



More or Less Dead: Femicide, Haunting, and the Ethics of Representation in Mexico

Alice Driver

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In Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, people disappear, their bodies dumped in deserted city lots or jettisoned in the unforgiving desert. All too many of them are women.

More or Less Dead analyzes how such violence against women has been represented in news media, books, films, photography, and art. Alice Driver argues that the various cultural reports often express anxiety or criticism about how women traverse and inhabit the geography of Ciudad Juárez and further the idea of the public female body as hypersexualized. Rather than searching for justice, the various media—art, photography, and even graffiti—often reuse victimized bodies in sensationalist, attention-grabbing ways. In order to counteract such views, local activists mark the city with graffiti and memorials that create a living memory of the violence and try to humanize the victims of these crimes.

The phrase “more or less dead” was coined by Chilean author Roberto Bolaño in his novel *2666*, a penetrating fictional study of Juárez. Driver explains that victims are “more or less dead” because their bodies are never found or aren’t properly identified, leaving families with an uncertainty lasting for decades—or forever.

The author’s clear, precise journalistic style tackles the ethics of representing femicide victims in Ciudad Juárez. Making a distinction between the words “femicide” (the murder of girls or women) and “feminicide” (murder as a gender-driven event), one of her interviewees says, “Women are killed for being women, and they are victims of masculine violence because they are women. It is a crime of hate against the female gender. These are crimes of power.”

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