

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. WILLIAM SABALBERINO Y ABULENCIA, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.*G.R. No. 241088. June 03, 2019*

Ponente: PERALTA, J.

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Before the Court is an ordinary appeal filed by accused-appellant, William Sabalberino, assailing the Decision[1] and Resolution[2] of the Court of Appeals (CA), dated May 31, 2017 and January 29, 2018, respectively, in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 02230. The CA Decision affirmed, with modification, the February 24, 2016 Decision[3] of the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Tacloban City, Branch 6, in Criminal Case No. 2005-08-446, finding herein accused-appellant guilty of the crime of parricide and imposing upon him the penalty of reclusion perpetua and ordering him to pay damages. The CA Resolution denied accused-appellant's Motion for Reconsideration.

The antecedents are as follows:

On August 19, 2005, the City Prosecutor of Tacloban filed an Information with the RTC of Tacloban City, charging accused-appellant with the crime of Parricide. The accusatory portion of the Information reads as follows:

That on or about the 17[th] day of August, 2005, in the City of Tacloban, Philippines and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, did then and there, willfully, unlawfully and feloniously stab his wife DELIA FERNANDEZ-SABALBERINO with a knife, hitting her on the chest and heart thereby inflicting upon the person of Delia Fernandez-Sabalberino a mortal wound which was the direct and immediate cause of her death

CONTRARY TO LAW.[4]

Upon arraignment on March 21, 2006, accused-appellant entered a plea of not guilty.[5] Subsequently, trial on the merits ensued.

The evidence for the prosecution established that herein accused-appellant, William Sabalberino (William) and the victim, Delia Fernandez-Sabalberino (Delia) were husband and wife who used to live together at Barangay 59, Picas, Sagkahan, Tacloban City. William was employed as a painter, while Delia worked as a laundrywoman. They have five (5) children, namely, Wendel, Wedylyn, William, Angela and Jessica. Around one o'clock in the morning of August 17, 2005, Angela and Jessica were roused from their sleep when they heard their parents shouting at each other. They were prompted to get out of bed and, thereafter, stood by the door of their room while witnessing their parents argue with each other. While in the middle of their quarrel, William punched Delia hitting her face. Angela and Jessica then rushed to their mother and embraced her. Thereafter, William went to the kitchen to get a knife and proceeded to stab Delia hitting her chest below the armpit while the latter was holding Angela and Jessica. Delia, on the other hand, managed to stand and walk towards the door of their house. However, before reaching the door, she decided to walk back towards the bed but before she could make it to the bed she collapsed. William then went to her aid, embraced her and cried. He asked his children to call for help,

but Delia died soon thereafter.

William, on his part, did not deny having stabbed Delia. However, he claimed that the stabbing was accidental. William alleged that in the afternoon of August 16, 2005, he arrived home tired and took a nap while waiting for his daughters to prepare their meal. He woke up around 6:30 in the evening and took dinner with his children. When he inquired about his wife, their children told him that she was still washing clothes. After eating, he went to sleep inside the master's bedroom. Around midnight, he woke up to urinate. Upon turning on the lights and stepping out of their bedroom, he saw his wife half naked with a completely naked man on top of her. Angry at what he saw, he went to the kitchen to get a knife and approached the two. His wife and the man then stood up, and the latter tried to gain possession of the knife. They grappled. When William was able to take control of the knife, he tried to stab the man but, unfortunately, he accidentally hit his wife who at that time stood between him and the man. The man then picked up his clothes and hurriedly jumped out of their window. William tried to run after him, but he came to the aid of his wife when he saw her fall down. He then asked his children to call for help, but his wife died before help arrived.

After trial, the RTC rendered judgment convicting accused-appellant as charged. The dispositive portion of the RTC Decision reads as follows:

WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing considerations, this Court finds accused WILLIAM SABALBERINO y ABULENCIA guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of Parricide, and sentences him to suffer the penalty of imprisonment of RECLUSION PERPETUA; and, to pay the heirs of the victim, Delia Fernandez Sabalberino, P75,000.00 as civil indemnity, and P50,000.00 for moral damages. To pay the Costs.

SO ORDERED.[6]

The RTC ruled that after accused-appellant admitted that it was he who stabbed his wife, the trial court, nonetheless, was not convinced that the stabbing was accidental because the evidence was contrary to accused-appellant's claim that his intention was to stab the man whom he caught as having sexual intercourse with his wife. The RTC gave credence to the separate testimonies of the daughters of accused-appellant and the victim that they did not see any man having sexual intercourse with their mother immediately prior to the stabbing incident and that their parents were, in fact, in the middle of an argument and quarrel when their father stabbed their mother.

Aggrieved by the ruling of the RTC, accused-appellant appealed to the CA praying for his acquittal and the reversal of the assailed RTC Decision. In his Appellant's Brief, accused-appellant reiterated his defense that the stabbing of his wife was accidental. Reiterating the provisions of Article 247 of the Revised Penal Code (RPC), accused-appellant stood by his claim that he caught his wife having carnal knowledge with another man; that his intention was to kill that man with a knife but since his wife stood between him and the man, it was his wife who was accidentally stabbed. Accused-appellant also contends that, even granting that he failed to prove his innocence under Article 247 of the RPC, the trial court, nonetheless, erred in imposing the penalty of reclusion perpetua as it failed to appreciate the mitigating circumstances of: (1) having acted upon an impulse so powerful as naturally to have produced passion or obfuscation; (2) voluntary surrender; and (3) lack of intention to commit so grave a wrong as that committed.

In its assailed Decision, the CA affirmed the conviction of accused-appellant, but modified the judgment of the RTC by ordering accused-appellant to pay the heirs of Delia temperate and exemplary damages, an increased amount of moral damages and interest on the monetary awards. The CA disposed, thus:

WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, the appeal is DENIED. The Decision dated February 24, 2016 of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 6, Tacloban City, in Criminal Case No. 2005-08-446, finding appellant William

Sabalberino y Abulencia, guilty beyond reasonable doubt [of] the crime of Parricide is AFFIRMED with the following MODIFICATIONS:

1)

The award of moral damages is increased to P75,000.00;

2)

Appellant is ordered to indemnify the victim's heirs temperate damages in the amount of P50,000.00 and exemplary damages in the amount of P75,000.00; and

3)

Interest at the rate of 6% per annum should be imposed on all damages awarded from the date of finality of this decision until fully paid.

The rest of the decision not inconsistent with these pronouncements STANDS.

SO ORDERED.[7]

The CA held that the prosecution was able to prove the presence of all the elements of parricide and that accused-appellant failed to convince the appellate court of the merits of his defenses.

Accused-appellant filed a Motion for Reconsideration,[8] reiterating his defenses, but the CA denied it in its Resolution[9] dated January 29, 2018.

Thus, on March 16, 2018, accused-appellant, through counsel, filed a Notice of Appeal[10] manifesting his intention to appeal the CA Decision to this Court.

In its Resolution[11] dated June 22, 2018, the CA noted and gave due course to accused-appellant's Notice of Appeal and directed its Judicial Records Division to transmit the entire records of the case to this Court.

Hence, this appeal was instituted.

In a Resolution[12] dated November 5, 2018, this Court, among others, notified the parties that they may file their respective supplemental briefs, if they so desire.

In its Manifestation and Motion,[13] filed on January 22, 2019, the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) manifested that, in lieu of a Supplemental Brief, it adopts its Appellee's Brief filed before the CA as it "already sufficiently affirms accused-appellant's guilt of the crime of Parricide." The OSG prayed that: (1) it be excused from filing a Supplemental Brief; (2) the assailed CA Decision be affirmed in toto; and (3) accused-appellant's appeal be dismissed for lack of merit.

In the same manner, accused-appellant filed a Manifestation[14] submitting that he is adopting the Brief for the Accused-Appellant, which he filed with the CA, as his Supplemental Brief since the Brief filed with the CA had "adequately presented and discussed all the issues" respecting his innocence.

The basic issue for the Court's resolution in the present appeal is whether or not the CA correctly upheld the conviction of herein accused-appellant, William Sabalberino, for parricide.

The Court rules in the affirmative.

Parricide is committed when: (1) a person is killed; (2) the deceased is killed by the accused; (3) the deceased is the father, mother, or child, whether legitimate or illegitimate, or a legitimate other ascendants or other descendants, or the legitimate spouse of the accused.[15]

In the present case, there was no dispute that the victim, Delia Sabalberino, was killed as shown by her Certificate of Death stating that the cause of death was "shock and hemorrhage intrathoracic due to stab wound of the left side of the chest, hitting the heart." [16] The said Certificate was admitted by the RTC and the defense did not object to its admissibility.

Also, the prosecution was able to satisfactorily establish that it was herein appellant who stabbed and killed Delia based on the eyewitnesses' account. Appellant and the victim's thirteen-year-old daughter, Angela, narrated the details of the stabbing incident as follows:

PROS. DOLINA:

Q Now, you stated earlier that the accused William Sabalberino is your father. Am I correct?

A Yes, Sir.

Q If your father is inside the court room, could you point [to] him?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Will you please point to him?

A (Witness pointing to a person [who] when asked of his name answered William Sabalberino).

Q Now, what is the name of your mother?

A Delia Fernandez Sabalberino.

Q Where is she now?

A She was killed.

Q Can you still recall when was she killed?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Will you please tell us the date when was she killed?

A August 17, 2005.

Q Where was she killed?

A Inside our house.

Q Now, at that time your mother was killed, where were you?

A I was in our house.

Q What were you doing at the time that your mother was killed?

A I was sleeping.

Q [S]ince you were sleeping at that time, how did you know that your mother was killed?

A Because when I awoke they were already fighting.

Q Who were fighting?

A My Ma and Pa.

x x x x

Q And why did you say they were fighting?

A They were shouting [at] each other. They were arguing in a loud voice.

Q While they were arguing in a loud voice, what happened?

A My mother was boxed by my father.

Q Where was your mother hit?

A On her face.

Q Now, after she was hit on her face, what did your mother do?

A They continue[d] on fighting.

Q How about your father, what did your father do after he boxed your mother?

A They continue[d] on arguing [with] each other.

Q Now, you said that your mother was killed. Did you see who killed your mother?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Who killed your mother?

A Papa.

Q Are you referring to the accused in this case William Sabalberino?

A Yes, Sir.

Q How did your father kill your mother?

A By stabbing her.

Q What did your father use in stabbing your mother?

A A knife.

Q Where did your father get the knife, if you know?

A From our kitchen.

Q [W]hat part of the body of your mother was stabbed by your father?

A Here, below the armpit (witness pointing the portion of her body just below her armpit).

Q As you saw your father [stab] your mother, what did you do?

A I became shocked and I cried.

Q By the way, do you know Jessica Sabalberino?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Are you related?

A Yes, Sir.

Q What is your relationship?

A We are sisters.

Q At the time your father stabbed your mother, where was Jessica Sabalberino then?

A She was in our house.

Q How far were you to Jessica Sabalberino when your father stabbed your mother?

A Jessica and I were being held by our Mama.

Q Now, when your father stabbed your mother, do you mean to say that Jessica and you were still being held by your mother?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Now, after your father stabbed your mother, what did your father do?

A He cried.

Q How about your mother, what happened to your mother?

A She went towards the door and opened the door.

Q [Was] she able to open the door?

A No, Sir.

Q Why? What happened to her?

A She went back towards the bed and when I glanced at her she fell down.[17]

Jessica, who was twelve years old at the time of her examination in court, corroborated the testimony of her sister, Angela, on material points, to wit:

PROS. DOLINA: DIRECT EXAMINATION

Q Miss [Sabalberino], what is your relationship with the accused, William Sabalberino?

A He is my father.

x x x x

Q Now, Ms. Sabalberino, do you remember where you were on August 17, 2006, at around 1:00 in the early morning?

A I was in our house.

Q Now, while you were in your house on August 17, 2006, at about 1:00 o'clock in the early morning, can you tell if there was any incident that happened?

A Yes, Sir.

Q What was the incident all about?

A My mother was stabbed.

Q Can you tell us who stabbed your mother?

A Yes, Sir.

Q Who stabbed your mother?

A My father.

Q Did you actually see your father stab your mother?

A Yes, Sir.

x x x x

Q What did he use?

A A knife.

Q Where is your mother now?

A She is already dead.

Q Did she die because of stabbing wound?

A Yes, Sir.

x x x x

CROSS EXAMINATION

x x x x

Q Now, so you were able to wake up that night?

A Yes, Maam.

Q What made you wake up?

A Because my mother was boxed by my father.

Q So, when (sic) you were able to wake up because of the commotion or noise, am I correct?

A Yes, Maam.

Q And when you woke up, that was the time that you saw your father boxed your mother?

A Yes, Maam.

Q Prior to that time that your mother was boxed by your father, you have not observed anything except when you woke up, that was the first time that you saw your father, am I correct?

A Yes, Maam.

Q And your sisters and your brothers, where were they when you woke up?

A They were asleep.

Q When you woke up, you did not see if there was [anybody] inside your house aside from your sisters and brothers?

A No Maam, I did not see anybody.

Q And you did not know what was (sic) they fought that night, am I correct?

A No, Maam.

Q You did not know because even before you sleep (sic), you did not hear any argument, am I correct?

A Yes, Maam.

x x x x

REDIRECT EXAMINATION

x x x x

Q After your father boxed your mother, what did your father do?

x x x x

A They argued with each other.

Q After they argued, what happened next?

A She was stabbed.

Q She was stabbed by your father?

A Yes, Sir.[18]

Moreover, accused-appellant himself acknowledged the stabbing incident during his direct examination, to wit:

x x x x

Q You said you slept in your room, can you please tell the Honorable Court until when have you been sleeping?

A In my estimate it was already 12:00 midnight when I woke up because of the call of nature so when I stepped out of the bedroom I turned on the light.

x x x x

Q While you were about to go to the comfort room, what happened if there was any?

A When I stepped out of the bedroom I saw my wife who was wearing a nightie already half naked and a man was on top of her.

Q In what particular place did you see your wife?

A In the sala.

x x x x

Q Upon seeing your wife in that situation what did you do?

A That was it. I asked that man what are you doing here and took a knife and when that man saw me with a knife, he grappled for the position (sic) of it and my wife told us to stop what we were doing.

x x x x

Q What was then the appearance of that man when you saw him on top of your wife?

A Completely naked.

Q When that man saw you, what did that person do upon seeing you?

A When he saw me with a knife, he faced me and when my wife stood up she told me to stop and middle (sic).

Q While your wife was meddling with you, what happened?

A When I was able to hold possession of the knife I stabbed the man but instead it was my wife who was hit.[19]

Thus, the outright admission of accused-appellant in open court, that he delivered the fatal stabbing blow that ended Delia's life, established the second element of the crime.

Among the three elements enumerated above, the relationship between the offender and the victim is the most crucial.[20] This relationship is what actually distinguishes the crime of parricide from homicide.[21] In parricide involving spouses, the best proof of the relationship between the offender and victim is their marriage certificate.[22] Oral evidence may also be considered in proving the relationship between the two as long as such proof is not contested.[23]

In the present case, the spousal relationship between Delia and the accused-appellant is beyond dispute. The defense has admitted, during the preliminary conference, that Delia was the legitimate wife of the accused-appellant.[24] Such admission was reiterated by the accused-appellant in the course of the trial of the case.[25] The prosecution, on its part, produced a copy of the couple's Certificate of Marriage,[26] which the defense did not oppose.[27] Hence, the key element that qualifies the killing to parricide was satisfactorily proven in this case.

Clearly, thus, all the elements of the crime of parricide, as defined in Article 246 of the Revised Penal Code, are present in this case.

In his defense, accused-appellant cites Article 247 of the RPC as an absolatory and exempting cause, the first paragraph of which states that:

Any legally married person who, having surprised his spouse in the act of committing sexual intercourse with another person, shall kill any of them or both of them in the act or immediately thereafter, or shall inflict upon them any serious physical injury, shall suffer the penalty of destierro.

For Article 247 to apply, the defense must prove the concurrence of the following elements: (1) that a legally married person surprises his spouse in the act of committing sexual intercourse with another person; (2) that he kills any of them or both of them in the act or immediately thereafter; and (3) that he has not promoted or facilitated the prostitution of his wife (or daughter) or that he or she has not consented to the infidelity of the other spouse.[28] Among the three elements, the most vital is that the accused-appellant must prove to the court that he killed his wife and her paramour in the act of sexual intercourse or immediately thereafter.[29] Accused must prove these elements by clear and convincing evidence, otherwise his defense would be untenable.[30]

In the present case, this Court finds no cogent reason to depart from the ruling of the RTC and the CA that accused-appellant failed to prove his allegation to the satisfaction of both courts that he indeed chanced upon his

wife in the vilest act of infidelity and that he was blinded by impulse and acted out of rage when he stabbed the victim. Both courts held that accused-appellant's uncorroborated claim pales in comparison to the consistent testimonies of their daughters, Angela and Jessica, that at the time of the stabbing incident, and immediately prior thereto, no person, other than the family members, was inside their house and that the killing of the victim was immediately preceded by an argument between her and accused-appellant. This Court, likewise, agrees with both the RTC and the CA that the defense failed to prove that the accused-appellant's and the victim's daughters were motivated by malice or ill-will in testifying against their father. As such, the testimonies of Angela and Jessica, having been found credible by the RTC and the CA, are sufficient to establish the guilt of accused-appellant.

Time and again, the Court has held that when the issues involve matters of credibility of witnesses, the findings of the trial court, its calibration of the testimonies, and its assessment of the probative weight thereof, as well as its conclusions anchored on said findings, are accorded high respect, if not conclusive effect.[31] This is so because the trial court has the unique opportunity to observe the demeanor of witnesses and is in the best position to discern whether they are telling the truth.[32] The factual findings of the trial court, especially when affirmed by the CA, are generally binding and conclusive on this Court, except under specific instances[33] which this Court finds to be absent in the instant case.

Accused-appellant also invokes the mitigating circumstances of passion and obfuscation, lack of intention to commit so grave a wrong as that committed and voluntary surrender, which the court finds to be unavailing.

It has been held that there is passionate obfuscation when the crime was committed due to an uncontrollable burst of passion provoked by prior unjust or improper acts, or due to a legitimate stimulus so powerful as to overcome reason.[34] The obfuscation must originate from lawful feelings.[35] The turmoil and unreason which naturally result from a quarrel or fight should not be confused with the sentiment or excitement in the mind of a person injured or offended to such a degree as to deprive him of his sanity and self-control.[36] The excitement which is inherent in all persons who quarrel and come to blows does not constitute obfuscation.[37] In the present case, the prosecution was able to establish that the crime was precipitated by a quarrel between accused-appellant and the victim. However, such kind of argument, no matter how heated or serious it was, is not the kind that would cause the passion or obfuscation contemplated under the law.

As to the mitigating circumstance of voluntary surrender, the same can be appreciated if the accused satisfactorily complies with three requisites, to wit: (1) he has not been actually arrested; (2) he surrendered himself to a person in authority or the latter's agent; and (3) the surrender is voluntary.[38] There must be a showing of spontaneity and an intent to surrender unconditionally to the authorities, either because the accused acknowledges his guilt or he wishes to spare them the trouble and expense concomitant to his capture.[39] In the instant case, there was no showing of spontaneity on the part of accused-appellant as it was not he who asked for the police to go to their house.[40] Neither was there proof that he acknowledged his guilt when apprehended by the police authorities. While it appears that he did not resist when the police officers brought him to the police station for questioning, such lack of resistance does not necessarily equate to his voluntary surrender. The voluntariness of one's surrender should denote a positive act and not a mere compliant or submissive behavior in the presence of authorities.

Anent the mitigating circumstance of lack of intention to commit so grave a wrong as that committed, this circumstance addresses itself to the intention of the offender at the particular moment when such offender executes or commits the criminal act.[41] In the instant case, the undeniable fact is that when accused-appellant attacked the victim, the former used a deadly weapon and inflicted a mortal wound on the latter. While intent to kill is purely a mental process, it may be inferred from the weapon used, the extent of the injuries sustained by the offended party and the circumstances of the aggression, as well as the fact that the accused performed all the acts that should have resulted in the death of the victim.[42] Indeed the location and nature of Delia's stab wound belie

accused-appellant's claim of lack of intention to commit so grave a wrong against the victim.

As to the penalty, this Court agrees with the CA and the RTC in imposing the penalty of reclusion perpetua in accordance with the provisions of Article 246 of the RPC, in relation to Article 63 of the same Code. As to the award of damages, this Court, likewise, agrees with the CA in awarding separate amounts of P75,000.00 each for civil indemnity, moral damages and exemplary damages, and P50,000.00 as temperate damages, all of which are subject to interest at the rate of six percent (6%) per annum from the finality of this Decision until fully paid, in accordance with prevailing jurisprudence.[43]

WHEREFORE, the appeal is DISMISSED. The Decision dated May 31, 2017, of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 02230, convicting accused-appellant William Sabalberino y Abulencia of Parricide, is AFFIRMED.

SO ORDERED.

Leonen, A. Reyes, Jr., Hernando, and Inting, JJ., concur.

[1] Penned by Associate Justice Edward B. Contreras, with Associate Justices Edgardo L. Delos Santos and Geraldine C. Fiel-Macaraig concurring; rollo, pp. 4-12.

[2] CA rollo, pp. 135-137.

[3] Penned by Judge Alphinor C. Serrano; id. at 56-62.

[4] Records, pp. 1-2.

[5] See Certificate of Arraignment and RTC Order, dated March 21, 2006; id. at 17-18.

[6] CA rollo, p. 62. (Emphasis in the original)

[7] Id. at 112.

[8] Id. at 114-118.

[9] Id. at 133-137.

[10] Id. at 143-145.

[11] Id. at 148-149.

[12] Rollo, pp. 20-21.

[13] Id. at 22-27.

[14] Id. at 28-31.

[15] *People v. Macal*, 778 Phil. 379, 388 (2016).

[16] Exhibit "B," records, p. 6.

[17] TSN, January 9, 2008, pp. 3-7.

[18] TSN, September 9, 2008, pp. 3-10.

[19] TSN, January 13, 2012, pp. 9-12.

[20] *People v. Macal*, supra note 15.

[21] *Id.*

[22] *Id.*

[23] *Id.*

[24] See Preliminary Conference Order dated June 13, 2006, records, p. 32.

[25] See TSN, January 13, 2012, p. 6.

[26] Exhibit "A," records, p. 6-B.

[27] See RTC Order dated September 30, 2008, *id.* at 120.

[28] *People v. Macal*, supra note 15, at 392-393.

[29] *Id.* at 393.

[30] *People v. Oyanib*, 406 Phil. 650, 661 (2001).

[31] *People v. Sota, et al.*, G.R. No. 203121, November 29, 2017, 847 SCRA 113, 127.

[32] *Id.*

[33] 1. When the conclusion is a finding grounded entirely on speculation, surmises, and conjectures;
2. When the inference made is manifestly mistaken, absurd or impossible;
3. Where there is grave abuse of discretion;
4. When the judgment is based on misapprehension of facts;
5. When the findings of fact are conflicting;
6. When the Court of Appeals, in making its findings, went beyond the issues of the case and the same is contrary to the admissions of both appellant and appellee;
7. When the findings are contrary to those of the trial court;
8. When the findings of fact are conclusions without citation of specific evidence on which they are based;
9. When the facts set forth in the petition as well as in the petitioners' main and reply briefs are not disputed by the respondents; and
10. When the findings of fact of the Court of Appeals are premised on the supposed absence of evidence and contradicted by the evidence on record. (*Id.*)

[34] *People v. Oloverio*, 756 Phil. 435, 451 (2015).

[35] *Id.*

[36] *Id.* at 453.

[37] *Id.*

[38] *Roca v. Court of Appeals*, 403 Phil. 326, 337-338 (2001).

[39] *Id.* at 338.

[40] See TSN, January 13, 2012, p. 15.

[41] *People v. Badriago*, 605 Phil. 894, 911 (2009).

[42] *People v. Boyles and Montes*, 120 Phil. 92, 101 (1964).

[43] People v. Jugueta, 783 Phil. 806 (2016).

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