

# SAS Newsletter

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- Heidi M. Altman and Brandon D. Lundy, SAS Website

## The Southern Anthropological Society's 48th Annual Meeting

### **Theme: "The Culture of Healing"**

March 7-10, 2013

Hosted by East Tennessee State University

**Carnegie Hotel & Spa\***  
in Johnson City, TN



This year's theme aims to explore healing writ broadly, as it relates to illness and medicine, physiology, human rights, the environment, sociopolitical dynamics, and ritual, spirituality and religion. We are interested in innovative approaches to the conceptualization of healing as a dynamic biocultural force. We also welcome papers that are integrative in nature, reflecting biocultural perspectives and/or linking varied aspects of social and cultural life under the auspices of healing.

**Keynote Speaker: Dr. Andrea Wiley**  
"Growing Children Around the World: Cow's Milk Consumption and Ideals of Growth"

### **ABSTRACT SUBMISSION DEADLINE:** **January 22, 2013**

On-line abstract submissions are currently being accepted for 2013: <http://southernanthro.org/home/annual-meeting/>

*For additional information, contact:  
Dr. Melissa Schrift and Dr. Lindsey King  
at [schrift@mail.etsu.edu](mailto:schrift@mail.etsu.edu)*

\*Book your room at the special conference rate of \$89.00 per night (plus tax) at the Carnegie. To reserve a room, call (423) 979-6400, and mention the Southern Anthropological Society meeting. Please note that the cutoff for this room rate is February 8, 2013.



# SAS Presidential Update

Dear SAS Colleagues,

I hope everyone had a good holiday. 2013 is a promising year for SAS. The organization continues to have an excellent membership base as well as fiscal health. The meeting in Johnson City, Tennessee, is shaping up nicely. The organizers, Melissa Schrift and Lindsey King, from East Tennessee State University, have been hard at work planning an exciting weekend for us. The theme for this year is "The Culture of Healing," and they have asked Dr. Andrea Wiley, noted medical anthropologist from Indiana University, to deliver the keynote address. She will be speaking on "Growing Children Around the World: Cow's Milk Consumption and Ideals of Growth." As you all know, the annual meeting is our yearly opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues, to forge new friendships and collaborations, to present our on-going and current research, and to survey the state of the field. The meetings are also special-

ly welcoming to both graduate and undergraduate students, allowing them to present their research to and to mingle with anthropologists and other students from across the South in a low-pressure and friendly environment. I urge everyone who has not done so already to submit their abstracts and registration materials before the January 22 deadline and to urge students to submit as well (and remember the student-paper award, see below and website for further details). More information about the meetings can be found on the SAS website.

I also encourage anyone with article-length research manuscripts to consider publishing in *Southern Anthropologist*, the SAS journal. Graduate student manuscripts are especially welcome. The *Southern Anthropologist* is a peer-reviewed, on-line journal, and the only Southern re-

gional journal of its kind. The journal is available on the SAS website. More information for how to submit a manuscript also can be found on the website or by contacting the editors, Julian Murchison (Millsaps College, Jackson, MS) or Matt Sampson (Davidson College, Davidson, NC). As to other business matters, we are seeking someone who would be interested in maintaining the SAS website. If you have any interest in doing so, please contact me or Brandon D. Lundy.

Finally I would like to thank the entire Executive Committee for their help and guidance through my first year as president. Their collegiality, professionalism, good advice, and investment in the organization is something to be emulated and I look forward to my continued work with them over the next year. I also look forward to seeing everyone in Johnson City!

**Robbie Ethridge**  
SAS President



**Robbie Ethridge,**  
SAS President  
Professor of Anthropology  
University of Mississippi



Photo Credit: David M. Johnson



Photo Credit: David M. Johnson

Presenting the 2012 SAS Student Paper Awards, Birmingham, AL

## 2013 SAS Student Paper Competition

The student paper competition committee invites undergraduate and graduate students to present at the SAS conference and to submit their papers into the annual student paper competition. We particularly ask faculty to be active in contacting their students who have produced quality research in the past year and to encourage them to take advantage of this great opportunity for their professional development. The deadline for the papers is not


until **February 10th**, but to be eligible, students have to submit the abstract for their paper online by **January 22nd**.

There will be a cash prize of \$200.00 and a selection of books awarded to a graduate and an undergraduate paper author or authors. Winning papers will also be published and archived on the SAS website.

Papers should be no

more than 25 pages, excluding diagrams, notes, and references; double-spaced, 12-point type, with one-inch margins. To enter the competition, students must send the full paper as an email attachment to the Student Paper Competition Committee Chair, **Dr. Vincent Melomo** ([vmelomo@peace.edu](mailto:vmelomo@peace.edu)). Students must also submit a separate paper abstract through SAS's online system by January 22; and they must pay membership and registration fees in advance.

# Spray-Painting Identity and Political Power in the Graffiti of Mérida, Yucatán



2012 Undergraduate  
Student Paper  
Competition Co-  
Winner

Will Lammons  
Millsaps College

## Abstract

I use graffiti in Mérida, Yucatán to examine the social and political role of the modern Yucatecan identity. My ethnographic research conducted with *graffiteros* in Mérida shows that graffiti comes to Mérida transnationally and is given a unique cultural theme centering on the *graffiteros*' reinterpretations of Classic Maya art. This constructs a modern Yucatecan identity that connects them to the ancient Maya. It is also supported by members of the community because it is painted on the facades of their homes with their permission, as well as its ability to provide them with cultural identity. The city and state government are included in Expo Graffiti, an annual exposition, which shows that authorities recognize the power of Maya themes and use graffiti for its ability to construct community identity. Arguably, this involvement suggests a state interest in using graffiti for propagandistic purposes. This allows them to appear as liberal in the public's eye, but also show that they support the connection between the modern Yucatecan and the ancient Maya. They allow things to be painted on political buildings and commission them, but there is no idea among the *graffiteros* of "selling out". While in most cases, graffiti is an expression of agency against a ruling structure, Mérida's graffiti expresses an agency that exists in tension with the government. This is also found in the state sponsored muralism of Diego Rivera, who also

painted to support the marginalized and indigenous in Mexico.

## Introduction

Over the course of about five months in Yucatán, close to three thousand photographs, and something like thirteen interviews, I found myself returning to the *Area Sur Crew Shop*, a local shop ran by Bogie, one of Mérida's most seasoned *graffiteros*, which sold paint, caps, graffiti magazines, t-shirts, sneakers, hats, and even some hip-hop CDs.[1] The store had been a major point during my summer research, mostly because *graffiteros* would congregate there, but this day was special because it was only about two days before I would leave for the United States. In addition to this, Bogie and some other *graffiteros* were asking if I would come to a paint session, which I had yet to attend with more than one *graffitero*. After a ten minute cab ride, I found myself in a neighborhood in an obscure part of the *sur* area of Mérida, watching five *graffiteros* paint while nine sat and watched, told stories, and made fun of each other and those painting. About this time, Ecko, another *graffitero*, started making runs for pairs of forty ounce bottles of beer, which would be passed around until empty, after which another set of forties would be obtained and placed in a clever backpack to conceal their identities. This concealment was important since drinking in the street in Mérida was, well, illegal. After about the fourth forty run, I felt the need to release the alcohol building up inside my body, and after requesting for a bathroom nearby, I was recommended to ask an elderly gentlemen who was watching all of this occur. I very politely went to ask the old man if it would be possible to use his facilities, and he said no. It was then that I realized how strange all of this was. Here I was, in the street with five "graffiti vandals" who were painting in broad daylight at about six o'clock, on someone's house at that, while a man of at least sixty years stood and watched as if they were doing something very normal, like delivering newspapers, instead

of "vandalizing" someone's home. While they were drinking in the street, there was a successful effort to conceal it, and they even told me to ask to use someone's bathroom. Though I understood elements in Mérida's graffiti scene that explained all this, I did not comprehend how unique painting graffiti on someone's house in broad daylight was, in comparison to graffiti rules of other cities.

Graffiti in Mérida exists, in its most basic form, as a painted, written, or scratched name, though it is not limited to this. It has existed in this format of a name or message for a long time and has focused mainly on cultivating status for writers. In the case that I describe above, graffiti that takes more than fifteen or twenty minutes is painted almost exclusively for the sake of creating art and is usually painted on peoples' homes in the city. This is possible because *graffiteros* ask the permission of whatever building they choose to paint, which allows them more time to perfect their work and an easy escape from the long arm of the law. Graffiti comes to Mérida from two major movements in the United States. The first of these is the *cholo* of the Hispanic west coast, which marks gang territory; and the second is the tag, which was popular in the East Coast and provides status through proliferation, instead of simply marking territory. This latter style eventually developed into a more artistic style of writing large letters on subways. As these art styles migrated to the rest of the country and to Mérida, via mass media and migration, their counter cultural spirits moved with them (Powers 1996:139; Grody 2006:22; Lewisohn 2008:35). These elements are still preserved in the *graffiteros*' desires to drink in the streets, while also painting graffiti that was petitioned legally. Yet despite its lack of illegality, Mérida's graffiti still constructs its own legitimacy as a scene, largely because of its distinct "Yucatecan" subject matter, but also because of the inherent rebellion found in

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those so cleverly concealed forty ounce bottles. The *graffiteros* also differ strongly from the *cholos* or chicano “home boys” to whom they credit the origins of the city’s graffiti, in that they paint art instead of supporting violence. Nothing shows this better than the moment when, after about the fifteenth forty run, we collectively decided it was time to quietly go home, and I mounted the kind lap of a stranger who had joined the group and began to pedal his bicycle home, while he steered. There was no talk of drunken fights, territorial markings, or rival crews, only the unity found in the graffiti itself.

### Methods

My data was collected primarily through taking photographs and interviews, supplemented by the occasional attendance at an event, like this painting session. Murchison states that it is often practical for ethnographers to use “instruments” like cameras while collecting data because it provides the ability to freeze a moment and return to it (2010:72, 73). Murchison argues that photographs can be difficult to work with because they are static, but they have proven to be the perfect tool for documenting graffiti (2010:73).

The second type of data collection that I did was formal interviews. My time was very short, because I only had a month in my second field season, and in my first I was not able to develop very close relationships with every *graffitero*. I decided to make the most of my time and schedule systematic interviews by compiling a general set of questions that I memorized (Murchison 2010:88, 102; Starks and Roberts 2002:203). I did my best to interview every *graffitero* I met, establishing a mostly systemic pattern of data (Murchison 2010:107-109; Starks and Roberts 2002:203). All of my interviews were in Spanish, and only on one occasion did I speak any English. At times this was very difficult because most *graffiteros* I communicated with spoke Spanish filled with Mexican and Yucatecan slang.

The third method I used to collect data was the unstructured observing of events, such as the Mérida graffiti expo or painting sessions (Starks and Roberts

2002:201). This was mostly informal and relaxed observation, as opposed to participant observation (Murchison 2010:84; Starks and Roberts 2002:201). During these events, I would focus on one aspect, since as Stark and Roberts state, “no one can pay attention to everything” (2002:201). I focused mostly on the dynamics occurring between *graffiteros* in these events of cohesion. I would also talk to them and observe their painting techniques, while of course always taking dozens of pictures. I did paint some graffiti, but only twice: one in the form of tagging my name and the other as a “*bomba*”, which I did not finish.[2]

I use Mitchell’s narrative theory to unpack the themes that exist within Mérida’s graffiti, particularly those that embody its unique cultural elements. These exist within a narrative process, described by a constant state of change and adaptation (2008:124). Mitchell argues that narratives accomplish this change “through four recurrent processes: repetition, amplification, elaboration, and reverberation” (2008:124). Repetition focuses on the reiteration of elements in order to create continuity in between works (2008:124, 125). Amplification emphasizes the most important themes in the story to make the main points more clear (2008:126). Elaboration centers on portions of stories that are changed or modified to suit a new version (2008:130). Reverberation focuses on works that serve as response to the narrative that creates a new work out of the original one (2008:133).

### Cultural Narrative

The ideas of the Yucatecan identity and the Mexican mural tradition converge in Mérida’s “cultural” graffiti, which portrays “Maya” or Yucatecan images. All major graffiti in Mérida is painted with the permission of the owner of the property, which also shows the extent to which *Meridianos* support graffiti, particularly that which embodies a cultural theme. Mitchell’s narrative method explains the importance of two cultural themes found in Mérida’s graffiti: Ancient “Mayoid” and modern “Mayoid”. The first theme, Ancient “Mayoid”, embodies graffiti’s recreation of Classic and Post-Classic Maya art, in

the form of images that “look” Maya. The second theme, modern “Mayoid”, centers on Mayoid images that depict the modern Maya people, usually in their traditional environments. These themes work together to construct a narrative that calls for a contemporary Yucatecan identity which holds a special place for the Maya.

### Ancient Mayoid

The first type of cultural graffiti theme is painted in an elaborated Classic Maya art style and repeats “Maya” iconography. I consider these “Mayoid” because of the *graffiteros*’ unique elaborations of Maya images or Maya art styles. Figure 1 shows a mural on part of the airport wall that was painted by a handful of *graffiteros*, including “Mare” and “Drip”. It repeats the pyramid of Kukulkan at Chichén Itzá, which is dedicated to the god Kukulkan, the feathered serpent, who appears at the bottom in the form of the two feathered serpent figures facing to the left and to the right. These serpents are also actual repeated icons that are present at Chichén. The famous figure of the creator god, Itzamna, is also repeated on the far left.



**Figure 1** This is a Maya themed mural that appears on Mérida’s airport wall. It is at least 3 or 4 years old. A section just out of sight has been painted over by government propaganda.

Today Chichen Itza is one of the seven New Wonders of the World and is a major tourist destination as one of Yucatán’s UNESCO world heritage sites (Breglia 2005:386). It serves as a major symbol in the modern Yucatecan identity, because it has the largest amount of fully excavated monumental Maya architecture, except perhaps for Uxmal. It serves as a symbol of the glory of the ancient Yucatec Maya that can still be seen. This mural shows *graffiteros* using popular images such as Chichén and Itzamna, along with other Mayoid icono-

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graphy, to amplify the importance of the ancient Maya in modern day Mérida. By painting, and in effect, creating, this amplification they can connect to the classic Maya heritage of Yucatán to construct identity. In painting this mural though, they are painting these images based on their own ideas of the art, as well as recreating it with the spray paint medium, and therefore elaborating Ancient Maya iconography. This elaboration allows them to recreate Maya art in their own image, and therefore, become their own and immediately connected with their identities. In recreating these symbols in a graffiti medium and placing them on a wall in modern Mérida, the unique elaborations and reverberations work together to create a new Yucatecan identity. This is very powerful in the case of this mural, because it shows Mayoid being the subject of the piece and controlling the entire work.

### Modern Mayoid

Another type of Mayoid cultural theme that is popular in Mérida centers on the modern Maya. In figure 2, the *graffitero*, Drip, shows a repetition of a modern Maya family, elaborated into surreal cultural characters. The father is dressed in a *guayabera*, the typical Yucatecan shirt; the mother is dressed in a *huilpil*, the typical dress of the woman; and the whole family appears in front of their *solar*, while the piece is filled with other *solars* on the right.[3] The figures themselves are depicted as indigenous because of their skin tone, clothing, and homes. I consider these characters “surreal” because their appearance is more in the style of cartoons than Mare’s realistic pieces. The arm of the woman that grasps the stick is long and strangely slender, while her hand is abnormally large by contrast. The detail that drives the amplification is also found in the characters’ faces, while their clothing is secondary and, by comparison, very simple. There is a large amount of shading and layering that went into the faces of all three characters, especially the shading that creates a shadow from the father’s nose. The characters’ strange facial expressions amplify a level of emotion that is not found in Mare’s more realistic figures, because their surrealism enhanc-

es their visible emotions. The daughter shows a look of youthful happiness, while the lines and shadows on the father’s face amplify his age and the hardship he has experienced as well as the quickly disappearing modern Maya culture.



**Figure 2** Drip’s expo piece shows a usage of surrealistic modern Maya characters, alongside Bogie’s wild style.

Drip holds a special place for the modern Maya culture. When I asked Drip about this piece, he said, “It’s something I always remember. I have a lot of good memories of the *campo* and that type of life.”[4] He said his great grandparents spoke Mayan and that his great grandmother spoke only Mayan, while his grandmother spoke Spanish and Mayan. Drip lived in a *pueblo* as a child and came to the city with his family, but stayed behind to paint graffiti when they decided to return to the *pueblo*. [5] He still holds a special place for “that type of life” associated with the indigenous life of the *pueblo* and sees that it is now fading. He said that certain things from the indigenous lifestyle are still important to him, especially when he said, “I like the smell of the earth after the rain.” This is a strong statement, because it emphasizes the contrast between Mérida, the largest city in the region, with the calm life of the *pueblo*. The fact that Drip can express this emotion shows that he has a strong connection to Maya life and wants to amplify and elaborate it in his art. He said, “I like that the people take their time to look at it.” The lines in the Maya father’s face reflect a lifetime of working in the fields or *milpas* and make him look weary, as if to suggest, as Drip believes, that he is aware that his way of life is ending. The look of sheer joy on the daughter’s face, however, provides a warm sign of hope for the family. He repeats images of a modern marginalized indigenous people in Yucatán, but provides his own elaborations on them to

illustrate their emotions so that the viewer can feel them and understand them. These two processes work together to amplify his connection to the modern Maya, while also amplifying them for Mérida, providing them a lasting place in Yucatecan identity through their location on a public wall.

### Mixing of the Mayoid: Modern Yucatecan Identity

Since the arrival of the Spanish, the Yucatán peninsula has been a place where identity has been an issue. Cultural graffiti is an attempt to reconcile this identity. This is largely achieved when Ancient and modern Mayoid elements are mixed into one piece. In modern Yucatán, the Yucatecans trace their lineage to the Maya and use them to construct their identity as Yucatecans, but this was not always the case and, in fact, shows how much the Yucatecan identity has changed in five hundred years.

Following the conquest, Maya rebellion continued in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Maya *indios* and *mestizos* organized in a military attempt at Yucatecan statehood. In 1840, as the newly formed Mexican republic was reaching for unity between all its different states, Yucatán enacted a rebellion of the Maya *indios* and the upper class *criollos* and *peninsulares* and took the peninsula, declaring Yucatán independent (Reed 2001:29). Following this, a new set of state officials were elected and a revision of the Yucatán constitution also declared all peoples of Yucatán, including *indios*, to be citizens, as well as the granting of religious freedom (Reed 2001:30). For the first time in post-conquest Yucatán, Spanish descended elites were supportive of Maya natives, and the two even fought alongside each other for similar goals. Maya citizenship and freedom of religion were gained from this, as well as the first instance of a unified Yucatán. Reed also states that a new Yucatecan flag was symbolically flown over the main plaza in Mérida (2001:31). The relationship between the Spanish and the Maya was reconciled for a moment, with both sides supporting the movement for an autonomous Yucatán. This peace and political

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unification quickly ended in 1844 when citizenship was taken away from *indios* and even more so in 1847 when Mexican troops killed a group of local Maya municipal leaders, causing the Maya to react with massacres in Valladolid, prompting the start of Yucatán's caste wars (Reed 2001:36-40). The Caste Wars provided such a lasting and brutal conflict that the Maya were only stopped when the peninsula was cut into three portions so the resistance could not be unified in a way that could threaten the entire peninsula (Standish 2009:41, 329-330).

Mare, another *graffitero* who exclusively paints cultural imagery, mixes the types of Mayoid imagery, which creates a contemporary Yucatecan identity that reconciles the ancient and modern role of the Maya, while elaborating them into one contemporary identity of the "Yucatecan". Figure 3 shows an example of this in a mural that appears in Mare's neighborhood on his neighbor's patio wall. It consists of a stoic ancient "Mayoid" face, similar to the one he painted in figure 4. Mare told me that this face is not of any god or figure in particular, but is his own take on Ancient Maya art. Both faces follow repeated stylistic elements of Classic Maya images, but embody his own general elaborations of the art style, as opposed to his version of the face of King Pakal or Bird Jaguar.



**Figure 3** This piece painted completely by Mare is located on the wall of the inner patio of one of his neighbors, but it is easily visible from the street.

Each Mayoid face represents the Ancient Maya, and each one is accompanied by a realistic Maya character representing the modern Maya. In figure 3, this is discernible because of the traditional *huipil* dress that the woman wears. In figure 4 this is discernible because of the corn the boy eats, which is the element from which the gods created man in the

*Popul Vuh*, the story of Maya creation (Tedlock 1996:3089). The 3D letter piece in figure 3 is also Mayoid, because, according to Mare, it is meant to look like Maya hieroglyphs. Just like Mare's faces, the letter piece repeats Classic Maya art in general, instead of one specific work of Maya art, while also elaborating it because Mare is using his individual graffiti aesthetic and style to shape it. It can also multi-vocally represent Mayoid and graffiti because both are present in the creation of the piece. The inclusion of the glyph letter piece and classic Mayoid faces beside modern Maya figures is meant to reconcile the tumultuous history the Maya have experienced and connect the modern Maya to the glory of the Classic Maya. Mare's repetition and elaboration allows him to bridge ancient and modern together to construct one ecumenical Maya identity. His own take on the Maya symbol system is included in these faces, combined with the medium of graffiti, and then adhered to the wall. With this he can connect himself to the Maya, through graffiti, and include them in his own definition of what it means to be a *Yucateco*. Mare's inclusion of elements representative of Ancient Maya and modern Maya, allows him to bridge the two periods together and construct one Maya consciousness that all Yucatecans can use to connect themselves to the Maya. The soft purple in figure 4 also works as a transition color between the face and the child so that they can be part of the same mural. The same is the case in figure 3 with the blue sky background and the red and green colors in the letters that connect to the green and red flowers in the woman's *huipil*. Mare's message in figures 3 and 4 is that modern Maya are connected to the ancients through their lineage, but that he himself is also part of this because he is a *Yucateco*. He sees Maya culture as part of *Yucateco* identity and by painting the murals in figures 3 and 4, he constructs Maya as a part of *Yucateco* identity. These pieces allow Mare to construct the same type of Yucatecan unity found in the Yucatecan independence of 1840, except in a way that venerates and celebrates the *indio*, instead of just providing him equality.



**Figure 4** This is another piece of Mare's. It also shows a modern Mayoid figure placed beside an Ancient one.

The largest concentration of Mare's work in the city is in his own neighborhood within about a three minute radius in every direction of his own house. He said that he painted the mural in figure 3 and then, "the neighbor over there liked it *muchísimo* and presented me with her wall and told me, 'If you want, you can paint it.' [6] Then the same thing happened again. I finished that, and my neighbor here on the corner liked it a lot and wanted me to paint her wall too." Across the main street that splits Mare's neighborhood in two, he has five more murals, but only the four in his immediate neighborhood are exclusively his own work. Mare's ability to bridge modern Maya imagery with his conceptions of "Ancient Maya" allows him to construct while simultaneously promoting his culture.

This happens in a way that not only works for Mare, but is also reverberated by his neighbors. They appreciate and support it for its amplification of this new Yucatecan identity. Though not all of the murals in Mare's neighborhood amplify the cultural imagery as strongly as this, they are still desired by his neighbors and are appreciated at a basic level as art. The neighbors respond to the cultural themes and support them by providing Mare with space to continue creating it. This builds the narrative and creates reverberations that allow these themes to exist in different ways. Not only do his neighbors support his creation of these themes of Yucatecan identity, but they want to own a part of it through its existence on the facades of their houses. They then use these things to construct their own senses of Yucatecan pride and identity through the public display of the art. This public display reverberates these ideas out to the community and is mani-

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defested in the desires of the other neighbors for painted facades showing these cultural images. The abundance of this theme also allows it to move out to the city at large. Mare also responds to this by happily painting for his neighbors without charge. The Ancient and modern Mayoid themes converge into one narrative that calls for a new Yucatecan consciousness, which elaborates on classic and modern images and weaves them together, amplifying one contemporary idea of Maya and “Yuca”. This identity is then reverberated through support and consumption by the members of the community, fulfilling Mare’s desire that it creates a new “Maya” identity.

Mare is also aware of his work’s ability to amplify this cultural theme. He states, “I like to represent my state with graffiti. When they see a picture all over the place, they see the culture everywhere. It’s like *exaltando* my culture.[7] They can see that I’m from here, from Mérida, and because of that, I focus myself more in the Maya culture. This is a Maya area, and there are Maya races here, and I am from Mérida. For that I consider myself Maya.” Mare’s art not only amplifies, repeats, elaborates, and causes reverberations of these cultural elements, but explicitly functions to serve this purpose for him. Like the rise of the mural and popular art in Mexico in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Mare wants to show the *indio* as something that is beautiful and something that he, and all other Yucatecans are part of (Rodríguez 1969:137). He also connects strongly to the Mexican muralists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because as Rodríguez says of the muralists, Mare supports a “re-awakening” of ancient indigenous art (1969:159, 160). Like Goitia, Orozco, Siquieros, and Rivera, Mare and others that paint elements of the cultural theme give voice and power to the people with their art, particularly the indigenous and *mestizo*, and show their suffering and marginalization since the arrival of the Spaniard (1969:160). Not only does the subject matter of cultural graffiti and the Mexican murals break down the conquest era hierarchy of Mexico, but the forms that they both use further this break down. Rodríguez states:

So, in a moment of ecstatic

rebellion, the painters destroyed the little pictures they had previously painted; they tore up the canvases in their studios and with the iconoclastic cry ‘Down with bourgeois art!’ they turned the walls of public buildings in order to proclaim, for all to hear, what they had seen during their struggle for their country, as well as all they knew of the struggle of others peoples fighting for land, freedom and justice. (1969:160)

*Graffiteros* and muralists, alike, paint in the street and in the public eye for the whole public to see. The content that they paint is so important that the medium itself must support it as well. No *graffiteros* I met were familiar with the work of the famous muralists like Rivera, but Mare still called what he paints “*muralismo*” or muralism and cited inspiration from one muralist who painted a series of murals in Mérida’s governmental palace depicting the history of the Maya.

### Graffiti and the Government

Like Diego River’s state sponsored muralism, graffiti exists in a close relationship with the government of Mérida and Yucatán. The cultural images in the graffiti create identity for *Meridianos*, as shown in the case of Mare’s neighborhood, and once the government realizes that it can benefit from this, a relationship between the two develops. The relationship between graffiti and the government exists in two major ways. The first is government or civic support for graffiti in general, like the Expo Graffiti, in which the city gives *graffiteros* permission to paint public buildings in the city. This works as de-facto graffiti for the government, because its presence shows the youth and young voters that the government “understands” and supports graffiti. The second form of this relationship occurs when the government actually commissions *graffiteros* to paint for them, as shown in the *Mural Bicentenario*. These commissions can display works of artistic graffiti, but they can also contain pieces that obviously fulfill only a desire for propaganda. These *graffiteros* are often compensated for these

commissions with money or large amounts of paint. The government, to an extent, has realized the popularity of graffiti and now supports it in some ways, while also using it to serve its own propaganda needs.

### Government and Civic Support



Figure 5 Expo 2011 shirt front.



Figure 6 Expo 2011 shirt back with the logo of SEJUVE.

Mérida has a major city wide expo, attended by *graffiteros* from other parts of Mexico and North America called Expo Graffiti. In 2009, the relationship between the state government and organized expo graffiti culminated when the expo moved to the wall of the city’s airport on *Calle 127*. [8] While the expo is a ritual of the *graffiteros*, it would not be possible without the help of the government. It has received support from the government through: spray paint, a large sound system, a tent canopy, permission of a park beside *Calle 127*, closing of *Calle 127* to all traffic, solid color paint for the background (white or gray that paints over previous work), and promotional posters. By closing the street and providing a huge sound system the gov-

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ernment transforms the expo into a huge block party. While the expo could exist without paint from the government, providing paint makes it considerably easier for *graffiteros* to participate in the event. In 2011, the organizers also gave out t-shirts, but they were not just t-shirts. On the front, shown in figure 5, there is a logo for the expo. But the back bears a small *SEJUVE* logo, shown in figure 6.[9] While Bogie, the head organizer, never said explicitly if the city government was helping with the expo, the combination of the closing of the street and the *SEJUVE* logos both show explicit cooperation. The *graffiteros* are not afraid to show that the government is helping this event exist, shown by the presence of the logo on the back of the shirt. The shirts themselves were popular and I saw several during the expo and some on my second trip to Mérida in mid-July. *Graffiteros* in Mérida are willing to cooperate with the city and state governments in exchange for space, paint, and other means of assistance. There is no shame in appealing to the government for help, nor is there any notion of “selling out”. The government even endorses graffiti, also shown by the logo on the back of the shirt.

**Commissioned Graffiti as White Propaganda**

Once graffiti is actually commissioned by the government, it becomes “white” propaganda. “White propaganda comes from a source that is identified correctly, and the information tends to be accurate.... White propaganda attempts to build credibility with the audience.... National celebrations, with their overt patriotism and regional chauvinism, can usually be classified as white propaganda” (Jowett and O’Donnell 2006:17). The *Mural Bicentenario* can be read as an example of white propaganda because it was commissioned by the Sports Institute of Yucatán (*IDEY*) as a means of celebrating Mexico’s bicentennial, but does not necessarily force *graffiteros* to refrain from their conventional styles. [10]

The mural consists of a *Cultura Urbana* piece, along with another mural on the main part of the street (see Figures 7 and 8). On the street corner where the *Cultu-*

*ra Urbana* piece turns to left, *IDEY* painted the logo of the state government of Yucatán, along with a symbol on the right that shows this mural was part of Yucatán’s program to celebrate the bicentennial of the nation.[11] The mural is white propaganda because *IDEY* chooses to identify itself as the organizers of the painting. It also shows that the paint was provided by the paint company Doal when it says, “*grafittis hechos con Pinturas Doal.*”[12]



**Figure 7** This is a part of the *Mural Bicentenario* that is immediately to the left of the *Cultura Urbana* piece. It identifies *IDEY* as the sponsor and the paint company *Doal* as the sponsor of the paint.

Lurias of *Cultura Urbana* told me that *IDEY* organized a competition of the best *graffiteros* in the city to paint this wall, which is located between a city sports park and a covered outdoor basketball court. All those that competed were paid, and a cash prize was given to the winner, plus the paint was paid for by *Doal*. Even though the *graffiteros* received compensation in the form of money and paint for the mural, it does not embody anything that is necessarily out of the realm of their styles. The piece of the mural featured in figure 8 shows images that follow the independence and revolution narrative of the mural that *IDEY* desires, but also features normal letter graffiti. The images featured are ones that fit into the myths of Mexico, but also into the lives of average Mexicans and Yucatecans.



**Figure 8** This is *Cultura Urbana*’s piece for the *Mural Bicentenario*. It consists of Lurias’s yellow letter piece on the left, Mare’s characters in the middle, and then Ache’s letter piece on the end.

One example of this is the mural painted by *Cultura Urbana*, Mare’s crew, shown in figure 10, which consists of a series of figures from the Mexican independence in 1810, along with some Mesoamerican imagery, and some traditional graffiti letter pieces. This mural follows the typical *CU* mode of Lurias’s letter piece on the left, Mare’s characters in the middle, then Ache’s letter piece on the right, but it also has additional characters on either end of the mural which add even more life, which were painted by a friend of Mare’s.[13] *CU*, as does Mare, exclusively paints cultural imagery, and this mural is no different, because of its depiction of several important figures from Mexican independence, including José María Morelos, on the left in the green, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla in the center, and Benito Juárez on the far right. The mural as a whole also shows the Mexican flag with the green, white, and red fields in subsequent order.

In the event of the *IDEY* commission, *Cultura Urbana* is willing to participate and mold themselves to the theme of “Bicentennial”, but they do not have to compromise their artistic integrity nor do they have to dramatically change their subject matter. As opposed to amplifying Yucatecan pride, they instead amplify Mexican pride, and, after all, they are Mexican and still hold the bicentennial imagery with regard. This small change though allows *IDEY* to exhibit a level of

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control on graffiti and shape it according to its desires so that it can project a nationalistic sentiment supporting the bicentennial of the nation. The figures themselves also do not appear generic or manufactured only for the sake of propaganda or money. They show a level of skill that evokes a feeling of art within the mural, which is also found in Mare's non-commissioned work. Yet even though the mural is a government commission aimed at supporting the ideas of the bicentennial, it still sports pure letter graffiti, which reads "Lurias", shown in figure 9, and "Sektor", shown in figure 10.[14]



Figure 9 This is an enlargement that shows the similarity of Luria's piece to the Kukulcan and the Maya figure.

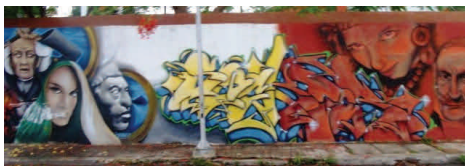


Figure 10 This enlargement shows the wild style piece's ability to connect the white and red parts of the mural. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla is visible with the white hair on the far left.

The existence of these pieces shows not only that these *graffiteros* are unwilling to compromise their pure graffiti style, even in the case of payment and free paint, but that they are able to elaborate graffiti to be relevant alongside Mexican history. It allows letter graffiti and historical imagery to be part of one cohesive image. This movement is possible because of the strong similarity between the green Kukulcan feathered serpent to the left, Lurias's yellow 3D letter piece, and the white Mayoid face to the right (see Figure 9).[15] The 3D piece looks like both of these "characters" and allows the mural to move from the green section to the white section smoothly. José María Morelos (just out of sight) and the Kukulcan exist within the green,

while the Maya face exists in the white, but the letter piece is placed on top of both of these and because of its similarity to them makes it appear as one cohesive image, as opposed to a green field and a white field. A similar effect is achieved with the movement from the white to red fields via Ache's wild style piece (see Figure 10), but it is not as effective, because, while the piece is placed on top of both fields, it does not show space underneath itself, as the 3D piece does. Nonetheless, the blue base in the wild style piece that exists in the red and white sections still facilitates a smooth transition to the end of the mural. This mural moves from left to right and carries the viewer with it as it goes, because of these transitions. This use of movement allows these images to be part of graffiti, in a way that does not simply place one beside the other, but incorporates them all into one image, blending in a level of rebellion and agency with what the structure of the government actually desires to see. These *graffiteros* definitely want to participate in this graffiti competition and paint for the government, but they do not want their work to simply be propaganda, because the images they are called to paint are important for government leaders, as well as *graffiteros*.



Figure 11 This is part of Deken's pure propaganda piece. It reads "Mérida te quiero con..." (continued)

in figure 12).

Murals shown in Figures 9 and 10 can be considered what Clark identifies as "propaganda art" and connects to Diego Rivera's state sponsored muralism (1997:8, 35). These pieces, like Rivera's, represent Mexico's desire to transcend "repression and resistance", but still show the government's take on how to go about that transcendence (1997: 35). While *CU* and the other *graffiteros* that painted the *Mural Bicentenario* were given a theme to follow by the government, they also felt it just as important to weave graffiti into the mural so that its relevance was equivalent to the mandated theme. *CU* supports the imagery, but they are not willing to sacrifice their identities as *graffiteros*, and so they weave their agency into the mural with the letter pieces.

White propaganda graffiti is not always as strongly motivated by the artists' own styles and desires as in the bicentennial mural. It is sometimes motivated only by money, and *graffiteros* are sometimes commissioned as an exclusive means for propaganda. Deken is a *graffitero* who ordinarily tries to "play with reality" in his work in order to challenge peoples' beliefs and values, in a way that combines Julio Cortázar with spray paint. Despite this strong artistic sentiment, he painted the piece in Figure 11 in *oriente* for the *PRI*, the rival party of the *PAN* and the leading party in Mérida and Yucatán.[16] Figure 11 shows an example of white propaganda that Deken was commissioned to do by the *PRI* before the mayoral election in 2010. It features Angelica Araujo and her running mate, Victor Alejandro Toledo Valencia, along with the phrase, "Mérida, I love you with more ART". This piece is very important, because it shows almost no elements of Deken's style and at first glance does not show very many traits found in Mérida's graffiti at all. The names of the candidates are done in a stylized type of signature, similar to a tag, and Deken adds a miniature letter piece of the word "arte" on the end, shown in Figure 12, but for the most part, this piece only functions as propaganda. The figures and the letters, with the exception of "arte" embody no unique creativity and no ele-

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ments that are found in Deken's other work, nor really in other graffiti in Mérida. In actuality, they are more in the style of the "kitsch" that Clark uses to describe Nazi and Soviet art and American mass media of the 1930s (1997:8). The figures also appear as if Deken painted them, knowing that he was painting pure propaganda for the *PRI* that would only serve to support the ruling structure's power.

The story behind this mural is that the local government worked out a deal with Deken. He agreed to paint two murals, this being the first and the second being a mural a couple blocks away, which consists of buildings that represent Mérida, shown in Figure 13. Deken said that he chose to paint the mural shown in Figure 10, but the mural of the candidates was commissioned by the *PRI*. In exchange for this, they gave him one hundred cans of paint, food, water, and money to pay for travel to a graffiti event in Villahermosa, Tabasco, which is about eight hours away from Mérida.[17] This shows that the city supports the youth graffiti movement, but also wants to profit in terms of propaganda from these *graffiteros*. They are willing to commission them to paint, feed them, and give them money to support their graffiti "careers", but they also value their function as propaganda producers.



**Figure 12** This is the end of the mural in Figure 11, "mas ARTE". This is the only part that shows any creative artistic elements.

Ecko, of the crew Bomb Squad, took me to see both of these murals and expressed a strong fondness for the mural in Figure 13 because of its representation of Mérida. When he told me that Deken painted it, I was honestly a little disappointed, because I had become accustomed to Deken's theme of playing with reality, which is plainly absent in Figure

13. This piece feels very plain, even though the buildings themselves are well painted and construct a powerful image of Mérida. It shows cultural imagery with its portrayal of *el Monumento de la Bandera*, which is a giant sculpture found at the northernmost point of Mérida's most beautiful boulevard, *el Paseo de Montejo*, but this and the candidate pieces do not maintain the same artistic integrity found in the *Mural Bicentenario*. [18] While Deken said that he wanted to paint Figure 13 "for Mérida", it still does not show his full artistic capabilities. When it is considered that both the Mérida mural and the candidate pieces were part of one deal with the *PRI*, it suggests that Deken did not want to explore as many abstract ideas, because all the murals were, in one way or another, centering on the election in 2010 and were only going to benefit the party, as opposed to a more indirect power system, such as the State Department of Sports (*IDEY*).



**Figure 13** This is a portion of the Mérida mural Deken painted and shows the *Monumento de la Bandera* at its center, the cathedral San Ildefonso on the right, and a portion of the train station, three of Mérida's most important structures.

In addition to this, there is another side to the story of these murals. While I was photographing the mural with Ecko, a couple of women walked up who turned out to be the president of the precinct and the *cuadra* or *manzana*. [19] "*Manzana*" is a governmental division within a neighborhood, existing in some neighborhoods in the city where the people nominate a president of the "*manzana*" to talk to city officials about the street, lights, utilities, and other public works services. I asked the president of the *manzana* what she thought of the Mérida piece, and she responded, "It's very pret-

ty. Lots of people think it looks good. A lot of young people do too. [20] The political party helps, giving the space and the paint. The youth need to express themselves." This older government worker was in full support of graffiti, particularly that which supports the identity of Mérida and Yucatán. She was in support of it as propaganda, but also seemed to understand that graffiti was a form of artistic expression, especially when the same woman said, "The graffiti of the trains is very pretty." This is odd though, because I have walked through the Mérida's train yards and there is little graffiti there, and that which is of a better quality is much more difficult to see and requires a significant amount of sneaking past guards and workers. This shows that this woman actually has some working knowledge of graffiti and is willing to support it. To her, and therefore, to a portion of her *PRI* party, graffiti is understood not as just "*vandalismo*". [21]

In addition to this awareness of graffiti's function as art and expression, the president of the *manzana* also showed me that political leaders are aware of its potential as propaganda. She said that the representatives from the state congress were invited to come out to the mural to take pictures with the *graffiteros*. This indicates that the state and the city are trying to support graffiti to some extent, but the fact that the subject of the entire mural is the same symbol as the *ayuntamiento* weakens the *PRI*'s "altruistic" case for supporting graffiti. This shows that they have learned of the cultural content that exists in Mérida's graffiti and wish to profit from it. Not only can they have the mural serve as propaganda by itself, but they can go to the actual site of the mural, take pictures with the painters, and "show their support for graffiti", creating more propaganda images with Mérida's youth. The president of the *manzana* also noted regarding these murals that, "It's voluntary. They don't pay them." This appears to inherently contradict Deken's statement. The president could have been misinformed or not have considered Deken's trip to Villahermosa as "payment", but it still seems that she thinks of these *graffiteros* as patriotic individuals supporting their city with their art. If she was deliberately misled-

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ing me, it supports my point that these political individuals see *graffiteros* as artists, but also propaganda machines that can turn out “Maya” and “Yucatecan” imagery, which the government also sees as beneficial. They can easily co-opt these images and, especially if a *graffitero* like Mare is involved, have propaganda created for them without it being obvious that they explicitly wanted propaganda to be created. By showing support in the way the president described and showed, they can maintain this relationship.

*Graffiteros* also do not have a problem painting for the government, because it gives them the opportunity to paint, and sometimes make some money. A thought that is easily overlooked is that to do graffiti, *graffiteros* need paint. A can of *Illegal Squad* paint, which is the most popular in Mérida because of its availability, bought at Bogie’s shop will cost thirty-seven pesos. A single piece can cost four hundred pesos in paint alone, not to mention all the obstacles associated with painting in the sun for six hours a day, like thirst and hunger. A more detailed piece can cost even more than four hundred pesos. A friend of mine that worked at a major movie theatre in Mérida made twenty pesos an hour, which according to my anecdotal experiences with *Meridanos*, is close to the city’s minimum wage, if not a little above. The cost of the paint alone is enough to make *graffiteros* willing to paint for the government, because the government will always at least provide the paint. Ecko also said that he thinks it is good that the government supports graffiti and can pay for murals and pieces. Deken has painted other pieces for the government, as well as for businesses in Mérida for money, and Vaca, a regular at the *Area Sur Crew Shop* provided another valuable voice when he said, “Yes, the government supports graffiti, but it’s for what they need. They simply ignore it, but when they want something, they support and ask. If they give you a hand, it’s for their convenience.” Vaca and a couple other *graffiteros* at Bogie’s shop one day said that usually, when they would paint for the government, they would ask for one hundred cans of paint, then use only two or three, and save the rest. Vaca and other

*graffiteros* are aware of the government’s true intentions with graffiti, but they do not really care. Money is so hard to come by that they do not mind painting for the government if it affords them the opportunity to benefit in some way. There is no idea of “selling out”, in which one trades in one’s artistic preferences for money that is found in other alternative art forms like punk rock and rock and roll. There is also no idea of “sticking it to the man” or standing up for beliefs that are against the system at large. There is also no shame in painting for the government, mainly because of *Meridano* graffiti’s emphasis on painting with permission, no matter who owns the property, but also because of the ability to benefit economically from it.

### **The Start of the Two Faced Propaganda Machine: Mérida’s Graffiti Workshop**

A *graffitero* called Ackon taught a series of city sponsored graffiti workshops in October 2011. The organization in charge of it was called “*Hábitat*”, which according to Ackon, “is a program of development for the city.”[22] He said that it especially works to beautify certain parks, which are often not used for very much and that this particular program will take place in the parks. Ackon said “the *chavos* are going to learn graffiti, hip-hop, and how to rap.[23] It’s going to be like a center of culture.” The funding for this comes from the federal government, and Ackon will get paid one hundred and sixty pesos per hour for teaching them for sixty-eight hours. Ackon also said, “I give classes on nursing, and they pay me less, fifty pesos per hour.” Just like painting for the government, economic motivation is a huge factor in this case, especially when Ackon can make over three times more teaching graffiti than in teaching his actual profession. One hundred and sixty pesos per hour is also a lot of money in Mérida, especially when one has the opportunity to make it doing what one loves. On one hand, this is obviously an incredible program with great potential. It gives Mérida’s youth an opportunity for an outlet outside of gangs and drugs while learning an alternative urban art form from one of the best and most seasoned *graffiteros* in the city. It is also

free to participants.

I thought that this was incredible when Ackon explained it to me, but I knew that there was another side to it. Given the relationship between graffiti and the government in Mérida, as in the case of Deken’s murals in *oriente*, the fact that the city had to give permission for the event to place, and the fact that it was a public sponsored program showed the potential for ulterior motives. I spoke to Deken a few days after Ackon told me about the *Hábitat* program, and he said that a few people wanted him to get involved with it. He also said that the *PRI* was having a heavy hand in bringing the program to fruition, but that initially the *PRI* did not want him to participate. He said that they said, “No, Deken is with the *PAN*, he can’t participate.” The *PRI* assumed that just because Deken had recently painted his own mural outside of the *PAN* headquarters that he was now “with the *PAN*”. They most likely assumed this also because Deken had probably not painted anything for the *PRI* since the *oriente* murals. This shows that these political parties see these *graffiteros* as commodities that they can “own” and use for their own propaganda purposes. Because these individuals produce alternative art that is popular among the youth and often invokes a mythos that the political parties take strong interest in, the political parties seek to use them to connect to young voters and sway public opinion. The *PRI* is also supporting this *Hábitat* initiative, which shows that they want to facilitate development within the city and provide youth programs, but also that they see this as an opportunity to produce a whole new generation of voluntary institutionalized propaganda machines. There are no negative connotations associated with painting for the government, and it has some economic benefits, so there are few reasons among *graffiteros* why any of this would not necessarily be bad.

### **The Government: The Blurred Relationship of Individual/Community Identity and the Structure**

In most cases, graffiti is an alternative art that in some way exhibits delinquency or counter-cultural sentiments, but Mérida is unique, because its dominant graffiti-

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ti form does not completely exhibit this (Ferrell 1996). While most graffiti is painted partially for the excitement of illegality, Mérida's graffiti takes pride in its petitioned legality. The *graffiteros* are also not actually rebelling against any major form of government in doing graffiti, because the government supports it, endorses it, and even commissions it. Despite this, part of the legitimacy of Mérida's graffiti is still derived from counter cultural connections to older graffiti at large that is painted without permission.

In most cases, graffiti is used as a form of agency used to react against the ruling structure of a society, but in the case of Mérida it actually becomes part of the ruling structure and exists simultaneously as structure and agency. The government and political parties use graffiti, especially cultural graffiti, to sway voter opinion and show support for the youth. They see the potential of the cultural narrative as a mechanism of exercising a discreet control over its citizens. They see the people's desire for the identity they can attain in supporting and consuming the graffiti, and the government draws a connection to its own cultural narratives that it displays in the *Palacio del Gobierno* with Pacheco's murals depicting the history of Yucatán and the importance of the Maya. Commissioning *graffiteros* to paint propaganda shows a direct connection between graffiti and the ruling structure, and the ruling structure's desire to co-opt this construction of cultural identity. When the government supports graffiti, they can show that they are liberal or progressive for supporting an illegal art form that finds a home in delinquency. In Mérida there is a very unique dynamic that exists within the graffiti. It is still connected to delinquency and counter culture, and the government adapts this in a move of hegemony, but this does not immediately change the popular view of graffiti. In order for the government to truly benefit from this, graffiti must always possess some level of delinquency, or it just becomes another division of "The Ministry of Truth" (Orwell 1981). This move by the government to have a relationship with delinquents or vandals in which they create art that supports the government is the greatest strength of

propaganda graffiti. Yet, to achieve this, illegal graffiti, and especially gang graffiti, must still be compared to legally petitioned graffiti. The two are still connected today, and will continue to be connected in the future, if for nothing else, than the specific intentions of the government's propaganda endeavors. In supporting graffiti, Mérida's government achieves power by supporting a counter cultural youth movement and appearing progressive and "cool", while simultaneously benefitting from its symbol system. The comparison of illegal work and graffiti as "*vandalismo*" must exist though, because in their support for graffiti, the government can be the entity that educates the populous on the positive side of graffiti. They can show that they support graffiti and that they are willing to educate people on it, but on some level, it must always be "*vandalismo*" or an act of degeneracy so that the government can truly benefit in its move of support.

The *graffiteros* are carving out identity for themselves through the cultural imagery, but this identity is then co-opted by the government to spread an image of all Yucatecans being connected to the Maya. In the effort to appeal to an ancient symbol system and give themselves and their neighborhoods a new foothold in society, the *graffiteros* provide the government a direct line to a symbology that touches the hearts of the lower class. They are reacting with their "own" Mayoid and letter styles, which become part of the ruling structure of the city, through the government's support for it. The same type of symbol system that the government conveys in the *Palacio del Gobierno* is one of the major symbol systems the *graffiteros* amplify and also one that the government adopts from them. Yet, the *graffiteros*, from what I have been told, are compensated for their work and do not feel like they are doing a disservice to graffiti or "selling out" in doing so. Mérida is a "nice" city, in which graffiti can exist, but it has its own specific place, outside of the historic district, in the dirtier *colonias*. It is "alternative" but in a way that is very polite, asks for permission, and says "*gracias*". This is, to some extent, the result of the work of the structure, partially through the jail time and fines that result in illegal painting. It also results

from the positive effects of government support, like money, food, and spray paint.

This asking for permission and painting for the government makes Mérida's graffiti seem as if it is not "really" graffiti, in comparison with other graffiti, especially that of the United States. Despite this, this is graffiti, because the *graffiteros* believe it to be this way, as does the entire structure surrounding it, particularly the city, its government, and foreign graffiti writers and artists that come to Mérida to paint. As Hanson shows, identity and culture exist within the eyes of the members of the culture and structure that exist to support it and believe in it (1989). While graffiti artists and writers in other parts of the United States might not see this as graffiti because of its petitioned legality, *Meridianos* see it as such, and when visitors come to Mérida, they are taught to see it as such (Chalfant and Silver 1983). In Mérida, it serves as a simultaneous act of agency and structure, because it is aesthetically analogous to "old school" graffiti of New York and L. A., its connection to illegal graffiti, and its adoption by the government. In one iteration, it exists to support the people and provide them a new identity, but because this identity is very popular in terms of Mexican nationalism and Yucatecan pride, the *graffiteros* work can seem as if it is "selling out", as "cheesy jazz" did. Yet, in actuality, Mare is much closer to Diego Rivera than Kenny G, mostly because, as Clark shows, Rivera painted a new consciousness for Mexico in murals, but was sponsored by the government and even painted their halls (1997:8, 35). In an interesting blend of structure and agency as well, Rivera was also a communist and learned to paint in Europe, yet painted Mexico a new identity that was state sponsored. He even appears on the five hundred peso note. Despite all of this, his art still speaks to what he believed, as does Mare's.

This idea that graffiti is "polite", petitioned legally, and can be propaganda, while still being graffiti, shows that it can mirror the identity of the city of Mérida. The city is, as Deken and other *graffiteros* and friends in Yucatán told me, "conservative", and in the last two years, Mérida has received the title of "the city

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of peace”, and Yucatán has been declared the safest state in all of Mexico (Diario de Yucatán 2011; Vangaurdia 2011). Graffiti exists in Mérida in a way that supports these ideas; it creates peace instead of conflict or delinquency, and the government even approves of it. The graffiti itself follows suit with the civic identity of Mérida, and though it consists of a graffiti form found in similar styles throughout North America and Europe, its cultural narrative gives it a unique subject matter, but the way in which the art is created supports the identity that Mérida creates for itself (Rybczynski 1995:35; Schlereth 1992:183). Graffiti can exist in this way because it is an urban art painted on the city’s buildings, so it conforms to the nature and identity of the city. Mérida’s graffiti is petitioned legally, because the culture of the city causes it to conform that way. As the *graffiteros* say though, this allows them to pursue graffiti as art, and they prefer things this way.

### Footnotes

- (1) *Graffitero* is the word used in Mérida for all individuals that do graffiti. There is no differentiation between “graffiti writer” and “graffiti artist”. The word literally means “graffitist” in Spanish.
- (2) A *bomba* is a medium sized letter piece, painted illegally that takes about ten to fifteen minutes. It and tags are the only illegal graffiti in the city.
- (3) The *solar* is the typical hut of the modern Maya. It is made of mud walls and a thatch reed roof. The people sleep inside in hammocks.
- (4) This word translates to “country” or “countryside”, but can also refer to “land”. It refers, as it does in English to less populated and more forested areas.
- (5) *Pueblo* in Spanish literally translates to “village” or “small town”. In Yucatán, *pueblos* can be from about 15,000 to less than 1,000 people. They are filled with indigenous, though these are not the only residents. Some larger pueblos still follow the square and grid format of larger colonial towns, but solars can be found in town and on the periphery of the *pueblo*.
- (6) *Mucho* is Spanish for “a lot” or “much”, but in this instance, Mare adds the suffix “*isimo*” which would be the equivalent of

“really” or “a lot”. In this case it means that the neighbor really really liked it or liked it a whole lot.

(7) This is the gerund form of the verb *exaltar*, which seems to be connected to our verb “to exalt”, but also means “to praise”, “to excite”, and “to arouse”. Therefore Mare’s art not only exalts and praises his culture, but excites peoples’ interests in it.

(8) *Calle* is Spanish for street.

(9) *SEJUVE* is a division of the state government called, *Secreteria de la Joventud* or Secretary of the Youth

(10) *Mural Bicentenario* is a mural in Mérida with a theme centered on the Independence and revolution of Mexico. *Mural Bicentenario* means Bicentennial Mural while *IDEY* is the *Instituto del Deporte del Yucatán*.

(11) Chichén Itzá’s pyramid of Kukulcan also serves as the second “A” in Yucatán, which shows the furthered importance of the building as a symbol for modern Yucatán. *Cultura Urbana* translates to “Urban Culture” and is the name of Mare’s crew.

(12) Graffiti made with Doal paint.

(13) *Cultura Urbana* is often abbreviated “CU”.

(14) Ache paints the letters “Ache” and “Sektor”. In this case, he paints “Sektor”.

(15) Kukulcan became central to Maya culture during 900 and 1000 A.D., which was very late in the civilization. The Aztecs also worshipped the feathered serpent, but called it Quetzalcoatl, and because the Aztecs are responsible for most of the modern symbolism of Mexico, Quetzalcoatl was then adopted into the national myths.

(16) *Oriente-West*, the west part of the city; *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*-Institutional Revolutionary Party, the party of congress and the president in Mexico for 70 years, until 2000.

(17) Given the stark contrast figures 11, 12, and 13 present when compared with Deken’s other work, I think that they were both part of the deal, but that Deken actually wanted to paint the Mérida mural. I asked him this a few times, because I had trouble believing it, but he always said, “Yeah, I wanted to paint that one.”

(18) *Monumento de la Bandera*, or Monument of the Flag, a monument to the flag of Mexico in statue form. The current *ayun-*

*tamiento* (city council) is also using the *Monumento de la Bandera* as part of their logo.

(19) *Cuadra* and *manzana* refer to the square or block of a particular neighborhood.

(20) The actual phrase she chose was “*a mucha gente se vea muy bien*”, which literally means “people see it well”, “it looks well to them”, but most accurately “it looks good to them”. I feel like saying, “It looks good to a lot of people” is closer to the actual language she uses, but the phrase I have chosen is how this would be said in English.

(21) *Vandalismo* means “vandalism”.

(22) *Habitat* literally translates to habitat.

(23) *Chavos* is a Mexican slang word meaning “guys” or “dudes”, usually of a younger age, fifteen to mid to late twenties.

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## Zora Neale Hurston Award

### Guidelines for the Preparation and Submission of Nomination Packet

Each nomination should include the following:

- (1) Letter of recommendation in support of the nominee; and
- (2) Summary of the nominee's accomplishments.

Contextualization of nominee's work should address the following questions:

- (A) What is the significance of the nominee's work within the discipline?
- (B) What is the impact of this work for the community in which the nominee works? How has this work benefitted communities?
- (C) How has this work moved the discipline forward into applications for the larger public?

Each nomination packet must:

- Be no longer than 10 pages.
- Include 2 additional copies of packet materials for the 3-person committee.

The selection review committee consists of two appointed members of the Southern Anthropological Society Zora Neale

Hurston Award Committee and the Zora Neale Hurston Award Chair. Annual deadline for receipt of nomination materials is November 1st. Supporting materials will not be returned. The Zora Neale Hurston Award may not be annual and will be awarded only if the committee deems nominees of merit.

Recipients will be contacted by January 1st so that they may make arrangements to attend the annual meeting in the spring. The Hurston Award winner will be announced and stipend and Zora Neale Hurston engraved award will be presented at the annual meeting banquet.

Please send electronically, nominations with supporting materials to:

**Dr. Lisa J. Lefler**

Zora Neale Hurston Award Chair  
Culturally Based Native Health Programs  
College of Health & Human Science  
Western Carolina University  
Cullowhee, NC 28723

Email: [llefler@email.wcu.edu](mailto:llefler@email.wcu.edu)

Phone: 828-227-2164

# BOOK REVIEW

## **Hypersexuality and Headscarves: Race, Sex, and Citizenship in the New Germany.**

Damani J. Partridge. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012. 189 pp.

**Claudia Stura**

Kennesaw State University

“Non-citizens” in Germany are the focus of *Hypersexuality and Headscarves*. Damani Partridge applies the term to those “perpetual foreigners” not *looking* “German” even if they have official German or European citizenship. Partridge argues that belonging is not only related to culture and citizenship, but to appearance as well. He focuses on how the physical body is read by mainstream society using black and Muslim bodies as indicators of being perceived as foreign and therefore “not normal” (p. 19).

In citing Habermas, the author explains society’s need to create a “new form of belonging together; crystallizing around a common origin, language, and history that makes subjects into citizens” (p. 41). He claims that looking different means being either exotic or dangerous. Even though many of the so-called non-citizens are German by birth, they are still perceived as outsiders and occasionally threatened by right-wing skinheads.

The book is organized along the historical development of the “non-citizenship” phenomenon, illustrating how government and parts of society have treated the non-citizens before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall and how non-citizens are being “produced” alongside national citizens. Partridge argues that Germany is exemplary for a better understanding of this differentiating process. While the unification brought supposed universal freedoms and rights, the access to these is only granted to certain people who fit the “German” image.

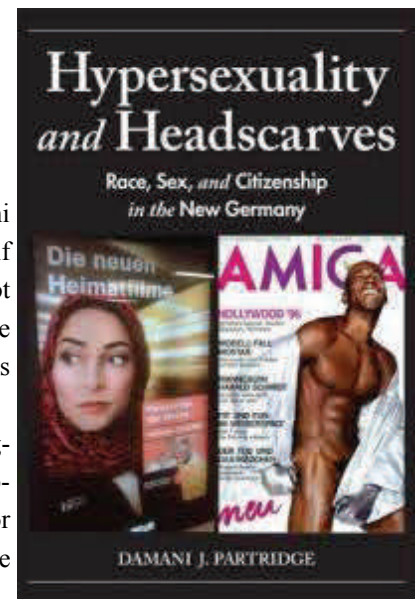
Using the example of black men who want to become legal residents, Partridge argues that German women exercise power through their intimate engagements. If blacks are regarded as beautiful, they can successfully perform *hypersexuality*. Hence, it becomes contingent for Black non-citizens to be beautiful in order to belong in Germany (p. 81).

Alongside hypersexuality, not *looking* “German” and exclusion are also illustrated through the example Islam, especially through the wearing of headscarves. The author uses the case of Fereshta Ludin that was broadly debated in the media, when the government did not allow a teacher to work because she was wearing her headscarf, which challenges the legitimate “German” image of citizenship.

In his further elaborations, the author claims that wearing headscarves symbolize having fewer rights, thus missing an opportunity to engage with the complexity of the problem more deeply. As many scholars, such as Necla Kelek have identified previously for example, Sharia law interferes with Germany’s basic constitutional laws because it prevents uniform equality between men and women.

The book provides extensive direct narratives from interviews with a variety of Germans. Some claims made in the book, however, need further validation; for example, the author maintains that German schools as part of the nationalized educational system refuse to look after Muslim youngsters (p. 104). In fact, Islam is regularly taught alongside Christianity and schools attempt to offer rooms for prayers. Furthermore, as a German who has lived in East and West Germany, and in Berlin, statements such as “in Germany, Black bodies become hypersexual ... and covered Muslim bodies are seen as sites of danger” (p. 134) seem to miss the “multi-kulti” culture that is present in many large cities in Germany.

In a country with “non-citizens” at every level of society, there is still a lot of work to be done on integration and acceptance. In this regard, *Hypersexuality and Headscarves* provides a compelling first insight from an outsiders perspective. Partridge offers a personal view on non-citizenship that society produces, excludes, imagines and desires – a new phenomenon in modern Germany that rightly deserves attention and further empirical study.



# BOOK REVIEW

If you are interested in reviewing any of the titles listed below for the SAS Newsletter (published in Summer and Winter), please send an email to Brandon D. Lundy ([blundy@kennesaw.edu](mailto:blundy@kennesaw.edu)). Your email should include your **name**, **institutional affiliation**, postal **address**, telephone **number**, and the **title** of the book you wish to review.

You will receive the book on the condition that you send the SAS a review conforming to our style guidelines within 2 months. *Please Note:* The SAS does not accept unsolicited or volunteered book reviews.

## Available Books

1. Baca, George, Aisha Khan, and Stephan Palmié, eds. 2009. *Empirical Futures: Anthropologists and Historians Engage the Work of Sidney W. Mintz*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
2. La Serna, Miguel. 2012. *The Corner of Living: Ayacocho on the Eve of the Shining Path Insurgency*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.
3. Love, Velma E. *Divining the Self: A Study in Yoruba Myth and Human Consciousness*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

## Instructions for Reviewers

Book reviews should be between 750 and 1,000 words, in 12-point font, double-spaced, and with a one-inch margin on all sides. Although references are uncommon in book reviews, if you do use references, please format according to the AAA Guidelines.

Number every page, and save the review as a Word document. Send the book review manuscript as an attachment. Please include the publication data for the book at the top of the first page. The format is as follows:

*Title of the Book. Author's Name. Place of Publication: Publisher, Date of Publication. Page Numbers*

The reviewer's name and affiliation data should follow on the next line. For example:

*Secularism Soviet Style: Teaching Atheism and Religion in a Volga Republic. Sonja Luehrmann. Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011. 275 pp.*

*Amanda Woomer*

*Kennesaw State University*

The most useful reviews will address an audience that includes anthropologists who are not area experts, will provide an outline of the strengths of the book, and will indicate a potential audience. The editor reserves the right to proofread and request revisions for all submitted reviews.

Publishers should send books for review to:

Brandon D. Lundy  
SAS Secretary-Treasurer  
3693 Iroquis NW  
Kennesaw, GA 30144

**Do you have something to share with the SAS? The SAS Newsletter is the perfect outlet for SAS-related news, updates about activities of the membership, and information on forthcoming publications. If you would like to contribute to the Summer 2013 issue, please contact:**

**Brandon D. Lundy**  
**SAS Secretary-Treasurer**  
**Newsletter Editor**  
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