

Evaluation of the AIDS Mural Project

Beyond Awareness Campaign

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Submitted by

Louise M. Bourgault, Ph.D.
Department of Communication and Performance Studies
Northern Michigan University
Marquette, Michigan 49855 U.S.A.
Email: Lbourgau@nmu.edu

Visiting Scholar in Residence
Centre for Cultural and Media Studies
University of Natal-Durban (UND)
Durban, KwaZulu-Natal
Email: dbnguest@iafrica.com

Executive Summary: AIDS Mural Project

This Evaluation considers the AIDS mural project of the Beyond Awareness 2 Campaign in its first phase. Begun in November 1998, the mural project has created seven murals to date. The project will terminate in October 2000.

The document describes the process of set-up and execution of the murals, providing details on the workshopping with groups of painters, typically art students studying at universities or technikons. It discusses the work of workshop facilitators, remarking on their ability to generate a group spirit and to develop a group vision as is appropriate for public art. It describes in detail the five murals the evaluator has seen. These include the murals at ML Sultan Technikon in KwaZulu-Natal province; University of DurbanWestville in KwaZulu-Natal province; Esikhawini College of Education in KwaZulu-Natal province; University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape and the Grahamstown city mural in Eastern Cape. It describes the themes and images that appear on the murals. These include "The New Multi-racial South Africa," "The New South African Struggle: AIDS," "The Local Threat of the AIDS Epidemic." The report highlights potential problem areas including the confusion of some over the meaning of the AIDS red ribbon, and the recreation in murals of gender stereotypes and roles which BAC and others in the NGO community would like to shift.

The report talks of the strength of murals in appealing to young persons that associate murals both with the South African political struggles of the late '80s early '90s, and with the fashionable world of pop culture and advertising which has appropriated this political imagery. The report argues that murals which present culturally challenging images or deliberately ambiguous icons stretch the interpretative powers of the viewer and engage him or her in a discourse about their meaning. Because these processes have the potential to strengthen the impact of the mural they should be encouraged in the workshopping phase of the process which precedes the painting. To extend the "shelf-life" of the mural through mural viewer discourse, this evaluation also proposes the organisation of contests seeking the best interpretation of the mural, the best suggestions for a mural sequel, or other games based on the murals.

These contests could be undertaken with the local radio, thereby promoting additional media coverage of the murals.

Finally, the evaluation touches briefly on the mural launchings, arguing that they should be held outdoors at the mural site, should be planned with a greater sense of public festival, and better covered by the media.

This evaluation expresses the views of its author, an American communication scholar who has spend the last four months in South Africa working with the Beyond Awareness Campaign. The report derives from action research combined with more traditional observation techniques and in-depth interviews. The evaluator has extensive experience working and consulting in media/development initiatives in 14 other African countries.

AIDS Murals Project Evaluation

The Aids Murals Project is one of several AIDS Action Projects funded by the Beyond Awareness 2 Campaign, a project of the HIV/AIDS and STD Directorate of the National Department of Health and the National HIV/AIDS Communication forum. The campaign runs from November 1998 to October 2000.

AIDS Action projects have been designed to promote and support a shift from awareness to social mobilisation around HIV/AIDS. This shift appears warranted in the light of research showing most South Africans are aware of the disease, and a smaller, though significant number are cognisant of the government exhortations on safe sex.

All of the Action projects therefore promote interpersonal dialogue and group discussion around the AIDS crisis as a prelude to action. Indeed the Beyond Awareness Campaign 2 Action projects are activity-based entities that engage participants in **carrying out a specific group initiative** connected to and connecting them to the AIDS epidemic. Actions undertaken by the group help either to mobilise communities against the epidemic or to promote care and support for the HIV+, the ill with AIDS, and the families and loved one of both groups.

The Project

The Beyond Awareness Campaign 2 has been granted a tender to manage the production of seven AIDS murals at and around Tertiary Institutions in South Africa. Between November 1998 and October 1999, seven murals have been painted. These are located in the following sites: ML Sultan Technikon (KZN); University of Durban-Westville (UDW) (KZN); Esikhawini College of Education (KZN); University of the North, Pietersburg (Northern Province); University of Fort Hare, Alice (Eastern Cape); Grahamstown (Eastern Cape); and Griffiths Mxenge College, King Wiliamstown (Eastern Cape). Apt Artworks of Johannesburg executes the project co-ordinating the efforts of groups of students who actually carry out the painting. BAC2 organises university contacts and other logistics for the mural project and provides workshop facilitators. Another seven odd murals are planned for the duration of the campaign that ends in October 2000.

This evaluation report grows out of my observation of the mural production process of the mural at the University of Fort Hare in mid-September 1999. It is strengthened by information gained from interviews with facilitators and participants together with additional interviews from the mural painters at Esikhawini College of Education, University of Durban Westville (UDW), ML Sultan Technikon, and Rhodes University. As I was unable to work with painters at the University of the North and Griffiths Mxenge College in King Williamstown, these two sites will receive only the briefest of mention in the report. It should be noted that the data contained herein have been augmented by four months of action research with the BAC2 campaign and by my production of the South African AIDS Memorial Quilt Evaluation.

The Process

The Site of the Murals

The murals are typically sited in locations on or near campuses where BAC2 is engaged in its Tertiary Institutions Campaign. On a bureaucratic level, this facilitates contact with the institutions and makes painting permission easier to obtain. On a project level, it creates a lovely synergy between two different AIDS action projects. (See below).

Once the institution has agreed in principle to a mural project, a university contact person is typically assigned to the project. This person may be a member of the Fine Arts faculty, the Student Health Centre, or other interested unit. Apt Artworks is informed of the project and invited to liaise directly with the contact person.

Typically the university contact person must pursue specific permissions needed to paint a specific campus wall. Such a wall should be located in a spot that is reasonably dry and high in traffic volume. This individual must organise a group of painters and he/she must schedule the project with Apt Artworks. A week is typically set aside for sketch preparation and mural painting. I shall describe the production process I observed at the University of Fort Hare in mid September 1999.

Day 1: Around 9:00 A.M, the painting co-ordinator/facilitator, Ms. Nikky Blumenfeld, met with the University of Fort Hare contact person, a lecturer in painting in the Department of Fine Arts. This instructor had

organised seven of her painting students who soon assembled for the project. The group was given a painting studio in which to begin. Beyond these seven third year students, several additional fine arts students asked to “sit in” on the warm-up sessions, some in the hope of participating in the entire project. The facilitator, Ms. Blumenfeld welcomed these additional students to the workshop but explained that the painting group would have to be limited to the manageable size initially planned.¹

Around 10:00 am we proceeded to the painting studio. Nikky introduced herself and asked everyone to do the same. She then explained the purpose of the project and the procedure the group would follow. She asked participants to begin thinking about their own concept of an AIDS Information mural. To give them ideas about what may be done artistically with murals, she shared portions of her portfolio with the students. This included numerous examples of murals, commercial and non-commercial and other public art projects she has undertaken over the years. The group and the evaluator were impressed with her work, her bubbly personality, and with her instant ability to connect with young artists.

This discussion lasted for one hour and was followed by a soft drink and snack break. Facilitator Blumenfeld had purchased refreshments in the town of Alice before proceeding to the University of Fort Hare.

Warm-Up

The mural project benefited from the services of a second facilitator, Jerome Dlundla, who was at the University of Fort Hare in conjunction with the Tertiary Institutions Project and an AIDS quilt workshop. It had been agreed that Dlundla would conduct a warm-up session with the artists. Indeed, it is standard practice to include a BAC2 “people warm-up” along with the “painting warm-up” supplied by Apt Artworks. Accordingly, Jerome Dlundla left his own TI group, crossed campus, and joined the mural painters for this hour-long session.

The warm-up consisted of games to help artists loosen up and be comfortable with one another. These games includes something I will call “bananas,” an exercise wherein students mill about a room until the

¹ Limiting the size of the group is important to the strength and the unity of a piece of public art. Each facilitator is best able to determine the optimal size of his/her painting group, though seven appears about right for the BAC2 murals.

leader calls out the word “bananas” a which time individuals must quickly grab a partner. Dlundla used other techniques (derived from Boal and adapted over the years by DramAidE) to get the group to think about AIDS. These included the “freeze frame” technique, wherein participants silently mime concepts with their bodies; and the living tableau technique, wherein participants “shape” two or three of their colleagues into a living sculpture representing a concept. Concepts explored included issues of sexuality, gender, and health. Games continued until about 12:30 when we broke for lunch.

After lunch, the group visited the site of the mural, a wall facing the student centre. Ideally situated in a high traffic area, the mural wall stands approximately 2.5 meters high, and is about 11 meters wide. The visit made it possible to inspect the physical characteristics² of the wall and it permitted all participants to get a sense of the context in which their art would be situated. The site visit is important because any physical flaws, such as cracks or chips in the wall’s surface must be repaired before the process of painting begins. Ideally this has been arranged between the facilitator and the university contact persons before the workshop begins.

Around 1:45, the group returned to the studio to work on the artistic master plan. Nikky encouraged each member of the group to spend about an hour sketching his/her own concept for the AIDS mural or a portion thereof. After this exercise, really a “painting warm-up,” each artist pasted his or her sketch on the wall and discussed his/her personal vision of the mural with the group. Nikky led the discussion, deftly probing concepts, helping participants to weave their separate visions into an integrated whole. Cleverly, she shifted some of the negative icons of AIDS that were emerging and helped to replace them with symbols of unity.

Around 3:15, the group had agreed broadly on a concept. They set about drawing the elements onto actual mural-sized paper supplied by the painting facilitator. The session broke up around 4:30. The main elements of the mural had been sketched, but portions or details remained unformulated. Nikky asked members of the group to continue sketching during their evening leisure, so that the completed concept could be agreed upon early the next morning.

² The wall should be smooth. Any cracks must be filled in before the painting process begins.

Day 2 of the University of Fort Hare mural project began around 9:30 A.M. at the painting studio. The artists were assigned to work on their sketches while the painting facilitator drove to Alice to obtain goodies for the morning “tea” break. By the time she returned, they’d completed their sketches and this evaluator was convinced that the individual elements had been forged conceptually into a sketch that belonged to the group rather than to any individual. This is a tribute to the facilitator who was able to guide the process with considerable dexterity and also to the painters whose spirit of *ubuntu* clearly “took over” during the creative process.

Around 10:30, the group took a snack break. Following the snack, the group proceeded to the mural site to prime the wall. While three or four students worked on wall priming, others distributed AIDS red ribbon stickers, Department of Health brochures, and condoms. The student painters also answered questions from passers-by.

The weather was hot and dry, so the mural dried quickly. As one side of the primed wall dried, Nikky and painters began outlining the major elements that would appear on the mural. The same procedure occurred with the opposite side. Before lunch, most of the mural had been outlined.

After lunch, some of the artists began to paint in some of the background such as the sky and the landscape of the Eastern Cape; meanwhile others continued outlining the smaller items of the work. Passers-by continued to meet and interact with the group and to collect condoms, albeit somewhat surreptitiously.³ By mid-afternoon, the painters began to tackle some of the large foreground elements such as the conference table on the viewers left, and the “hand of God” on the viewer’s right. They also painted the “strongman” image with his bucket of condoms.

Again, condoms, stickers, and brochures were distributed. When supplies ran out this evaluator and one of the painters replenished supplies at the student health centre.

As indicated above, Jerome Dlodla was running a quilt workshop at the same time. When the students from that group had completed their quilt panels, they came outside to inspect the mural. Quite elated from their

³ The students at the University of Fort Hare, particularly the women were quite uneasy with the idea of taking condoms. Their attitudes contrast markedly with those of ML Sultan Technikon where female are proud to appear on camera availing themselves of free condoms and stuffing them in their purses or their book bags.

afternoon with Jerome, they spontaneously burst into dancing when they saw the mural. Their enthusiasm was infectious and they were joined by many passers-by. After about 15 minutes of dancing and condom distribution, they marched off to one of the residence halls with the young HIV+ woman who was visiting the campus in conjunction with the Tertiary Institution Campaign. The woman was to address a group of residents that evening. **The synergy among the three action projects, all of which are managed by the Beyond Awareness Campaign 2 became immediately clear to this evaluator.**

Day 3 saw a continuation of the painting process with painters proceeding to smaller elements of the mural, i.e., painting of the putative conference participants sitting around the conference table; the map of Africa suspended over it; and the couple on the viewer's left. Again, condoms, stickers and brochures were distributed.

Day 4 saw the mural completed. The final lettering was added; detailed images and final shadings were included. A public launch date was set for October and students were planning an outreach mural at a school in the nearby township.

Facilitators

The BAC2 project uses two kinds of facilitators, artistic facilitators and process facilitators. I have held extensive discussions with artistic facilitator, Ms. Nikky Blumenfeld owner of Apt Artwork. A professional public artist, Blumenfeld enjoys great rapport with the student painters with whom she facilitates projects. She admits to learning as much as she teaches on the collaborative works. Nikky has also trained two of her own staff to serve as artistic facilitators. Both of them, Ashleigh Heron and Philani Mhlungu have facilitated some of the BAC2 murals.

Process facilitators are used by the project to facilitate interaction between painters and to engage them in discourses about AIDS and sexuality before the start of the project design. The process facilitators used in BA2 are facilitators with many years of experience with DramAidE projects. Using Boalian techniques, they have facilitated youth and school improvisational theatre and life skills development.

Mural Descriptions

Esikhawini College of Education

The Esikhawini College of Education mural is 4 meters high and 6.5 meters wide. It is located one story above the ground on a building opposite the entrance gate of the college. Completed in June 1999, the mural is dominated by the face of an attractive woman whose image appears in the foreground on the viewer's left. In a "cartoon" bubble above her head is written in English "YOU CAN'T GET AIDS FROM KISSING." Behind this foreground figure is the figure of a woman among a group of marchers at an apparent rally. The woman carries a banner that reads "YEZO YEZO, USE CONDOMS." Along side of her are two other male figures, one Indian and one White man both of whom carry a single banner. The banner, written in Zulu, says "PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST AIDS, USE A CONDOM." Behind these marchers in the middle ground, is a much larger group of demonstrators. Some have filled in features and represent the various racial and social groups of South Africa. Others are merely cartoon outlines. A cityscape with modern block office buildings appears behind them. Artists producing the mural said these depicted Richard's Bay, a seaside city not far from Esikhawini where many of the students' families are employed and where the spread of the AIDS epidemic is believed to be particularly high even by KwaZulu-Natal standards. The cityscape and the march appear in a yellow "spotlight" of colour, which nicely fills the centre of the mural.

To the viewer's right, in what is ostensibly a separate part of the mural is an older couple seated in a sitting room or waiting room. Behind their heads is an AIDS poster marked with a red ribbon. The cartoon bubble above the old man's head says in Afrikaans, "BEWARE, USE A CONDOM."

Below the sitting room scene and to the right at the bottom of the mural is painted the red AIDS ribbon on the side of which appears the AIDS help-line phone number. Other details incorporated into the mural include: a banner or a title "ESCOLE (Esikhawini College of Education) UNITES AGAINST AIDS;" a heart in which are written the names of the painters; and condoms painted in the colours of the South African flag and scattered over the mural. Worth noting is the widespread use of the AIDS red ribbons as decorative motifs. They appear in the shape of the earrings on the large foreground image of African woman. They appear as part of

a print design on the tablecloth covering the table in the elderly couple's sitting room. Condoms are the other decorative motif in use. The White man in the march wears "condom print" trousers and significantly, a red shirt.

Painted in June 1999, Esikhawini's mural was facilitated artistically by Philani Mhlungu. A mini-launch was held on the final day of the painting process. Two months later, an official launch was held. (See below).

University of Durban-Westville (UDW)

Probably the most artistically sophisticated of the murals is the creation of the University of Durban-Westville's (UDW) art students.

The University of Durban-Westville's mural is about 3.5 meters high and about eight meters wide. Painted in June 1999, it stands below a busy walkway near the Education block adjacent to the Maths and Commerce Block on the University's campus. The focal point of the mural is its centre where a mural-high AIDS red ribbon has been painted. The ribbon encircles 19 different figures, all painted to represent all of South African society. Some of the figures include: a white clergyman; a veiled Islamic woman; a very pregnant black woman; a uniformed African school girl; a gaunt black man wearing a crocheted Rastafarian cap; a trendy tressed-haired female wearing a tank top; and even a couple of indeterminate gender standing arm in arm. Above the red ribbon are painted the Zulu words "*PHANSI-NGE-AIDS PHANSI* which means "DOWN WITH AIDS."

Below the tails of the ribbon is an old-fashioned black rotary telephone. The AIDS help-line number is written across the handset. On either side of the phone is a putative caller. To the right, a female caller wearing the red AIDS ribbon talks on the telephone. To the left is a male caller who is not wearing the ribbon.

To the viewer's right in the foreground, in an apparently different "scene" is a young boy in a gold shirt being helped (i.e., raised up by the arms) by an older man wearing an open green shirt. Above him, in what could be a different "scene," a black physician used a stethoscope to check the breathing of a white patient.

On the viewer's left in the foreground is a couple sitting in a bed with a pink heart-shaped bed board. They rest against a green pillowcase printed with AIDS red ribbons. They are covered from the waist down with a gold blanket. On the blanket is prominently displayed a blue packet of three government issue South African condoms. The male is wearing no shirt; the female is wearing a skimpy nightie. Their bedroom wallpaper is features the red AIDS ribbon print. Above the bed is written in a lovely feminine script, "LOVE WISELY." The bedroom scene is inscribed in a yellow heart.

Above the bed in what is purported to be a different scene is a greying black man receiving condoms from a black nurse dressed in white. A red cross is painted on a poster hanging at the site identifies it as a clinic. Behind him, perhaps in a queue is a "Coloured" man. On the wall behind him is painted in blue the words, "Free condoms."

The entire mural is outlined in a gold border. On the bottom edge the border is decorated with blue condoms, orange-brown hearts, and blue-black hands. The top of the mural border was not similarly decorated because the scaffolding was insufficiently high enough to reach.

The mural contains two other noteworthy details. Below the heart that inscribes the couple in bed is a space that has been painted blue. On the blue background are female symbols painted in dark blue which the artists maintained symbolised female condoms. The pink signature heart, containing the name of the facilitator Ashleigh Heron of Apt Artworks and the student painters appears on a wall adjacent to the mural.

A public launch for the mural was held on June 17, 1999. The launch was attended by about 50 people and featured speeches from University dignitaries.

Grahamstown Mural

Grahamstown's mural was originally to be sited at Rhodes University, but bureaucratic delays led facilitators and the university contact person to secure a public space. The mural is 20 meters long and 2.5 meters high. The long mural in Grahamstown is designed to be "walked along" rather than to be taken in a single viewing. Though it forms part of a unified whole, its diverse images must be appreciated in a piecemeal fashion.

Located in front a taxi rank adjacent to a market, the mural clearly reflects its colourful locality.

At either end of the wall are two framing devices: the large red ribbons and the AIDS helpline numbers, and wall-high condoms painted in the colours of the South African flag. If one begins the tour of the wall at the market side, one comes to a group of three persons, a bald white man holding a banner saying in English “STOP AIDS;” a child of mixed race wearing a shirt saying “NO CONDOM NO SEX;” and a white nun. Both the nun and the boy wear the characteristic red ribbon. This group is depicted in the foreground and to the viewer’s right is a much larger racially mixed group. The group appears to be engaged in a march or rally which purportedly is being held on the campus of Rhodes University, as the university’s administration building is clearly visible in the background. The group is painted in perspective so that they appear to emerge out of the background. In the front of the parade are three women carrying a banner. Also featured in the march are two men, possibly of mixed race, each wearing American-style stovepipe hats associated in South Africa with *tsotsis* and which are locally called condoms.⁴ Near them on the mural, though possibly in what may not be part of the same scene, is an image of a mixed couple kissing. The male in the couple wears the AIDS awareness red ribbon. The parade appears to be marching toward an intersection of two streets. On the corner of one of the streets is a neo-gothic Christian church representing one of the many such structures in Grahamstown. Across from this gothic church is a typical Grahamstown edifice built in Grahamstown “frontier-style” architecture. On the top of the building is marked “HARRY’S LAUNDRY,” a plug for the businessman who gave permission for his wall to be used for this mural. In the background are images of the city’s Black township

In what is clearly another set of images, one sees a racially mixed group of teenage girls, holding hands and either dancing or playing “ring around the rosie” or a similar circle game. The Black girl sports dreadlocks and wears the Rastafarian beret, both fashionable with the varsity set. The image of the three young women is inscribed in a large yellow circle that suggests the sun or a ball of light. The circle is surrounded a the message written in Xhosa which translates to “LET US UNITE AND FIGHT AIDS.”

⁴ The visual metaphor was fully intended by the painters.

Next, moving away from the market as one proceeds along the mural, one comes to an image of taxi rank. In the foreground is a large red mini-van; behind it is a smaller orange van; and finally in the foreground, a white one. Several individuals representing the different cultural groups of South Africa appear to queue up for a taxi. Two females out of three in the queue wear the AIDS awareness red ribbons, but none of the four males wear it.

As the viewer proceeds down the mural, the taxi queue seems to transform into a market scene. A black mother and child stand at the market and a white clergyman stands behind her, as does a fashionable young black woman wearing a head tie. A young woman with tressed hair sells fruits. She sports the AIDS awareness ribbon. Next to her is a braai with grilled sheep's heads. They are tended by a woman wearing a veil, purportedly representing the Islamic community.⁵

As one moves further down the mural, one spots an elderly couple. The "grandmother" carries a baby on her back. She also leads a young boy whose shirt is decorated with the AIDS ribbon. To the boy's right is an elderly man ("grandfather") who walks with the help of a stick.

Then come the framing devices, the mural high condom painted in the colours of the South African flag and adjacent, the red ribbon in the middle of which is the AIDS help-line number. Finally, one comes to the pink meter-high signature heart outlined in yellow. On the heart are written the words "Sponsored by the Department of Health and the Beyond Awareness Campaign."

The Grahamstown mural is unique in that it was painted off campus. Also unique is the fact the mural was painted during the 1999 Grahamstown Arts Festival held each year in July. A public launch was held on the second to the last day of the festival. The Grahamstown mural was facilitated artistically by Ms. Ashleigh Heron.

ML Sultan Technikon

⁵ Most Muslims in South Africa have Indian origins, and do not generally engage in this type of informal sector trading. The person who painted this image was not one of the university painters but a passer-by that was indulged by the Rhodes University art students.

ML Sultan Technikon's mural, which stands 3.5 meters high, and spans 6.5 metres in width and was painted in late June/early July 1999. The technikon's Department of Fine Arts was initially contacted about this project but failed to respond. BAC contacts at ML Sultan then sought volunteers for the task. Several students who had participated in the BAC2 Tertiary Initiative Project and the AIDS Quilt workshop were eager to be included to paint the mural. With almost no painting experience, these students wisely chose a bold design that would be comparatively easy to execute.

ML Sultan's mural is situated in the main entrance foyer of the Technikon. Although it is not visible from the entrance doors, it is a prime site because it must be passed in order to reach any area of the campus.

The ML Sultan mural is dominated by a single strong image, that of two arms, a white arm and a brown arm exchanging a heart. The background of the mural is divided into bold fields or bands of colour. The first field or band is a wide frame of about 200 centimetres that surrounds the mural. The frame is painted purple at the top and bottom. On the top centre of the frame in bold yellow letters are the words "FIGHT AIDS." On the bottom of the frame are the boldly written words "UNITE AGAINST AIDS." The sides of the frame are symbols of the AIDS struggle: blue condoms, and pink hearts. On the bottom right within the frame is the characteristic red ribbon, symbol of AIDS awareness and the AIDS help-line number. Below the entire mural are written the words "SPONSORED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND THE BEYOND AWARENESS CAMPAIGN."

Within the frame are bands (or stripes) of colour. The first band, powder blue in colour, contains the words "JOIN TOGETHER." The Black arm that receives the heart appears to come out of this band. Next comes a pink band of colour on which are superimposed South African flags on either side of the arms. Below the pink band is a narrow strip of green colour. On this green strip is a row of imagistic human figures (resembling the kind of paper dolls cut from a single folded paper) holding hands across the mural. Below the green is a narrow yellow band of colour containing symbols of AIDS education, i.e., books and condoms. Next comes a narrow blue strip of colour on which more messages have been written including the words "RESPECT" and "EDUCATION."

The ML Sultan mural project was facilitated by Nikky Blumenfeld. A launch was held on August 24 and 25 1999 in conjunction with the AIDS EduFAir.

Other BA2 Murals

Two other murals were painted in conjunction with the BAC2 project. The first of these is a mural at Griffiths Mxenge College in King Williamstown, Eastern Cape. Painted in early September 1999, this mural stands 2.5 meters high and is 8 meters long. The King Williamstown mural was facilitated artistically by Ashleigh Heron. The other mural was produced at the University of the North in the Northern Province. Produced in late August-early September 1999, it stands about 3 meters high and is 8 meters in length. The University of the North's mural was facilitated artistically by Philani Mhulungu. (Images of these and all completed murals appear at the end of this document.)

Perspectives of the Mural Painters

Artists/painters appear very pleased to be included in this project and they take the work very seriously. Several artists at the University of Fort Hare expressed their intention to take "starter kits" of leftover paints to produce smaller mural artworks within their own communities. And some of the University of Durban-Westville students had done the same. They seemed clearly inspired by the mural initiative, and they were thrilled to be able to make a contribution to the AIDS crisis. It struck me that the kind of social mobilisation campaign underway in South Africa calls for the efforts and talents of every willing and able-bodied person. Their energy and interest should not be wasted. After all, for a few cans of paint, some snacks and drinks and the cost of one or two facilitators, BAC2 has engaged painters in an AIDS issue, caused a stir on their campuses, and created a potential for media attention.

I was also impressed by the group spirit of the artists and their lack of ego. Try as I might to cajole a given artist into telling me which figures on the mural he or she had imagined or created, i.e., which images he or she "owned," I was unsuccessful. Each of the artists avowed that the murals were **group designs and group creations**. They appeared to have worked in seamless harmony, totally absorbed by a group ethic.

This was reflected in the content of the murals, highly contextualised pieces drawing from the community in which they stood. Hence the passers-by with an umbrella at the University of Fort Hare appeared in that university's mural as did the market sellers in Grahamstown.

Images Painted

This section provides a discussion of the images appearing on the murals. Here in the interest of triangulation, I have made an effort to synthesise my own observations with those provided by the facilitators and the painters and of the passers-by.

Multi-Cultural Society in South Africa

Perhaps the most striking aspect for an outside evaluator whose memory of South African politics stretches back at least as far as the 1970s, is the concerted efforts at racial and ethnic inclusivity and racial blending. The tableaux consciously depict groups wherein all of South Africa's peoples are represented. In the Esikhawini mural, there's a parade with marchers of every colour; and the banners they carry appear in English, Zulu, and Afrikaans. Indeed the students at Esikhawini College of Education made a special point of including Afrikaans language signs on the mural because, although the Afrikaans speaking population is negligible in that part of Zululand, there are Afrikaans speaking lecturers at the College, to whom the mural was also addressed.

Painters at the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) were very keen to represent all segments of society on their mural. This is why a white priest, a black mother, and a "Coloured" couple appear on it. The Grahamstown artists used the queue at the taxi rank to incorporate all the South African groups on the mural. Painters at ML Sultan used imagistic figures painted in a range of colours to achieve the same inclusive effect.

Beyond the racially inclusive aspect of the murals, is a concerted effort to break old racial stereotypes. Hence the doctor in the Westville mural is black and his patient is white. Customers at the taxi rank in the Grahamstown mural come in all colours even though whites rarely travel in public mini vans in South Africa.

Perhaps even more significant was the conscious effort to create racial blurring. Many of the figures appearing in the mural were of indeterminate race. Painters offered interesting comments on this. Some allowed that certain figures had been intended to be one colour but had unintentionally “come out” another colour. Of course, it is significant that these artists remained unconcerned by these “racial mistakes.” On the contrary, they seem pleased, allowing with mischief that in the new South Africa, the viewer was allowed to project any racial category onto a given image. Other images had been deliberately ambiguous from the outset. Indeed the painters themselves could not agree on the racial origins of the couple in bed in the Durban-Westville mural. Some said both male and female were Indians; some said both were black. Some said the male was Indian and the woman was black with relaxed hair. Others said the woman was definitely Indian and the male was black. Another painter, herself an Indian, said that all non-white South Africans are black, so the distinction was insignificant.

Perhaps what surprised this evaluator the most, was not the content of the answers by the painters so much as their surprise at my racial questions. It occurred to me that these young students have lived for some years in an era of political correctness and have absorbed its values. Clearly these students were helping to extend the notion, already well diffused in the media, of the new multi-racial South Africa.

The New South African Struggle: AIDS

Related to racial mixing is the notion of the AIDS crisis as the new political struggle in South Africa. This is a theme that much of the mass media have adopted. The AIDS mural painters have absorbed it and they seek to diffuse it. Three of the five murals I evaluated incorporated political symbolism reminiscent of the struggle to end Apartheid. The Esikhawini and Grahamstown murals show demonstrations or rallies; and Fort Hare’s mural shows a conference organised for the African continent.

Although less overtly political, both the ML Sultan and the Durban-Westville murals are strongly group-oriented. ML Sultan’s mural shows figures of many colours with joined hands, possibly dancing; UDW’s features a very diverse group encircled in a red ribbon.

It is clear from the comments of the painters and some of the onlookers that the message of a group struggle, a struggle steeped in *ubuntu*, is

recognised as needed to fight this epidemic. This image is particularly poignant in the figures on the viewers' right of the UDW mural where a little boy, ostensibly ill is being raised up by an older friend.

Related to the subject of inclusiveness is the widespread use of a range of characters to represent a range of ages and social positions. Artists fully intended to convey the message that AIDS is a risk for all people, directly or indirectly. That is why they used the image of the greying man collecting condoms in the clinic in the University of Durban–Westville mural. That is why they used the gender-bending couple image at the University of Durban-Westville. That is why they incorporated the old couple with the two children in tow in the Grahamstown mural. And that is why they also used the image of the nun even though, as one of the artists told the evaluator, “Nuns don’t get down.” Certainly the notion of a universal risk is closely related to the idea of universal struggle. And the use of unity slogans on placards and symbols of the South African flag reinforce these overlapping concepts. This double struggle is expanded to the entire continent in the University of Fort Hare mural wherein a group of delegates at a putative conference purportedly discuss Africa’s AIDS problem. It is perhaps no coincidence that students at the university which trained so many of the region’s political leaders would design mural making reference to the continent as a whole.

The **Local** Threat of the AIDS Crisis

The AIDS mural artists have taken great pains to present AIDS as an affliction striking their communities. The Grahamstown mural, with its clearly recognisable locality markers was the most successful of the five discussed in this regard. Equally powerful was the use of images from the very market and taxi rank adjacent to which the mural stands. The University of Fort Hare’s mural used the wide-open spaces of the Eastern Cape landscape and the missionary marker on the hilltop overlooking the campus to convey a similar local feel. The message intended here is that AIDS and the struggle against it **are here in this community**, here in Alice in the Eastern Cape, here in Grahamstown, here in peri-urban Zululand. **AIDS is not and not just “out there,”---somewhere else in South Africa.** Above and beyond its aesthetic appeal, the artists’ use of local visual referents calls into question the viewer’s propensity to view the AIDS epidemic as a problem of “the other.” Perhaps the Durban mural painters failed to see the need to localise the struggle against AIDS to this coastal city, given that KZN is known as the epicentre of the epidemic.

Some of the individual symbols appearing in the murals appear to require little mental processing to grasp their meaning. Condoms seem recognisable as condoms, are associated by most people as linked to as AIDS epidemic, and are broadly viewed as an AIDS prevention measure. Red and pink hearts seem to be universally associated with love and sex. And the red ribbon is recognised as the badge for AIDS awareness. These symbols are well known on campuses; their recognition rate is undoubtedly lower in the wider community.

Potentially Problematic Issues

Red Ribbons

The symbol of the red ribbon still generates some confusion. Some painters used the red ribbons to suggest to the public that certain characters in the mural were HIV+. The large image of the woman in the Esikhawini mural, according to the most outspoken person among the painting group, was supposed to be HIV+. Her positive status, he said, was indicated by the red ribbon earrings she wore! I was surprised to hear this assertion from a student who had gone through the Tertiary Institution AIDS Awareness training programme! Perhaps this individual was simply parroting popular beliefs. Indeed, there is a widespread sense in South Africa that AIDS activists (those wearing red ribbons) must be HIV+ or they would not bother with the cause! But if this is the case, then perhaps artists can use the popular misconception to their advantage. They can paint everyone to look like an activist, rather like the King of Denmark who donned a yellow six pointed star and ordered all his subjects to do the same when invading Nazis commanded the Jews in Denmark to identify themselves. What might be artistically redundant could be powerfully persuasive. And, like advertising, it might foster imitation, encouraging all South Africans to sport the red ribbon in their daily lives. Widespread diffusion of the symbol can only lead to more acceptance of the epidemic, and hence more tolerance for those with HIV/AIDS

The red ribbon as symbol for the AIDS helpline is understood by university students but not by the ordinary citizens of Grahamstown. BAC2 should continue to use radio to promote and reinforce the helpline concept, as the helpline's use was not clearly understood by mural viewers consulted in Grahamstown. Moreover, calling strangers for

advice is likely to be a somewhat alien practice for some working class South Africans.

The use of the heart to signify romantic love and sexuality seems quite well understood. Other painters use the heart to symbolise the love that one should continue to show to the HIV+. This may be a bit abstract, and thus difficult to grasp. Yet, the BAC mural painters have used it as a signature mark for their work, so perhaps in time the public will take it as a group valentine sent to the whole community.

Images of Gender; Image of Race

The evaluation of any artistic project of this type must of necessity be concerned with the creation of unintended meanings. It must be equally sensitive to the potential for reinforcement of meaning which have heretofore contributed to the problem at hand. Therefore it is useful to examine gender images as well as race images.

On the Fort Hare mural, there is an image of “Condom Man.” He is a muscle bound character carrying a bucket and distributing condoms. We may wish to begin to question the gender images we are disseminating in murals designed to slow the spread of AIDS. Indeed research appears increasingly to inform us that skewed gender relations and inordinate amount of male power are at the root of the AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa, if not the whole continent.⁶ Perhaps less problematic, but still at issue is the “grandfather” image on the Grahamstown mural. Grandfather walks with a stick, (a symbol of masculinity in southern Africa) but is unencumbered by human charges. His elderly wife carries a baby and leads a small boy by the hand. While the image may be realistic, it does not portray the equitable gender relations anticipated for BAC and beyond.

DramAidE is soon to become involved in a series of workshops which will explore South African concepts of masculinity with a view to aiding society to devise a “kinder, gentler, (read less sexist, less misogynist) South African male.” It may be that muscle men images will not survive the new definition. And aloof fathers, fathers uninvolved with children, could also disappear soon from the new gender script.

⁶ Panos, HIV/AIDS Briefing No. 5, 1998.

In the interest of social reconstruction, I also raise the issue of the positioning of the hands in the ML Sultan mural. I think the hands could be reversed so that the black hand would appear to give the white one a heart rather than vice-versa. This would be more empowering to blacks who are typically depicted as recipients of white largesse rather than initiators of action of any kind. In future, facilitators could be sensitised to these visual nuances which communicate powerfully, yet unconsciously to all of us.

Processes Which Communicate Effectively and Their Targets

Most of the murals created in the BAC2 campaign appear on university campuses. The mural, once used as a form of political protest in South Africa, still retains some of its outlaw glamour in South Africa, and this certainly appeals to the young. So fashionable are murals that the advertising industry has co-opted them, further contributing to their popularity. These murals, with their upbeat popular and trendy images, are in keeping with the “sense of fun” the BAC campaign has attempted to associate with AIDS presentation. The most daring, the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) mural with its rather frank depiction of a couple about to engage in sexual activity, appeals directly to the youth. What is all the more interesting and relevant about this image is that it was placed in a corner where a cement stairway meets with the mural wall. It is a quiet spot on campus where couples are often found kissing furtively. The mural has indeed risen out of its environment!

These murals seem likely to be conducive to a newer and more open attitude about sexuality on campuses. This appears feasible for highly educated urban university students. And research with the DramAidE sentinel sites confirms that condoms are being used when they are available.⁷ But it is clear to this evaluator that even tertiary students in South Africa have a long way to go before they are comfortable and open with issues of sexuality. Students at Fort Hare, particularly the females, were very hesitant to take condoms from the student distributors working with the mural painting crew. There was a great deal of shyness and dare I say hypocrisy even among male student and lecturers in this regard. Tertiary students in KZN appear much more comfortable with sexuality and with condom use generally. This evaluator would argue that other sections of the country should be the focus of as much anti-AIDS intervention as KZN has enjoyed over the years. This may help prevent

⁷ Personal Communication, Dr. Kevin Kelly, Sentinel Site Evaluator, Sept. 16, 1999.

HIV+ levels outside KZN from climbing as high as those within this province.

Mural Launches and Media Response

Esikhawini College of Education benefited from a dynamic project coordinator and an excellent group of students. I was able to evaluate the college's mural launch in conjunction with this report. The results of my findings are detailed below.

The Esikhawini College of Education held its mural launch on August 27, 1999. This event was a follow-up to a 'mini launch' held on the final day of painting on June 30 1999 and was covered by SABC Zulu radio. The August launch programme featured opening prayers, remarks, musical items, poetry recitations, two AIDS awareness dramas, and selections of music and dance. Entertainment was provided by Esikhawini college students, and students from nearby Sandile and Khula high schools. The programme was entertaining and well attended. It was followed by a luncheon for the faculty and students involved.

Clearly, the programme had been well organised and a lot of thought had gone into making the event. I suspect it was a rather typical South African opening ceremony. I think there are ways this "launch model" could be improved upon.

I would have liked to see some additional elements that would have raised the project's profile in the community. I think some aspect of the event should have been held out of doors in front of the mural. Certainly some of the dances could have been performed there. And an AIDS parade, (as depicted in the mural) complete with marching bands could have been added to the festivity. Food and drink could be offered outdoors, so that a greater sense of festivity would be felt. The larger the celebration, the greater is likely to be the media attention. Community radio should certainly have been on hand to cover the event; and perhaps Radio Zulu, present at the 'mini' launch on June 30, could have found a different angle to the mural story. The local Esikhawini newspaper, *Umlozi* did run a photo of the mural on September 8, 1999. But this is insufficient coverage for an effort of this magnitude. BAC2 must strive to promote more synergy between its Media workers project, its Radio Training Project, and its AIDS Action projects.

As noted above, most of the murals have already been launched. Launches provide an important opportunity for social mobilisation and media coverage. The University of Durban-Westville (UDW)'s mural launch, complete with speeches by dignitaries, was covered on KZN Tonight. The Grahamstown mural launch was covered in conjunction with the main Grahamstown Arts festival on satellite-TV station QUE TV. But the extent to which the media devote column space or airplay to these murals seems to depend on the personalities involved at specific mural sites. Where university contact persons are dynamic, launches are well organised and appropriate dignitaries and media representatives are invited.

Artistic facilitators also try to generate coverage for the mural painting process. This tends to be serendipitous at best, as the facilitators are too busy with the practicalities of mural painting to pursue the media with much tenacity. I believe a MURAL PAINTING press kit and a MURAL LAUNCHING press kit should be prepared and sent to designated media approximately a few days before each of these two events is to begin. Press kits could be prepared by the Wireless Additive, with portions completed in their media training courses.

Creating AIDS Discourses Through the Use of Public Murals

The murals described herein served to delight and to upgrade the communities in a pleasant but fairly innocuous way. In so doing, they contribute to maintaining a general level of awareness of AIDS within the community. This is important, as a decrease in awareness is likely to increase the practice of unsafe sex.

I have observed, however, that the more provocative murals seem to raise more questions from passers-by. Presumably they generate more discourse around the mural, and by extension, more attention to the AIDS issue. The couple of uncertain gender in the University of Durban-Westville created considerable curiosity and discussion. The “couple about to couple” also engendered a great deal of teasing of the artists who were asked whether they were painting scenes from their own lives, their fantasies, and so on. It would seem that facilitators should be encouraged to work with groups to explore tension lines around the issues of sexuality and gender. These “areas of tension” might be incorporated

into murals so that people would have to look at the mural several times before dissecting the meaning. Gender role reversal might be a good place to begin. A mural might find ways to blur the genders of members of a couple, as did the Westville mural. Or they might reverse the roles for men and women: depicting women as taxi drivers and doctors; men as market sellers and child-minders. Deciphering these new images would require more time and mental engagement on the part of viewers.

BAC “process” facilitators have been trained to raise these issues in the context of playmaking and as noted above, they do use the Freire methodology for consciousness raising in the mural workshops. I believe as we enter into a more gender sensitive phase of BAC, i.e., as we begin to workshop the definition of masculinity, we should make a concerted effort to promote murals that question accepted gender relationships. The questioning in the workshops will undoubtedly lead artists to paint ambiguous gender images in much the same way as they struggle to blur the lines between social groups.

The image of the “hand of God” offering the condom to the campus at the University of Fort Hare certainly raises the potential for discussion and even controversy among different strains of believers. Indeed it is clear that more than one Christian group would deny the role of the “hand of God” in any condom distribution programme! The response of the public to the use of religious symbolism should be monitored with interest and care. It will be an intriguing future challenge to explore religious and ideological discourses in upcoming workshops and future mural projects.

Provocative images are not the only ones to increase the level of discourse around a mural. When questioning individual observers on the contents of murals, I noted the propensity of viewers to provide long, involved, and oftentimes fanciful accounts of the mural contents. In other words, mural viewers used the murals projectively. This was particularly true of the observers in Grahamstown, who were not university students but working class taxi drivers and market shoppers. This tendency reminded me very much of fieldwork I have undertaken elsewhere in Africa, where illiterates or low-literates understand survey questions in terms of a request for a story. Such respondents, not wishing to disappoint, narrate highly imaginative tales about the subject at hand.⁸ Such behaviour may also be related to a dialogical approach to reality in

⁸ See also Clifford and Marcus, 1986.

which an interchange is incomplete until the audience participates in its deconstruction and reconstruction.⁹

The desire on the part of observers to create fictions around the murals could be used with profit to extend the “life of the mural” and retain community interest in it. Contests could be held periodically in conjunction with community radio. The contests could ask people to compete in inventing the best mural story or story sequel. The stories could be read on local radio and judged either by the radio producers or the listeners themselves. The winners could then be announced weekly or bi-weekly in all the local media. Winners would win valuable prizes donated by SA business and industry, while contestants could each be given an AIDS mural tee shirt and other similar promotional item. The first mural story contest could be announced, along with coverage from community radio, at the mural launch.

⁹ See Bourgault, 1995, pp. 194-195; 202-203. See also, Gottlieb and Graham, 1993, pp. 162-167.

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