

**THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS.
RENATO MORAL, ABRAHAM ANTONIO, AND LEOPOLDO PEDRIGOSA,
DEFENDANTS, ABRAHAM ANTONIO AND LEOPOLDO PEDRIGOSA,
DEFENDANTS-APPE...**

G.R. No. L-31139. October 12, 1984

Ponente: CONCEPCION JR., J.

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CONCEPCION JR., J.:

In Criminal Case No. CCC-VII-160-Rizal (19290) of the Circuit Criminal Court of Rizal, the State charged Renato Moral, as principal, and Leopoldo Pedrigosa and Abraham Antonio, as accomplices, of the crime of murder committed, as follows:

"That on or about the 3rd day of May, 1969, in the municipality of Makati, pro-vince of Rizal, Philippines and within the juris-diction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, Renato Moral, conspiring and confederating together with his principal co-accused, Alexander Moral, who is still at large, and both the two of them mutually helping and aiding one another, at night time, a circumstance deli-berately sought to insure success in the commission of the crime, with intent to kill, evident premeditation and by means of treachery, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously attack, assault, and stab with knives one Teodoro Casa who, as a result there-of, sustained stab wounds on the vital parts of his body which directly caused his death;

That the accused accomplices, Leopoldo Pedrigosa and Abraham Antonio, conspiring and confederating together and mutually helping and aiding one another, did then and there will-fully, unlawfully and feloniously cooperate in the commission of the crime by the principal accused by simultaneous acts, that is, by then and there throwing stones at said Teodoro Casa."

The People's version of the facts of the case is, as follows:

"Ang usapin ay nagpatuloy laban kina Renato Moral, Leopoldo Pedrigosa at Abraham Antonio lamang, sapagkat si Alexander Moral ay hindi pa nadarakup hanggang sa kasalukuyan.

Ang panig ng taga-usig na Pamahalaang Pam-purok na Taga-usig na si Cornelio M. Melendres, ay nagharap ng mga katibayan upang patunayan ang kasalanang pagpatay na ibinibintang sa mga nasasakdal. Na noong ika-siyam at kalahati (9:30) ng gabi, ika-3 ng Mayo, 1969, si Teodoro Casa ay nasawi dahil sa mga tinamong sugat na bunga ng pananakit ng mga nasasakdal na sina Renato Moral, Leopoldo Pedrigosa, Abraham Antonio, at Alexander Moral, na ang huli ay nakalalaya pa hanggang sa kasalukuyan.

Ang nasawing si Teodoro Casa ay nakatira sa itaas ng isang paupahang bahay sa daang General del Pilar, Bangkal, Makati, Rizal na kasama ang kanyang kapatid na si Luz Casa at ang asawa niyang si Ceferino Cervo, sa bahay na ito ay umuupa rin sa silong ang magkapatid na Moral, mga kabilang sa mga nasasakdal sa usaping ito.

Tatlong linggo bago nasawi si Teodoro Casa, ang mga akusadong sina Renato Moral, Leopoldo Pedrigosa, Abraham Antonio, at si Alexander Moral, ay nagkaroon ng inuman ng alak sa silong ng bahay na kanilang

inuupahan. Sila ay nag-inuman hanggang sa sila ay mangagkalasingan at ang bawat isa sa kanila ay sumisigaw at kumakanta tanda ng kanilang kalasingan. Ang isa sa pangkat ay nagsabi pa ng ganito: 'Putang ina ninyong lahat, hinahamon namin kung sino ang magsasabi na kami ay nakatira sa bahay ng manok.' Ang mga kaguluhang bunga ng pag-iinuman ng alak ng pang-kat na ito ay hindi minabuti ng kanilang kasam-bahay na sina Teodoro Casa dahilang sila ay na-bubulahaw lalung-lalo na ang kanyang kapatid na si Luz Casa na may anak na apat na buwan ang gulang. Dahil dito ay kinausap ni Teodoro Casa ang mga akusadong sina Renato Moral, Leopoldo Pedrigosa, Abraham Antonio, at si Alexander Moral, at kanyang pinakiusapan na huminahon sila at itigil ang kanilang pag-iingay, subalit ipinag-walang bahala ang pakiusap na ito at ang nasabing pangkat ay nagpatuloy sa kanilang pag-iingay. Ang ginawa ni Teodoro Casa ay nagtungo sa bahay ng may-ari ng bahay na kanilang inuupahan upang ipaalam ang bagay na iyon. Hindi nagtagal, ang may-ari ng bahay ay dumating at nakiusap din sa mga akusado na huwag gagawa ng anumang kaingayan na nakabubulahaw sa mga kasambahay nila. Subalit sa kabila ng mga pakiusap na ito ng may-ari ng bahay, ang mga nasasakdal na sina Renato Moral, Leopoldo Pedrigosa, Abraham Antonio, at si Alexander Moral ay nagpatuloy sa kanilang mada-las na pag-iinuman at panggugulo sa loob ng kabahayan. At noon ngang ika-siyam at kalahati (9:30) ng gabi, Sabado noon ng ika-3 ng Mayo, 1969, habang ang nasabing pangkat ay nag-iinuman na naman ng alak, si Luz Casa ay nakarinig ng salita buhat kay Renato Moral, na ganito ang sinasabi, 'Yayariin natin si Teodoro Casa.' Di naglaon ay dumating buhat sa pagtatrabaho ang nasawing si Teodoro Casa at bago siya naghapunan ay nagtungo muna siya sa kanilang palikuran. Samantalang si Luz Casa, sa pangambang isagawa ng pangkat ang kanilang masamang balak ay sinun-dan niya ang kanyang kapatid. Nakita niya na nang lumabas mula sa palikuran ang kapatid niyang si Teodoro Casa, ito ay sinalubong ni Renato Moral na may hawak na patalim at kapagdaka ay sinaksak si Teodoro Casa, kasabay ang sabling, 'Yayariin kita.' Bagamat sugatan si Teodoro Casa nakuha pa rin ninyang tumakbo ng palabas ng bahay. Siya ay sinundang mull ni Renato Moral, sumugod na rin ang kapatid niyang si Alexander Moral pati ang mga kasabwat na sina Leopoldo Pedrigosa at Abraham Antonio. Nang abutan ng magkapatid na Moral si Teodoro Casa, sinaksak ni Alexander Moral sa likod ang nasawi samantalang sinaksak muli sa harapan ni Renato Moral si Teodoro Casa. Nang nakadapa na sa lupa ng pasubsob ang nasawi ay siya'y pinagpupukpok ng bato at bote sa ulo ni Abraham Antonio, samantalang ang isa pang ka-sabwat na si Leopoldo Pedrigosa ay pinagpupukpok din ng bote ang iba't ibang bahagi ng katawan ng biktima. Dahilan sa kabiglaanan at matinding pagkatakot, walang nagawa si Luz Casa kundi ang magsisigaw at magtitili ng paghingi ng saklolo sa mga kalapit-bahay. Ang mga pangyayaring unang nababanggit ay sangayon sa pahayag ni Luz Casa pangunahing saksi ng taga-usig.

Ang panig ng taga-usig ay nagharap ng iba pang mga saksi na nagpapatunay at kumikilala na pinaslang ng mga nasasakdal si Teodoro Casa. Ang mga saksing ito ay sina Andres Guinanao at Cefe-rino Cerbo, ang huli ay bayaw ng nasawi. Kini-lala nila na ang sumaksak sa nasawi ay ang mga magkapatid na Moral, sina Renato at Alexander. Kinilala rin nila na matapos masaksak ang nasawi, si Abraham Antonio ay pinagbabato at pinagpupukpok ng bote sa ulo ang nasawi, samantalang si Leopoldo Pedrigosa ay tuwirang tumulong din sa pamamagitan ng pagpupukpok ng bote sa iba't ibang bahagi ng katawan ng nasawi. Ipinahayag pa rin ni Ceferino Cerbo, bayaw ng nasawi na tinangka niyang awatin at pigilin ang mga magkapatid na Moral pati ang mga kasabwat nila sa pananakit sa kanyang bayaw, ngunit sahalip ay siya'y bi-nigwasan ng saksak ng magkapatid na Moral at siya'y nasugatan, katunayan nagprisinta ng isang certificado ng pagkakagamot ang nasabing saksi, na ngayon ay bahagi ng mga kasulatan ng usaping ito.

Kabilang pa rin sa mga saksi ng taga-usig ay si Cpl. Manolo Dizon, Kagawad ng Kagawaran ng Pulisya ng bayan ng Makati, Rizal, na siyang nag-imbetiga sa krimeng naganap at siya'y nag-bigay ng ulat na nagpapatunay na ang mga may ka-gagawan sa naganap na krimen ay ang mga magka-patid na Moral, na sina Renato at Alexander, at ang mga kasabwat nilang sina Abraham Antonio at Leopoldo Pedrigosa, ito ay napapaloob sa nasa-bing ulat na may markang 'Exhibit C'. Si Pfc. Conrado de Gamo, Kagawad ng nasabing Kagawaran ng Pulisya ay nagpahayag din na kanyang naaresto si Renato Moral na natagpuan niyang nagtatago sa ilalim ng kama ng bahay na pinagtataguan.

Dahilan sa mga malulubhang sugat na tinamo ni Teodoro Casa bunga ng mga pananakit ng mga nasasakdal,

siya ay namatay ng oras ding yaon, at hindi na nagkaroon ng pagkakataong idulog sa pagamutan upang iligtas ang buhay niya, ng mga kaanak nito.

Ang bangkay ng nasawing si Teodoro Casa ay sinuri ni Dr. Dario C. Nalagan, isang opisyal ng Medico-Legal ng 'National Bureau of Investigation'. Ayon sa kanyang 'Necropsy Report', na may markang 'Exhibit A', ang nasawi ay nagtamo ng mga sugat na sumusunod: x x x"

The accused Renato Moral denied having inflicted the wounds on Teodoro Casa which resulted in the latter's death. He declared that on May 3, 1969, he was working as a mason in White Plains, Quezon City. After washing up at the end of the working day, he got his wages and went to the house of Rodolfo Reodique at Bangkal, Makati, Rizal, arriving thereat at about 8:00 o'clock in the evening. From there, he and Alexander Moral and his cousin, Abraham Antonio, went to the house of Alexander Moral at Gen. del Pilar Street, also at Bangkal, Makati, Rizal. Upon arrival at the house of Alexander Moral, at about 9:00 o'clock that evening, he requested Abraham Antonio to buy some rice for their supper. When Abraham Antonio returned with the rice, he (Renato Moral) went to the faucet at the back of the house in order to wash it. While at the faucet, the deceased Teodoro Casa, who was with his brother-in-law Ceferino Cerbo, hit him repeatedly with a beer bottle on the head. He tried to parry it, but he did not know if Teodoro Casa was hit by his "stab". His face was bloody and he tried to run towards the street, but his way was blocked by Andres Ginanao who was holding a piece of wood. When Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo caught up with him, he was again hit several times by Teodoro Casa. Then, he fainted. When he regained consciousness, he ran towards the house of his friend Rodolfo Reodique.[1]

The accused Abraham Antonio, for his part, invoked defense of stranger, claiming that when he saw his friend Renato Moral being attacked by Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo, he came to the succor of his friend by throwing a stone at the latter's assailants. His testimony reads, as follows:

"Q On May 3, 1969 at about 9:00 o'clock in the evening do you know where you were?

A Yes, sir.

Q Where?

A I was with Renato Moral and Alexander Moral, Sir.

Q Where?

A At Bangkal, Makati, Rizal, Sir.

Q Where did you come from on May 3, 1969 before you go to Bangkal, Makati, Rizal?

A From White Plains, Sir.

Q And where did you proceed when you go to Bangkal?

A After we have come from White Plains, we proceeded to the house of Rodolfo Reodique, Sir.

Q After coming from the house of Rodolfo Reodique, where did you go?

A We went to the house of Alexander Moral, Sir.

Q Were you able to reach the house of Alexander Moral?

A Yes, Sir.

Q And when you reached the house of Alex-ander Moral, what did you do?

A When we reached there I was asked to buy rice, Sir.

Q Did you buy rice?

A Yes, Sir.

Q After buying rice, what did you do?

A After I have bought rice Alexander Moral and Renato Moral washed the rice, Sir.

Q Did they wash the rice?

A Yes, Sir.

Q What about you, what did you do?

A I was pumping the gas stove, Sir.

Q When Renato Moral and Alexander Moral were washing the rice and you were pumping the gas stove, do you know what happened, if any?

A I heard a shout at the side of the house, Sir.

Q And when you heard that shout, do you know who shouted?

A I do not know whose voice, I just heard the word, 'aray', Sir.

Q What did you do when you heard that shout?

A I went out, Sir.

Q When you went out, what did you see outside?

A I saw somebody ran around the house of Alexander Moral, Sir.

Q Do you know the person who was run-ning around the house of Alexander Moral?

A I do not know him, Sir.

Q And where did you go when you heard somebody shouted and you saw somebody was running around the house?

A I went to the road because the person who was running around the house went to that direction, Sir.

Q When you went to the direction of the road, did you see that person whom you said that running around the house and went to the direction of the road?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Who was that person?

A I saw Renato Moral being hit by some-one, Sir.

Q Did you know the person who was hit-ting Renato Moral?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Who?

A Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo, Sir.

Q When this Renato Moral was being hit by Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo, what happened to Renato Moral?

A When I saw the two, Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo hitting Renato Moral I got a stone and threw at, Sir.

Q When you threw stone, did you hit somebody?

A I do not know if somebody was hit be-cause Teodoro Casa chased me, Sir.

Q What about Alexander Moral, do you know where was he at that time?

A He was there, Sir.

Q Do you know what Alexander Moral doing at that time, if any when Re-nato Moral was being molded (mauled) by Teodoro Casa and Ceferino Cerbo?

A No, Sir.

Q What about Leopoldo Pedrigosa, do you know where he was at that time?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Where was he?

A He was at the house of Rodolfo Reodique Sir."[2]

The accused Leopoldo Pedrigosa, upon the other hand, denied participation in the commission of the crime and interposed the defense of alibi. According to him, he remained in the house of Rodolfo Reodique, a place about 20 meters away from the residence of Teodoro Casa where the stabbing incident took place, after Renato Moral and Abraham Antonio went to the house of Alexander Moral and came to know of the incident only when Renato Moral and Abraham Antonio, who were both wounded, returned to the house of Rodolfo Reodique.[3]

The trial court, however, rejected the defendants' claims and found them guilty of the charg  and sentenced each of them to suffer the death penalty; to indemnify, jointly and severally, the heirs of the deceased in the amount of P12,000.00; and to pay the costs.

On September 18, 1975, the accused Renato Moral died while confined at the New Bilibid Prisons at Muntinglupa, Rizal, and the case against him was dismissed.[4]

The death sentence having been imposed, the case is now before the Court for mandatory review.

The accused Leopoldo Pedrigosa insists on his in-nocence and assails the trial court for believing the testimonies of the witnesses for the prosecution which he claims to be unreliable and untrustworthy in view of contradictions and discrepancies in their testimonies which impair their credibility. He further claims that the imposition of the death penalty is unwarranted as he had only been charged and found guilty as an accom-plice in the commission of the crime and not as a prin-cipal thereof.

The accused Abraham Antonio also assails the trial court for giving credit to the testimonies of the witnesses for the prosecution which are allegedly biased and in-herently weak; and for sentencing him to suffer the death penalty since he, like his co-accused Leopoldo Pedrigosa, had only been charged and found guilty as an accomplice in the commission of the crime.

After examining the record of the case, We find no compelling reasons to disturb the findings of fact of the trial court. The testimonies of the prosecution witnesses regarding the participation of the accused in the commission of the crime are clear, precise, positive and straightforward and included details consistent with human nature and experience. There was also no doubt as to their ability to identify the assailants as the place was illuminated and the deceased, as well as the accused, are well known to them. While it may be true that there were flaws or

discrepancies in their state-ments, concerning the incident, the said flaws or dis-crepancies refer to minor details and are not of such magnitude as to destroy their credibility or the veracity of their declaration.

The defense of alibi interposed by the accused Leopoldo Pedrigosa is weak and unconvincing. Accord-ing to him, he was in the house of his friend, Rodolfo Reodique, when the incident complained of happened and came to know of the stabbing incident only when Renato Moral and Abraham Antonio returned to the house of Rodolfo Reodique. However, the house of Rodolfo Reo-dique was only 20 meters away from the residence of the victim, Teodoro Casa, where the incident happened so that it was not physically impossible for him to be at the scene of the crime at the time it was committed. Moreover, the actual participation of Leopoldo Pedrigosa in the commission of the crime was vividly described by witnesses for the prosecution. His denial cannot stand against the positive declarations of the said witnesses.

The defense of Abraham Antonio that he acted in defense of stranger is untenable. In order to invoke defense of strangers, the accused must prove unlawful aggression on the part of the person injured or killed by the accused; that there was a reasonable necessity of the means employed to prevent or repel the aggres-sion; and that the person defending be not induced by revenge, resentment, or other evil motive. In the instant case, it had been established that when the de-ceased Teodoro Casa descended from their second floor apartment to answer a call of nature at their backyard, he was followed by the accused Renato Moral who, with-out any provocation, stabbed the deceased saying: "Yayariin kita"; that when the said deceased tried to escape by running away, he was pursued by Renato Moral and Alexander Moral who took turns in stabbing him, as a result of which, he fell to the ground; that while the deceased was lying prostrate on the ground, Abraham Antonio hit him on the head with a bottle and a stone; that, not to be outdone, Leopoldo Pedrigosa also hit the victim on various parts of his body with a stone; and that it was only when Renato Moral said: "Bagsak na iyan. Patay na iyan" that they stopped.

As could be seen, there was no unlawful aggression on the part of the deceased Teodoro Casa since it was the accused Renato Moral who stabbed the deceased with-out any provocation and, hence, the aggressor. There was also no reasonable necessity of the means employed since the deceased was unarmed at the time,[5] and was already lying prostrate on the ground and bleeding from his wounds inflicted upon him by Alexander Moral and Renato Moral when the accused Abraham Antonio hit him with a stone. Accordingly, the accused Abraham Antonio cannot be said to have legally acted in defense of a stranger when he hit the deceased with a stone.

The crime committed is murder, qualified by trea-cher-y, since the deceased Teodoro Casa was stabbed sud-denly and unexpectedly by Alexander Moral and Renato Moral as he came out of the toilet after answering a call of nature. The attack was such that the deceased was unable to prepare a defense for himself thus enabling his assailants to accomplish their criminal act without any risk to themselves arising from the defense that the deceased might put up. The accused Abraham Antonio and Leopoldo Pedrigosa were correctly adjudged guilty as accomplices in the commission of the crime. It is an established fact that after Renato Moral and Alexander Moral had delivered mortal stab wounds upon the deceased Teodoro Casa, the accused Abraham Antonio and Leopoldo Pedrigosa took turns in hitting him with beer bottles and stones. It has been held that the infliction of wounds by a co-accused after the principal accused had delivered the fatal blows is guilty thereof as an accomplice.[6]

The trial court, however, erred in appreciating the aggravating circumstances of evident premeditation, nocturnity, abuse of superior strength, and intoxication in fixing the penalty imposed upon the accused. The ag-gravating circumstance of evident premeditation cannot be considered against the accused since there is no evidence of a plan to kill the victim and that sufficient time had elapsed from the conception of the plan and its execution to allow the accused to coolly reflect upon the consequences of their act and permit their conscience to overcome the resolution of their will. In the instant case, Luz Casa declared that she heard the accused Renato Moral remark: "Yayariin natin si Teodoro Casa pagdating niya" while the accused were drinking, which started at about 5:30

o'clock in the afternoon, and sometime before Teodoro Casa arrived at 9:30 o'clock that night.[7] She was not precise, however, as to the exact hour when she heard Renato Moral utter those words, so that only a few hours, if not minutes, had elapsed from the time Renato Moral made the remark up to the arrival of Teodoro Casa.

Nocturnity cannot also be appreciated as an aggravating circumstance since there is no evidence that the accused had purposely sought the cover of the darkness of the night to commit the crime; nor is there evidence that nighttime facilitated the commission of the crime. Besides, Andres Ginanao declared that the place where the stabbing incident took place was illuminated by a big bulb from a Meralco Street post.[8] Ceferino Cerbo also declared that the back of their house where the toilet was situated was well lighted.[9]

Abuse of superior strength cannot also be appreciated in fixing the penalty since abuse of superiority is absorbed in treachery.[10]

The alternative circumstance of intoxication was also appreciated by the trial court as an aggravating circumstance. Said the Court:

"Napatunayan din na ang mga nasasakdal ay may ugaling umiinom ng alak at sinadya nila ang pagiinuman ng alak ng araw na isa-gawa nila ang krimen."

The record, however, does not show excessive and habitual use of intoxicating drinks, or that the accused purposely got drunk in order to commit the crime. Luz Casa merely declared that the accused were drinking liquor on the night in question and were telling stories,[11] and that they were singing, laughing, and shouting and were very jolly.[12] While she further said that the accused used to drink liquor every Saturday night, her testimony is not competent proof that the accused are drunkards whose habit is to get drunk, and whose inebriety has become habitual, in order that intoxication may be considered as an aggravating circumstance. Consequently, the fact that the accused were intoxicated at the time of the commission of the crime should instead, be considered as a mitigating circumstance.

The trial court further erred in imposing the death penalty upon the accused Leopoldo Pedrigosa and Abraham Antonio who were merely charged, and found guilty, as accomplices in the commission of the crime. Article 52 of the Revised Penal Code provides that the penalty next lower in degree than that prescribed by law for the consummated felony shall be imposed upon the accomplices in the commission of the consummated felony. Since the impossible penalty upon the principal of a consummated crime of murder is reclusion temporal, in its maximum period, to death,[13] the penalty to be imposed upon the accomplice is not death, as decreed by the trial court, but, the penalty next lower in degree which is prision mayor in its maximum period to reclusion temporal in its medium period, or from 10 years and 1 day to 17 years and 4 months. Considering that there is one mitigating circumstance and no aggravating circumstance to offset it, and considering the provisions of the Indeterminate Sentence Law, the impossible penalty should be from 4 years, 2 months and 1 day of prision correccional as minimum to 10 years and 1 day of prision mayor, as maximum.

WHEREFORE, the judgment appealed from should be as it is hereby, AFFIRMED with the modification that the accused Abraham Antonio and Leopoldo Pedrigosa are ordered to suffer an indeterminate penalty ranging from 4 years, 2 months and 1 day of prision correccional as minimum to 10 years and 1 day of prision mayor as maximum. The indemnity to be paid to the heirs of the deceased is hereby increased to P30,000.00. With proportionate costs against the accused Abraham Antonio and Leopoldo Pedrigosa.

SO ORDERED.

Teehankee, Makasiar, Aquino, Guerrero, Abad Santos, Melencio-Herrera, Plana, Escolin, Relova, Gutierrez, Jr., De La Fuente, and Cuevas, JJ., concur.

Fernando, C.J., on official leave.

[1] tsn of Aug. 30, 1969, pp. 6-11.

[2] tsn of Sept. 2, 1969, pp. 6-11.

[3] tsn of Sept. 12, 1969, pp. 4-8.

[4] Rollo, pp. 210, 227, 229.

[5] tsn of Aug. 21, 1969, Afternoon Session, p. 5.

[6] People vs. Azcona, 59 Phil. 580.

[7] tsn of Aug. 21, 1969, Morning Session, p. 8.

[8] tsn of Aug. 21, 1969, p. 8.

[9] tsn of Aug. 22, 1969, Afternoon Session, pp. 9-10.

[10] People vs. Camano, G.R. No. L-36662-63, July 30, 1982, 115 SCRA 668, and cases cited therein.

[11] tsn of Aug. 21, 1969, p. 7.

[12] Id., p. 27.

[13] Art. 248, Revised Penal Code.

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