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Module 2 Comparative News Analysis

Six years ago, a United States marine was imprisoned for the murder of a transgender woman in the Philippine; one day ago, he was completely pardoned by the Philippines’ president, Rodrigo Duterte. Reported on by NPR under the title “Philippines Pardons U.S. Marine In Killing Of Transgender Woman”, by The Guardian under the title “Philippines pardons US Marine for killing transgender woman”, and the Washington Post under the title “Philippines’ Duterte pardons U.S. Marine convicted of murdering transgender woman”, it is important to first note that all of these sources have a left-of-center bias according to the site mediabiasfactcheck.com, and though NPR and the Washington Post both have very high or high factual ratings on this site respectively, The Guardian’s factuality is reported as “mixed”.

Despite this supposed mixed factuality on The Guardian’s reporting, the content found between all three articles is remarkably similar, and all of these news articles share a similar, unbiased tone despite the potential to put a great deal of spin on this to appeal to their target audiences. All three articles all start with explaining how this decision seems to have been a surprise that came out of nowhere, as well as explaining that the pardon is not just a regular pardon, it is an “absolute pardon”. A detail that NPR leaves out while the other two sources include, however, is how the United States marine supposedly killed Jennifer Laude via choking; at the same time, NPR is the only one of the three sources to mention that she was found with a broken neck and slumped over a toilet. Both the Washington Post and The Guardian explain that his murder of Jennifer Laude was in a direct response to him finding out that she was transgender, with NPR leaving out that detail. The Guardian and NPR both point out that the United States marine was only found guilty of homicide, not murder, because “factors such as cruelty and treachery had not been proven”.

It is extremely difficult to hear that statement and think of it as anything other than ridiculous. Based upon what was reported here, between these three articles, we know that a witness reported this United States marine choking Jennifer Laude, likely to death and even more likely with enough force to break her neck; it is simply unbelievable that a death like that would not count as cruel and that doing so after going into a hotel room together, likely for sex, would not count as treachery to Jennifer. When a death like this is reported and investigated by police as a hate crime, how is that not seen as deliberate cruel behavior? All three articles report on the fact that the court had ordered for this Marine to be released on good behavior, even as Laude’s family and – so it had originally appeared, at least – the President’s Office were going to oppose it, and with Duterte so often taking an anti-United States stance, it seems unbelievable that this release would be appeasement. So why is Duterte pardoning someone who killed one of his own citizens instead of letting the courts handle this once more? This action does not seem to be coming from a place of fairness, but then why does Duterte claim that he’s being called upon to be fair – and does that mean that the courts in the Philippines, then, are not fair?