

## AMADO ALVARADO GARCIA, PETITIONER, VS. PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, RESPONDENT.

*G.R. No. 171951. August 28, 2009*

Ponente: QUISUMBING, J.

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### QUISUMBING, J.:

For review on certiorari is the Decision[1] dated December 20, 2005 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R.-CR No. 27544 affirming the Decision[2] dated July 2, 2003 of the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Branch 9, Aparri, Cagayan, which found petitioner Amado Garcia guilty beyond reasonable doubt of homicide. Contested as well is the appellate court's Resolution[3] dated March 13, 2006 denying petitioner's Motion for Reconsideration.[4]

On February 10, 2000, petitioner was charged with murder in an Information that alleges as follows:

The undersigned, Provincial Prosecutor accuses AMADO GARCIA @ Manding of the crime of Murder, defined and penalized under Article [248] of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659, committed as follows:

That on or about September 29, 1999, in the municipality of Aparri, province of Cagayan, and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, armed with a bottle, with intent to kill, with evident premeditation and with treachery, did then and there wilfully, unlawfully and feloniously assault, attack, box, club and maul one Manuel K. Chy, inflicting upon the latter fatal injuries which caused his death.

CONTRARY TO LAW.[5]

Upon arraignment, petitioner entered a not guilty plea. Thereafter, trial on the merits ensued.

The factual antecedents are as follows:

At approximately 11:00 a.m. on September 26, 1999, petitioner, Fidel Foz, Jr. and Armando Foz had a drinking spree at the apartment unit of Bogie Tacuboy, which was adjacent to the house of Manuel K. Chy. At around 7:00 p.m., Chy appealed for the group to quiet down as the noise from the videoke machine was blaring. It was not until Chy requested a second time that the group acceded. Unknown to Chy, this left petitioner irate and petitioner was heard to have said in the Ilocano vernacular, "Dayta a Manny napangas makaala caniac dayta." (This Manny is arrogant, I will lay a hand on him.)[6]

On September 28, 1999, the group met again to celebrate the marriage of Ador Tacuboy not far from Chy's apartment. Maya Mabbun advised the group to stop singing lest they be told off again. This further infuriated petitioner who remarked, "Talaga a napangas ni Manny saan ko a pagbayagen daytoy," meaning, "This Manny is really arrogant, I will not let him live long."[7]

Yet again, at around 12:00 p.m. on September 29, 1999, the group convened at the house of Foz and Garcia. There, petitioner, Foz, Jr. and Fred Rillon mused over the drinking session on the 26[th] and 28[th] of September and the confrontation with Chy. Enraged at the memory, petitioner blurted out "Talaga a napangas dayta a

day[t]oy a Manny ikabbut ko ita." (This Manny is really arrogant, I will finish him off today.))[8] Later that afternoon, the group headed to the store of Adela dela Cruz where they drank until petitioner proposed that they move to Punta. On their way to Punta, the group passed by the store of Aurelia Esquibel, Chy's sister, and there, decided to have some drinks.

At this juncture, petitioner ordered Esquibel to call on Chy who, incidentally, was coming out of his house at the time. Upon being summoned, the latter approached petitioner who suddenly punched him in the face. Chy cried out, "Bakit mo ako sinuntok hindi ka naman [inaano]?" (Why did you box me[?] I'm not doing anything to you.))[9] But petitioner kept on assaulting him. Foz attempted to pacify petitioner but was himself hit on the nose while Chy continued to parry the blows. Petitioner reached for a bottle of beer, and with it, struck the lower back portion of Chy's head. Then, Foz shoved Chy causing the latter to fall.

When Chy found an opportunity to escape, he ran towards his house and phoned his wife Josefina to call the police. Chy told Josefina about the mauling and complained of difficulty in breathing. Upon reaching Chy's house, the policemen knocked five times but nobody answered. Josefina arrived minutes later, unlocked the door and found Chy lying unconscious on the kitchen floor, salivating. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the hospital. The autopsy confirmed that Chy died of myocardial infarction.

After trial in due course, the RTC of Aparri, Cagayan (Branch 9) found petitioner guilty beyond reasonable doubt of homicide. The dispositive portion of the RTC decision reads:

WHEREFORE, the Court renders judgment:

1) Finding AMADO GARCIA guilty beyond reasonable doubt for the crime of HOMICIDE defined and penalized by Article 249 of the Revised Penal Code and after applying in his favor the provisions of the Indeterminate Sentence Law, hereby sentences him to suffer an indeterminate prison term of TEN (10) YEARS OF PRISION MAYOR, as minimum, to FOURTEEN (14) YEARS and EIGHT (8) MONTHS of RECLUSION TEMPORAL as maximum;

2) Ordering him to pay the heirs of Manuel Chy the amount of FIFTY THOUSAND (P50,000.00) PESOS, as death indemnity; TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND (P200,000.00) PESOS, representing expenses for the wake and burial; THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND (P300,000.00) PESOS, as moral damages; and THREE HUNDRED THIRTY[-]TWO THOUSAND (P332,000.00) PESOS, as loss of earning, plus the cost of this suit.

SO ORDERED.[10]

On appeal, the Court of Appeals affirmed the conviction in a Decision dated December 20, 2005, thus:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, appeal is hereby [DENIED] and the July 2, 2003 Decision of the Regional Trial Court of Aparri, Cagayan, Branch [9], in Criminal Case No. 08-1185, is hereby AFFIRMED IN TOTO.

SO ORDERED.[11]

Petitioner moved for reconsideration but his motion was denied in a Resolution dated March 13, 2006.

Hence, the instant appeal of petitioner on the following grounds:

I.

THE APPELLATE COURT ERRED IN AFFIRMING THE RULING OF THE TRIAL COURT THAT PETITIONER IS THE ONE RESPONSIBLE FOR INFLICTING THE SLIGHT PHYSICAL INJURIES SUSTAINED BY THE DECEASED MANUEL CHY.

II.

THE APPELLATE COURT ERRED IN AFFIRMING THE RULING OF THE TRIAL COURT FINDING PETITIONER LIABLE FOR THE DEATH OF MANUEL CHY DESPITE THE FACT THAT THE CAUSE OF DEATH IS MYOCARDIAL INFARCTION, A NON-VIOLENT RELATED CAUSE OF DEATH.

III.

THE APPELLATE COURT ERRED IN AFFIRMING THE RULING OF THE TRIAL COURT WHICH CONCLUDED THAT THE HEART FAILURE OF MANUEL CHY WAS DUE TO "FRIGHT OR SHOCK CAUSED BY THE MALTREATMENT."

IV.

BOTH THE APPELLATE TRIBUNAL AND THE TRIAL COURT ERRED IN NOT ACQUITTING THE PETITIONER ON THE GROUND OF REASONABLE DOUBT.[12]

In essence, the issue is whether or not petitioner is liable for the death of Manuel Chy.

In his undated Memorandum,[13] petitioner insists on a review of the factual findings of the trial court because the judge who penned the decision was not the same judge who heard the prosecution evidence. He adds that the Court of Appeals had wrongly inferred from, misread and overlooked certain relevant and undisputed facts, which, if properly considered, would justify a different conclusion.[14]

At the onset, petitioner denies laying a hand on Manuel Chy. Instead, he implicates Armando Foz as the author of the victim's injuries. Corollarily, he challenges the credibility of Armando's brother, Fidel, who testified concerning his sole culpability. Basically, petitioner disowns responsibility for Chy's demise since the latter was found to have died of myocardial infarction. In support, he amplifies the testimony of Dr. Cleofas C. Antonio[15] that Chy's medical condition could have resulted in his death anytime. Petitioner asserts that, at most, he could be held liable for slight physical injuries because none of the blows he inflicted on Chy was fatal.

The Office of the Solicitor General reiterates the trial court's assessment of the witnesses and its conclusion that the beating of Chy was the proximate cause of his death.

Upon careful consideration of the evidence presented by the prosecution as well as the defense in this case, we are unable to consider the petitioner's appeal with favor.

The present petition was brought under Rule 45 of the Rules of Court, yet, petitioner raises questions of fact. Indeed, it is opportune to reiterate that this Court is not the proper forum from which to secure a re-evaluation of factual issues, save where the factual findings of the trial court do not find support in the evidence on record or where the judgment appealed from was based on a misapprehension of facts.[16] Neither exception applies in the instant case as would justify a departure from the established rule.

Further, petitioner invokes a recognized exception to the rule on non-interference with the determination of the credibility of witnesses. He points out that the judge who penned the decision is not the judge who received the evidence and heard the witnesses. But while the situation obtains in this case, the exception does not. The records reveal that Judge Conrado F. Manauis inhibited from the proceedings upon motion of no less than the petitioner himself. Consequently, petitioner cannot seek protection from the alleged adverse consequence his own doing might have caused. For us to allow petitioner relief based on this argument would be to sanction a travesty of the Rules which was designed to further, rather than subdue, the ends of justice.

We reiterate, the efficacy of a decision is not necessarily impaired by the fact that the ponente only took over from a colleague who had earlier presided over the trial. It does not follow that the judge who was not present during

the trial, or a fraction thereof, cannot render a valid and just decision.[17] Here, Judge Andres Q. Cipriano took over the case after Judge Manauis recused himself from the proceedings. Even so, Judge Cipriano not only heard the evidence for the defense, he also had an opportunity to observe Dr. Cleofas Antonio who was recalled to clarify certain points in his testimony. Worth mentioning, too, is the fact that Judge Cipriano presided during the taking of the testimonies of Fidel Foz, Jr. and Alvin Pascua on rebuttal.

In any case, it is not unusual for a judge who did not try a case in its entirety to decide it on the basis of the records on hand.[18] He can rely on the transcripts of stenographic notes and calibrate the testimonies of witnesses in accordance with their conformity to common experience, knowledge and observation of ordinary men. Such reliance does not violate substantive and procedural due process of law.[19]

The Autopsy Report on the body of Manuel Chy disclosed the following injuries:

#### POSTMORTEM FINDINGS

Body embalmed, well preserved.

Cyanotic lips and nailbeds.

Contusions, dark bluish red: 4.5 x 3.0 cms., lower portion of the left ear; 4.0 x 2.8 cms., left inferior mastoid region; 2.5 x 1.1 cms., upper lip; 2.7 x 1.0 cms., lower lip; 5.8 x 5.5 cms., dorsum of left hand.

Lacerated wound, 0.8 cm., involving mucosal surface of the upper lip on the right side.

No fractures noted.

Brain with tortuous vessels. Cut sections show congestion. No hemorrhage noted.

Heart, with abundant fat adherent on its epicardial surface. Cut sections show a reddish brown myocardium with an area of hyperemia on the whole posterior wall, the lower portion of the anterior wall and the inferior portion of the septum. Coronary arteries, gritty, with the caliber of the lumen reduced by approximately thirty (30%) percent. Histopathological findings show mild fibrosis of the myocardium.

Lungs, pleural surfaces, shiny; with color ranging from dark red to dark purple. Cut sections show a gray periphery with reddish brown central portion with fluid oozing on pressure with some reddish frothy materials noted. Histopathological examinations show pulmonary edema and hemorrhages.

Kidneys, purplish with glistening capsule. Cut sections show congestion. Histopathological examinations show mild lymphocytic infiltration.

Stomach, one-half (1/2) full with brownish and whitish materials and other partially digested food particles.

CAUSE OF DEATH: - Myocardial Infarction. (Emphasis supplied.)[20]

At first, petitioner denied employing violence against Chy. In his undated Memorandum, however, he admitted inflicting injuries on the deceased, albeit, limited his liability to slight physical injuries. He argues that the superficial wounds sustained by Chy did not cause his death.[21] Quite the opposite, however, a conscientious analysis of the records would acquaint us with the causal connection between the death of the victim and the mauling that preceded it. In open court, Dr. Antonio identified the immediate cause of Chy's myocardial infarction:

ATTY. TUMARU:

Q:

You diagnose[d] the cause of death to be myocardial infarction that is because there was an occlusion in the

artery that prevented the flowing of blood into the heart?

A:

That was not exactly seen at the autopsy table but it changes, the hyperemic changes [in] the heart muscle were the one[s] that made us [think] or gave strong conclusion that it was myocardial infarction, and most likely the cause is occlusion of the blood vessels itself. (Emphasis supplied.)[22]

By definition, coronary occlusion[23] is the complete obstruction of an artery of the heart, usually from progressive arteriosclerosis[24] or the thickening and loss of elasticity of the arterial walls. This can result from sudden emotion in a person with an existing arteriosclerosis; otherwise, a heart attack will not occur.[25] Dr. Jessica Romero testified on direct examination relative to this point:

ATTY. CALASAN:

Q:

Could an excitement trigger a myocardial infarction?

A:

Excitement, I cannot say that if the patient is normal[;] that is[,] considering that the patient [does] not have any previous [illness] of hypertension, no previous history of myocardial [ischemia], no previous [arteriosis] or hardening of the arteries, then excitement [cannot] cause myocardial infarction. (Emphasis supplied.)[26]

The Autopsy Report bears out that Chy has a mild fibrosis of the myocardium[27] caused by a previous heart attack. Said fibrosis[28] or formation of fibrous tissue or scar tissue rendered the middle and thickest layer of the victim's heart less elastic and vulnerable to coronary occlusion from sudden emotion. This causation is elucidated by the testimony of Dr. Antonio:

ATTY. CALASAN:

Q:

You said that the physical injuries will cause no crisis on the part of the victim, Doctor?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

And [these] physical injuries [were] caused by the [boxing] on the mouth and[/]or hitting on the nape by a bottle?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

On the part of the deceased, that [was] caused definitely by emotional crisis, Doctor?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

And because of this emotional crisis the heart palpitated so fast, so much so, that there was less oxygen being pumped by the heart?

A:

Yes, sir.

Q:

And definitely that caused his death, Doctor?

A:

Yes, sir, it could be.[29]

In concurrence, Dr. Antonio A. Paguirigan also testified as follows:

ATTY. CALASAN:

Q: I will repeat the question... Dr. Antonio testified that the deceased died because of the blow that was inflicted, it triggered the death of the deceased, do you agree with his findings, Doctor?

A: Not probably the blow but the reaction sir.

Q: So you agree with him, Doctor?

A: It could be, sir.

Q: You agree with him on that point, Doctor?

A: Yes, sir.[30]

It can be reasonably inferred from the foregoing statements that the emotional strain from the beating aggravated Chy's delicate constitution and led to his death. The inevitable conclusion then surfaces that the myocardial infarction suffered by the victim was the direct, natural and logical consequence of the felony that petitioner had intended to commit.

Article 4(1) of the Revised Penal Code states that criminal liability shall be incurred "by any person committing a felony (delito) although the wrongful act done be different from that which he intended." The essential requisites for the application of this provision are: (a) the intended act is felonious; (b) the resulting act is likewise a felony; and (c) the unintended albeit graver wrong was primarily caused by the actor's wrongful acts.[31]

In this case, petitioner was committing a felony when he boxed the victim and hit him with a bottle. Hence, the fact that Chy was previously afflicted with a heart ailment does not alter petitioner's liability for his death. Ingrained in our jurisprudence is the doctrine laid down in the case of *United States v. Brobst*[32] that:

x x x where death results as a direct consequence of the use of illegal violence, the mere fact that the diseased or weakened condition of the injured person contributed to his death, does not relieve the illegal aggressor of criminal responsibility.[33]

In the same vein, *United States v. Rodriguez*[34] enunciates that:

x x x although the assaulted party was previously affected by some internal malady, if, because of a blow given with the hand or the foot, his death was hastened, beyond peradventure he is responsible therefor who produced the cause for such acceleration as the result of a voluntary and unlawfully inflicted injury. (Emphasis supplied.)[35]

In this jurisdiction, a person committing a felony is responsible for all the natural and logical consequences resulting from it although the unlawful act performed is different from the one he intended;[36] "el que es causa de la causa es causa del mal causado" (he who is the cause of the cause is the cause of the evil caused).[37] Thus, the circumstance that petitioner did not intend so grave an evil as the death of the victim does not exempt him from criminal liability. Since he deliberately committed an act prohibited by law, said condition simply mitigates his guilt in accordance with Article 13(3)[38] of the Revised Penal Code.[39] Nevertheless, we must appreciate as mitigating circumstance in favor of petitioner the fact that the physical injuries he inflicted on the victim, could not have resulted naturally and logically, in the actual death of the victim, if the latter's heart was in good condition.

Considering that the petitioner has in his favor the mitigating circumstance of lack of intention to commit so grave a wrong as that committed without any aggravating circumstance to offset it, the imposable penalty should be in the minimum period, that is, reclusion temporal in its minimum period,[40] or anywhere from twelve (12) years and one (1) day to fourteen years (14) years and eight (8) months. Applying the Indeterminate Sentence Law,[41] the trial court properly imposed upon petitioner an indeterminate penalty of ten (10) years of prisión mayor, as minimum, to fourteen (14) years and eight (8) months of reclusion temporal as maximum.

We shall, however, modify the award of damages to the heirs of Manuel Chy for his loss of earning capacity in the amount of P332,000. In fixing the indemnity, the victim's actual income at the time of death and probable life expectancy are taken into account. For this purpose, the Court adopts the formula used in *People v. Malinao*: [42]

Net earning capacity =

$\frac{2}{3} \times (80 - \text{age of the victim at the time of this death})$

$\times$

a reasonable portion of the annual net income which would have been received by the heirs for support. [43]

Branch 9 of the Aparri, Cagayan RTC took judicial notice of the salary which Manuel Chy was receiving as a sheriff of the court. At the time of his death, Chy was 51 years old and was earning a gross monthly income of P10,600 or a gross annual income of P127,200. But, in view of the victim's delicate condition, the trial court reduced his life expectancy to 10 years. It also deducted P7,000 from Chy's salary as reasonable living expense. However, the records are bereft of showing that the heirs of Chy submitted evidence to substantiate actual living expenses. And in the absence of proof of living expenses, jurisprudence [44] approximates net income to be 50% of the gross income. Accordingly, by reason of his death, the heirs of Manuel Chy should be awarded P1,229,600 as loss of earning capacity, computed as follows:

Net earning capacity

$= \frac{2}{3} \times (80 - 51) \times [P127,200 - \frac{1}{2} (P127,200)]$

$= \frac{2}{3} \times (29) \times P63,600$

$= 19 \frac{1}{3} \times P63,600$

$= P1,229,600$

We sustain the trial court's grant of funerary expense of P200,000 as stipulated by the parties [45] and civil indemnity of P50,000. [46] Anent moral damages, the same is mandatory in cases of murder and homicide, without need of allegation and proof other than the death of the victim. [47] However, in obedience to the controlling case law, the amount of moral damages should be reduced to P50,000.

WHEREFORE, the Decision dated December 20, 2005 and the Resolution dated March 13, 2006 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R.-CR No. 27544 are AFFIRMED with MODIFICATION in that the award of moral damages is reduced to P50,000. Petitioner is further ordered to indemnify the heirs of Manuel K. Chy P50,000 as civil indemnity; P200,000, representing expenses for the wake and burial; and P1,229,600 as loss of earning capacity. No pronouncement as to costs.

SO ORDERED.

Carpio Morales, Brion, Del Castillo, and Abad, JJ., concur.

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[1] Rollo, pp. 51-65. Penned by Associate Justice Vicente Q. Roxas, with Associate Justices Conrado M. Vasquez, Jr. and Juan Q. Enriquez, Jr. concurring.

[2] CA rollo, pp. 93-108. Penned by Presiding Judge Andres Q. Cipriano.

[3] Rollo, p. 101.

[4] Id. at 69-98.

[5] Records, p. 2.

[6] TSN, September 24, 2001, p. 8.

[7] Id. at 10.

[8] Id. at 11.

[9] Id. at 21.

[10] CA rollo, pp. 107-108.

[11] Rollo, p. 65.

[12] Id. at 188.

[13] Id. at 180-220.

[14] Id. at 190.

[15] TSN, September 16, 2002, pp. 15-19.

[16] Lascano v. People, G.R. No. 166241, September 7, 2007, 532 SCRA 515, 524.

[17] Resayo v. People, G.R. No. 154502, April 27, 2007, 522 SCRA 391, 401-402.

[18] Decasa v. Court of Appeals, G.R. No. 172184, July 10, 2007, 527 SCRA 267, 283.

[19] Id. at 284.

[20] Records, p. 260.

[21] Rollo, p. 216.

[22] TSN, September 26, 2001, pp. 10-11.

[23] R. Sloane, The Sloane-Dorland Annotated Medical-Legal Dictionary 506 (1987).

[24] Id. at 60.

[25] Id. at 506.

[26] TSN, August 5, 2002, p. 39.

[27] Supra note 23, at 60.

Myocardium is the middle and thickest layer of the heart wall, composed of cardiac muscle.

[28] Id. at 285.

[29] TSN, September 16, 2002, pp. 20-21.

[30] TSN, June 20, 2002, p. 44.

[31] People v. Ortega, Jr., G.R. No. 116736, July 24, 1997, 276 SCRA 166, 182.

[32] 14 Phil. 310 (1909).

[33] Id. at 318.

[34] 23 Phil. 22 (1912).

[35] Id. at 25.

[36] Quinto v. Andres, G.R. No. 155791, March 16, 2005, 453 SCRA 511, 520.

[37] People v. Ural, No. L-30801, March 27, 1974, 56 SCRA 138, 144.

[38] ART. 13. Mitigating circumstances. - The following are mitigating circumstances:

x x x x

3. That the offender had no intention to commit so grave a wrong as that committed.

x x x x

[39] People v. Ilustre, 54 Phil. 594, 599 (1930).

[40] Article 64(2) of the Revised Penal Code provides:

ART. 64. Rules for the application of penalties which contain three periods. - In cases in which the penalties prescribed by law contains three periods, whether it be a single divisible penalty or composed of three different penalties; each one of which forms a period in accordance with the provisions of Articles 76 and 77, the courts shall observe for the application of the penalty the following rules, according to whether there are or are no mitigating or aggravating circumstances:

x x x x

2. When only a mitigating circumstance is present in the commission of the act, they shall impose the penalty in its minimum period.

x x x x

[41] Act No. 4103.

SECTION 1. Hereafter, in imposing a prison sentence for an offense punished by the Revised Penal Code, or its amendments, the court shall sentence the accused to an indeterminate sentence the maximum term of which shall be that which, in view of the attending circumstances, could be properly imposed under the rules of the said Code,

and the minimum which shall be within the range of the penalty next lower to that prescribed by the Code for the offense; and if the offense is punished by any other law, the court shall sentence the accused to an indeterminate sentence, the maximum term of which shall not exceed the maximum fixed by said law and minimum shall not be less than the minimum term prescribed by the same. (As amended by Act No. 4225.)

[42] G.R. No. 128148, February 16, 2004, 423 SCRA 34.

[43] Id. at 54.

[44] Id. at 55.

[45] TSN, October 17, 2001, p. 7.

[46] People v. Ducabo, G.R. No. 175594, September 28, 2007, 534 SCRA 458, 476.

[47] Id. at 477.

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