

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, APPELLEE, VS. CONRADO AYUMAN, APPELLANT.

G.R. No. 133436. April 14, 2004

Ponente: SANDOVAL-GUTIERREZ, J.

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SANDOVAL-GUTIERREZ, J.:

For automatic review is the Decision[1] dated March 4, 1998 of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 19, Cagayan de Oro City in Criminal Case No. 97-1040 finding Conrado Ayuman, appellant, guilty beyond reasonable doubt of parricide and imposing upon him the supreme penalty of death. He was also adjudged to pay the heirs of the victim P50,000.00 as civil indemnity.

The Information charging appellant with parricide reads:

“That on or about April 22, 1997, in the City of Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the said accused did then and there willfully and feloniously, with intent to kill and taking advantage of superior strength and ascendancy over Sugar Ray Ayuman, his legitimate son, maul, maltreat and kill the latter by slapping and hitting the latter on his head, stomach and other parts of the latter’s young and tender body thereby inflicting upon the latter traumatic abdominal injuries, which are fatal injuries and which caused the latter’s death shortly thereafter, to the damage and prejudice of the said Sugar Ray Ayuman and his legal heirs.”

Upon arraignment, appellant, with the assistance of counsel, pleaded not guilty to the crime charged.

The version of the prosecution was established through the testimonies of Dr. Tammy Uy, Marino Jalalo, SPO1 Salome Catulong, Ederico Mariano, Angelito Roluna, Grace Songcuya and SPO1 Medel Makalino.

On April 22, 1997 at around 10:15 in the morning, Ermita Ayuman, appellant’s wife, rushed her five-year old son Sugar Ray to the Emergency Room of the Northern Mindanao Medical Center (NMMC). When Ederico Mariano, a nurse, took the child’s vital signs, it appeared that he was dead on arrival. Ederico then asked Ermita what happened to the child. She answered that he was mauled by his father. Ermita’s statement was noted in the emergency room record.[2]

At about 10:45 in the morning of the same day, SPO1 Salome Catulong of Police Precinct No. 1 of Cagayan de Oro City, received a phone call from the NMMC informing her that a child died because he was assaulted by his father. Being in charge of cases involving women and children, she immediately proceeded to the hospital. Angelito Roluna, a newspaper reporter of the Sun Star, was with her. Ermita refused to answer any query from SPO1 Catulong regarding the death of her son. But when Roluna asked her what happened, she told him that Sugar Ray was mauled by his father.[3] This interview could only be finished the following day when Ermita admitted to him that appellant used to hurt the child every time the latter left the house or made mistake; that before he died, appellant kicked him; and that the child informed her he was in pain and vomiting. Roluna reported this interview in the “Sun Star.”

Also on that same day, April 22, 1997, at about 8:00 o'clock in the evening, SPO1 Catulong went to the Ayuman residence. That was the start of the wake for Sugar Ray. When SPO1 Catulong interviewed Ermita, she stated that appellant maltreated the boy in order to discipline him and that appellant started to hit him at the age of four. Upon suggestion of SPO1 Catulong, Ermita agreed that the body of the child be autopsied.[4]

On April 23, 1997, Dr. Tomas L. Uy of the NBI, Region 10, Cagayan de Oro City, performed the autopsy on the body of Sugar Ray. Prior thereto, he learned from Ermita that the child was maltreated by appellant in their house on April 22, 1997 at about 10:30 in the morning.[5]

Dr. Uy's Autopsy Report contains the following findings:

"Pallor, generalized. Rigor mortis, lower extremities. Livor mortis, generalized, back, buttocks, posterior aspects of the neck and extremities. Areas of post-mortem greenish discolorations of the abdomen and inferior aspects of the chest are noted.

ABRASIONS: 0.2X0.4 cms. And 0.3X0.6 cm., lower thoracic region of the back, mid-aspect; 3X2 cms., right iliac region, lateral aspect.

HEMATOMAS, violaceous: 2.2X1 cms. Forehead, right side; 1.5X2 cms., 2.5X2 cms., 1.2X1.6 cms., and 3X0.8 cms., left side of the face; (page 2-A, record) 1.8X1.2 cms., right elbow region; 4X2.5 cms., dorsum of right hand; 2.4X1.2 cms., left forearm, dorsal aspect, distal third; 2.5X2.2 cms., lower sternal region of the chest; 6X3 cms., epigastric region of the abdomen.

HEMATOMA, 6X2 cms., surface of the pericardium, anterior aspect, beneath the sternum.

HEMATOMA, stomach, 5X2 cms., lesser curvature region, anterior aspect.

LACERATED WOUND, 1.5 cms. long, with irregular edges, right lobe of the liver, medial aspect, overlying the gall bladder, surrounded by a HEMATOMA of 4X3 cms.

RUPTURE, small intestine, ileal region/portion; with irregular edges.

PERITONITIS, generalized, aero-purulent; with extensive intestinal and mesenteric adhesions; serosal surfaces of the small and large intestines are markedly congested and covered with patches of foul-smelling yellowish purulent exudates. Peritoneal fluid is heavily contaminated with fecal matter.

Heart chambers, contain small amount of dark fluid and clotted blood.

Stomach, contains about 1 tbsp. of yellowish-green bilious substance.

Brain, markedly congested.

Other visceral organs, congested.

CAUSE OF DEATH: Traumatic abdominal injuries."

On April 23, 1997, Sugar Ray was buried. Appellant was nowhere to be found. Neither did he report for work from April 23 to May 21, 1997.[6] During the burial, Ermita cried and shouted, "Dong, forgive your father. Dong, don't leave us." Afterwards, upon invitation of SPO1 Catulong, Ermita, with her two children, went to the former's office and executed the following statement quoted as follows:

"01.

Q - Do you swear to tell the truth and nothing but the whole truth in your statement now?

A - Yes, I will swear.

02. Q - Please state your name, age, address and other personal circumstances?

A - I am Ermita Ayuman y Mayuela, 36 years of age, married, presently residing at Pilgrim Compound, Del Pilar/ Magsaysay Street, Cagayan de Oro City and originated from Manuikan, Zamboanga del Norte, a mother of 3 children, 2 girls and one boy.

03. Q - Why are you here at the police Station at OKK Police Precinct No. 1?

A - I am here to file a criminal complaint against my own husband PO3 Conrado Ayuman an active member of Cagayan de Oro Central Fire Station, for killing our only son Sugar Ray Ayuman, 5 yrs. Old, Kinder 2 at Faith Tabernacle situated at Del Pilar/Magsaysay, Cagayan de Oro City.

04. Q - When and where did this happen?

A - This happened on April 22, 1997 at 10:30 in the morning more or less from our house at Del Pilar/Magsaysay going to Northern Mindanao Medical Center but died on arrival at the hospital and the mauling which was done by his father happened in our house and this the cause of the death of my son.

05. Q - Please narrate shortly the incident.

A - The father of Sugar Ray started mauling him when he was then 4 years old until the age of 5. His father would kick, box, slap, and beat him even if he just committed slight mistakes. If Sugar Ray would go out from our room to watch TV at our neighbor's place his father would be furious and would beat him. And on Monday, April 21, 1997, at 10:00 a.m., more or less, my husband came home from office to get something. He called Ray because that time Ray went out from our room, and immediately slapped him and the head of Ray bumped on the wall. He let Ray get inside our room, slapped him again and I saw my husband kick Ray many times hitting his abdomen. I tried to stop him but he would not listen and instead kicked Ray several times because as what he said 'I must discipline my child because he is a boy.' He easily gets angry even for slightest mistakes.

06. Q - What else can you say?

A - In that afternoon at past 1:00 o'clock of same day, he came home from his work to get epoxy to repair his radio, and he saw Ray wiping his hands and suddenly hit Ray's head and said 'You will go out again as your mother is sleeping.' But that time I was not yet asleep and I heard everything that he said to the child then looked for a chain but there was none; he saw a rope and tied the neck of my son to the bed, so Ray could not go out and even told me not to untie the knot until the child sleeps, then he left going back to his office.

07. Q - What other things happened?

A - The following day April 22, 1997 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning my husband was at home from a 24 hours duty before that day. He saw me wiping the hands of Ray with wet face towel and asked me by saying 'Is Ray having fever? It's because he is disobedient.' He told the child to stand up by saying 'stand up Ray.' Ray then stood up and felt nauseated and was about to vomit and told Ray 'Pretentious child he's just pretending to vomit.' Ray lay down again and I continued wiping him and massage him with sanitary balm as he felt cold and was sweating and at that time seemed to have hard time breathing. I could not determine his way of breathing, sometimes very fast, and then my husband approached Ray and put his clenched fist on Ray's face and commanded Ray to squat then let Ray stand up and squat with open hands in front his knees. I told him to stop Ray from squatting, then Ray lay down again but rose up and vomited and I saw him vomit with blood and I was so scared so I brought my child to Northern Mindanao Medical Center, and while on our way on board motorela going to said hospital, Ray was able to say 'Mang, maybe I will die now' and I told him, 'You won't die "Do" because we will go to the hospital.' At that time I noticed Ray having hard time breathing and upon arrival at the emergency room of said hospital the nurse touched his pulse and declared that my son died on arrival. I could not believe that my son was already dead and did not know what to do that time. I just

embraced him and kept on crying.

08.

Q - Did your husband know at that time that Sugar Ray is already dead?

A - Yes, because he was informed by his sibling who accompanied us to the hospital but my husband that time did not go with us to said hospital and as what I knew from his sibling that he told his 'manong' (my husband) that Sugar Ray is already dead and his response was 'bury him' and until now my husband has not yet appeared.

09.

Q - I have no more questions, do you have something more to add?

A - No more as of now.

10.

Q - Will you sign your statement voluntarily without being coerced or intimidated by anybody?

A - Yes, I will sign. (Affidavit as translated, pages 185-186, records).

(Signed) ERMITA MAYUELA AYUMAN

(Affiant)"[7]

Thereafter, SPO1 Catulong and Ermita proceeded to the office of Grace Songcuya, Clerk of Court of the Municipal Trial Court in Cities, Cagayan de Oro City. Ermita subscribed and sworn to before Songcuya the truth of her statement given before SPO1 Catulong.

However, on May 15, 1997, Ermita executed an affidavit retracting what she stated in her sworn statements. Nonetheless, the City Prosecutor filed with the court a quo the corresponding Information and eventually issued a warrant of arrest against appellant. SPO1 Catulong arrested appellant at the Central Fire Station, Cagayan de Oro City.[8]

Marino Jalalo, testified that he and appellant's family are neighbors. Appellant has three children, two girls and a boy. But he was particularly violent to his son Sugar Ray. Every time the boy committed a mistake, appellant would punish him inside a room. About 3 to 4 times a month, appellant would hit the child with a belt or a stick and he could only cry. Once, Marino heard the child gasping for breath as if he was being drowned by appellant. At one time, the boy approached Marino and asked for something to eat, saying "Tatay, did you hear me a while ago?" At that moment, Marino noticed that the child's head was partly swollen. When asked what happened to him, the child replied, "My face was pushed down." In the same month and year, appellant locked the child inside a room. Observing that Marino was around, the child begged him for help.[9]

The defense presented as its witnesses appellant and his wife Ermita.

Appellant denied killing his son Sugar Ray. He testified that on April 22, 1997, when he came home at around 9:00 o'clock in the morning, he saw his son on bed. His wife was rubbing "sanitary balm" on him. While he was having breakfast, he noticed that his son was pale, had fever and was vomiting. So he told his wife to bring the child to the hospital. Initially, she was reluctant because they had no money, but he insisted. On the same day, he went to Pagadian to borrow money from his relatives. He returned home on April 27, 1992. Ermita told him that Sugar Ray died because an unidentified person slapped and kicked him at the Cogon market. At that time, his son was already buried. The couple then went to the Office of the Prosecutor to "tell the truth." [10]

On cross examination, appellant admitted he was strict with his children and disciplined them in a military way. [11]

After hearing the case, the trial court rendered its Decision, the dispositive portion of which reads:

“WHEREFORE, the Court finds accused Conrado Ayuman guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of parricide committed by killing his minor son, Sugar Ray Ayuman, aggravated by treachery, lack of respect due to Sugar Ray’s tender age, cruelty and abuse of confidence, and thereby hereby sentences him to death, to indemnify the heirs of Sugar Ray Ayuman in the sum of P50,000.00 and to pay the costs of this case.

His custodian is hereby also ordered to ship him to the National Penitentiary immediately, or without delay.

SO ORDERED.”

Appellant now raises the following assignments of error:

“I

THE COURT A QUO ERRED IN CONVICTING THE ACCUSED-APPELLANT NOTWITHSTANDING THE LACK OF EVIDENCE TO ESTABLISH HIS GUILT BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT

II

THE COURT A QUO ERRED IN DISMISSING THE AFFIDAVIT OF DESISTANCE FILED BY THE COMPLAINANT AND IN DISREGARDING HER TESTIMONY IN OPEN COURT.”[12]

Appellant contends that the prosecution failed to prove by evidence beyond reasonable doubt that he is guilty of the crime charged. In fact, there is no evidence directly pointing to him as the culprit. What the prosecution presented are mere hearsay evidence and “assumption.” While SPO1 Catulong testified that Ermita executed a sworn statement on September 22, 1997, however, Ermita denied its veracity. Her affidavit of desistance tells all.

Appellant likewise maintains that the circumstantial evidence enumerated by the trial court in its assailed Decision “do not support any finding of parricide.”

For his part, the Solicitor General, in the appellee’s brief, maintains that Ermita’s affidavit of recantation is an afterthought and exceedingly unreliable. Moreover, the circumstantial evidence relied upon by the trial court sustains the conviction of appellant of the crime charged.

Article 246 of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659, defines and penalizes parricide as follows:

“Article 246. Parricide. – Any person who shall kill his father, mother or child, whether legitimate or illegitimate, or any of his ascendants, or descendants, or his spouse, shall be guilty of parricide and shall be punished by the penalty of reclusion perpetua to death.”

The elements of the crime of parricide are: (1) a person is killed; (2) the deceased is killed by the accused; and (3) the deceased is the father, mother or child, whether legitimate or illegitimate, of the accused or any of his ascendants or descendants, or his spouse. The key element here is the relationship of the offender with the victim.[13]

All the above elements were sufficiently proven by the prosecution, specifically on the basis of circumstantial evidence.

In *People vs. Almoguerro and Aton*,[14] we held:

“Direct evidence of the commission of the crime charged is not the only matrix wherefrom a court may draw its conclusions and findings of guilt. The rules on evidence and case law sustain the conviction of appellants through circumstantial evidence.

Under Section 4, Rule 133 of the Revised Rules of Court on circumstantial evidence, the following requisites must concur: (1) there must be more than one circumstance; (2) the facts from which the inferences are derived are proven; and (3) the combination of all circumstances is such as to produce a conviction beyond reasonable doubt of the guilt of the accused.”

The following circumstances cited by the trial court led us to conclude that the prosecution proved by evidence beyond reasonable doubt that appellant killed his son, thus:

- Appellant has the propensity in maltreating his son. He himself testified that he disciplined the victim by inflicting on him serious corporal punishment akin to “the military approach;”[15]
- Marino Jalalo, appellant’s neighbor, testified that whenever the victim committed a mistake, appellant would bring him in a room and punish him. He often heard the victim crying as he was being hit by appellant with a belt or a stick. This happened about 3 to 4 times a month;
- Appellant was at home on April 22, 1997 when Ermita rushed the victim to the NMMC where he was declared dead on arrival;
- Appellant immediately left after his son was rushed to the hospital by his wife;
- Ermita admitted to Ederico Mariano, the nurse then on duty when the victim was rushed to the hospital, that the latter was mauled by his father. This declaration was later entered in the NMMC emergency room record by the same nurse;
- Ermita, when interviewed by SPO1 Catulong and Angelito Roluna, a newspaper reporter, also admitted to them that appellant has been maltreating his son and mauled him before he died;
- Dr. Tomas L. Uy who physically examined the victim found abrasions and hematomas all over his body, as well as lacerated wound of the liver and ruptured intestine, among others. According to Dr. Uy, Sugar Ray died of “traumatic abdominal injuries.” To a layman, Dr. Uy’s findings readily show that the child suffered violent blows on his body.
- During the interment, Ermita shouted, “Dong, forgive your father.”
- Although Ermita advised appellant that the victim was slapped and kicked by an unidentified person at the Cogon market on April 21, 1997, however, contrary to a father’s natural reaction, appellant failed to take any action to defend a loved one or report the incident to the police;
- Appellant did not return home immediately. In fact, he was not present during the wake and the burial of his own son, conduct so unnatural for a father like him.

The foregoing circumstances, when viewed in their entirety, are as convincing as direct evidence and as such, negate appellant’s innocence. Otherwise stated, the prosecution established beyond a shadow of doubt, through circumstantial evidence, that appellant committed the crime of parricide.

Here is a father who mercilessly abused his own son and refused to bring him to the hospital, although on the verge of death, for prompt medical treatment. Such a heartless conduct is condemnable and is extremely contrary to human nature. Every father is expected to love his children and shower them with acts of affection and tenderness. But appellant belongs to a different breed. Indeed, he is a tyrant without mercy. His intense apathy to

his dying young son is beyond comprehension.

We have ruled that facts or circumstances which are not only consistent with the guilt of the accused but also inconsistent with his innocence, constitute evidence which, in weight and probative force, may surpass even direct evidence in its effect upon the court. [16]

But appellant discredits Ermita's sworn statement because she retracted. It bears emphasis that mere retraction by a prosecution witness does not necessarily vitiate the original testimony if credible, as in this case. We look with disfavor upon retractions of testimonies previously given in court. The rationale for the rule is obvious: Affidavits of retraction can easily be secured from witnesses, usually through intimidation or for a monetary consideration. Recanted testimony is exceedingly unreliable. There is always the probability that it will later be repudiated. [17] Thus, the trial court correctly disregarded Ermita's affidavit of desistance. Obviously, she was influenced by appellant to execute it. Moreover, if it were true that an unidentified person killed their son, why did appellant fail to report the matter to the proper authorities? There can be no other conclusion, therefore, than that Ermita's affidavit of retraction is an afterthought, intended to exculpate appellant from criminal liability.

Appellant, merely denied the commission of the crime and interposed the defense of alibi. Alibi is inherently weak and unreliable, unless corroborated by disinterested witnesses. Since he was unable to substantiate his alibi with the testimony of a credible witness, it is reduced to self-serving evidence undeserving of any weight in law.[18]

In his desperate attempt to exculpate himself from any criminal liability, appellant insists that the prosecution failed to prove that he is the father of the victim. While the prosecution failed to present to the trial court the victim's Certificate of Live Birth, however, both appellant and his wife Ermita admitted during the hearing that the victim is their son. In *People vs. Malabago*, [19] we ruled that oral evidence of the fact of filial relationship maybe considered.[20]

We now resolve the issue of whether the trial court imposed the correct penalty. Under Article 294 of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Section 5 of R.A. No. 7659, the penalty for parricide is composed of two indivisible penalties, reclusion perpetua to death. In the case at bar, the trial court erred in appreciating the aggravating circumstances of treachery, abuse of confidence and cruelty. Outright, we cannot consider these aggravating circumstances in determining the proper penalty because they have not been alleged in the Information. Also, there are no mitigating circumstances here.

Considering that no aggravating or mitigating circumstance attended the commission of the crime, we impose upon the appellant the lesser penalty of reclusion perpetua.

Regarding damages, the trial court correctly awarded P50,000.00 as civil indemnity to the victim's mother and sisters. When death occurs as a result of a crime, appellant should be ordered to pay the heirs of the victim P50,000.00 as civil indemnity,[21] without need of any evidence or proof of damages.[22] We also award them exemplary damages in the sum of P25,000.00 considering that the qualifying circumstance of relationship is present, this being a case of parricide.[23] In *People vs. Catubig*, [24] we held that exemplary damages in the amount of P25,000.00 are recoverable if there is present an aggravating circumstance (whether qualifying or ordinary) in the commission of the crime.

WHEREFORE, the assailed Decision dated March 4, 1998 of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 19, Cagayan de Oro City, in Criminal Case No. 97-1040, is hereby **AFFIRMED** with **MODIFICATION** in the sense that appellant **CONRADO AYUMAN** is sentenced to suffer the penalty of **RECLUSION PERPETUA** and is ordered to pay the victim's heirs P50,000.00 as civil indemnity, and P25,000.00 as exemplary damages.

Costs de oficio.

SO ORDERED.

Davide, Jr., C.J., Puno, Vitug, Panganiban, Quisumbing, Ynares-Santiago, Carpio, Austria-Martinez, Corona, Carpio-Morales, Callejo, Sr., Azcuna, and Tinga, JJ., concur.

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- [1] Penned by Judge Anthony E. Santos, Rollo at 23-43.
- [2] Exhibit “G-1-A”.
- [3] TSN, September 22, 1997 at 4-35; TSN, December 2, 1997 at 4-15.
- [4] TSN, September 22, 1997 at 4-35.
- [5] TSN, September 15, 1997 at 3-15.
- [6] TSN, December 3, 1997 at 28-32
- [7] Rollo at 29-32.
- [8] TSN, September 22, 1997 at 4-35.
- [9] TSN, September 16, 1997 at 15-20.
- [10] TSN, February 10, 1998 at 79-97.
- [11] TSN, February 10, 1998 at 95-97
- [12] Rollo at 61.
- [13] See *People vs. Dalag*, G.R. No. 129895, April 30, 2003.
- [14] G.R. No. 121177, November 11, 2003 at 15, citing *People vs. Edralin Taboga*, 376 SCRA 500 (2002); and *People vs. Fegidero*, 337 SCRA 274, 282 (2000).
- [15] TSN, February 10, 1998 at 95-97.
- [16] *People vs. Taliman*, G.R. No. 109143, October 11, 2000, 342 SCRA 534, 544, citing *People vs. Alberca*, 257 SCRA 613, 632 (1996); and *People vs. Abitona*, 240 SCRA 335 (1995).
- [17] *People vs. Abon*, G.R. No. 130662, October 14, 2003 at 15, citing *Virgilio Santos vs. People*, G.R. No. 147615, January 20, 2003; *People vs. Dulay*, 217 SCRA 103 (1993); and *Lopez vs. Court of Appeals*, 239 SCRA 562 (1994).
- [18] *People vs. Aton and Almoguerra*, supra. at 21, citing *People vs. Avendaño*, G.R. No. 137407, January 28, 2003.
- [19] G.R. No. 115686, December 2, 1996, 265 SCRA 199.
- [20] See *People vs. Florendo*, G.R. No. 136845, October 8, 2003. See also *People vs. Velasco*, G.R. No. 128089, February 13, 2001, 351 SCRA 539, citing *People vs. Malabago*, 265 SCRA 198 (1996).
- [21] *People vs. Velasco*, supra., citing *People vs. Malabago*, 265 SCRA 198 (1996); and *People vs. Lacson*, G.R. No. 132512, December 15, 1999.

[22] *People vs. Joey Manlansing y Ambrosio and Mario Manlansing y Ambrosio*, G.R. Nos. 131736-37, March 11, 2002.

[23] See *People vs. Arnate*, G.R. No. 148724, October 15, 2002, 391 SCRA 155, 161.

[24] G.R. No. 137842, August 23, 2001, 363 SCRA 621, cited in *People vs. Berdin*, G.R. No. 137598, November 28, 2003 at 19.

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