

Headline: A very public killing

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For a country at, or very near, the top of the list of “the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists,” the Philippines has certainly had its share of media killings, though very few have been solved or resolved.

I can only recall one very public killing: That of a radio broadcaster that took place while the anchor was on air, the shots I imagine chillingly echoing through the radios of people tuned in to the program. There have been other brazen media murders, the most brazen being the still-unresolved 2009 “Maguindanao massacre” of at least 32 journalists who were part of a 58-person entourage assembled for the filing of candidacy of now-Maguindanao Gov. Esmel Mangudadatu.

We should be used to this by now.

Still, the death of colleagues, even colleagues from abroad, diminishes us all in the media. The shooting Tuesday of TV reporter Alison Parker and camera operator Adam Ward by former colleague Vester Lee Flanagan, who went by the name Bryce Williams professionally, has stunned the entire journalistic community, I would think.

It isn't that the shooting was particularly horrific, or bloody. And journalists who cover wars, street battles and executions should be inured by now to death. What makes this double-murder (the subject of the on-air interview was also wounded but has survived) particularly jarring was the use by Flanagan of the very tools of media—live TV coverage, Facebook and Twitter, even a fax message sent to a major TV outlet—to “cover” his crime and “share” the experience of violence and mayhem and hatred with as many people as possible. And as the evidence shows, before the posts were taken down by managers of the social media outlets he patronized, Flanagan got what he wanted. His video of the shooting, taken from a body camera even as he wielded his gun, had spread to hundreds of accounts, forwarded and copied and, despite efforts to expunge them, will likely surface again and again in days to come.

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In its story, the New York Times, which got a copy of the rambling 23-page fax message, said Flanagan linked his actions to the shooting of nine people last June in Charleston, South Carolina, where a white supremacist is accused of shooting down the victims who were part of a Bible study group.

“Why did I do it?” the gunman wrote in his letter. “I was already on the edge. The church shooting was a tipping point. The victims’ initials are written on the bullets.”

Certainly, he strived to lend a racial motive to his own dastardly act, since Flanagan is black and gay, which he said left him vulnerable to “racist” and “sexist” attacks.

But coworkers at the station where he used to work with Parker and Ward, and in a string of stations where he had been employed before being dismissed for “disruptive” behavior which, former employers said, tended to create a “hostile work environment,” have a different story to tell. Apparently, he saw himself primarily as a victim, and seemed to be on the lookout for any excuse to

take offense.

The shooting during an early morning talk show, during an interview on the tourism potentials of the area, seems particularly jarring. Flanagan, described as competent in his reporting, covered mainly human interest stories. Perhaps his murderous act was his way of creating a “hard news” headline for himself. He shot himself in his car even as law enforcers chased him down a highway.

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Next week, the Catholic faithful are admonished to reflect deeply on our ties with and responsibility for the environment as the Archdiocese of Manila opens the “Season of Creation” on Sept. 1. This day is also observed throughout the Christian world as the “World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation.”

In a circular, Manila Archbishop Luis Antonio Cardinal Tagle called on the flock to participate fully in the celebration of the season, the period when “we thank God for the many ways He has gifted our land and resolve to cherish and protect what remains of this bounty for this and future generations of Filipinos.”

The archdiocese has lined up a program of activities for parishes and schools during the entire season. Among other activities, there will be ecology exhibits, a Children’s Forum on “Laudato Si” (the recent encyclical of Pope Francis on humanity’s duty to care for creation), an Ecology Quiz Bee in schools, and “Storytelling on the Care of Creation.”

The “Season of Creation” will open with a Mass on Sept. 1 at the Manila Cathedral. Cardinal Tagle has asked that for this year’s observance, the Philippine church give “emphasis on deepening the commitment to care for our common home and to support the Global Catholic Climate Movement that aims to gather 10 million signatures to call on world leaders to sign the commitment to limit the increase of the global temperature to below 1.5 degrees centigrade.”

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The “Season of Creation” might also be a good time for everyone to reflect on and repent for the various crimes we Filipinos have or are committing against the environment.

Most obvious and urgent for me is to take responsibility for the death of “Pamana” the Philippine eagle shot to death recently inside what was supposedly a protected area. In mourning the killing of Pamana and other eagles like her, we mourn not just the loss of these creatures, rare and endangered as they are. We mourn, too, the dwindling of their habitats that has made the long-term survival of endangered species iffy.

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We also need to reflect on our own heedless exploitation of nature, including our rate of reproduction, with our growing population putting tremendous pressure on our existing resources—land, water, open space and clean air. We are ending up being the greatest threat to the home we claim to love and cherish.