

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, APPELLEE, VS. RUBEN TIU A.K.A. RUBEN GO A.K.A. MR. ONG, ROSALINA SUMILI A.K.A. ROSE AND TAN HUNG A.K.A. EMMIE TAN, APPELLANTS.

G.R. No. 144545. March 10, 2004

Ponente: AZCUNA, J.

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AZCUNA, J.:

In an Information filed with the Regional Trial Court of Makati City on January 14, 2000, docketed as Criminal Case No. 00-050 and assigned to Branch 143 thereof, appellants Ruben Tiu (a.k.a. Ruben Go/Mr. Ong), Rosalina Sumili (a.k.a. Rose), and Tan Hung (a.k.a. Emmie Tan) were charged with the offense of selling and delivering prohibited drugs, more popularly known as shabu, as defined and penalized under Section 15, Article III, Republic Act No. 6425, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659. The accusatory portion of the Information reads:

That on or about October 1, 1999, in Makati City[,] Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the abovenamed accused, conspiring, confederating[,] and mutually helping one another, did then and there, willfully, unlawfully, and feloniously sell, deliver and give away to a poseur-buyer One Thousand Nine Hundred Seventy Seven [grams] (1,977 g.) of Methamphetamine Hydrochloride, commonly known as SHABU, a regulated drug, without authority of law or the corresponding license therefore.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[1]

Upon arraignment, the three accused pleaded not guilty.

At the trial, the prosecution presented as witnesses Forensic Chemist P/Insp. Victor C. Drapete, of the Philippine National Police (PNP) Crime Laboratory, Camp Crame, who examined the seized shabu; P/Insp. Emerson Mañibo, the leader of one of the teams which conducted the buy-bust operation; Col. Teofilo Andrada, the over-all leader of the buy-bust operation; P/Sr. Insp. Rolando S. Bijasa, the leader of one of the two teams; SPO3 Neowillie De Castro, a member of one of the teams, and Setsuo Sugawara, the confidential informant and poseur-buyer.

It appears from the testimonies of the witnesses that on September 30, 1999, P/Insp. Emerson Mañibo, Chief Intelligence and Investigator, Special Operations Division of the Narcotics Group In Camp Crame, Quezon City, received a telephone call from Setsuo Sugawara, a Japanese national who also works as a confidential informant (CI) for the PNP. Sugawara informed him that he had scheduled a meeting with appellant Rosalina Sumili at the Aristocrat Restaurant in Malate, Manila that same day between 9:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. to discuss the purchase of drugs, specifically the substance called Methamphetamine hydrochloride, more commonly known as shabu. P/Insp. Mañibo thus instructed Sugawara to wait for him so that they could go to the restaurant together.

That evening, P/Insp. Mañibo fetched Sugawara from his house and, together, they proceeded to the said restaurant. When they arrived, Sugawara went inside alone while P/Insp. Mañibo waited in the car. He was parked in front of the restaurant and from there, P/Insp. Mañibo could see Sugawara approach appellant Sumili. After

some time, Sugawara stood up, left the restaurant, and returned to his car where he immediately informed P/Insp. Mañibo that they already agreed to the sale of shabu for P960,000. He also told P/Insp. Mañibo that he and appellant Sumili agreed to meet again the following day at the coffee shop in Shangrila Hotel, Makati City at around 11:00 a.m. so that they could finalize the plans for the delivery of the shabu and the payment thereof.

The next day, October 1, 1999, P/Insp. Mañibo and Sugawara went together to Shangri-La Hotel in Makati City to meet appellant Sumili. Again, Sugawara went inside alone, leaving P/Insp. Mañibo to wait in the car. After speaking with appellant Sumili for thirty (30) minutes, Sugawara returned and informed P/Insp. Mañibo that the plans for delivery and payment have been finalized. Apparently, appellant Sumili wanted to first see if Sugawara indeed had the money, so she told the latter that they should meet again that day at 5:30 p.m. in the coffee shop of Dusit Hotel in Makati City.

P/Insp. Mañibo and Sugawara rushed to Camp Crame in Quezon City where they immediately reported the planned purchase of shabu to P/Sr. Supt. Arturo M. Castillo, Chief of the Special Operations Division, Narcotics Group. P/Insp. Mañibo then requested that an entrapment operation be organized.

Without wasting time, P/Sr. Supt. Castillo assembled two teams: Team 1 was led by P/Sr. Insp. Rolando S. Bijasa and had for its members SPO2 Francisco Pacuna, PO2 George Villanueva, PO1 Richard Pasajol, PO1 Benjamin Ignacio and PO1 Florencio Resco, while Team 2 was led by P/Insp. Mañibo himself and had for its members SPO3 Neowillie De Castro, SPO2 Rolando Barroga, PO3 Tomas Calicdan and Eddie Español. Col. Teofilo Andrada was designated as the over-all team leader for this operation. He, in turn, was under the supervision of P/Sr. Supt. Castillo.

During the pre-departure briefing of the two teams, P/Supt. Castillo instructed P/Insp. Mañibo to prepare boodle money to be used as payment for the two kilos of shabu. He then gave P/Insp. Mañibo ten (10) genuine five-hundred peso bills with the following serial numbers: GU 6907419, JD 821908, JD 843380, HR 978085, FD 664966, FN 901199, HE 335851, HE 335848, DH 371447 and GR 881326.[2] The genuine bills were placed on top of each bundle of the boodle money. P/Insp. Mañibo was also assigned to monitor the car they would use for the operation, a light blue Honda Civic with plate number UUE 737. P/Insp. Mañibo placed inside the Honda Civic the boodle money for the payment of the shabu.

At around 3:00 p.m. of the same day, the team started to proceed to Makati City. SPO3 De Castro drove the Honda Civic while P/Insp. Mañibo used another car, a Proton with plate number WDS 105. When they reached Makati City, they drove around the vicinity of Park Square 1 of the Ayala Commercial Center. At around 4:30 p.m., P/Insp. Mañibo instructed SPO3 De Castro to park the Honda Civic inside Park Square 1 between the SM Shopping Mall and Dusit Hotel. After parking the car, SPO3 De Castro gave the key and the parking ticket to Sugawara and joined P/Insp. Mañibo who had followed him inside Park Square 1. The latter positioned his vehicle around ten (10) to fifteen (15) meters away from where the Honda Civic was parked.

Meanwhile, Col. Andrada and Sugawara left Camp Crame together and arrived in Dusit Hotel at 3:30 p.m. where they waited for appellant Sumili. Col. Andrada sat at another table near the table of Sugawara. At around 4:30 p.m., appellant Sumili arrived and sat at the table of the latter. After a short while, Sugawara went to Col. Andrada and asked the latter for the money. Col. Andrada handed Sugawara the bag containing the boodle money. Sugawara, with the bag of boodle money, returned to his table and handed the said bag to appellant Sumili. She then went to the ladies' comfort room with the bag, presumably to examine the money. When she returned to the table, she informed Sugawara that the money was in order and that there was no problem. She then called a certain "Mr. Go" through her cellular phone and told him that she had already checked the money and everything seems in order. After speaking with "Mr. Go", she turned to Sugawara who told her to check the parking lot for a

light blue Honda Civic with plate number UUE 737. While appellant Sumili left to check the parking lot, SPO3 De Castro handed Sugawara the keys to the car and the parking ticket. When appellant Sumili came back from the parking lot, Sugawara handed to her the parking ticket and the keys.

At around 9:30 p.m., P/Insp. Mañibo was radioed by Col. Andrada that appellant Sumili would be meeting a certain “Mr. Go” at the parking lot. The said “Mr. Go” would later turn out to be appellant Ruben Tiu. A few minutes later, P/Insp. Mañibo saw appellant Sumili walk past his parked Proton with appellant Tiu and a woman, who appeared to be Chinese, who was carrying a dark green paper bag. The latter would turn out to be appellant Tan Hung. P/Insp. Mañibo, using his radio, confirmed the presence of appellant Sumili in the parking lot as the three appellants walked around the area as if looking for a parked car. After thirty minutes, appellant Sumili left her two companions in the parking lot and proceeded back to Dusit Hotel.

After an hour or around 10:00 p.m., Col. Andrada informed the two team leaders, P/Sr. Insp. Bijasa and P/Insp. Mañibo, that the deal was pushing through. He informed both men that the plan was for appellant Sumili to deactivate the security alarm of the Honda Civic and place the two kilos of shabu inside the baggage compartment. After doing this, she would then get the money inside the car. Col. Andrada instructed his men to make the arrest as soon as appellant Sumili takes out the money from the car.

At 10:30 p.m., P/Insp. Mañibo, who was still stationed inside the parking lot, saw appellant Sumili walk towards the two other appellants and hand to appellant Tiu the car keys. She then led him and appellant Tan Hung towards the Honda Civic and stood in front of the car while appellant Tiu deactivated its security alarm. Afterwards, appellant Tiu opened the driver’s door of the said car, reached inside, and pulled open the lock for the baggage compartment. Appellant Tan Hung then placed the dark green paper bag inside the baggage compartment. Thereafter, appellant Tiu closed the door near the driver’s seat and opened the door by the left passenger’s side. He then took out the paper bag containing the boodle money from inside the car.

As he did this, the policemen swooped upon the three and started arresting appellants Sumili and Tan Hung. Appellant Tiu, on the other hand, attempted to run away, but after a brief scuffle, the policemen were able to subdue him. They recovered from him the paper bag containing the boodle money. Upon their arrest, appellants were read their rights and were brought to Camp Crame in Quezon City for booking and investigation.

On October 2, 1999, P/Sr. Supt. Castillo requested the Director of the Crime Laboratory in Camp Crame to examine the substance suspected to be shabu seized from appellants the previous day. He submitted the following:

EVIDENCE SUBMITTED:

A- One (1) colored green bag labeled St. Michael MARK & SPENCER with the markings Exh. “C” OCT. 1, 1999 10:30 PM RSB containing the following: A-1-One (1) Zest-O box with markings Exh.-A Oct. 1, 1999/ 10:30 PM RSB containing one (1) [C]hinese newspaper and marked as A-1-a used to wrapped (sic) one (1) self-sealing transparent plastic bag with markings Exh. “A” Oct. 1, 1999 10:30PM RSB and marked as A-1-b with 940.2 grams of white crystalline substance.

A-2-One (1) Zestea box with markings Exh.-B Oct. 1, 1999/ 10:30 PM RSB containing one (1) plastic bag colored gray labeled Ledonne SALE and marked as A-2-a containing one (1) self-sealing transparent plastic bag with markings Exh “B” Oct. 1, 1999/ 10:30 PM RSB and marked as A-2-b with 1036.8 grams of white crystalline substance. x x x

PURPOSE OF THE LABORATORY EXAMINATION:

To determine the presence of prohibited and/ or regulated drug. x x x[3]

On the same day, P/Insp. Victor C. Drapate, the Forensic Chemist of the PNP Crime Laboratory, submitted Physical Sciences Report No. D-4930-99 with the following findings:

FINDINGS: Qualitative examination conducted on the abovestated specimen gave QUALITATIVE result to the tests for Methylphenetamine hydrochloride, a regulated drug x x x.[4]

The defense, on the other hand, presented as witness appellant Ruben Tiu. His testimony was adopted by the two other appellants, Rosalina Sumili and Tan Hung.

In his affidavits[5] and in open court, appellant Tiu denied that he and the other appellants sold and delivered shabu to the poseur-buyer on September 30, 1999. He also denied that he is “Mr. Ong” or “Ruben Go” who was allegedly the person whom appellant Sumili spoke to on the phone before the delivery of the substance and the subsequent arrest.

Appellant Tiu claimed that he and appellant Tan Hung were in the parking lot of Park Square 1 on September 30, 1999 to meet with appellant Sumili. They were supposed to go to another place where they could discuss the extension of appellant Tan Hung’s stay here in the Philippines. Allegedly, appellant Sumili owned a travel agency with her daughter. Appellants Tiu and Tan Hung had hoped that she would be able to help them. Moreover, appellant Tiu claimed that he also wanted to discuss with appellant Sumili the sale of glass cutters. He was allegedly interested in buying glass cutters from the latter. While they were in the parking lot, he saw the policemen hurrying towards them and started grabbing appellants Tan Hung and Sumili. He first thought that the men were kidnappers and he started to run away. However, they soon caught up with him. He was not read his rights. He was simply blindfolded and taken to a Makati apartelle where he was threatened to give his captors P3 million. He was not able to identify his captors since he was blindfolded.

Finding for the prosecution, the trial court, thereafter, rendered the appealed Decision on June 16, 2000, the dispositive portion of which reads:

The foregoing considered, the court finds accused Ruben Tiu a.k.a. Ruben Go a.k.a. Mr. Ong, Rosalina Sumili a.k.a. Rose, Tan Hung a.k.a. Emmie Tan, guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the offense charged and, in the absence of any mitigating and aggravating circumstance[s] [they] are sentenced to suffer the penalty of reclusion perpetua and to pay the fine of ten million pesos (Php10,000,000.00) each.

Let the shabu subject of this case be disposed of in the manner provided by law.

SO ORDERED.[6]

Appellants, hence, lodged the present appeal.

In its Brief, the defense cited twenty-two (22) assignments of error, all essentially stating that the court a quo erred in finding appellants guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime charged. [7]

First, the defense argues that there should have been no conviction since the essential elements for the crime of illegal sale of regulated or prohibited drugs were not present.

Only two elements are to be proven for the prosecution of illegal sale of regulated or prohibited drugs: (1) the identity of the buyer and the seller, the object, and the consideration; and (2) the delivery of the thing sold and the payment therefor.[8] Both elements were proven in this case by the testimony of P/Insp. Mañibo:

Q

And while you were inside your vehicle what if anything happened?

A

At around 9:00 o'clock in the evening I received instruction from Supt. Andrada stating that Rose Sumili will see Mr. Ruben Tiu somewhere at the car park of the Park Square 1, Makati City.

Q

And how was the communication made?

A

It was through our handheld radio.

Q

So after that information was relayed to you by Supt. Andrada, what if anything happened?

A

As he relayed that information, I noticed that Rose Sumili passed by my position and later on I noticed that she [was] in [the] company of Mr. Ruben Tiu and one unidentified Chinese[-]looking lady who was later identified as Tan Hung and roaming around the vicinity of Park Square 1, Makati City, as if looking for something.

Q

And how long did these people roam around the Park Square 1, near your car?

A

They roamed I think, more or less, 30 minutes. Then when they saw the vehicle, UUE-737, they stopped there and examined the vehicle and they left again and they continued on walking [within] the vicinity of the car park.

Q

Then after that, what happened?

A

Later on Rose Sumili left the parking area and her two companions were left there also, and I informed Supt.

Andrada that Rose Sumili proceeded to the direction of Dusit Hotel.

Q

And what was the reply of Supt. Andrada?

A

He replied that he sighted already Rosalina Sumili, then later on he informed me that the transaction for the buying of the 2 kilos of shabu was already reached.

Q

And then after that what happened?

A

Supt. Andrada gave me instruction of the possible buy[-]bust scenario.

Q

And what was that instruction?

A

The instruction was that Rose Sumili will put the 2 kilos of shabu at the trunk compartment of the Honda Civic first by disarming the alarm of the vehicle, and open the trunk compartment then placed (sic) the two kilos of shabu and then the money will be taken inside the Honda Civic.

Q

And did that scenario push through?

A

However, based on that instruction[,] Supt. Andrada further cautioned us that Rose Sumili might change the scenario, but arrest can be effected if the buy bust money which was placed inside the car will be taken by anyone of the suspects.

Q

Did the scenario as instructed or told [to] you by Supt. Andrada take place?

A

There [were] little changes ma'am, but it took place.

Q

And how did it take place?

A

And then the three suspects returned back to the car park, then Rose Sumili handed the car key to Ruben Tiu, then after handing the key Rose Sumili stayed in front of the vehicle as if looking... as look out, then Ruben Tiu disarmed the alarm and open the front—left front door of the Honda Civic then pulled the lever and open[ed] the compartment. Tan Hung put a dark bag containing the shabu inside the compartment, and when Ruben Tiu closed the front left door he again open[ed] the left back door and he got hold of the buy bust money which was placed in the backseat of the Honda Civic.

Q

So you said that accused Sumili stayed in front of the vehicle, which vehicle do you refer?

A

I am referring to Honda Civic with Plate No. UUE-737.

Q

You made mention of accused Rose Sumili, Ruben Tiu, and Tan Hung, accused Sumili was just standing in front of the vehicle after handing the key to Ruben Tiu, and then Ruben Tiu opened the compartment and then Tan Hung put the green paper bag containing shabu, and then accused Ruben Tiu opened the back left door and then got the bag containing the money. If you see these persons again, these three persons whom you mentioned again, will you be able to identify the same persons?

A

Yes, ma'am.

Q

So were you able to finally arrest accused Ruben Tiu?

A

After [a] short chase and scuffle I was able to subdue him and put him under arrest, ma'am.

Q

You said a while ago that accused Ruben Tiu was able to get the bag containing the money from inside this Honda Civic car UUE-737. Were you able to recover the money?

A

Yes ma'am.

Q

From whom?

A

From the possession of Ruben Tiu, ma'am.

Q

And you also made mention of the marked money that was used in this operation, how many P500.00 bills?

A

10 pieces of genuine P500.00 bills, ma'am.

Q

Are these 10 pieces of P500.00 bills with you?

A

Yes, ma'am.

Q

Will you show them to the Honorable Court?

A

Yes, ma'am.

Q

And these money included to what you have recovered to accused Ruben Tiu?

A

Yes, ma'am.

(to the Court)

May I request, Your Honor, that the 10 pieces...

(to witness)

Q

By the way, why did you say that these are the same money that were used and confiscated from Ruben Tiu, Mr. Witness?

A

Actually, ma'am, it was the same given to me by Supt. Alcantara which I prepared, the boodle money, and in fact I recorded the serial numbers and I placed my initial[s] before we left our office, ma'am.

Q

Where did you place your initials?

A

I placed my initials at the back of that genuine money, ma'am.

Q

Will you look at these P500.00 bills and tell us - the Honorable Court where is that initials of yours placed?

A

(Witness going over the marked money)

It was placed at the back portion, ma'am.

Q

Which one?

A

This one, ma'am. (Witness pointing to his initial at the back portion of the money)

Q

So this EMM?

A

Yes, ma'am.

Q

What does this EMM stands for?

A

It stands for my name, Emerson Maniego Mañibo, ma'am.[9]

The shabu subject of the buy-bust operation and the boodle money were presented in court and marked in evidence as Exhibits "A," "B," "C," and Exhibits "J-1" to "J-20," respectively. P/Insp. Victor C. Drapete, the forensic chemist of the Philippine National Police Crime Laboratory who examined the shabu obtained during the buy-bust operation, confirmed in his Physical Sciences Report No. D-4930-99[10] and in his testimony[11] during the trial that the specimen indeed contains Methylamphetamine hydrochloride.

On the other hand, the defense disputes these findings and alleges that the court a quo erred when it held that the substance seized from appellants was indeed shabu. The defense points out that the forensic chemist only examined five percent (5%) of the seized substance, claiming that a small portion of the said substance cannot be made a representative of the whole. Such an argument, however, makes obvious the fact that the defense is clutching at straws. We have clearly stated before that a sample taken from the substance seized from the accused is logically presumed to be representative of all the contents of the package unless proven otherwise by the defense.[12] The package seized from appellants in the case herein contained 1,977 grams of shabu. Therefore, a positive result for the presence of Methamphetamine hydrochloride in five percent (5%) thereof is sufficient evidence that there are 1, 977 grams of shabu in the package from which the sample was taken.

Second, the defense questions the credibility of the prosecution witnesses and alleges that the court a quo erred in relying upon their testimonies.

At this point, we find apropos the doctrine that the assessment of witnesses and their testimonies is a matter best undertaken by the trial court, which had the opportunity to observe the demeanor, conduct or attitude of the witnesses. The findings of the trial court on this point are accorded great respect and will not be reversed on

appeal, unless it overlooked substantial facts and circumstances which, if considered, would materially affect the result of the case.[13] Furthermore, appellant Tiu's allegation that the PNP had been holding a grudge against him for embarrassing them during a failed operation the previous year does not inspire belief. This allegation cannot be construed as a clear and convincing evidence that the buy-bust team was driven by an improper motive when it arrested the appellants. Neither was it shown that the members of the buy-bust team were not properly performing their duty. Hence, the prosecution witnesses' testimonies on the operation deserve our full faith and credit.[14]

Third, the defense claims that conspiracy was not proven.

We are not persuaded. The records clearly reveal that appellants' behavior during the entrapment shows that there was conspiracy among them. Direct proof is not essential to the establishment of conspiracy, as it may be inferred from the acts of the accused before, during, and after the commission of the crime. All such acts imply conspiracy when they indubitably point to or indicate a joint purpose, a concert of action and a community of interest.[15]

Finally, appellant Tiu insists that he was not arrested pursuant to a valid buy-bust operation. He vigorously claims that on the day he was arrested, a group of men swooped down upon them, took him to a Makati apartelle, and demanded a huge amount of money from him.

We cannot find in the records the names or even just the descriptions of these alleged captors. We are, moreover, aware that defense of frame-up or huli-dap is commonly used in buy-bust cases. True, this defense is difficult to substantiate, but as held in *People v. Hajili*,[16] once the elements of a crime have been established, the frame-up or huli-dap must be clearly proven. In this case, the defense failed to do so.

With respect to the penalty imposed by the trial court, appellants were charged and convicted for the sale of a prohibited drug under Section 15, Article III of Republic Act No. 6425, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659. The law provides that for said offense, the penalty imposed shall be reclusion perpetua to death and a fine ranging from five hundred thousand pesos (P500,000) to ten million pesos (P10,000,000). The trial court, therefore, correctly pronounced that appellants shall suffer the penalty of reclusion perpetua and pay the fine of ten million pesos (P10,000,000) each and no modification is necessary thereon.

Time and again, we have condemned the illegal drug trade for being a scourge to our society. Drug pushers are merchants of death[17] whose commodities cause so much physical, mental, and moral pain not only to the immediate victims of their greed, but also, more especially, to the families of their victims.[18]

IN VIEW WHEREOF, the appeal is DENIED and the Decision of the Regional Trial Court of Makati City, Branch 143, in Criminal Case No. 00-050, convicting appellants Ruben Tiu, Rosalina Sumili and Tan Hung for violation of Section 15, Article III of Republic Act No. 6425, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659, and sentencing them to suffer the penalty of reclusion perpetua and to pay the fine of Ten Million Pesos (P10,000,000) each, is AFFIRMED in toto. Costs de oficio.

SO ORDERED.

Davide, Jr., C.J., (Chairman), Ynares-Santiago, and Carpio, JJ., concur.
Panganiban, J., on official leave.

[1] Rollo, pp. 10-11.

[2] Exhibits J-1 to J-10; Records, pp. 141-142.

- [3] Records, pp. 23-24.
- [4] Exhibit “H”; Records, p. 139.
- [5] Records, pp. 30-34.
- [6] RTC Decision, p. 6; Rollo, p. 31.
- [7] Appellant’s Brief; Records, pp. 157-160.
- [8] *People v. Mala*, G.R. No. 152351, September 18, 2003.
- [9] TSN, February 11, 2000, pp. 19-26.
- [10] *supra* note 4.
- [11] TSN, February 4, 2000.
- [12] *People v. Tang Wai Lan*, 276 SCRA 24, 33 (1997).
- [13] *People v. Hajili, et al.*, G.R. Nos. 149872-73, March 14, 2003 citing *People v. Gonzales, Jr.*, G.R. Nos. 143143-44, January 15, 2002; *People v. Zacarias*, G.R. No. 138990, January 30, 2002; and *People v. Tabones*, 304 SCRA 781 (1999).
- [14] *People v. Valencia*, G.R. No. 143032, October 14, 2002.
- [15] *People v. Khor*, 307 SCRA 295 (1999).
- [16] *supra* note 13.
- [17] *People v. Abedes*, 146 SCRA 132, 137 (1986).
- [18] *People v. Requiz*, November 19, 1999.

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