: xix) place murals in opposition to the alienating 'high' culture of the art elite as well as the 'manipulative culture of the commercial bourgeois media'. Their belief that mural-making is an 'experiment in the possibility of a democratic mass culture' (ibid.), situated in opposition to both the 'fine arts' and popular media, is contentious with regard to murals in KZN. Instead, murals occupy a more ambiguous position. It would be far more appropriate to situate murals in the middle ground between 'fine arts' and popular media as it contains elements of both.

Firstly, murals can be placed in the category of a postmodern art form, with its eclectic use of various styles; the appropriation of imagery from many sources, emphasizing the intertextuality of the work, as well as the limited life span of a mural which makes it replaceable. Murals also dispose of the commodification aspect of

'fine art' forms (Evans, 1999: 17) in that murals, although they are commissioned, cannot be sold again if they are executed on a wall. Their impermanent nature also defies the sale of murals.[11] Murals also allow for many pluralistic voices to 'come through' at the same time (i.e. male/female, formally trained/self taught, white/black, etc.).

Secondly, murals also portray characteristics of popular culture. There are murals that are used for advertising purposes only. Occasionally, commercial murals (murals commissioned by private businesses for the sake of advertising) have elements of community murals. These commercial murals try to reflect the community within which they have been painted while also advertising the company's brand or logo. However, businesses have also sponsored social awareness murals and thus have somewhat further blurred the line between a community mural and a commercial mural. Such commercial murals have been drawn on at times to illustrate a point where necessary.

Cockcroft et al. (1998: xx, xxi, 226) have defined murals in the United States during the 1950's -1970's as being 'a people's art form', i.e. 'a visual art for and with the masses, understood and supported by them'.[12] In the South African context, many muralists interviewed have similarly seen the function of community murals as working with the previously disadvantaged communities. Murals and the various popular media in South Africa (TV, cinema, radio, magazines, and advertising), primarily focus on appealing to the masses, often using similar stereotypes to communicate with their audience. These issues will be elaborated on in chapter two.

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[11] There are murals that have are executed on panels made of board, and then fixed to a place. These types of murals do allow for sale of such murals.

[12] Cockcroft et al.'s *Toward A People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement* (1977, 1998) was a seminal work in mural documentation and studies when it was released in 1977, and it has been revised in 1998 with an overview of the mural scene in the U.S. to cover the second half of the 1990's. It has proved invaluable in this research project, and has been frequently drawn upon, as the mural process in the U.S. shares many similarities (and differences!) with the mural scene in South Africa.

With the flourishing of this art form and the diversity of murals and subject matter on offer, one would expect murals to have attracted much scholarly attention. Surprisingly, though, apart from Marschall's work, virtually no critical research has been conducted on murals. Established artists, Sue Willamson (1989) and Gavin Younge (1988), have merely documented murals from the 1980's in their books *Resistance Art in South Africa* and *Art of the South African Townships* respectively. Elisabeth Deliry-Antheaume's CD Rom *Walls are Speaking* (1999) is only a comprehensive visual documentation of murals in South Africa, especially in the 1990's. Marschall's research is just beginning to fill this gap and this thesis intends to make a further contribution to this field.

I also hope to contribute with this research to the study of public art in general, as well as to the fields of gender and cultural studies in South Africa. With each question asked during this research, many more complex questions rather than answers emerged. So, while this study hopes to provide a few feasible solutions to problems presented, it has generated more questions on assumptions that should be asked of the many forms of cultural expression. Unfortunately, while the notion of 'generalisations', especially in terms of women, has been questioned and criticised, other generalisations have been incurred during the course of this study (as with any) and I apologise in advance for these. For every woman's experience spoken about, there is almost always an exception to it, which makes a study of women both extremely complex and intricately fascinating.

CHAPTER ONE: Theoretical Framework

1.1 Feminism:

This study focuses on the representation of women in murals and thus draws on a vast body of feminist theory. This study engages with many differing feminist perspectives, from those of Western feminism and its intersections with other theoretical perspectives (rationalism, deconstruction, postmodernism, etc.), to that of Afrocentric and/or black feminist thought and other feminist perspectives from 'women of colour' or 'Third World women'. It is thus necessary to present a brief overview of some of these feminist perspectives as well as a few of the important contradictions that have emerged between Western feminism and feminisms used by women of colour.

Feminism has since its inception been challenging modern foundationalist epistemologies that have presented traditional underpinnings as universal, essential, truthful and ahistorical (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 26). Feminism has revealed the 'gendered' nature of history, culture, science and society (Bordo, 1990: 136/7). The category of the 'human' was shown to be a white, Eurocentric, male one against which all other humans were measured. Dominant relationships between men and women were shown to be social constructions and that it is not only men, but women as well who have internalised society's dominant perceptions of femininity and masculinity.

Different strains of feminism have used different theoretical perspectives to explain sexism. For example, some feminists used the essentialist or biological approach claiming that differences in biology were the root to gender differences and human conflict (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 27). The emergence of postmodernist theory (and the works of Lyotard, Lacan, Derrida, Barthes and Foucault) made a major contribution to feminist studies (and vice versa). Postmodernist criticisms of the grand, overarching philosophies of the Enlightenment have been used extensively by many feminists (ibid.: 22).

Many other feminists, however, have been wary of certain postmodernist perspectives, sometimes criticizing aspects of it and sometimes altogether rejecting postmodernism as a suitable theory for studies of women. Some feminists have rejected the viability of postmodernism for feminist inquiry saying that postmodernist perspectives debunk any subject-centered inquiry and therefore question the very legitimacy of broad-based organized movements, e.g. 'feminism'. The fracturing of identities beyond comparison, has also led people to question whether postmodern politics are capable of being sustained over time (Di Stefano, 1990: 76).

Western feminist theories though have been criticized as being 'essentialist' and 'ahistorical', as universalizing features of the theorist's own era, society, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation or racial grouping (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 27). In other words, some feminists were replicating the very 'universalisations' that they themselves were criticizing (Nicholson, 1990: 1). Some of those who rejected Western feminism during the latter part of the 20th century were women of colour, who supported the basic aims of Western feminism but still felt that Western feminism was overlooking some equally important social factors specifically affecting women of colour, such as oppression based on race, class, sexual orientation, colonialism, globalism, as well as racialised and 'feminized' poverty.[13]

South African feminism has also been criticized as having overlooked the interconnectedness of race, gender and class concerns (Koyana, 2001: 67). South African feminism has supposedly, been developed autonomously by white academics, researchers and intellectuals and labeled as being divorced from the concerns of most black women in the liberation struggle (ibid.: 70).

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[13] The postmodernist-feminist critique, however, has sought to be explicitly historical, very temporally and culturally specific, to different groups in different societies in different times (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 34). Postmodernists have argued that certain feminist perspectives (e.g. feminist standpoints theories and feminist empiricism) contain traces of 'the grand narratives of legitimation' (Bordo, 1990: 139; Di Stefano, 1990: 74). Postmodern feminists have refuted essentialism's or biologism's claims in feminist studies of the importance of biology and gender difference and, instead, believe that gender difference in just one strand in a list of others (e.g. race, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation) responsible for the oppression of women (Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 34 –35).

Some African academics and writers have rejected the use of Western feminism on the reasoning that the acceptance of Western feminism by African women has been seen as 'parroting' or imitating other people's voices (Kolawole, 1997: 8). The need to guard against the cultural hegemony of Western approaches has resulted in the need for a local and context-specific gender analysis and feminist practice in Africa (Essof, 2001: 125). Alternative African-based, African women-centered (Gqola, 2001: 14) feminist epistemologies have also been put forward - for example Black feminism and Afrocentric feminism which view the positioning of African women's writing in the feminist discourse as akin to the issue of the margin displacing the center (Kolawole, 1997: 7). There have been however some scholars who have completely rejected even using the term 'feminism'. For instance, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (quoted in Kolawale, 1997: 23) says that the term feminism automatically conjures up the notion of a Western feminism for both African men and women and is therefore unsuitable.[14]

One of these alternative black feminist epistemologies i.e. 'womanism' will be looked at very briefly to identify some of the common characteristics seen in many strains of black feminist thought. This comparison will give an indication of some of the contrasts between black feminist thought and Western feminist thought. Womanism has been described as a model of thought that is grounded in African culture and focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women (ibid.: 25). Clenora Hudson-Weems (quoted in Kolawale, 1997: 25) rejects the idea that womanism is an outgrowth of feminism, or a black or African feminism but rather an ideology that is specifically created for all women of African descent. Three areas of contention between black feminist thought and Western feminism have been highlighted for the purpose of this study: i.e. the role of men in feminist inquiry; the individual/collective and the public/private dichotomies; and finally, the role of family in women's lives.

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[14] Self-naming is supposedly central to an African worldview with many African cultures considering naming a sacred rite (Kolawole, 1997: 26). Thus, many African writers reject using names like African feminism and Black feminism, and have preferred African alternatives like Motherism and womanism. Other black female theorists, however, have argued that changing the terminology doesn't solve the problem of global domination (Amina Mama interviewed in Salo, 2001: 61).

Unlike some Western feminists who have been criticised as viewing men as the primary antagonist, womanists do not solely blame men for their problems and with regard to black men, womanists realise that racial oppression has been shared by men as well (Gaines, 1999; Kolawole, 1997). This study likewise has not sought to lay blame for stereotypical representations of women solely on male muralists but instead to highlight the patriarchal thinking contributing to the perpetuation of these stereotypes.

The second area of contention among Western feminists and feminists of colour concerns the collective vs. individual, public vs. private dualisms. For womanist Mary Kolawole (1997: 18), black women are unanimous on the inseparability of the individual and communal experience, as well as private and public space. It has been shown by many feminists that white, male, Eurocentric thought has placed women in the private domain to maintain the household and rear children, while men were free to participate in the public domain of paid, valued employment and politics (Lloyd, 1984: 84; Fraser and Nicholson, 1990: 28). This notion is very important with regard to the understanding of the depiction of the nurturing role of women in murals which will be discussed further in the third chapter.

The third issue of major contention between black feminists and Western feminists is that of the role of family in women's lives. The centrality of family to African women's lives is reiterated frequently in black female thought (Kolawole, 1997: 11). The African worldview traditionally, is predominantly family-orientated and many African women see this as a positive legacy (ibid.: 13). Thus, generally black feminist thought is family-centered as opposed to being just women-centered (Koyana, 2001: 65). Womanists see the institution of family as an important source of support for many black women (Kolawole, 1997: 32) and reject certain western feminists' (e.g. Zilla Einstein, Anne Oakley) ideas of the family as being a tool of 'capitalist oppression and individualism', and as creating 'gender and generation hierarchies'. The role of the mother and family in murals will be discussed more in the third chapter.

These few comparisons between one strain of black feminist thought (womanism) and a few perspectives in Western feminism have been used to give a brief indication of the differing debates in feminism today. Although there are many proponents of a black feminist epistemology, this study has been specifically influenced by Patricia Hill Collins's seminal work *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). It is further necessary to elaborate on some of the principles of her black feminist epistemology and how they have shaped this study.

1.2 <u>Black Feminist Epistemology:</u>

Patricia Hill Collins (2000) criticizes the Eurocentric, masculinist process of validating knowledge as being unsuitable for black women to use. She argues that black women validate knowledge in their daily experiences in different ways from women of other races and genders – especially that of the Western, white, educated male which is widely used in academic circles (2000: 253-257). Collins advocates an alternate way of validating knowledge, i.e. a black feminist epistemology that takes into account the various socio-economic (and historical) factors influencing black women's experiences. Collins acknowledges the common experience of oppression shared by black people, as well as the history of gender oppression experienced by women (to varying degrees). According to Collins, a black feminist epistemology reflects elements of both these traditions as often ideas, characteristics and values associated with that of being 'black' are similar to characteristics of being 'female' (ibid.: 269).

Genevieve Lloyd (1984: ix, 104) however doesn't believe that women have their own distinct female criteria for 'truth' and 'reasonable belief'. She does acknowledge though that in terms of the Enlightenment ideal of reason and rationality, women cannot easily be accommodated into a cultural ideal that has defined itself against the feminine. Collins (2000: 254 - 255) argues that black women may be unable to legitimize their knowledge claims by using prevailing scholarly norms, or may have their knowledge claims rejected as they don't 'fit' into an existing body of knowledge that one group controls. Some of the characteristics identified by Collins, of a black

feminist epistemology that is used in this study are: concrete experience as a criterion of meaning; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; and the ethic of personal accountability. These will be briefly discussed with regard to their relevance to this study.

a) Concrete Experience as a Criterion of Meaning:
This aspect of an Afrocentric methodology advocates concrete experience as a credible criterion for validating knowledge claims. Personal opinion is considered an important source of information, with Collins (2000: 257 – 260) claiming that many women use concrete knowledge of an individual's experience as acceptable in assessing knowledge claims. In other words 'knowledge comes from experience'. According to Sandra Harding (1990: 95), knowledge in modern Western cultures has originated in and is tested against only a certain limited kind of social experience. Any investigation into race, class and gender will reveal whose experiences are considered most important and whose experiences and knowledge have been sanctioned (Probyn, 1990: 184).

This theoretical position is relevant to murals with respect to the images of women which are predominantly painted by African men. Hence, these images reveal more the beliefs and ideologies of the men than the experiences of women. Harding (1990: 95) further states that those feminist perspectives and theories originating in female experience lead to more valid knowledge claims rather than those originating in men's experiences. In this study, my own experience as a muralist is often drawn on to understand and expand on imagery created by muralists, as well as an understanding of how the mural process affects muralists. Thus, this study informed by a practising muralist, will invariably differ from studies by solely academic persons.

b) The Use of Dialogue in Assessing Knowledge Claims:
bell hooks (quoted in Collins, 2000: 269) defines dialogue as 'talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object'. She further characterizes dialogue as speech that challenges and resists domination. For Collins (and hooks), knowledge claims are validated by dialogues between individuals and other members of the community as well. This use of dialogue is rooted in African-based oral tradition.

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Kolawole (1997: 33) states that a 'dialogic perspective is more wholesome and valid to African women'. Dialogue is supposed to result in a feeling of interconnectedness (Collins, 2000: 260-261), and is not to be confused with adversarial debate, or speech in which one speaks on behalf of the 'Other'. Collins' idea of dialogue is one where ideas are tested and validated through the participation of every member of a group. One of the main characteristics of community murals in the United States is the dialogue that occurred between artists and the community before and during the painting of murals (Cockcroft et al. 1998).[15]

Many murals in the United States, from the period 1950's – 1980's, have included dialogues between the community (or representatives thereof) and muralists. These dialogues - usually in the form of discussions and planning meetings - have greatly influenced the images of many U.S. community mural projects. There is however, usually very little dialogue involved in KZN murals, with limited input and participation from the communities for whom they are created. It will be shown in this study that generally, one group of select individuals (the muralists) 'speak' on behalf of a range of people in society.

Collins (2000: 30) believes that in a dialogical relationship, thinking and consciousness should be altered but most importantly, that this should be accompanied by changed actions – 'an ongoing dialogue whereby action and thought inform one another'. There has been an ongoing need in Western feminism and black feminist thought for feminist theory to be practical for black women, i.e. it must be tested in practice. As mentioned in the personal note, this specific principle has influenced me and changed my visual arts practice.

c) The Ethic of Personal Accountability

The ethic of personal accountability acknowledges the owner's identity as important, i.e. persons have to be accountable for their knowledge claims (Collins, 2000: 265

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[15] Many mural co-ordinators interviewed claimed to having gained an interest in murals once they were exposed to the murals in Mexico (during the 1950's and 1960's), and/or the mural movement in the U.S. (1970's –1980's). Mural co-ordinators Lallitha Jawahirilal, Vukile Ntuli and Vedant Nanackchand all studied the Mexican and U.S. mural movements, and their modus operandi has been influenced by those of the above mentioned mural movements (Jawahirilal, 2001; Ntuli, 2001).

–266). Nancy Hartsock (1990: 163) claims that the creation of the 'Other' simultaneously created the idea of a transcendent, omnipotent theorizer who exists outside time, space and power relations. With the ethic of personal accountability, not only are an individual's knowledge claims assessed, but this person's character, values and ethics are as well. Emotions and ethics are not subordinated to reason as is done in positivist methodology which eliminates all human characteristics except rationality in the research process, thereby distancing researchers from the 'object' of their study (Collins, 2000: 255). Colonialism created the idea of the colonizer being capable of reason and rational deduction while the 'Other' was supposed to operate according to intuition (Hartsock, 1990: 160) – hence the reason versus emotion-intuition dichotomy (Di Stefano, 1990: 68). A black feminist epistemology though, views personal expressiveness, emotions, ethics, empathy and reasoning as interconnected and essential to assessing knowledge (Collins, 2000: 263, 266).

Although apartheid has ended, cultural, sexist and racial mythologies have not dissipated and artists are not necessarily portraying imagery that is free from assumptions about the 'Other'. Thus, knowing about the person behind any body of work (as well as his/her beliefs) allows one to understand where that person is 'coming from' (Collins, 2000: 265-266) – this is applicable to written texts as well as images. Thus using an ethic of personal accountability allows the reader to understand that all work is biased and personal and is not an objective piece of work 'mirroring' society. The researcher is always located in specific historical circumstances (Harding, 1990: 93). Some muralists have alluded in interviews to reflecting an objective reality stating that their personal values and ideologies do not affect their portrayal of 'reality' (Ngobese, 2001; Duma, 2001). Thus an examination of the composition of mural teams and the intentions of the artists will revealed why certain images, ideologies and values are reflected in mural imagery

Feminist author bell hooks (1990: 8) and art historian Vernon Hyde Minor (1994: 198) have noted that a work is not necessarily oppositional, non-racist or non-sexist just because it is created by a black person, a woman or by 'people of good will'. Stereotypical, sexist images of women have also been perpetuated by female muralists (including myself). This is partly due to a lack of awareness of feminist perspectives

by some female muralists. Other female muralists who may be aware of gender issues may not fully comprehend the possible negative implications of using sexist stereotypes of women. Many female muralists though are simply influenced by dominant ideologies and representations of women found in popular media.

During this research project, while the small number of white and Indian female artists was apparent, the lack of African and Coloured female muralists was quite glaring. This disparity of female artists is however, not just a South African phenomenon. Susan Vogel's *Africa Explores* (1991) covers a broad range of artists and art from Africa in the 20th century but still shows an amazing vacuum of black female artists on the continent due to a number of social factors.[16] This problem is similarly noticeable in a study of South African murals.

When male and female muralists were asked to speculate as to the absence of African female muralists, some likened mural painting to 'fine art' painting saying it was too laborious for women and thus thought to be a male domain. Some suggested that due to tradition, it was craft and not painting which was the duty of women. A few muralists said that many African women are still oppressed within their society and therefore are not allowed by their men to participate in this seemingly 'unfemale' discipline (Hall, 2001; Stevenson, 2001). This sort of response is surprising though, as it was traditionally African women who decorated the homestead - for example, Ndebele mural art executed by Ndebele women, has been considered an art form by many (Changuion, 1989; Powell, 1995).[17] Other reasons suggested were that African women don't have the confidence needed to start participating in such projects and that they are afraid of heights and therefore would not go up scaffolding. Gabi Ngcobo (2001) presented the most plausible reason for the lack of black female

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[16] Vogel (1991) states, 'For a variety of familiar social and economic reasons, Africa claims only a fraction as many professional women artists as men – in many places there are literally none' (1991: 12). Vogel doesn't expand on what specifically these 'familiar social and economic reasons' may be. Vogel also discusses professional artists, and the South African mural scene, remains somewhat 'informal', where artists may just participate in one mural, and then never paint another, or where artists can actually join a mural project on site (Stevenson, 2001).

[17] Ndebele mural art as it is today known originated in its current form when the Ndzundza were settled in Hartebeesfontein (in the vicinity of Pretoria), and were first photographed during the late 1940's (Powell, 1995: 46 – 49).

muralists, which is that many of them have just not been presented with an opportunity for mural experience.[18]

Thus, it is suggested that the problem may not be a lack of African female artists as much as a problem with how mural co-coordinators source their mural teams and that if the mural process itself were altered, one might overcome this imbalance. For instance, the selection of mural teams could target more females of different races with community workshops being run over a week to determine if these people have enough potential to participate in the project. As briefly mentioned earlier, there have been many instances where community people, passers-by and anyone interested (even with no visual art experience) were allowed to participate in painting a mural. Co-coordinators targeting women for mural projects, even if they are inexperienced, could also have experienced muralists working side-by-side with the novices, to give them direction. This of course brings with it technical problems and will probably slow the painting process. Mural co-coordinators usually work within limited budgets and time frames and it is easier sometimes to acknowledge that there is a problem and still do nothing about it, than actually finding alternatives to the problem.

This aspect of an alternative epistemology is in stark contrast to Roland Barthes' 'death of the author' theory.[19] Christine Battersby (1989: 219), in her analysis of postmodernism and the female author, argues that Barthes' theory is not the position that feminists should take when they are seeking a basis for a 'female' aesthetic, as feminism has just begun to bring to the surface a rich history of female authors and artists who have been hidden for so long (Di Stefano, 1990: 75). Thus, according to

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[18] The Bat Centre Visual Arts Programme 2001, which basically served to equip selected students with an introduction to all visual art disciplines, was attended by only non-white males (two Coloured and six African). This group also went on to participate in the 'restoration' of the Nomkhubulwana mural in November `01 along with five other more experienced male muralists (with Stevenson and Mikula representing the female composition on this team.) But while CMP's mural teams usually have just a few female muralists, the UDW mural team composition was predominantly made up of non-white females, i.e. African and Indian students.

[19] Roland Barthes theory of 'the death of the author' comes from his essay *Image Music Text*, 'where he presented the notion of a text as something without a fixed meaning apart from that produced by readers in the act of reading' (Barthes, 1977). Thus, the author's intention of the text is no more the authoritative than any other reading of a text. Any text can be read in a number of ways, with no single reading being preferential over the others.

Battersby (1989: 214), to announce the death of 'individuality' and 'authorship' of female authors and artists is premature and detrimental for women and their history.[20] Most of the major mural groups in KZN are run by female co-coordinators and using this methodology for this research project 'gives a voice' to the ideas and intention of these women as well as the female muralists. One finds though, that these female co-coordinators rarely use their position of power to influence images of women or to create gender awareness in their mural teams.

Most of the female muralists in KZN have been tertiary educated and should therefore be aware of gender issues yet have still depicted women in stereotyped roles. CMP, Apt Artworks and the UDW mural team have been responsible for the majority of the mural projects in KZN. CMP is headed by two white female co-ordinators, so is Apt Artworks while the UDW mural team's primary co-ordinator is an Indian female (Lallitha Jawahirilal). Two other white females, Leonie Hall and Bronwyn Findley, have also separately co-ordinated a few (mainly private, commercial) mural projects in Durban. Apart from Jawahirilal, the other female mural co-ordinators generally considered themselves 'humanist' as opposed to feminist, although many of them were aware of feminist theoretical issues (Blumenfeld, 2001; Hall, 2001; Findley, 2001; Jawahirilal, 2001; Stevenson, 2001) They chose instead to tackle social issues associated with 'humanity', as opposed to those primarily affecting women.

Gamman and Marshment (1988: 3) similarly find that women, who have succeeded in the business and media world, don't necessarily hold feminist views themselves and don't necessarily challenge gender stereotypes. It is not suggested as the feminist essentialism argument proposes (Moore, 1988: 50), that females, because of their biology see things differently and that images of a female muralist would be less stereotypical than that of a male muralist. Rather it is being proposed that women who are aware of gender issues need to interrogate the way they themselves depict women and perhaps try to find alternative ways to representing women, other than the

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[20] Christine Di Stefano (1990: 75) is similarly sceptical about postmodernism's viability for women, stating that men can afford a sense of decentered self and a humbleness toward the coherence and truth of their claims, as they have already experienced their Enlightenment, and can therefore subject that legacy to critical scrutiny.

available stereotyped images presently found in murals and various media in society. The Women's Wall (figs. 9, 10) is a good example of a conscious attempt by Jawahirilal and students at the re-addressing of female representations and this is the only mural in KZN that can claim to be a tribute to women only.

While this chapter has briefly examined just a few concepts of a black feminist epistemology (as identified by Collins) that has informed the structure of this research, there are other concepts that this study has drawn on. The next chapter will briefly look at women and the issue of identity in South Africa and also deals with debates around ideologies and stereotypes found in popular cultural studies. It will also examine the influence of popular media on murals.

CHAPTER: TWO

2.1 <u>Murals and Female Identity:</u>

South African society today, due to various factors, is still very patriarchal. Gamman and Marshment (1988: 1) think that political regimes, economic systems, culture and even the unconscious mind are all informed by patriarchal views. Many female academics criticise the patriarchal values found in society and attribute women's oppression in many societies to the continuation and perpetuation of these patriarchal values (Cooey, 1994; hooks, 1990; Gamman and Marshment, 1988). Cultural determinist theory creates awareness of the role of culture in constructing human reality, particularly with respect to sexual difference (Cooey, 1994: 27 – 28). Social relations, especially the cultural construction of identity, needs to be examined to account for the oppression of women and to create the grounds for change to begin (Cooey, 1994: 31).

As a form of cultural production, murals offer an arena where identities are displayed and negotiated. hooks (1990: 5) says that people identify and construct themselves as social beings through the mediation of images. Marschall's (1999) case study on the impact of community murals in Durban (1999) to an extent, confirms this. Marschall concluded that people did identify with realistically painted images, e.g. Umlazi Station murals, and that these images could contribute to the process of their identity formation (2002: 176). Many muralists attested to this potential of murals - as a place where people could identify themselves and their communities (Ngcobo, 2001). For instance, muralist Vaneda Pillay (2001) said that murals had the potential to portray all identities, while artist Langa Magwa (2001) thought people like to 'think and size themselves' against the mural depictions. Hence, the issue of identity and women needs to be examined in murals as well.

With regard to South African society, there are many interconnected aspects of culture (e.g. race, ethnicity, class, religion and sexuality) that must be examined with respect to women and identity. Unfortunately, the limitations of a mini-dissertation do not allow a proper analysis of the intersection of these various social factors and its

effects on women's identities and lives. The initial part of this chapter will deal specifically with the issues of multiculturalism and history, while racial issues are dealt with generally throughout the study.

2.1.1 Women in the Context of Multiculturalism:

In post-apartheid South Africa, identities are constantly being redefined and re-negotiated. Identity in South African society is very complex, with hybridity characterising women's identity in post-colonial society (Latha, 2001: 29). In the 1990's murals, like various other media[21], are trying to give public visibility to those that were previously denied a voice (Lewis, 2000: 175). The exploration of identities has emerged mainly through a celebration of the 'rainbow' nation. The politics of difference, once used by the colonialist and apartheid regimes to subjugate certain people, have been used by multiculturalists to recognise and affirm different groups by representing different group interests (Young, 1990: 319).

The displacement of the apartheid grand narrative has also led to a number of smaller narratives being foregrounded, e.g. 'unity in diversity', 'rainbow nationalism', 'simunye'[22]. It has been argued that within the notion of 'difference', there is the tendency to 'fix' certain identities (Nuttall and Michael, 2000c: 16; Robins, 2000: 416). According to Homi Bhabha (1999), the colonial discourse was sustained by the articulation of forms of racial and sexual difference, which both recognises and at the same time disavows racial/cultural/historical differences (1999: 371). It will be seen later on that difference among women is often masked with a simplified, stereotyped,

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[21] Graffiti is also a medium that is thought to express and assert identity. Some muralists have drawn a distinction between graffiti and mural art (Cockcroft, et al., 1998). Graffiti has always been criticised by muralists as 'just appearing overnight' (ibid.: 308) which doesn't allow for community input, with no significant structure to the process, and thus forces itself upon its audience. Murals are supposedly much more structured, with a lot of planning and group input. Permission has to be garnered for the execution of a mural on a specific site. While both graffiti and murals serve the purpose of group assertion and expression of identity, murals in KwaZulu-Natal also try to explore a range of social issues and messages, in (arguably) a 'grander, more impressive and effective' way (ibid.: 81).

[22] 'Simunye' is a slogan that means 'We are one', and basically reaffirms the idea of 'togetherness' and unity in diversity (Ntuli, 2002).

or generalised image creating the aura of a 'natural', original presence. For example, the role of 'mother' is often seen as a natural role, and not a constructed one.

Nuttall and Michael (2000c: 1) state that in South Africa 'an over-simplified discourse of rainbow nationalism' has been foregrounded instead of the complex configurations of identity that have always been there. The ramifications of this can easily be seen in the depiction of women in murals. Despite the variety of cultural influences and the diversity of women in this country, South African women have become a rather generalised subject matter in murals.

Irrespective of their colour, age or economic conditions, women in South Africa are encouraged to identify with roles that are supposed to be symbolic of womanhood. These appear to be defined according to 'nurturing' roles of teacher, nurse, caretaker (of home and community). Furthermore, while women are an integral part of the nation-building concept, they seem to merely supplement the work of their male companions. In these generalised mural depictions, women find themselves playing secondary or 'side kick' roles to the themes of reconstruction and development, Masakhane[23], racial unity and cultural diversity – all perceived to be driven by men. The concerns, problems and experiences of women are often deferred in the interest of portraying the general hopes of a non-gendered, diversified, multicultural society. Thus, in terms of the self/community/nation configuration, individual experiences are often sacrificed in order to portray the 'collective' experience or community 'rainbow' national ideal.

A segment on the Umlazi Station murals[24] (fig. 4), shows an African woman sewing at a table in front of a wall being built by three African men (one man lays bricks; another provides mixed cement and another, saws a piece of wood). In the distance is

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[23] 'Masakhane' means 'Let us build together' or 'Build each other', and was instituted by the post-apartheid government to create the ideology of people working together with each other, the national and local government to 'build up' South Africa (Ntuli, 2002).

[24] A panel in the Umlazi Station murals exemplifies this. The Umlazi Station murals (1996 – 1998) were co-ordinated by Stembiso Sibisi and painted by several African men and women. The murals consist of several panels, each depicting a different township scene i.e. the urban environment in the township; a shebeen (informal tavern) scene; a fruit vendor; a farming scene; a classroom scene; the train platform with commuters and an imaged of the regional mayoress at the time of the execution of the murals.

a signpost with the slogan 'MASAKHANE'. Thus, the scene seems to suggest that both men and women (all South African women being represented by this one woman) are an important part of the building process of this country. But, while the depiction of the three builders can be seen as a metaphor for the 'building process' in South African society, it isn't exactly clear how this lone image of a woman sewing really fits into nation-building.

Interestingly, in traditional African society it was the duty of women to build the rural homestead (Powell, 1995), while in the above-mentioned panel at the Umlazi Station it is the men who represent the process of construction. Perhaps this image follows a Western mode of representation, in that the woman is depicted sewing, while the men are involved in the 'hard' labour of building. In Western society, building is regarded as a male activity, with the Greeks and Romans exemplifying this insistence on monumentality and a sense of immortality through their stone and marble structures. Sewing has often during the ages in Western society, been relegated to the role of women, not as a formal job but as a female 'past time'. African audiences though, can probably identify with such depiction of male and female roles as it is fairly reflective of contemporary, urban, Westernised society, in which the garment industry is overwhelmingly female, and construction work, predominantly male.

South Africa is among the top ten countries in the world with regard to the sizeable number of female politicians in its parliament (Mabandla, 1995; Mqadi, 2002: 7), but one would hardly gauge this from the sparse representations of females in political roles in murals.[25] While images of female politicians and government workers are few, some murals do show women as active protesters and political activists.[26] The Women's Wall (fig. 9) in Ladysmith (henceforth call the 'Women's Wall') shows two groups of protesters - one group is made up exclusively of women of different races,

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[25] Only three images - from the Human Rights `97 mural, the Lamontville mural and the Umlazi Station mural - show women in the political sphere.

[26] A few murals in KZN also encourage women to participate in the political decision-making of the country. Murals like the CMP Voter Education mural at Durban Station and another voter education mural in Edendale, Pietermaritzburg encourage women to participate in the voting process (Marschall, 2000: 185). Marschall (2002) has suggested that such mural depictions, which defy gender specific behavioural expectations by encouraging women to vote even against their husbands' wills, may help women to forge new identities.

marching arm in arm; the other is a mixed gender group, unitedly marching with hands held together defiantly in the air. Here, women are potently represented as agents but the theme is not developed to its full potential to make a complete or strong statement as no visual hint is given at what concerns or issues are being addressed in these protests.[27]

Furthermore, it is not the real, current, prevalent problems of South African society that are portrayed in murals, as murals are usually intended to be positive and uplifting. Paralleling trends in other productions of popular culture, many murals seem to be constantly portraying the past or an idealised future, while only a few murals deal with the 'presentness' of everyday life in South Africa. According to Iris Young (1990: 302, 314), the ideal of community suppresses difference in the sense of time and space and similarly, many murals superficially represent difference by creating an ahistorical work that supposedly transcends time, space and complex current social realities.

One of the differences that murals in KZN do not explore especially in black areas is that of class distinctions between people. Post-colonial and post-apartheid society has seen a huge shift in the demographics of people moving from rural areas to urban areas as well as the social mobility of many blacks (Marschall, 2002). Class restructuring has had a significant role in the re-negotiation of identities among the different classes of the black community. This has resulted in new models of identification, behaviour and value systems. Distinctions in the class status of women though are usually not explored in murals[28], as if there is an 'essentialist' black experience which has become synonymous with that of lower class 'township life'.

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[27] In comparison, a segment on the Lamontville mural shows both men and women protesting outside a factory. The slogans held by female workers read: 'Don't Work', 'Right To Strike' and 'Equal Pay for Equal Work'. These simple slogans hint at specific work related issues. This mural is much more effective in getting its message across than the images of the Women's Wall. The protest slogans held by the female workers convey to the audience specific issues of concern, while the audience has to guess what the protestors on the Women's Wall are protesting against.

[28] One of the very few murals to explore the class distinctions between women, is the Women's Wall, which shows women from both upper and working class society.

Middle and upper class society have spawned a whole new breed of African men and women who combine traditional values and customs with Western beliefs, attire and lifestyles (this group of upwardly mobile Africans are colloquially referred to as Black 'yuppies'), e.g. Batsetsane Khumalo and Tumi Makoba. These women combine multiple professional careers, spousal and/or motherly duties, as well as other activities. The lack of representation of such women in murals could perhaps be due to them not being considered 'real' enough by some muralists because of their economic and social status.

One of Marschall's (2002: 178 - 179) suggestions for the lack of representations of black professionals, is that muralists want their community to see their own experiences represented in their murals as opposed to seeing role models and visions that 'someone else believes they should be aspiring to'. Collins (2000: 101) however, argues that when black women are given their own spaces they will observe dominant images of 'femininity' and the 'Other', realize they are destructive to them, and subsequently fashion themselves after the 'prevalent, historical black female role models in their own community'. These female roles could therefore be either someone like Batsetsane Khumalo (model, TV producer) or Cynthia Mngadi (a local, Durban community worker), or both.

Thus, the realities and voices of real women in today's society are often sacrificed so as to present to the community a utopia-in-progress. This sidelining of female experience means that general racial and cultural issues are usually foregrounded over those of women's issues. This thinking could 'play on' already skewed labels of identity and contribute to the continuation of the marginalisation of women. These portrayals not only fail to legitimise the reality (and diversity) of women's experiences and identities but also continue to distort for black women the reality that sexism can be just as oppressive as racism. Furthermore, utopian murals (like modernist utopian ideals) also fail to identify the practical process of change that would be needed to transform the 'impure, inauthentic society that we live in', into the 'pure, authentic society we seek' (Young, 1990: 315, 239).

However, while it is necessary in terms of the constitution (and feminist ideals), for women to be represented equally with men, I don't believe that there should be a tokenist mode of representation either. One of the possible reasons for the success of the Umlazi station murals is that they concentrate on their immediate environment and realities of modern life in a township. There is only a single image of a white person in these murals, with no attempt being made to demonstrate racial or cultural diversity or political correctness. By sparing this tokenism, the Umlazi station murals succeed in being contextual and reflective of the community and circumstances township people find themselves in. As a result, the mural is loved and admired by the self-same community (Marschall, 1999). It creates a definitive historical, political, economic and social context for the residents of Umlazi. Similarly, murals need to focus on issues relevant to the various women in society at a particular historical moment in a sincere, well-researched manner, not necessarily ignoring issues of race, culture and diversity but portraying them as seen through the eyes and experienced through the lives of South African women.

2.1.2 Women and South African History:

Generally history has been written by men and about men ('his story') and in the South African context, it has been specifically that of white men. A thorough reworking of history by blacks, females, and black females is in progress (De La Rey, 1997: 9). A few murals that do attempt to commemorate past South African heroes (and some present ones) however show a bias towards important male (especially African) figures in South African history. Jacqui Roach and Petal Felix argue in their essay 'Black Looks' (1988: 130), that whenever a black perspective is created in popular American cultural productions it is usually synonymous with a male one. One only has to consider the 'University of Durban-Westville (UDW) Reconciliation and Development Project' (R.D.P) mural (henceforth called the 'UDW R.D.P. mural')[29] to

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[29] The UDW R.D.P mural (1995) consists of many images reflecting the R.D.P. process. On the left hand side of the mural, the healthcare sector is represented by three nurses; the housing and construction sector is shown by the outlines of steel construction work. The education system is represented by a young schoolboy a girl receiving computer training and a school feeding scheme. On the right of the mural are large portraits of political leaders Nelson Mandela, F.W. De Klerk, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Jay Naidoo and an unknown camerman.

understand this concern (fig. 11). All the political stalwarts portrayed are male - Nelson Mandela, F.W. De Klerk, Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Jay Naidoo.

In the UDW R.D.P mural it is these individual male heroes and their experiences that have been used to depict the collective experience of the liberation struggle. The Kwa-Muhle Museum mural (fig. 26) depicts the injustices suffered by African people during apartheid times. All the images - the doctor, the policeman, the African workers, and the protesters - are of males. This mural suggests therefore that it was only African men who suffered discrimination and that politics in South Africa are determined by only the men folk of the country. Can any historian or sociologist deny the vital role played by women like Winnie Mandela, Fatima Meer, Frene Ginwala, Helen Suzman, Graca Machel, Miriam Makeba and many others in South Africa's liberation struggle? This is not to mention the contribution of ordinary women who led marches, spent time in prison, were killed as MK soldiers, exiled or just killed for being wives, mothers, sisters or lovers of freedom fighters?[30]

Can it be that in a democratic society such as South Africa, despite the reality of the contribution of women to the attainment of democracy, that the sacrifices of male leaders are seen as far greater than the sacrifices made by women? This mindset of a hero being male is not only found in murals but in many other cultural productions[31] including monuments, both past and present.[32] While one can understand financial constraints and concerns regarding the erection of large monuments to women who

[30] Emma Mashinini, political activist in the trade union movement in South Africa (quoted in Schalkwyk, 2000) speaks about the marginalisation of women even within the trade union movement. She also expresses her anger at the exclusion of women from the grand story of political incarceration and claims by male prisoners that their female counterparts had an easy time. Collins (2000) says that prevailing beliefs grant more credence to the public-sphere activities of men.

[31] The majority of films made on the South African liberation struggle, for instance, concentrate more on the contribution made by men than women (Tomaselli, 1996: 260). Textbooks (presently as well) gender 'the nation' as almost exclusively male: men as discoverers, heroes, political leaders, military men (Witz, 2000: 337), victims and martyrs.

[32] This is with the notable exception of the Women's Memorial Monument in Pretoria that commemorates the Women's March of 1956 on the Union Buildings, Pretoria.The Union Buildings ran a sculpture/monument-making workshop for artists in 1999 (I participated in this workshop). A subsequent competition was run for the creation of a woman's monument that has been placed in the vestibule of the Union Buildings to commemorate the Women's Day March of 1956.

contributed to South Africa's democracy, murals could be used as a cost effective means of commemorating past and present heroes and heroines. Moreover, the limited life span of a mural can be considered as a positive factor in this regard. The Umlazi Station mural (fig. 27) is an example of this, as it effectively commemorates the regional mayoress of that time. The shorter life span of a mural can also be used to depict heroines as time and history changes, and to consistently portray changing leaders.

While both the UDW R.D.P and Kwa-Muhle murals depict mainly prominent male leaders in South African society, the mural painted at the Broad Street Police Station (henceforth called the 'Broad Street mural')[33], differs by also depicting a few females. The *Independent on Saturday* newspaper and Nedbank ran a competition for students to submit ideas for a mural based on the theme of 'My Community Hero' (figs. 12a – 13b). Three images of female 'heroes' (fig. 13a,b) were depicted, including Cynthia Mngadi, a local community worker, Pushpan Murugan, a poet and writer of the Tamil Dravidian Society, and Nise Malange, poet and director of Durban's Bartel Arts Trust (BAT) Centre. With the exception of Nise Malange, the other women commemorated are not high profile people or famous stalwarts of the liberation struggle.

The Broad Street mural is a potent example of how murals can be used to commemorate the achievements of ordinary individuals. This mural redefines the concept of the 'hero' as portrayed in other murals - i.e. a high profile, male stalwart of the Struggle. The women depicted are ordinary women who are working in their respective communities to try and make a difference. This aspect of women's lives is also reflective of the ethic of caring as well as personal accountability of an Afrocentric feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000: 192), that sees individuals not only accountable for the welfare of their private lives and domains, but also the welfare of others.[34]

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[33] The Broad Street mural (2002) is painted above the Broad Street police station and consists of various panels, each depicting a community leader. Each panel was painted by individual muralists.

[34] Many of the prominent male liberation fighters often made huge personal private, domestic sacrifices, as they spent time in training, exile or in prison. The women of these stalwarts, had an equally hard task in, at times, almost single-handedly running their households and raising the children e.g. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

This also reiterates the African concept of 'ubuntu' that sees people working together for the collective. Yvette Abrahams (2001: 72) cautions though that Africans have been socialised to think of struggling for the good of the collective (be it family, clan, village, nation or continent) as the highest and most legitimate form of validation. She suggests that this may be problematic for African women at times, when they believe that their personal opinions and values are not as valid as those of the collective and they therefore do not define themselves as individuals within the collective.

The Broad Street mural honours ordinary women's achievements on a public platform and introduces society to new role models. It is perhaps, indicative of the new criteria being used presently by some organisations and government departments, to honour individual contributions to society.[35] These female individuals not only help women reclaim their place as females in history (Nicholson, 1990: 55), but help women identify with them as individual role models while still promoting community participation.

The African Renaissance programme has promoted the concept of nation building in South Africa and murals have shown to be an excellent forum where 'African' identities and realities can be explored and negotiated. However, as Helen Dodge's analysis of South African television in the 1990's (quoted in Lewis, 2000: 176) reveals, the issue of race and racism are generally glossed over and ideological issues of class and gender are seldom dealt with in TV programmes. Murals likewise, have never explored deeper aspects of race, class and gender, choosing instead to propagate generalised broad social issues and a generalisation of identities ('rainbow nation', 'multiculturalism', 'Indian', 'African'). One can argue that murals which glorify 'rainbow' nationalism, have served their purpose during the last 10 years to promote reconciliation and diversity. A community or national identity however, should never be at the expense of the rich diversity of identities in South Africa. This pursuit of

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[35] Examples include the Shoprite Checkers 'Woman of the Year Award', and the 'Soweto Awards'. These awards were created in recognition of initiative, contribution and innovation of individual South Africans to their communities (Ntuli, 2002).

idealism in murals could unfortunately end up with 'ideal equalities.... conceal[ing] actual inequalities' (Lloyd, 1984: 107), and 'construct[ing] unreal essences' (Young, 1990: 304).

2.2. <u>The Influence of Popular Culture on Female Imagery:</u>

The term 'popular' has come to be tied to the concept of 'the people' and 'the ordinary' (Nuttall and Michael, 2000c: 11). Murals too, are thought to be 'a people's art'. But murals, like many forms of popular culture (TV, magazines, radio, films and advertisements), still have a small group of people speaking for the masses, determining what appeals to people and what the majority would like to, and should see. Although there are many strains of thought regarding popular culture and popular media, there are two that need mentioning for the purposes of this study and both contest the effects of dominant ideologies in society.

Initially it should be mentioned that theories of ideology are highly contested in popular culture studies and as Dominic Strinati (1995) shows, even the effects of ideologies are highly debatable. The notion however, that cultural stereotypes do inform people's thinking of themselves and others and thus influence their ideologies and ways of relating to the world, is the most relevant for this research. One strain of thought suggests that the mass media are merely a reflection of predominant ideologies and thinking already evident in society and do not 'inject' audiences with new ideas (Gamman, 1988: 26). In terms of gender relations, this statement is extremely important for, as Lorraine Gamman (1988) argues, it is in popular culture that we get to view dominant attitudes and ideologies about women.

One such ideology is that of women and shopping, and this can be seen in many murals (figs. 2, 3, 6, 8). Women are often represented as consumers carrying their shopping, usually in packets or baskets. This association of women with active consumption can also be seen in various billboards in many African townships and city centres. Advertisers have been targeting African people - even lower class, economically strapped African communities - as good consumers, as evidenced by the proliferation of billboard advertisements throughout African townships (Klopper,

2000: 192).[36] Muralists seem to have picked up on this representation of women as consumers, thereby reflecting it back to their community. A cursory glance at the representation of women in billboards shows the same stereotypes that one observes in murals, i.e. women as nurturers, home-makers, seductress, in conventional working roles and as keepers of tradition. Advertising is said to use points of identification to build and sustain a relationship with the audience (Fjeld, 2000: 399). Advertisers therefore use prevalent ideologies about women for people to identify with and then exploit these 'points of identification' for the purpose of selling tangible products and intangible fantasies.

The second strain of thought suggests that popular media could play an active role in identity construction. In *Yearning*, bell hooks (1990: 5, 8) discusses the negative impact that portrayals of African-American women in the media (by white and black men) have had on the image black women have of themselves. She further states that in contemporary postmodern culture, the media are central to the construction of social identity through mass-mediated images. Billboard adverts found in many African townships are directed at African women to buy a certain washing powder/mielie-meal/cake flour, while the majority of adverts show African men consuming alcohol. Women however, are usually not shown consuming alcohol in these billboards. Similarly, in murals, while beer making is represented as a chore of women, women are never depicted drinking beer. There are however, a few depictions of men involved in drinking and socializing. It is suggested that such billboard adverts found around African townships, could have fed into these murals the ideology that African women are not to consume alcohol for enjoyment. Hence, murals could be re-producing in the paint medium, the messages and stereotypes conveyed by the advertisements in townships.

The issue of the stereotype is a fundamental one to any discussion on popular media, as many researchers have criticised the constant use of stereotypes in popular media productions. Deschamps et.al (1998: 4) defines stereotypes as 'the expression of the attribution of features shared by different members of a group without taking into

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[36] In contrast, predominantly Coloured and Indian townships are largely billboard free unless the townships are situated in the vicinity of an industrial area or shopping centre.

account the interindividual differences'. They further state that the classification used as a basis for stereotypes 'minimises the differences in features among the members of a social group' (ibid.). It is this oversimplification and neglect of differences that has been criticised, with many academics often presenting stereotypes as always negative.

It is however necessary to recognise that some people identify with certain stereotypes and can find them empowering (Perkins, 1979). For instance, while I as a tertiary educated female may find images of women as mothers and street vendors degrading, there are many women who identify with these images as affirming their daily reality[37]. Stereotypes often exaggerate a few characteristics while excluding many more (ibid.: 139), but it is on the basis of these few characteristics that many people identify with the stereotype (e.g. 'mother' image, street vendor). Furthermore, the technical limitations of mural painting as well as the technical ability of individual artists, may 'force' artists to portray women in stereotypical ways, i.e. in a way that represents only one facet of her identity.

Homi Bhabha (1999: 370), in his analysis of the stereotype in colonial discourse, argues that the stereotype is a form of knowledge and identification that 'must be anxiously repeated'. The stereotype for Bhabha (ibid.: 374, 375) is not just a simplification because it is a 'false representation of a given reality', but because it seeks to portray 'an arrested, fixated form of representation' that does not acknowledge the play of difference and even disavows or masks it. Stereotypes of women found in murals in KZN do acknowledge differences in women (especially in terms of race), but tend to 'gloss over' other fundamental differences such as class, age, sexuality, education and religion. Stereotypes, like ideologies, have specific

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[37] Cockcroft et al. (1998: 127 - 130) relate the experience of mural co-ordinator, Tomie Arai, during the execution of the 'Wall of Respect for Women' (1974) in New York. Arai worked with nine working-class women of different races and cultures form the Lower East Side district. She says that during the early concept meetings, the women's minds were awakened to feminist ideas, but when it came to deciding on imagery, the idea of paining doctors and lawyers was rejected. The women favoured painting women 'in characteristic roles', 'because they felt women should be portrayed in roles they actually lived, historically and today' (1998: 127/130). These 'characteristic roles' included women educating children, household activities, produce vendor, cashier, switchboard operator, sewer, nurse, protestor, washerwoman and mother.

values attached to them (Perkins, 1979) and often promote the values of the artist. This will be discussed in more detail with regard to the mother/seductress dichotomy.

Ultimately, stereotypes are problematic because they tend to 'fix' identities, often surreptitiously portraying certain attributes of women's identities, roles and characteristics at the expense of others. The other problem with repetitively using such stereotypes is that they become automatically asserted and rarely questioned (Parker and Pollock, 1981: xviii). The objective of stereotypes is not to reflect or represent reality but instead to disguise or mystify social relations, thus making issues like racism, sexism, poverty and other social injustices appear to be natural, normal, inevitable aspects of everyday life (Collins, 2000: 69). For instance, muralist Gabisile Nkosi (2002) believes that murals are like advertisements, portraying what is really happening in the environment. This idea is disconcerting for the simple reason expressed earlier – that advertisers are out to make money and exploit values, stereotypes and ideologies (in fact, any point of identification) in their attempt to be commercially successful.

Marschall (2002: 179) argues that South African murals develop and disseminate racial stereotypes as well as convey direct and subliminal messages about gender relations in society, as one can evidence throughout this analysis. Thus, by muralists repeating 'easily' read stereotypical portrayals of women, these representations seem as if they are 'truthful', realistic depictions of women's roles and abilities within society, when they are actually just (over-) simplified portrayals of a diverse social group.

So how do the media influence images of women in murals? The fact that the same stereotypes of women are found in both suggests a considerable influence. Firstly, many muralists, especially African muralists, tend not to abstract forms in their murals because people in black communities are believed to find it harder to comprehend them (Ngcobo, 2001). Susan Vogel's *Africa Explores* (1991: 16) similarly noted that works of art from Africa usually have a readable message or story which can be explained in terms of a narrative, religious, social or political context and is easily understood by the artists and the viewers. It has been argued that murals

need to cater to their target audience. In black townships this audience includes people who never visit art galleries or have any 'art' knowledge. Murals also have to be easily understood by passers-by who are usually on the move, and thus muralists tend to use generalized imagery found in popular culture to increase the 'readability' of murals.

Secondly, when muralists were questioned about their research material and sources of inspiration, the majority of artists said they frequently or occasionally used magazines, books, newspapers or pamphlets to derive ideas and images. Whether it is imagery for children's murals or about more serious issues, print media form the most important source for the formation of mural images. Only very few artists use actual photographs taken by themselves to develop images, but even then they still occasionally turn to images from the print media to supplement their photographic record (Nkosi: 2002; Ngcobo: 2001; Findley: 2001). Most artists simply turn to magazines and books as they provide 'ready-made' images and then transpose them to the mural, altering it as they see fit. The same stereotypes of women may thus exist in both the mass media and murals because the former is used as source material for the latter.

An example of this is the Human Rights mural (henceforth called the H.R. `97 mural)[38], that shows two segments with 'mermaid' images.[39] One of these segments has a large half female/half fish image with similar smaller figures flying within it. There are also, smaller images inside these 'little' mermaid images e.g. jousters, two faces (fig. 25). The whole larger figure flies over a barren farming landscape. Artist Clinton De Menzes (2001) said that he had derived the image from a book on Shamanism. He saw the image as a connection between our physical reality and an

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[38] The H.R. `97 mural (1997) consists of various images painted by different artists and is 'divided' into various sections based on the various human rights laws, i.e. the right to life, right to education, occupation, trade and profession, human dignity, property, freedom of religion, language and culture. Styles of the various images and sections differ according to each muralist.

[39] I have referred to these images as 'mermaids' i.e. half female and half fish (female upper body and lower half of a fish) as described in the Hans Christian Anderson story of 'The Little Mermaid'.

attempt to transcend what South Africa has gone through to a new reality (e.g. the jousting knights are supposed to represent conflict on the land.) This example illustrates how images are recycled from one medium to the next and are invested with new meaning in the process.

This modus operandi of muralists contributes to the perpetuation of certain ideologies and stereotypes. Dominant ideologies in a patriarchal society influence popular cultural productions, which in turn is one of the sources that influence muralists. Popular media validates these dominant ideologies by further circulating them and thus these ideologies become entrenched in our thinking. Murals then further perpetuate them. Collins (2000: 27) argues that although individual black women interpret experiences in different ways and some black women reject dominant controlling images (e.g. the white Barbie-doll femininity model), other women internalise sexist images and believe that these stereotypes are reflective of them. Hence, due to this cycle patriarchal ideas of women (that they are predominantly caretakers, supplemental to men, ruled by nature and emotions rather than reason) continue to be sustained.

However, hooks (1990: 31) along with Gamman and Marshment (1988: 1- 2), feel that popular culture can be an exciting location for resistance to stereotypes and an exciting arena for the forging of new identities where meanings can be debated and contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed. Thus, if one considers murals to be a form of popular cultural production and if one assumes that popular media does indeed have this potential of resistance it can be argued that murals too can be a site of resistance.

While murals may share some similarities with popular media, ultimately popular media are driven by money-making motives, while muralists claim that the function of community murals is to represent the various communities and issues affecting them (Ngcobo, 2001; Ngobese, 2001; Nkosi, 2002; Stevenson, 2001). In this regard murals resemble the 'fine arts' more than advertisement. Like the 'fine arts', they have the potential to be critical while also creating awareness of pertinent issues. Muralists however must ensure that the images they are creating are not simply

catering for their individual tastes but have to be approved and understood by the community and therefore have to remain accessible. Therefore, muralists are faced with the hard task of attempting to challenge dominant ideas and limited stereotypes, while injecting mural imagery with new modes of representation and at the same time ensuring that they do not offend the community.

All artists wish for 'their' murals to be liked and it is perhaps this 'popular' aspect that prevents many muralists from challenging dominant ideas and stereotypes. Muralists thus subject themselves to a 'self-censorship' and this may deter them from confronting controversial issues (Cockcroft, et al., 1998: 306). Muralists may also avoid challenging stereotypes or painting 'oppositional images' because they want future site permission and funding - Cockcroft, et al. (1998: 271) call this 'conservative' tendency the 'domestication' of murals. As funding is a key component in KZN murals, muralists choose to please the funders as much as themselves and the audience. Funders usually want the mural to be 'politically correct' and have at times 'monitored' mural imagery. Arbitrary time deadlines have also impacted on U.S. murals in similar ways, in that these pressures place the design process solely on trained mural artists, which has at times lessened community participation (Drescher, 1998: 294). These concessions, according to Timothy Drescher (1998), result in murals trying not to offend rather than attempting to resolve issues strongly.

Addressing the imbalances of the past, especially the upliftment of women, is entrenched in the South African constitution (Women's Memorial Project Handout, 1999: 6[40]). Government, through its 'Legacy Project' is attempting to readdress these inequalities and imbalances in the cultural landscape through the creation of monuments and awards. In the South African context, generalisations of the 'Other' (i.e. non-whites and women) were effectively used by the colonial and apartheid government to devalue both non-whites and (especially black) women. Thus, it is necessary in post-apartheid society for such assumptions and preconceptions to be challenged and replaced. Murals too, can positively contribute to this process by re-

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[40] Anonymous (1999). 'Women's Memorial Project Handout'. Pretoria: Pretoria Technikon and Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology.

negotiating identities in this platform – dispelling notions of the 'Other' and documenting the hybridity of identities evident in society today.

While this study recognizes the fact that generalized imagery has been very much a part of the mural process, it seeks to nonetheless question such images and create awareness, especially for muralists themselves that these images are not 'natural' representations of reality. These depictions have been selected by <u>the muralists</u> (albeit often unconsciously) and it is these self-same muralists (if made aware) that can choose not to paint stereotypical images and perhaps search for alternate representations.

CHAPTER: THREE

3.1 Women in Dualistic Roles:

Various scholars have traced the roots of Western male dualistic thinking, from the early Greek philosophers, through the Renaissance, then the Enlightenment, to modern day society (Lloyd, 1984; Battersby, 1989). Dualisms have been used in Western society to reveal 'general, all-encompassing principles' (Nicholson, 1990: 2). These binary divisions - white/black, male/female, reason/emotion, culture/nature, mind/body, subject/object, public/private - served to create a fixed 'Other' (Collins, 2000: 70). Post-structuralists have pointed out that one of the two terms is always privileged over the other (Yeatman, 1990: 288), thereby creating a hierarchy that shapes identity. These dualisms are also infused with masculine/feminine inferences i.e. 'body' and 'nature' are associated with the 'feminine', while 'language' and 'culture' are associated with the 'masculine' (Cooey, 1994: 21). Hence the privileging of the male sex and male attributes over the female sex and female characteristics in most spheres of life in patriarchal societies.

These dualisms have been severely challenged by recent critical perspectives including feminism (ibid.: 13), as they present universalisations and generalisations as truthful observations. Binary thinking has shaped human understanding of difference, it sets things and people apart as opposites to each other, and establishes relationships of superiority and inferiority (Collins, 2000: 70 - 71). Binary thinking also creates hierarchies, which have been used to justify race, gender, class and sexual oppression and therefore need to be challenged (Cooey, 1994; Kolawole, 1997). In patriarchal societies, dualisms help justify man's superiority over woman – 'he' is central/essential, 'she' is marginal/supplemental (Minor, 1994: 165).

Two prominent dualisms represented in murals are those of mother/seductress and male activity/female passivity. The problem with such dichotomous female imagery is that it conforms to an either/or mindset. bell hooks (1990: 8) warns that one of the problems of using Western metaphysical dualisms is that individuals from oppressed

and exploited groups may internalize this way of thinking. Thus these depictions advocate to society the thinking that women can only succeed in one role at a time.

hooks in *Ain't I A Woman* (1981) describes the various stereotypical roles in which African-American women are portrayed in American popular culture and literature. She develops in this context the concept of the Aunt Jemima/Sapphire dichotomy. Aunt Jemima (also called 'mammy') is the overweight, head-scarved, motherly-type figure which can also be found in KZN mural depictions of African women as mothers. Collins (2000: 84) argues that the 'mammy' figure is usually considered asexual and is an example of the split between sexuality and motherhood that is present in Eurocentric, masculinist thought. On the other hand, the seductress-type image depicts black women as 'sexy', enjoying the power of their sex appeal. Images of women conforming to the Sapphire-type are shown as inducing some sort of response from the men depicted around them by their 'sexual' presence.[41] This chapter will firstly discuss mother-type images, then the seductress-type image and thereafter the dualism of male activity and female passivity. The final part of this chapter will look at the association of women with tradition versus the association of women with nature.

3.1.1. Women in Mother-type Roles:

The predominance of the role of motherhood in murals can be interpreted to show that people highly value this fundamental, biological role of women in our society. In mother-type images (usually overweight African) women are usually shown with one or two children. They are shown as the key figure in the family unit - not in terms of providing for the children economically, but in terms of providing love, support and ensuring their physical well-being. Murals in various places bear images conforming to limited variations of the African mother-type. They are rarely depicted involved in

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[41] Margaret Marshment (1988) and Avis Lewallen (1988) noted the same dualistic approach to the depiction of women in their studies on women in popular culture in the American media, as does Marschall (2002: 186) in murals in South Africa. Marschall refers to this binary opposition as the Madonna/whore dichotomy, which has informed the representation of women in European painting in the 19th century.

any activity apart from being shown with her children (sometimes with shopping bag in hand) walking off to an unknown destination (figs. 2, 5, 6).

Similarly, women are frequently represented in this motherly role in various South African media productions. The mother-figure has been identified by society as the embodiment of nurturing, with women seen in a positive light because of their care for their families and their 'self-sacrificing love' for others (hooks, 1981: 66). (The nurturing aspect will be discussed later on with relevance to women in working roles.) In various traditional South African communities great respect was accorded to the mother in a family, insofar as a person who treats the mother well is blessed with a good life and one person who doesn't, 'invites' a curse, or scorn from family and community (Qunta, 1987b: 42 - 44). Thus, the mother-image in murals could be a reflection of the respect that women are accorded as mothers in all cultures in South Africa (especially African and Indian).

However, while African mother and child images are common, there are very few images of white mothers and their children. There are even fewer images of Indian mothers and it can only be speculated why this is so. One possible reason could be that many of these murals are targeted at African township audiences (at Umlazi, Lamontville, KwaMashu) or areas frequented by mainly African people (Alice Street Taxi Rank, Umgeni Station, Warwick Street Triangle in Durban). Regardless of her colour though, the mother-figure rarely seems to have occupations or facets of life other than childcare.

Rosika Parker and Griselda Pollock (1981: 116) in their examination of the female nude in 19th century painting in Europe, explore the contradictions found in Western society that demanded a rigid sexual moral code for women, whose rightful place was seen to be in the domestic sphere. In contrast, many of this period's paintings depicted images of female sexual availability. Since imagery in any medium is mediated by a person, it should not be read as a mere reflection of reality and social relations (ibid.). Just 19th century paintings were predominantly meditated by male artists, so is mural imagery in the contemporary mural scene in KZN. Thus, even though women in real South African society are able to maintain many roles simultaneously, more often

than not it is the African male muralist who 'mediates and re-presents' (ibid.: 119) the roles of women in most murals, positioning the mother-role as the most prominent role of women.

It can be argued that the depiction of women in the mother-role has led to a glorification of motherhood in society. Collins (2000) similarly notes that many male thinkers in the US have tended to sanctify the notion of black motherhood, which can also be detrimental to women. There is a similar trend in South African society, which has led to the idea of the 'superstrong Black mother' who is praised for sacrificing everything and enduring much hardship for the sake of her children (Collins, 2000: 176). Although the prominence given to mothers is worthy and understandable, it needs to be cautioned that the 'superstrong Black mother' stereotype may serve to defer the complexity of motherhood, as it romanticises the harsh realities experienced by these self-same mothers. Motherhood, especially for lower-class women, brings with it many social concerns which are rarely seen, in murals.[42] An exception would be an image on the H.R. `97 mural which shows an African mother, baby on her back, kneeling before a welfare official thus reflecting some of the socio-economic hardships of mothers today. This lone image portrays the realities of many mothers in South Africa who have to feed, clothe and provide financially for their children. Hence, while some women see motherhood as the fulfilment of their 'womanhood' and as a status symbol in their community, other women may find motherhood burdensome, stifling and limiting to their own personal vision (ibid.).

The Women's Wall (figs. 9 & 10)[43] is an exception to many murals, depicting women in many different roles, from different class groups. An image of an African

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[42] It has been noticed that African women are not depicted being involved in housework in an urban setting (only in rural areas). One can only speculate as to why this is so. While the housewife-image may seem like a stereotype that society can do without, would it not be creating an alternate stereotype by not attempting to validate all women's concerns (be it a cleaner or housewife) rather than just the glamorous or politically correct? Collins (2000) argues that inverting and imitating male success in a man's world is to displace women-centred values and woman's interpretation of reality and to continue to work within male-dominated modules, without ever questioning the module itself.

[43] The Women's Wall (1995) is one of several murals painted at the Windsor Secondary School in Ladysmith. While the Women's Wall was dedicated to women's rights, the reverse side of this wall was used to commemorate workers' rights. Another panel, the school's nameplate, was used to reflect

mother/caretaker, baby in arm, is depicted amid a number of images of women in a diversity of roles, i.e. academic, traditional healer, construction worker, sewer, political activist. Placed in this pluralistic context, the mother role is displaced from its dominant position and finds itself on equal standing with the various other roles a woman can simultaneously maintain in reality. Miki Flockemann (2000: 146 - 147) in her examination of soap operas in South Africa, discusses models used for 'decoding' forms of mass culture which draws on the works of scholars such as Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu. These models focus on the production of meaning by the 'differently positioned spectator' rather than the acceptance of given meanings. Flockemann's further description of such models aptly describes the Women's Wall – 'here the emphasis on polysemic readings presented the possibility of readings that could either accept the 'intended' or 'preferred' reading or result in a 'negotiated' or 'demystifying' reading, or even be rejected through a 'resistant' or 'alternative' reading' (ibid.).

In the Women's Wall, the bricolage of images of the various roles of women allows for a number of different readings of individual images and the mural as a whole. For instance, the image of the woman with the baby in her arm is open to various interpretations, i.e. the 'preferred' meaning could be that the image is supposed to represent a mother with her child. However, the reader cannot be completely sure of this as it could also represent a caretaker with a child[44] - thus, this would result in an 'alternate' reading of the same image. Furthermore, the displacement of the woman-and-child image in preference to a more prominent image of a female graduate could be seen as resistant to conventional ways of depicting the mother-type image as the most important role of women. A factor that could have impacted on this depiction of women in the Women's Wall was the fact that it was painted by tertiary educated males and (more) females. These muralists' education may have been a contributing factor in what was a conscious effort to try and be 'politically correct' in their tribute

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the Indian and African cultures at the school, while the last wall was used to depict the diversity of religious practices in South Africa and the need for harmony with nature.

[44] The attire of this image gives me reason to read this woman as a caretaker of the child, as opposed to the mother. The woman is dressed in what seems to be a domestic maid's uniform, suggesting that perhaps she is a child minder.

to women. A tertiary education though doesn't always result in social awareness of gender representation (e.g. UDW Aids mural) (fig. 16).[45]

Men however are portrayed in murals in various roles which they seem to be able to maintain simultaneously. These roles (of businessman, father, husband, pastor, politician, and sportsman) may not be at the expense of one to another. However, the complimentary to the mother-image i.e. that of the father, is distinctly absent from most murals. Although mothers are usually shown only with their children, it is doubtful that this is meant to represent single parenthood. Rather it may be more reflective of the country's colonial and apartheid legacy. The ongoing migration of African men for work to urban areas since the 1920's left many women as heads of households in rural areas (Mabandla, 1995: 67). This entailed household chores, working in the fields, as well as educating the children (Qunta, 1987). Alternatively, many African women moved to urban areas to find domestic or factory work, taking their children with them or sometimes leaving them in their rural homesteads with other family members (Collins, 2000: 243). The families of African women in urban areas suffered as women were forced to spend long hours in low-paying jobs in domestic service or formal employment (Meer, 1984, Mabandla, 1995). Thus these various social and political circumstances could have contributed to the perception that African mothers are solely responsible for the welfare of their children   which are perpetuated in some murals.

Political activities also had negative effects on African households as once again men had to leave their home to fight for freedom, spending months or even years in prison, in exile, or in hiding. Thus, the absence of or apparent uninvolvement of African fathers in the family unit, as seen in murals, may serve as a reminder of the negative side effects of living in an abnormal society surviving the legacy of apartheid.

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[45] UDW Fine Art students and Apt Artworks painted the UDW Aids mural in 1999. The group comprised of Indian and African males and females, with female students outnumbering males 5:2. There are a number of stereotyped images portrayed in this mural, some of which I have personally been responsible for: e.g. a pregnant African mother; an Indian woman with bun, sari and bindi; a female Aids counsellor, female nurses and a female African domestic worker.

Susan Bordo (1993: 42) discusses the persistence of the public/private dualism, which reinscribes the patriarchal idea that the 'natural' place of a woman is in the home, while men are meant to be in the public domain. Western patriarchal thinking has devalued the private domain of the woman, while some Afrocentric feminists have claimed that in pre-colonial societies, black women were highly valued for this role. Western dualistic thinking though traditionally holds a male's economic contribution to the family in higher regard than it does a female's contribution to child rearing.

Postcolonial theory recognises the inevitability of the 'contamination' of the colonised culture with practices of the dominant (Gqola, 2001: 13). Thus, it can be argued that a 'colonial' attitude may have pervaded the mindset of black men in post-colonial South Africa, in that while men may value the contribution of the mother and the 'status' of motherhood, they may not hold the actual daily household activities in high regard. Men do not regard other men who are the primary caretakers of children, in the same esteem as they would one who is earning well financially. So while a man can take care of a family as well as a woman can, it is not thought of as an honoured position when men assume the role of 'nurturer'. Thus although men hold women in high esteem as mothers, they may still subscribe to patriarchal thinking that views the 'natural' place of a woman as in the home, taking care of children.

In the majority of the murals, mural teams usually comprised of tertiary educated or informally trained adult muralists. There are also murals that have been painted exclusively by children, with one or more adult muralists. Since children in South Africa spend most of their time with their mothers, a close mother-child relationship develops which is reflected in children's paintings, as seen in various murals. Even street children, when given a chance to paint on the H.R. `97 and Blue Lady (Fig. 25) murals, chose to paint smiling women, children, homes and flowers.

The Escourt Station mural and fence murals[46], painted solely by children, differ from the 'adult' murals which all show a lack of involvement of fathers. The Escourt murals

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[46] The Escourt Station (date unknown) and Fence (1996) murals were painted by various schoolchildren on the walls leading to the train station, as well as inside the station and on a fence near

both focused on overpopulation as a problem and advocated the importance of smaller families. Although these murals reflect important female/mother concerns, it is interesting to note that children have shown the father figure as an integral member of these small families. Although there seems to be no apparent 'dialogue' between either parents or between parents and children, the very presence of the father-image suggests support and active participation of the father in the family, as well as for women and children concerns.

The role of motherhood, depicted so frequently in murals and various popular media in South Africa, is firstly indicative of the importance of the role of mothers in society. Secondly, it shows the changing dynamics of a society that has been influenced by other cultures, social and political factors. All these factors could have contributed to child-rearing being represented as a 'woman's job' in post-colonial South African society often at the expense of the representation of other facets of women's lives.

3.1.2 Women in Seductress-Type Roles:

While popular media show many representations of the mother/seductress dichotomy, the seductress-type images are much more subdued in mural imagery than similar role representations in popular media. Nonetheless, this type of female representation is present in a few murals in KZN. The Umlazi Station murals (figs. 7, 8, 15) have a few depictions of sensual women: women in tight jeans, short dresses, mini skirts, high heeled shoes, with red lipstick and nail polish. The Bat Africolor mural (fig. 14) also depicts women in tight-fitting dresses, pants and tops, dancing rather 'provocatively' with a few men. At KwaMnyandu Station, we see young school children pick up on the social interaction of stylishly dressed young women being solicited by men.[47] A

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the station. These murals deal with the issues of overpopulation and its effects as well as the various environmental issues.

[47] An older, no longer extant mural at Kwa-Mnyandu painted in 1993 shows a rather sensual image of a young African woman, dressed in a leopard skin, figure hugging body suit and high heels, wearing sunglasses, waiting in line to buy a ticket. This is a child's impression of a black woman dressed up in a very 'sexy' way.

segment on the Ogwini mural is also suggestive of the sexual prowess of African women.

The problem with the seductress-type image is that it can be used to represent an evil side of women - 'in short, all that the mammy figure was not' (hooks, 1981: 85). Marschall (2002: 186 - 187) has observed that while mother-type women are usually depicted as helpless and passive, subservient to the male, the seductress role is an active one. Marschall suggests that here, agency is implied to be on the part of the woman. Belinda Budge (1988) similarly observes the passivity of mother-type images as opposed to the active role of the seductress-type image in soap operas. The same applies to other cultural productions, especially advertising. In Budge's deconstruction of the popular American serial, *Dynasty*, it is the Krystle Carrington character that is the passive mother and household nurturer and is generally depicted as visually static (ibid.: 108). As with representations of mother-images in murals, other facets of the seductress-woman's life are rarely portrayed (Budge, 1988: 107). If the essence of the mother-images in murals is their portrayal as static, passive characters, the same passivity can be observed in depictions of women in other roles as well.[48] (The issue of female passivity will be discussed more later on.)

While the mother-image of Krystle may be passive, the opposite image to the Krystle character in *Dynasty*, the Alexis Dexter character, is the active exponent of her destiny refusing to play a side kick role to any man (ibid.: 106). Even South African soap operas have their own Aunt Jemima/Sapphire dichotomy e.g. Egoli (Nena/Kimberly Edwards); Backstage (Mrs. Abrahams/Zandi); Isidingo (Mrs. Matebane/Cheryl De Villiers). These images may seem harmless but one has to consider the fact that the various soap operas in South Africa are watched by 700 000 to 1 500 000 people daily (Vosloo, 2002). It is hardly questionable that these characters and the stereotypes they portray could influence the approximately 1 000 000 people they are broadcast to

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[48] The vast majority of cartoon characters depicted in murals are of male characters, with female characters playing minor sidekick roles or love interests to the central male character e.g. Mickey Mouse/Minnie Mouse, Aladdin/Princess Jasmine.

daily.[49] The majority of both male and female muralists interviewed revealed that they watched one or more of these soap operas on a daily or regular basis, with only a few artists not watching soap operas at all. The constant portrayals of women in these stereotypical roles in soap operas (and other popular cultural productions), could also influence some artists' perceptions on the roles of women and they then reproduce this in the paint medium.

Bordo (1993: 6-9) finds representations of black women in seductive roles problematic because these depictions play on cultural mythologies of the 'Other', i.e. stereotypes of black women as amoral 'jezebels' who induce sexual responses from men through manipulation. The 'jezebel' role was informed by the Western dualistic thinking of male/female heterosexuality. This dualism expects the male to be the agent and the woman to be passive (ibid.: 83). Black woman with her 'Other' status is exempt from this though, as she is supposedly sexually deviant anyway (Collins, 2000: 83).[50] 'Jezebels' not only invite sexual responses from men but also its abusive consequences, e.g. rape (Bordo, 1993: 6-9). Rape in South Africa has reached staggering proportions with some statistics claiming that one woman is raped every 37 seconds (Padayachee, 2002). One of the common myths in South Africa is that women who are scantily clad are the only ones raped. Given the current situation, such perceptions are rather dangerous (ibid.). Collins (2000: 82) rejects these black seductress-type images, arguing that the more they circulate, the more they are validated and credence is given to these sexist/racist ideologies of black women.

In murals there are more images of African women in seductive-type roles than there are of other races. This could primarily be because (as stated previously) most of the

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[49] Interestingly, while one may assume that it is predominantly women who watch soap operas, Flockemann (2000: 149) quotes a survey which shows that more than 50% of the viewers in Soweto who watched 'The Bold and the Beautiful' were African males. This debases the assumption that soap operas are watched predominantly by women. One of the reasons for this male audience is that the high unemployment rate has left many men at home during the day, with little to do.

[50] This is epitomised by the exploitation of Sara Bartman in nineteenth-century Paris (Collins, 2000: 136-137, Abrahams, 1997). Bartman, a Khoisan woman, was taken from South Africa, and displayed in Europe, as a 'specimen' of 'Hottentot' peoples (Abrahams, 1997: 43 – 45). Upon her death in 1815, Bartman's body was dissected by two scientists and examined, and permanently displayed in a glass case in the Musee de l'Homme. In 2002, Bartman's body was finally buried in South Africa.

murals are found in African townships. The depiction of the seductress-type image is perhaps reflective of an actual aspect of township life, in terms of young women enjoying different styles of dressing. However, the seductress-image may also serve as moral chastisements to both women and the community at large. Women's bodies as sites of cultural production are shaped by inner and outer forces 'which inscribe into the body a particular identity and religio-cultural expectations of bodily discipline, behaviour, health and beauty' (King, 2000: 9). Hence, these images of seductive women in murals carry certain ideas of morality and values (usually that of the muralist and the culture that they come from).

A segment on the Umlazi mural (figs. 6 & 7)[51] in particular depicts an African woman in bra-top and tight-fitting pants being accosted by a taxi-driver and it could be interpreted that the woman's provocative dressing invites the sexual response from the man. Women who dress provocatively are criticised by muralists for dressing 'unacceptably', as it is inducing men to sexual responses. In this way, the muralist functions as a 'moralist' (Marschall, 2002: 189) - challenging the erosion of traditional values, behaviour and morality. The process of painting murals allows individuals to propagate their ideals and thoughts about issues in society. Gabisile Nkosi (2002) said that if she painted murals in townships, she would send specific messages to the community, commenting on behaviour that needs to be changed.

Murals though are not the only art forum that propagates certain moralist values and societal behaviour. In *'Africa Explores. 20th Century African Art'* (1991), Susan Vogel and Bogumil Jewsiewicki both discuss the moralising aspects of urban African painting in the DRC. Congolese artist Cheri Samba is discussed as being a key proponent of this type of art that mix a moralising aspect with eroticism and politics (Jewsiewicki, 1991). Jewsiewicki (ibid.: 134) calls Samba 'a moralist and a teacher who will try to instruct not only members of his own society, but anyone he considers in need of a lesson…'. Marschall (2002) also recognises that there is a similar trend in South African art. She cites the example of the late Durban artist Trevor Makhoba as

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[51] This panel in the Umlazi Station shows the roadside urban environment and on-goings in a township. A scantily-clad woman is accosted by a taxi driver; a mother walks off with her shopping and her bare-bottomed child; a shopowner chats to some kids; a drunken sleeping old man is pushed in a wheelbarrow; while another mother, baby in arm, ponders what to purchase from a fruit vendor.

one of the professional black artists whose work strives to depict the erosion of traditional moral value systems, due to the influence of urban Western culture (ibid: 187 – 189). Two other black Durban artists' works are also reflective of this moralising practise, namely Stembiso Sibisi and S'busiso Duma. Their paintings and prints comment on the moral degradation of urban African communities due to the loss of traditional African values. Both Sibisi and Duma are also active muralist in KZN and their mural images are equally reflective of their moralistic stance. An example of this would be the Umlazi Station murals (discussed above) where certain types of dressing by women are criticised as inviting sexual responses from men (hence conversely one can say that the moral here is that 'good', decent women have to be dressed less revealingly in order to prevent this sort of sexual harassment (Fig, 7)).

In the depiction of traditional rural scenes, muralists are advocating the roles and values they have portrayed as a model of behaviour of the way things should be done, at a time when educated Africans are lamenting the loss of traditional values in African culture (Buthelezi, 2001a: 18). Muralists propagate certain values in their mural images and these values are influenced by various sources e.g. family, religion. Thus, artist's personal ideas bout morality and values also need to be examined as they may still reflect a conformation to sexist, patriarchal definitions of morality. As mentioned in the introduction, dominant ideologies and stereotypes found in society are used by the popular media to communicate with their audience and that the popular media are also a source that influences muralists and their values systems. Hence, the continual perpetuation of certain patriarchal values, ideologies and stereotypes of women in murals like the mother-and seductress-type image.

3.2 Male Activity/Female Passivity:

It is mainly in seductress-type images however, that women can be seen as 'active'. Most often, women are depicted as static figures in the presence of men and are usually not depicted participating in any activity. They are usually just assistants to the scene being played out by the male figures.

A mural that exemplifies the depiction of the passivity of women in comparison to the active roles of men is the UDW R.D.P. mural (fig. 11). This mural celebrates the roles of past heroes in the freedom struggle and ordinary people in the process of reconciliation and development. The mural reflects themes of education, culture, housing problems, literacy, employment and health care (represented by three female nurses). Out of all these themes depicted, a large figure of an African woman stares back at the viewer (one cannot really tell what she is representing); a racially ambiguous woman with her back to the viewer wears a hard helmet, a little girl is being taught computer literacy; with a faceless Bharatanatyam dancer in the background. Apart from the nurses, all these female images are rather static and it isn't clear exactly how they are actively involved in the R.D.P. process except to say that they are definitely a part of it.

It has to be taken into consideration though, that the technical ability of muralists as well as limited space on murals may result in muralists depicting women as 'static' figures. This however is not applicable to the UDW R.D.P. mural, where the tertiary educated fine art students were not hampered by either of these factors. The men depicted in this mural are all well-known personalities who were very actively involved in the transformation process of the country (e.g. F.W. De Klerk, Nelson Mandela). Even the ordinary men depicted are actively involved in contributing to South African society - a male construction worker drives a tractor, a man teaches computer literacy to a little girl and another man (supposedly Vivian Reddy, a prominent Indian businessman) spoons out food to a line of schoolboys in a feeding scheme. Visually, this mural reiterates the idea of men as active and women as passive. Since it is not hampered by technical limitations, one can speculate that it is either influenced by an ideology of male activity/female passivity or a lack of in-depth research into the contribution of women to the R.D.P. process.

This association of males with activity and females with passivity is rooted in Western thought. Genevieve Lloyd's (1984: 3, 24) examination of various Greek philosophical writings reveals the association of activity with the male (active male seed) and passivity with females (passive female egg). Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (quoted in Kolawole, 1997: 9) decries simplistic images of women that portray African women

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as passive and mute[52], saying that African women have always spoken out but that 'we' fail to look for their voices in sites and forms that these voices may be uttered. The idea of female passivity therefore is not an actual observation of women but rather a male idea or stereotype of women that has been sustained through the ages in different disciplines.

There are only a few murals that depict women as 'active' participants in working roles and these depictions are more exceptions to the general rule. These murals however, only portray women in conventional pre-feminist roles, i.e. as nurses, as teachers, and recently, as street vendors. Street vendors have become proliferous sights in the Durban city centre and elsewhere in South Africa, since the early 1990s. Almost every street in central Durban has vendors, selling anything from fruit and vegetables to shoes, combs and mirrors. In murals, vendors are one of the predominant depictions of African women working in the informal sector.

These murals intend to depict the different members of society (often reduced to lower class society) and it can be argued that these portrayals acknowledge and give dignity to a strata of South African society that is largely ignored. Gabisile Nkosi (2002) who was responsible for painting a female street vendor on a segment of the H.R. `97 mural says that she painted what she saw happening around these areas. Depictions of women involved in vending however, tend to be rather romanticised, failing to convey the harsh reality of these people's everyday plight. They almost always give no socio-economic or political context as to what has led to these female hawkers living and working on the streets (Buthelezi, 2001b: 24).

The nurturing aspect of mothers, as mentioned earlier, can also be extended to the working roles of nursing and teaching. Quite a few murals depict female nurses and teachers (figs. 11, 16, 18, 19). Popular media in South Africa perpetuate these

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[52] African feminists and womanists alike have denied this idea of the 'voiceless', passive black woman. For instance, womanist Mary Kolawole (1997) maintains that average African women are not invisible in reality, and that the real life courage of women, like Ellen Kuzwayo and Emma Mashinini in South Africa against oppression reveals the falsity of people presenting African women as passive, suffering victims.

stereotypes, with a number of advertisements depicting women according to these nurse- and teacher-models (e.g. fig. 17). One finds that the majority of health-related posters at local hospitals and clinics all conform to this stereotype of representing women as nurses.

One finds that in South Africa, the majority of nurses in both hospitals and clinics tend to still be female and thus mural (and popular media) depictions could on the one hand be representing a current reality. On the other hand, there are plenty of female doctors specialising in all areas of healthcare and the problem with murals is that they rarely represent women in these 'higher positions', i.e. that of doctors. The UDW Aids mural (fig. 16)[53] shows one of the only representations of an African female doctor tending to a male patient and once again it could be suggested that this is the result of this image being painted by a university student.

Representations of men in healthcare however, are usually read as doctors, hence one also sees a dichotomy of men as doctors/women as nurses. This is indicative of the role of the viewer (as discussed in the introduction), which shows that although texts are polysemic and the viewer can read an image in any number of ways, societal norms and conventions have 'taught' us to read certain images/texts in particular ways and associate certain values with them. In this instance, ideologies in society have 'taught' us to read male images in healthcare as doctors and female images in healthcare as nurses.

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[53] The UDW Aids mural (1999) is painted within the university's premises by students from the Fine Art Department. The mural has a central image consisting of a large red ribbon, encompassing various images of people who are meant to be reflective of South African society: a nurse, Indian woman, African women, young white male, a businessman, a young schoolboy and schoolgirl, a priest, a pregnant woman, a construction worker, a Rastafarian. Written across the top of the Aids ribbon are the words 'Phansi Nge Aids Phansi' (Down with Aids, Down). Below the ribbon on the left and right of the intersecting ends of the ribbon are a caller to the Aids helpline and a telephone councilor respectively. Between them is a telephone with the Aids hotline telephone number. On either side of the ribbon are 2 scenes each. On the upper left is a scene of a nurse handing out condom, below this is a bedroom scene of two lovers in bed, with condoms on the sheets and 'love wisely' written above them. On the upper right hand side of the ribbon is a sick person being checked by a doctor and below this scene is the image of two males helping out a third. This image is based on the Aids slogan 'my friend with Aids is still my friend'.

Like the nursing role, teaching is also seen as a part of the women's role of nurturing (figs. 18, 19). Various muralists commented on the respect they had for the role women played in society, especially roles of nurturing which went hand-in-hand with the role of educators. Muralists Khehla Ngobese (2001) and Bongani Mbete (2001) for example, remarked that they saw women as the primary educators in society, with education beginning at home for children - 'even a humble home' (Mbete, 2001). According to these muralists, it was women who initially instructed children and that this role would be carried out throughout the child's life. These depictions of women and nurses still evoke the nurturing aspect of mothers - as caretakers of children, sick people and the community.

While women are mostly seen as primary educators and murals try to depict both male and female learners, young female students in the classroom however are usually outnumbered by their male counterparts. Once again there seems to be a dichotomy present, that of the male as learner/female as educator (figs. 18, 19). It would seem from these representations that in places of learning (schools, universities and colleges) men formed the majority of learners. This is not necessarily true but fortunately there are a few murals which are more reflective of the current situation. For instance, a segment on the Technikon Natal `96 mural shows more tertiary female students than male students and a more multiracial grouping of students is meant to reflect the diversity of the institution. This mural reflects the current situation in education, which sees unprecedented numbers of females in schools and tertiary institutions. Thus, the Technikon Natal `96 mural may be a more accurate depiction of the male/female ratio in education today because it was painted by students who are studying in such an environment.

Men though are depicted in a variety of working roles in society. The H.R. `93 mural (as well as the Kwa-Muhle Museum and Broad Street murals) have images of policemen (always male) actively involved in duty, while a male judge affirms the right to a fair trial. A male government official presides over a female pension/welfare applicant in the H.R. `97 mural. A male fireman rescues a little boy on the S.A.P.S mural, while the Umlazi (fig. 22) and Thembalihle stations are littered with images of

men involved in railway and general construction. Murals thus portray what is believed to be typical working roles that men perform in South Africa society.

In various KZN murals, artists have often chosen the mining and construction sectors to represent men as labourers (figs. 20, 21). They have chosen the representation of 'hard' male labour to convey the harshness of certain 'male' jobs. The reverse side of the Women's Wall was supposed to be dedicated to workers in South Africa (fig. 20). The working industry is represented by the silhouetted form of what seems to be a male figure in hard helmet against the steel beams of construction work. Despite the simplistic design of the Worker's Wall mural, it creates quite a potent statement on the importance of these industries. Likewise, the H. R. `97 mural also shows a segment on 'Labour Relations' (fig. 21) which once again depicts the male dominated employment sectors of mining and construction. In both these murals, 'hard' male labour is used to represent the spectrum of South Africa's (male and female) labour force. Although women have become increasingly involved in the mining sector, women are never depicted in these roles.[54]

These 'hard' male jobs are usually 'commemorated' when it is necessary to depict the theme of 'labour'. Female jobs (like secretarial and garment work) are rarely represented in murals. Perhaps patriarchal ideas have once again informed the thinking that men perform the 'real', 'hard' work in society while women's work is once again supplemental. The economic hardship and survival of the lower classes in South Africa today tells a different story though, as a woman's wage has become quite essential to family earnings. In fact, many women's wage is often indispensable to families due to the escalating unemployment and poverty rates.

Thus, one sees that although in reality women are very active in all spheres, men are usually depicted as the predominantly active role players in society. This idea of male activity and female passivity, which is rooted in Greek philosophy combined with patriarchal structures, still influences thinking today. Even when women are

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[54] Women miners today are capable of performing the same tasks as male miners (Jacobson, 2002).

occasionally seen in active working roles, it is still male jobs that are shown to be the harder tasks and therefore given more importance.

3.3 Women and Nature/Women and Tradition:

Lloyd's (1984: 1- 2) examination of the concepts of 'male' and 'female' rationality, emotions and body in *'The Man of Reason – "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy'*, shows how early Greek thought was permeated with the distinction of the male as rational, cultured being and female as emotional, nature-orientated being. 'Femaleness' (as well as women's bodies (Bordo 1993: 33)) has been associated with 'nature' and just as nature needs to be controlled, so do women. Culture is equated with civilisation and 'control', while nature is objectified and equated with 'primitive' and 'animalistic' qualities, which was used to justify the white man's domination and rule over nature (Collins, 2000: 71). Thus, by equating women with nature, this thinking validates the domination of men over women and his subsequent control over her apparent 'primitive' tendencies.

This association of women with nature is seen in many murals in KZN. The most direct examples are the icons of 'mother nature', 'mother water' and 'female spirits'. Even though different CMP artists belong to different races and ethnicities and have varying levels of art training, this theme is perpetuated by many of them. One such example is the strange image of a female 'mermaid' [55] that has reoccurred several times in murals. Other examples include Avitha Sooful's Indian lady petting a sacred cow in the Nomkhubulwana `94 mural, as well as a woman painting stars into the night sky while her male counterpart observes the sky through a telescope in the H.R. `97 mural.

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[55] I have referred to these images as 'mermaids' i.e. half female and half fish (female upper body and lower half of a fish) as described in the Hans Christian Anderson story of 'The Little Mermaid'. This image, in different forms is found in the different murals. While these mermaid images may be reminiscent of the Mami Wata ('Mother Water') image that is frequently found in West and Central African popular art (Mudimbe, 1991; Jewsiewicki, 1991), it is not suggested that the image of Mami Wata has influenced the mermaid images found on KZN murals. Rather the influence is probably a Western one, as a result of the popular Western Hans Christian Anderson story of 'The Little Mermaid' (doomed by her love for a human male). Strangely enough though, these 'mermaid' images are not meant for a child audience, but instead is meant to communicate to, and be understood by adults.

Other potent examples include the Nomkhubulwana `94 mural [56] (designed by Stevenson and Mikula), which depicts the huge figure of Nomkhubulwana (fig. 1), the only goddess in the Zulu pantheon, who is worshipped in spring and petitioned for harvest aid and fertility (Bradford, 1987: 311-312). The Blue Lady mural (fig. 23) depicts a reclining blue female nude figure with long hair flowing in the wind 'pointing the way forward' (Stevenson, 2001), amid trees, plants, insects and a swirling 'Van Gogh-like' sky, with moon and twinkling stars. Mikula's 'mandala of peace' scene (Medwood Garden mural), depicts a white nude female swept against a flowery 'orb'. All these images were painted or designed by white, fine art, academically trained women and it is suggested that their Western training has influenced their imagery. They clearly perpetuate stereotypes that are found in Western 'fine art' forms even though Stevenson has claimed to reject Western influences in favour of African-influenced imagery (Stevenson, 2001).

A segment on the Medwood Garden mural goes even further than just associating women with nature. Here the female figure is used as an allegory for nature. A Botticelli-inspired white female nude is depicted (once again by Stevenson and Mikula) with long hair blowing in the wind, flowers strategically placed over her body (fig. 24). She is supposed to represent rebirth and renewal as it was painted during spring time (Stevenson, 2001). The ability of women to produce new life has meant that allowed 'femaleness' has become linked with concepts of body/earth/cosmos, which is often 'symbolically and ritually expressed through the celebration of the 'Great Mother' (King, 2000: 10).

The female body is viewed as 'fertile ground' (Chawla, 2000: 225), and thus both this image (above) and the Nomkhubulwana image have been used to represent the female as a sign of fertility and certain attributes of women as an allegory for certain qualities of nature. The fertility of the earth which encourages crop growth and nourishes people has often been compared to the fertility of the female body (Chawla, 2000:

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[56] The Nomkhubulawana `94 mural (1994) depicts a large, visually dominating image of an African woman, arms outstretched. In her right hand she holds a madube with flowers and plants above her wrist. Above her left hand floats an orb and a rainbow. Below her are various figures representing commuters, vendors, passers-by and musicians. On the far left of the mural is a scene depicting a rural landscape, maize fields and traditional clay pot. On the right of the mural is a depiction of the sea.

225). Leela Dube (quoted in Chawla, 2000: 260) claims that there are sexual implications attached to this analogy which once again renders women as passive and inert (the 'passive' earth), while men are active and dominating (the active seed). One also finds that female figures are frequently associated with images of maize or grinding of mielies. Stevenson (2001) referred to the fact that many African drawings have images of mielies - either crushed mielies or the maize plants, which according to her represents fertility and women. Other Zulu/African muralists and academics interviewed however, did not agree with this association (Belle, 2001, Ntuli, 2001; Sithole, 2001).

While many white muralists (Mikula, De Menzes, Stevenson) have associated female images with nature, it has been noted, that black male muralists tend to associate female images more with tradition. Traditional rural scenes found in murals not only commemorate and celebrate African heritage, but also hearken back to certain traditional values and roles for women. This is reflected in images of women involved in traditional African household activities, African women in traditional dress[57], or women in traditional roles such as that of a *sangoma* or a chief's wife. A number of murals depict more African women in traditional dress than men.

Even though representations of Indian women are few, the image of a female classical Bharatanatyam dancer is used a few times to signify Indian tradition and has become a signifier for Indian culture. Indian women have also been represented most often in the Indian traditional dress of the sari, with long, black hair and usually wearing a bindi (red dot on forehead worn by married Hindu women). Rarely are Indian men depicted and it is Indian women in traditional attire that have been used to symbolise the whole Indian population. Irrespective of fragmentations along ethnic, linguistic and religious lines, as well as the Westernisation of subsequent generations of Indian people in South Africa, it is still the stereotypical image of a Hindu female in Bharatanatyam pose or sari and bindi that is used to symbolise a vast group of people.

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[57] This can be seen in the Kwa-Muhle Museum, Thembalihle Station, and the Umlazi Station murals. Marschall (2002: 183) notes that a number of recent murals use images of women like the Nomkhubulwana figure, to 'validate traditional African beliefs and emphasise their relevance in the contemporary urban context'.

Marschall (2002: 219) rightfully warns that such 'traditional rural type' images (and, I might add, the above Indian woman stereotype) are a kind of type-casting which conforms to (and may be derived from) images from popular media, as well as the tourism and heritage industry. While some people may feel empowered by such stereotypes because such imagery validates their values and beliefs, ultimately they are problematic because these traditional/rural-type images promote the idea of an authentic, timeless, pure society. Steven Robins (2000: 416) finds a similar problem with multiculturalist discourses saying that like apartheid, they draw on 'exoticized and ahistorical notions of authentic African cultural identities, thus ignoring the hybridity and fluidity of African culture'. These traditional/rural-type images can be deceiving in that they romanticise certain aspects of the past, without taking into account that all cultures have assimilated (both good and bad) characteristics of other cultures they have come into contact with over time.

Furthermore, debates still continue over customary and traditional laws versus constitutional law, with regard to African women (Mabandla, 1995). Many rural African women are still subject to customary and traditional rules, which may at times violate their constitutional rights. Some women activists argue that customary laws, distorted with the Calvinistic principles of the colonial government and enforced by African chiefs who collaborated with these ruling powers, were used to subjugate African women within the African family (ibid.: 68 – 69). While female activists recognise the validity of tradition and customs, they also acknowledge patriarchal (be they African or Western) elements within them that keep women in a subordinate position. Hence, muralists depicting traditional life may also be validating past gender roles within family and society which may be viewed by some women as being oppressive.

The use of Western dualisms (mother/seductress, male activity/female passivity) in contemporary society is indicative of the extent to which patriarchal thinking is still engrained in society. Depicted in murals, these dualisms continue to reflect the subordinate, inferior values attributed to women. They reaffirm both the control of women and the privileging of men in society. It has been the goal of many feminists

to expose patriarchal thinking and the structures that support it. Dichotomies are such structures that continue to perpetuate and naturalise the superior/inferior roles of men and women respectively. It is only through the awareness of such dualisms though that one can choose not to use such dichotomies. In her examination of feminist theory, Cooey (1994: 30) argues that feminist theory should 'cultivate a high tolerance, indeed outright appreciation for [the] complexity, plurality, variability of women's identity and then portray it concretely and convincingly'. Murals like the Women's Wall show that murals can be an excellent platform where the 'multiplicity' and 'variety' of women's lives (Hartsock, 1990: 171) can be explored in deeper, more sincere ways.

CONCLUSION

Murals have been used extensively in the 1990's in KwaZulu-Natal (and South Africa at large) as a popular way of bringing art into previously disadvantaged communities. Murals have dealt with various issues relevant to South African post-apartheid society such as reconciliation, 'unity in diversity', HIV/Aids, and crime. These murals are usually uplifting, concentrating more on being 'politically correct' in terms of race as opposed to gender. This may be indicative of the larger South African context where gender issues are still perceived as being secondary in importance to those of racial issues. Using these themes, murals have also explored different identities in society (to a certain extent). With regard to the representation of women in murals though, this representation of female identity has often been superficial. Most often this very diverse social group has been generalised and stereotyped into roles reflective of society's dominant ideologies of women.

It has been seen that patriarchal thinking, prevalent in both traditional African and Western societies, which privileges the male and regards women as 'secondary' and 'supplemental', still informs much thinking and representation today through various structures that support this thinking. One of these structures, dualisms, has been elaborated on to show how male, Eurocentric thinking still influences the representation of women in murals and popular culture. The stereotypes of women (as mother/seductress, in nurturing roles and pre-feminist working roles, etc.) depicted in murals are also found in other popular cultural productions.

In working roles, it is most often, 'male' labour (mining, construction) that is used to represent the employment sector and hardships experienced in the job market. Women are seen in conventional pre-feminist modes of representation, notably the occupations of nurse and teacher. The economic contribution of women to their families and society is an important one. Various interwoven factors (like sexuality, reproduction, family and community life) affect the economic structure of women's lives and households worldwide, with race also contributing to the economic situations of black and white women (Haraway, 1990: 209 – 210). While colonialism relegated women to lower working roles, it can be argued that women also gained a

degree of financial emancipation. One would assume therefore that by earning money and providing for their families women would have gained more power or a more equal status with men. This has not necessarily been the case though. According to Donna Haraway (1990: ibid.) this has resulted in the 'feminization' of poverty, i.e. women being subjected to unstable jobs, lower wages compared to those of men and the continued devaluation of women's work due to the public/private dichotomy. Many women in both rural and urban areas continue to live in abject poverty (Mabandla, 1995: 67 – 68) but the difficulties experienced by South African women (many of whom are the primary breadwinners in their homes) are barely hinted at in murals.

This research project has determined that the perpetuation of similar stereotypes in popular media and murals are not coincidental but that magazines, books and other print media are often used as source material from which many muralists derive their information and mural images. Artists often use images from the media, changing them to suit their context and meaning. Furthermore, sexist images, stereotypes and patriarchal ideologies of women are constantly disseminated through popular media and are further perpetuated by muralists, thereby contributing to the continued stereotyping of women. But while murals may share some similarities with popular media productions, ideally as an art form they should be more critical of stereotypical representations of women in society, while also trying to maintain their accessibility to the middle and lower class societies for whom they are created.

Collins' problem with racist and sexist ideologies is that they permeate social structures to the degree that they become hegemonic and seem 'natural'. Ideologies evident in murals are determined by the values of individual muralists, which may be largely influenced by the social group to which they belong, which in turn is reflective of the values of society at large. Hence, for ideologies about women to be changed, it requires not only the change of personal beliefs but also a change of the beliefs and ideologies of society at large (van Dijk, 1998: 128).

The majority of artists, although acknowledging the fact that popular culture could influence their imagery, did not in fact consider whether they were perpetuating

stereotypes in their mural images. While many artists tried to be 'politically correct' in terms of race, they rarely thought about gender perspectives and whether their images could be read as 'sexist'.

A few muralists have tried to reject the use of popular media imagery. Terry-Anne Stevenson (2001) has been quite emphatic about the need to stay away from Western imagery. Stevenson's recent 'Joko'[58] murals have tried to steer away from Eurocentric subject matter and depictions and have tried to promote and create 'an African image, a South African art form and a South African freedom of expression' (ibid.). Similarly muralist Khehla Ngobese (2001) was adamant that he tries to steer clear of Western media entering his murals, by depicting African imagery of indigenous pots, spoons and seats. Despite these declarations though, murals that Stevenson and Ngobese have been involved in still reflect the influence of Western stereotypes of women.

Throughout this research project, Western dualisms have constantly been criticised, but it would be insufficient to criticise them without offering an alternative. Collins (2000) embraces in her black feminist epistemology, a both/and conceptual orientation which can perhaps displace Western dualisms that place women in dichotomous roles. Collins warns against reversing binaries and instead advocates rejecting binary thinking altogether (ibid.: 169). A both/and concept doesn't set one set of experiences against another but rather allows them to be encompassed together without any conflict. This sort of thinking allows for woman to be mother and career woman, mother and sensual woman, to be an active partner to a man rather than just a passive, subservient one. Thus characteristics in people are not seen as either/or but instead as differing, with sometimes seemingly contradictory elements co-existing.

Collins argues that the Western either/or, dichotomous thinking reduces and oversimplifies concepts and creates hard-line divisions between entities, while a both/and concept is much more 'fluid' (ibid.: xi) - for example, the public/private

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[58] The 'Joko' murals are a series of murals executed around South Africa by CMP, sponsored by Unifoods. These murals focus on the element of 'story-telling', from the African, commemorating African heritage, stories, history and mythology (Stevenson, 2001). 'Joko' is a brand of tea made by Unilever.

binary genders labour, advocating the perception that men do real work (in public) and get paid accordingly, while women have to take care of their families for free (in private). Consequently, women who work in public spheres are considered less 'feminine' because they compete with men for pay and are away from their children. Collins' (2000: ix) testimony of her own life debunks this theory - 'I discovered that the both/and conceptual stance of Black feminist thought allowed me to be both objective and subjective, to possess both an Afrocentric and a feminist consciousness, and to be both a respectable scholar and an acceptable mother'.

A both/and thinking furthermore, acknowledges that all individuals and groups possess varying amounts of penalty and privileges in a historically created system. Thus individuals and groups may alternately be oppressors in some settings, while being themselves oppressed in others or they can be simultaneously oppressors and oppressed. This is imperative in the South African situation where male oppressors of women are themselves oppressed by racial structures and women are also oppressors of other women, due to the complexities of apartheid. Hence, a both/and thinking is more reflective of the hybridity of a postcolonial, postmodernist, post-apartheid society like South Africa.[59]

Murals have the power to comment on relations in society, from a subtle message to a blunt 'in-your-face' statement. Murals during the `80's[60] were used as a site of resistance against the apartheid regime challenging the value system of the ruling white government (Marschall, 2002). By not challenging the presumptions of the female 'Other' and patriarchal ideas of women found in society today, murals perpetuating similar ideas allow them to become even more entrenched into our thinking and feed them into the new and growing generation. This symbiotic (parasitic?) relationship can only be changed by awareness and confrontation. The

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[59] It needs to be cautioned though, that in the extreme, the both/and thinking could promote the ideal of the 'superwoman', i.e. the idea that a woman should do everything at once, which could again be detrimental to women by raising too high expectations. What is ideally needed is a more differentiated fluid mode of representation.

[60] Marschall (2002: 51) defines murals from this period rather broadly ' to include some types of graffiti, wall paintings on cloth, cardboard or paper and large-scale banners'.

potential of murals to be a site of resistance to dominant ideologies has with regard to gender roles never been truly realized in murals in KZN and probably never will so long as individual muralists and mural groups prefer to take the 'safe' route of uncontentious mural imagery.

Mural teams and specifically individual male and female muralists need to be conscientised about their role in affirming, recycling and even constructing stereotypes of women. Female muralists need to be aware that they have the power to influence murals and the portrayal of women. For example, CMP's female co-coordinators imposed the female figure on the Nomkhubulwana `94 mural and made the image conform to a 'V' or inverted triangle shape to represent the female pubis (Stevenson, 2001) – the male muralists who worked on this project remain unaware of this association. This shows how these female muralists have used their role as co-coordinators to influence meaning in a 'feminist' way. This is what this research has fundamentally hoped to achieve - to make muralists aware about how their images could be 'read' and what possible messages they are sending to their communities.

While murals continue to flourish in KwaZulu-Natal in the 21st century, much more can be done to use murals as an exciting, potent forum where women's issues can be highlighted. The diversity of women in South African society poses quite a challenge to muralists. What are the 'correct' images of women to depict? Does one try to validate all women's concerns and risk generalizing and universalizing 'women' as a diverse social group? Does one try to depict only what is 'politically correct', glamorous and broadly acceptable? Or does one depict the exceptional experience which is exclusive to but a few? The answer may lie somewhere in the middle. One must recall the function of murals, i.e. to create points of identification for the diverse groups of people in South Africa, to educate and create awareness of pertinent issues in society. While South Africa may have one of the most liberal constitutions in the world (Mabandla, 1995; Pillemer et al.), South African societies continue to be very conservative. Mural art can be one of the forms that help bridge the gap between 'the ideal' and current reality, by proposing new values and new models of behaviour, by developing alternative modes of representations and challenging prevailing

ideologies. Murals can help tackle the challenge of the constitution, to 'yield meaningful and enduring gains for women throughout the country' (Mabandla, 1995: 71).

Initially, part of the solution would be to get more women from different cultures, races, religions and education levels involved in mural projects. Murals, like Cooey's (1994: 31) idea of a feminist theory, perhaps needs to begin with ordinary women telling their own stories to one another and becoming transformed by this experience. This will begin to address not only the conflicts between men and women, but between the diversity of South African women themselves. Another possibility is that there needs to be more murals aimed at women, representing their concerns. Apt Artworks mural group runs HIV/Aids awareness workshops before executing the murals, dealing with the various factors regarding HIV/Aids. A similar approach, with murals focusing on the issue of women and problems specifically affecting women (rape, woman abuse, rising 'feminized' poverty), could be highly successful in addressing gender equality. Ultimately though, it is both male and female muralists who need to be conscientised about gender issues, for as many strains of black feminist thought argue, it is both men and women who need to work together for the upliftment of women and a fairer, more equal and democratic society.

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FIG 1: Nomkhubulwana `94 Mural - Durban
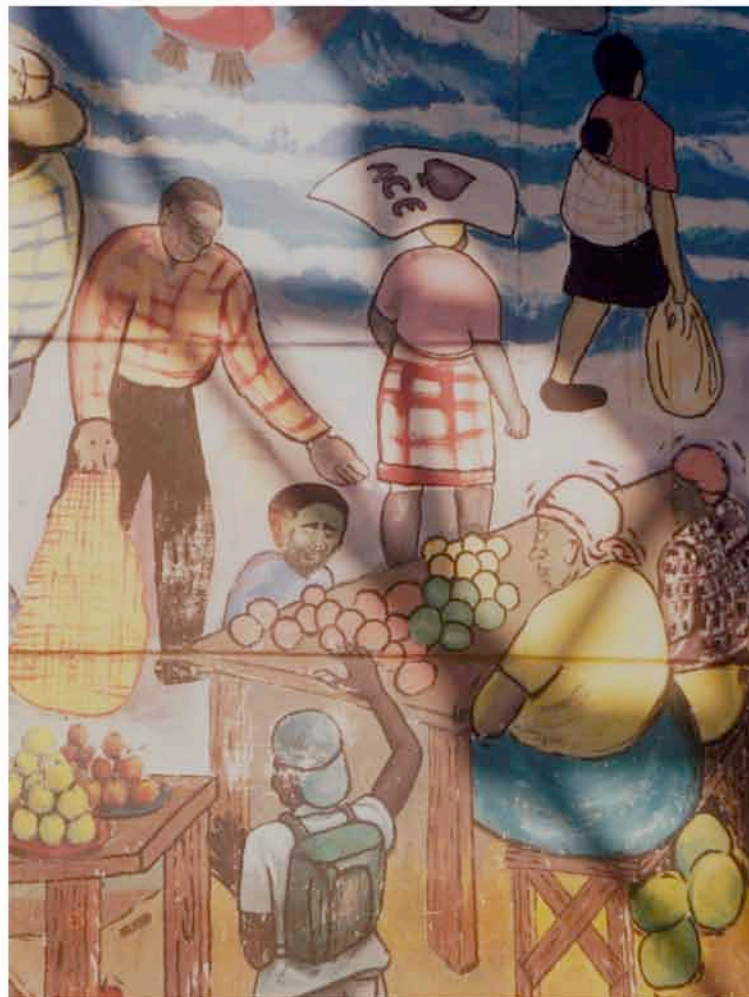

FIG 2: Nomkhubulwana `94 Mural (detail)

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FIG 3: Umlazi Station Murals - Durban

FIG 4: Umlazi Station Murals (detail)

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FIG 5: Umlazi Station Mural (detail)

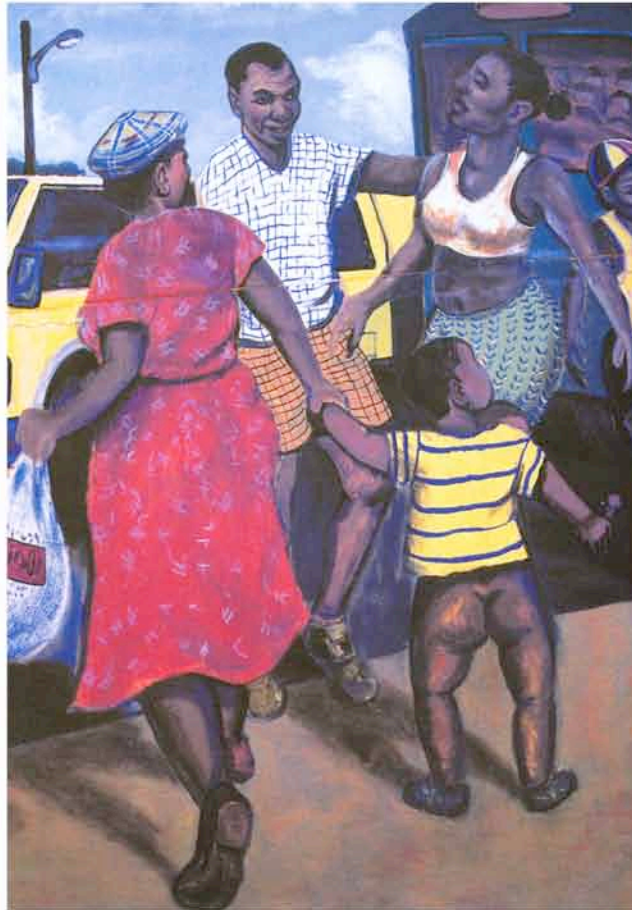**FIG 6: Umlazi Station Mural (detail)**

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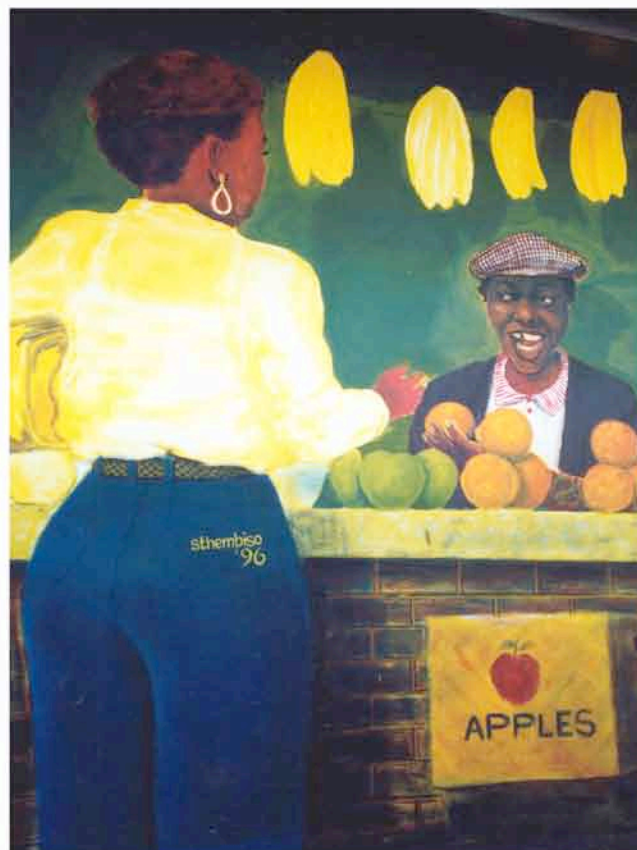**FIG 7: Umlazi Station Mural (detail)**

FIG 8: Umlazi Station Mural (detail)

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FIG 9: Women's Wall - Ladysmith

FIG 10: Women's Wall (detail)

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FIG 11: UDW R.D.P Mural - Durban

FIG: 12a: Broad Street Mural - Durban (detail)
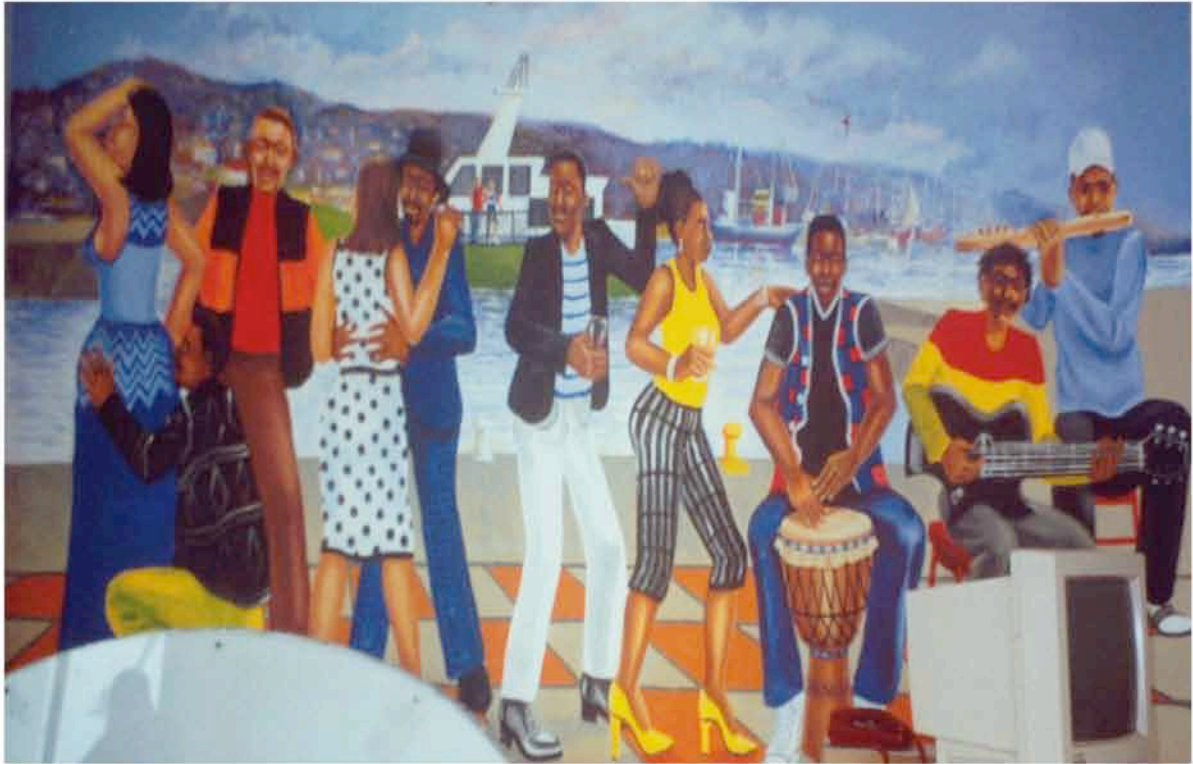

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FIG 17: Billboard Outside Umlazi Station

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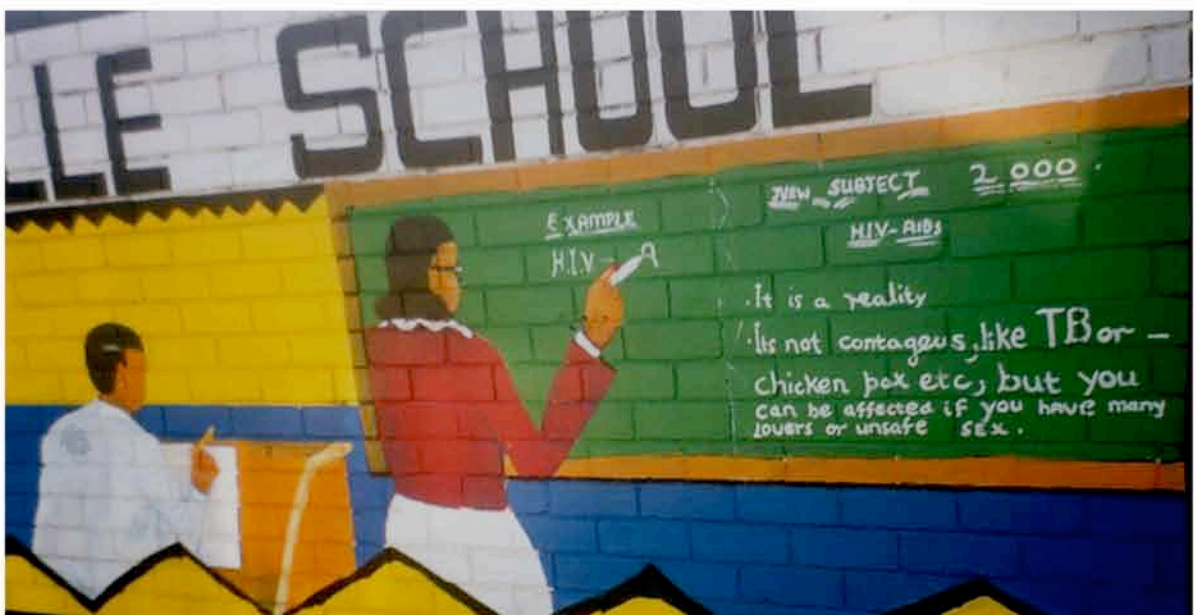**FIG 19: King Shaka Arts Center - Durban (detail)**

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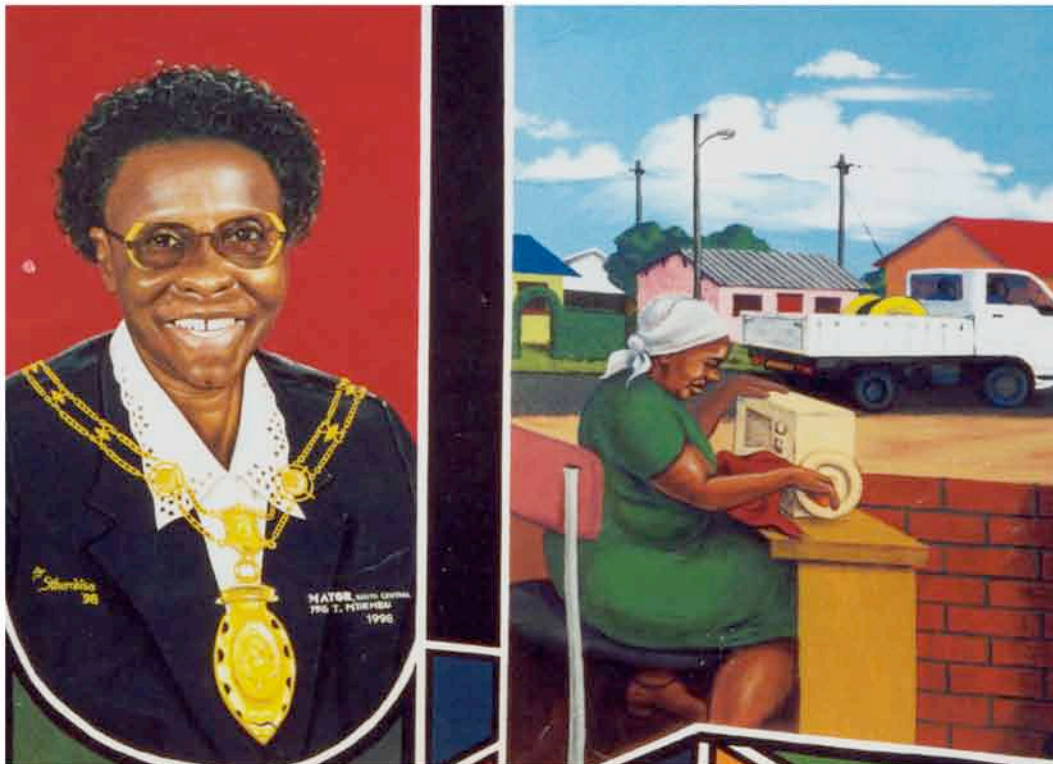
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FIG 27: Umlazi Station Mural (detail)