

Jocelyn Duenas

Spanish 365-01

Dr. Donaldo Urioste

December 1, 2016

Government Corruption: Desert Blood

Alicia Gaspar De Alba author of *Desert Blood* presents the controversial topic of the horrors that the women of Juárez have been exposed to for many years. *Desert Blood* was published in 2005 and is significant because it sheds light on the lack of justice that these missing women and their families have received. The novel focuses on Ivon Villa and her experience with the unjust system as she works hard to find her missing sister Irene Villa who has fallen victim to the disappearances in Juárez. Alicia Gaspar de Alba presents the idea of government corruption and the negative effects it has on discovering the truth behind these murders. Through the novel, the protagonist, Ivon Villa becomes aware of this governmental corruption, which closes doors to finding justice not only for her sister Irene, but the other hundreds of missing women.

Ivon Villa is presented as a well-educated successful professor, however is ashamed when she realizes that she is oblivious to the disappearances taking place in Juárez. As Ivon reads an article about the murders she describes, “Yeah, and I’m ashamed I’m just finding out about it, by reading this article, she wanted to say, but it would have been too embarrassing to admit that kind of ignorance” (Pg. 5). The media has been silenced and are doing a poor job of informing the people of the unjust atrocities occurring in Juárez. The silence and lack of media coverage about this issue begins to reveal the many layers of governmental corruption. The

Mexican government would not want these murders and disappearances to create a negative image of them and the country itself. In fact, perhaps Ivon has not been informed about the disappeared in Juárez because the U.S. media doesn't report about it making it seem that these murders only affect Mexican women across the border. However, throughout the novel Ivon discovers that not only Mexican women are being affected by these crimes, but also many American women like Irene. The lack of media coverage on these issues only helps the corruption of both Mexico and America ultimately ignoring a significant issue, which desperately needs attention.

While searching for Irene, Ivon runs into much trouble with the authorities in Juárez. Ivon and her cousin William are detained by *judiciales* in Juárez who accuse them of being seen selling drugs. This encounter with the state police presents a strong critique toward the corruption found in governmental figures such as the judicial police. "These pigs hauling them out of Casa Colorada were not just ordinary cops these were state police, *judiciales*. Bribes and blow jobs would be the least of what she was going to have to do to get out of this one" (Pg.213). Ivon immediately knows that the last thing these official will do is help them look for Irene and desperately thinks of how to get William and herself out of this situation. The *judiciales* present a negative yet unfortunately common image of government corruption when they plant marijuana in Ivon's backpack. "The *judiciales* climbed into the front seat. The one in the green glasses held up a baggie full of marijuana. What do you call this? he said, dangling the baggie in front of the grille that separated them from their captives. William glared at Ivon like he really believed they had found that dope in her pack. "Give me a break, they fucking planted that," she told him. To the cop, she said, in Spanish, I didn't have that in there you put it there." "Let's see what the captain says at the station," he said (Pg.214). This incident reveals that these

authoritative figures have only the intent of killing both Ivon and William. They are willing to go to the extremes of killing them rather than having them finding information and clues toward their contribution to the corruption behind these murders and disappearances.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was frequently discussed throughout the novel becomes symbolic to the government corruption taking place in Juárez and the United States. According to the Council on Foreign Relations, NAFTA is a three-country accord negotiated by the governments of Canada, Mexico, and the United States that entered into force in January 1994. This agreement created many American factories (*maquiladoras*) that reeled in many poor young Mexican women to Juárez. NAFTAs demanded maquiladoras hire poor young women who are willing to work long hours for lousy pay. Unfortunately, these women aside from terrible working conditions become prone to the disappearances in Juárez. While families seek answers to the murders these *maquiladoras* benefit both the U.S. and Mexico. The U.S. benefits from cheap labor and for Mexico these maquiladora workers become candidates for prostitution. The mother of the child Ivon was going to adopt, Cecilia is presented as an example of these young Mexican maquiladora workers who have been abducted and brutally killed.

Ivon is shocked to discover the amount of corruption that has led to the disappearance of Irene. There were numerous seemingly innocent people who turned out to be accomplices in the prostitution ring, which abducted Irene. For example, Salvador Peñasco the medical examiner that Ivon meets at Cecilia's autopsy turns out to be partners with Walter, Rubi Reyna's husband in the porn industry that has Irene. Ultimately, Ivon discovers that they both work for J.W. Jeremy Wilcox or Lone Ranger who is a border patrol also the stranger she met on the plane to El Paso. Therefore, Ivon soon realizes that various authority figures from both sides of the border

are benefiting from the murders in Juárez. This corruption is responsible for the lack of answers and is presented in the novel when Ivon goes to Cecilia's autopsy and Father Francis and Ximena talk to a police officer,

"Por que hay tanto humo?" asked the priest.

"Queman los cuerpos?"

"No, they're not burning the bodies," the policemen said.

"It's the clothes. They had it all piled up in the patio, and it got infested with rats."

"But that's evidence," said Ximena.

"The policeman ducked down to peer into the back seat of the car. He took off his sunglasses and narrowed his eyes at Ximena. "Evidence for what, senora? (Pg. 45)

These police officers who should be offering help and support to their community continue to turn their cheek and pretend that all is fine. They continue to remain silent to the injustice because they are all benefiting from these murders and speaking up would only hurt their business. Ivon is disgusted to find out that Jeremy Wilcox is honored as a hero in cracking his own pornography because he is a border patrol and no one would ever expect him to be responsible. Ivon states, "They're saying that this Border Patrol pig was operating undercover. In other words, he was infiltrating the porn ring, not running it. That is complete bullshit" (Pg. 327).

Ultimately Gaspar de Alba's critique toward government corruption is strongly presented throughout the novel. The disappearances and murders benefit many from both sides of the border, which is why not many answers or leads have been found regarding the murders. The hundreds of families who have suffered the loss of a daughter, mother, sister, etc. are still neglected justice because of the massive amounts of corruption. Ivon finally notes, "The cards fell so perfectly into place, it was almost nauseating. This thing implicated everyone. No wonder the crimes had not been solved, nor would they ever be solved until someone with much more power than she, with nothing to lose or to gain, brought this conspiracy out into the open" (Pg.

335). Despite the many years that have passed by Juárez continues to wonder who is responsible for these murders and yet receive no answers. These femicides were approached with much corruption and lack of interest that many families continue and will always continue to live without justice.