

Taiwan in need of a lot of light on the toddler murder

April 3 2016, By Daniel J. Bauer

The horrible pain Taiwan is still feeling so keenly over the murder of the toddler now popularly known as “Xiao Deng Pao” (Little Lightbulb) is sure to stay with us for some time. Pundits of every sort have literally pounced on this tragic event, and I myself struggled over the question of whether to address it here today.

There are about the same number of reasons not to discuss the situation as there to, yes, discuss it.

Reasons not to touch the topic include the fact that media have so obsessed on the possible death penalty (DP) angle of the story that critics must fight to find a place to plant their feet for a focus on other more worthy concerns. In addition to the overly emotional, not to say explosive issue of the DP as a reason not to discuss this event at this particularly sensitive time, we have the problem of over-exposure. By now most of us have been deluged with data about the grisly killing and its aftermath. We are overwhelmed by the amount of coverage the crime has received, and have little stomach left for more on it.

I believe many thoughtful, ordinary people like me, including the wise and humane mother of the 4 year-old victim, are frankly incensed by the exploitation we see going on all around us. Suddenly I am not certain. Is this, or is it not, a reason to write about what has happened?

It seemed like only minutes after the slaying, but it was probably at least a few hours (small consolation, that), when the new Chair of the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) virtually taunted the public with microphone in hand with the words, “Do we still want to get rid of the DP?” Heaven help the people of Taiwan (and, sigh of frustration at the moment, I am one of them), I thought. What unspeakably inhumane and vicious behavior on the part of a public official. Such a rush to capitalize on innocent blood to push a political agenda!

The Bible asks, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” I want to ask, “Is there no feeling for the heartache of this child’s parents and family?”

To be fair, the snarling reaction of the new Chair (and that is precisely what it was, the sound of a wounded, angry animal) was but a reflection of many in society at large. Sometimes we all make

fools of ourselves in a spur of the moment eruption that, upon further analysis the next day, causes us shame.

The problem is: where is the further analysis? Where is the shame?

A strong reason to focus at least briefly on this sad story lies in its potential to open our eyes to the intense pain of parents of children of all ages who display signs of serious mental disability.

This Victorian-era type of crime already has more than enough victims. We do not need more.

It was unethical and patently unprofessional of police officials to blab to the press like a bunch of gossipy old hens about the impressions and opinions of neighbors of the man arrested on the spot for the atrocity. Families with a member who flies off the wall and perpetrates acts such as these, especially in their adult years, deserve compassion and respect from all of us, and certainly from “the procedures of justice.” Details about this man’s character, state of mind, past behavior and so on should come to the light of day via lawful channels and only after painstaking investigation. Assessing the mental condition of someone who shows this type of abnormality is the bailiwick of mental health professionals and social scientists, not frenzy-feeding, half-baked, shoot-from-the-hip Wyatt Earp aficionados.

The people of Taiwan need to step back from this horrific scenario. We need to engage in an extended process of unheated and open-minded dialogue about many issues. Among them are questions of social perceptions about our mentally troubled neighbors and loved ones. Are we availing ourselves of public resources that could help these persons to better cope with their burdens? Do we isolate those who do not fit into our comfortable social niches, or do we engage ourselves with them? Why is violence, verbal and / or physically graphic, apparently more prevalent in today’s Taiwan than it was in the past?

Finally, with a sincere nod to Xiao Deng Pao and her family, how can we personally shine a little more light on a society that is all too often marred by shadow and darkness? (Father Daniel J. Bauer SVD is a priest and associate professor in the English Department at Fu Jen Catholic University.)

Talking points

- 1) So very much attention on the horrible murder of the 4 year old child "Xiao Deng Pao" has centered on the Q of executing (using capital punishment against) the murderer. This column argues now is not the time to discuss the death penalty (DP) Instead, we need to talk about violence from other aspects. Agree or disagree?
- 2) The mother of the little girl has asked society not to capitalize on the crime to advance arguments about the DP. Are you aware of other opinions she has expressed? Do you see her response in all this as different from some in society, especially the Chair of the KMT (Chinese Nationalist Party)?
- 3) Is violence more common in Taiwan today than it was in the past, at least, according to what you hear from your parents, grand-parents, and others?

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