

Title: People of the Philippines vs. Eladio Viernes y Ildefonso

Facts:

1. **Initial Complaints:** On August 21, 1997, Catherine Linatoc, assisted by her mother, filed three criminal complaints against Eladio Viernes, the common-law husband of her mother, accusing him of rape and attempted rape.
2. **Charges:**
 - **Criminal Case No. 0532-97:** Alleged rape on September 29, 1996.
 - **Criminal Case No. 0533-97:** Alleged attempted rape in March 1997.
 - **Criminal Case No. 0534-97:** Alleged rape on August 18, 1997.
3. **Investigation and Prosecution:** These complaints were filed before Prosecutor Danilo S. Sandoval and consolidated in the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Lipa City, Branch 12. Viernes was arraigned and pleaded not guilty.
4. **Trial Court Decision (April 6, 1998):**
 - **Conviction:** Found Viernes guilty of two counts of rape and one count of attempted rape.
 - **Penalties:** Imposed penalties, including reclusion perpetua for each rape case and prision correccional for the attempted rape, alongside monetary damages.
5. **Prosecutor's Motion for Reconsideration (May 18, 1998):**
 - **Motion Filed:** Prosecutor Sandoval requested an increase in penalties to conform with Republic Act (RA) No. 7659.
 - **RTC's Order (May 21, 1998):** Increased the penalties, upgrading the sentences to death for the rape cases and reclusion temporal for the attempted rape case.
6. **Appeal:** Viernes appealed these decisions claiming wrongful convictions and excessive penalties.

Issues:

1. **Substantive Issues:**
 - Whether the RTC erred in convicting Viernes of the crimes charged.
 - Whether Viernes was properly identified and the necessary evidence for conviction was presented.
2. **Procedural Issue:**

- Whether the RTC erred in increasing the penalties via the Motion for Reconsideration, and whether this violated Viernes' right against double jeopardy.

Court's Decision:

1. **Rome v. Substantive Matters:**

- **Appellant's Culpability:** The Supreme Court affirmed Viernes' conviction. The testimonies of Catherine Linatoc were considered credible, being detailed and consistent. Her testimony was corroborated by physical evidence from the medico-legal officer showing laceration of the hymen.

- **Credibility:** The trial court's assessment of Catherine's testimony was upheld, reinforcing the belief that a young victim would not fabricate such a traumatic experience without basis.

- **Alibi Defense:** Viernes' alibi and denial were weak and unsupported by credible evidence. His proximity to the crime scene removed the physical impossibility aspect of his defense.

2. **Rome v. Procedural Matters:**

- **Increase in Penalty:** The Supreme Court found the trial court's act of increasing the penalties improper under the Rules of Court, particularly Section 7 of Rule 120, which allows modification of a judgment of conviction only upon the accused's motion. The increase in penalties, therefore, violated Viernes' right against double jeopardy.

3. **Final Disposition:**

- **Appeal Partially Granted:** The Supreme Court annulled the RTC's Order increasing the penalties and reinstated the original decision with modifications in the award of damages:

- Moral damages were increased to P50,000 for each count of consummated rape.

- Exemplary damages were increased to P25,000 for each count of consummated rape.

Doctrine:

- **Modification of Judgment:** A judgment of conviction may be modified upon motion of the accused, not by the prosecution or the court unilaterally.

- **Double Jeopardy:** Instituting any motion or action that places the accused in double jeopardy is prohibited and considered a violation of procedural due process rights.

Class Notes:

- **Rape Conviction Elements:**

- Carnal knowledge of a woman.

- Done through force, threat, or intimidation, or when the victim is deprived of reason, unconscious, or under twelve years of age.
- **Attempted Rape:**
- Direct act leading towards the commission of rape.
- No completion due to reasons independent of the perpetrator's will.
- **Credible Witness Testimony:** Consistency, spontaneity, and the absence of ill motive.
- **Legal Citations:**
- **Article 335, Revised Penal Code (as amended)**
- **Republic Act No. 7659** (Death Penalty Law)
- **Rule 130, Section 27, Rules of Court** (Offer of compromise as admission of guilt)
- **Rule 120, Section 7, Rules of Court** (Modification of judgment)

Historical Background:

- **Amendments to Criminal Penalties:** The case illustrates the transition in Philippine penal law particularly regarding the imposition of the death penalty and adjustments in juridical reviews of criminal cases over time.
- **Prosecutorial Procedures:** Highlights the importance of safeguarding procedural rights even post-conviction, emphasizing the court's mandate to observe stringent due process.