

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. JERRICO JUADA Y NAVARRO, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.

G.R. No. 252276. November 11, 2021

Ponente: LOPEZ, M., J.

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LOPEZ, M., J.:

In robbery with homicide, the presence of treachery in killing the victim is considered as a generic aggravating circumstance in fixing the proper penalty and civil liability of the accused.[1] We apply the doctrine in this appeal assailing the Court of Appeals' (CA) Decision dated June 20, 2019 in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 10012.

ANTECEDENTS

Jerrico Juada y Navarro (Jerrico) was charged with the crime of robbery with homicide committed against Florante Garcia (Florante) before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) docketed as Criminal Case No. 3948-M-2011,[2] thus:

The undersigned Asst. Provincial Prosecutor accused Jerrico Juada y Navarro of Robbery with Homicide penalized under the provisions of Art. 294 of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by Republic Act No. 7659, committed as follows:

That on or about the 18th day of December 2011, in the municipality of Bocaue, province of Bulacan, the above-named accused, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, with intent to gain and by means of violence and intimidation, take, rob and carry away with him cash amounting to [P]110,000.00 and a Colt MK IV caliber 45 pistol, belonging to one Florante Garcia y Celestino, to the damage and prejudice of the latter, that on the occasion of the said robbery and by reason thereof, said accused did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously, with intent to kill, treacherously assault, attack and shoot with a firearm he was then provided with Florante Garcia y Celestino, who suffered mortal wounds that caused his instantaneous death.

CONTRARY TO LAW.

Jerrico pleaded not guilty.[3] At the trial, the prosecution presented Amalia Valentin (Amalia), PO2 Carlito Bucco, Jr. (PO2 Bucco, Jr.), Angel Bonbon (Angel), PO3 Richard Higoy (PO3 Higoy), Marlon Geronimo (Marlon), and Jonathan Garcia (Jonathan).

Amalia, a traffic enforcer, testified that on December 18, 2011 at around 11:45a.m., she saw a man wearing a white cap, red and blue jacket, and whose face was covered with a blue handkerchief. The man shot Florante on his temple. At that time, Florante was on board and driving his owner-type jeep. Thereafter, the man took Florante's two (2) bags. Amalia and her companion another enforcer, steered away to safety but the perpetrator chased after them on his motorcycle. Amalia and her companion went to the police station and reported that the assailant was tailing them.[4]

PO2 Bucco, Jr. corroborated Amalia's testimony. PO2 Bucco, Jr. narrated that he received information from two

(2) traffic enforcers who witnessed a killing incident and that the perpetrator was after them. PO2 Bucco, Jr. stepped out of the police station and the enforcers pointed to a man on board a motorcycle wearing a cap and a jacket. The man fled after seeing that PO2 Bucco, Jr. drew his gun. The police officers went after the man but they were unable to catch him.[5]

Angel recalled that on December 18, 2011 at around 12:00noon, she was eating in the carinderia where she worked as a wait staff. A man wearing a white cap, red and blue jacket, and blue handkerchief arrived and requested to use the comfort room. Afterwards, the man grazed one of the dining tables. Angel saw that the table got stained with blood. Angel just assumed that the man had a wound. The man went out of the carinderia. Angel then proceeded to the comfort room and noticed that the man left his cap, jacket and handkerchief. Angel smelled blood on the garments but did not give it much thought and returned to the table to finish her lunch.[6]

PO3 Higoy testified that he verified the report of the traffic enforcers regarding a killing incident. While in transit to the crime scene, PO3 Higoy received word that the assailant was headed towards the direction of Barangay Wakas. Thereat, PO3 Higoy found a motorcycle abandoned in a trucking site and two (2) bags containing money, gun and receipts. The people in the area told PO3 Higoy that the man driving the motorcycle ran towards a carinderia. PO3 Higoy proceeded to the carinderia where he secured the suspect's cap, jacket and handkerchief.[7]

Marlon narrated that Jerrico borrowed his motorcycle on the date of the incident. Jerrico told Marlon that he needed to borrow the motorcycle to buy spare parts for his tricycle. Around lunch time, Marlon received a call from his aunt advising him to go to the police station to get his motorcycle. On December 19, 2011, Jerrico called Marlon and apologized. Marlon told Jerrico, "Pre, bakit naman ako at pati ang motorsiklo ko ay nadamay sa ginawa mo?" The following day, Jerrico called again and asked Marlon about the status of Florante's case. Marlon told Jerrico that the police wanted them. Marlon explained to the authorities that he just lent to Jerrico the motorcycle. The police officers investigated and learned that Jerrico also had a pending case for theft. The police officers requested the booking sheet of Jerrico and showed it to Angel, Amalia and her companion. Angel positively identified Jerrico as the person who used the comfort room in the carinderia.[8]

Jonathan testified that his neighbors informed him about the incident. Immediately, Jonathan went to the crime scene and saw his father's body scrolled sideways inside the jeep. The police officers returned to Jonathan the belongings of his father and said that they will update him for any development on the case. After two days, the authorities told Jonathan that they arrested the suspect.

On the other hand, the defense presented Jerrico, Jayson Duhilag (Jayson) and Imelda Santos (Imelda).

Jerrico testified that he worked as a kargador in the fish port. On December 18, 2011 at around 9:00a.m., Jerrico borrowed Marlon's motorcycle to buy spare parts for his tricycle. Thereafter, Jerrico parked the motorcycle in the lower portion of the fish port and worked on his tricycle. At around 11:00a.m., Jerrico discovered that the motorcycle was no longer there and presumed that Marlon already took it back. Jerrico waited for Marlon to return so that he could thank him personally. Marlon did not arrive so Jerrico left to drink with his kumpare named Bukol. After an hour, Jerrico fetched his wife in Meycauayan, Bulacan. They went home and did chores. At around 2:00p.m., Jerrico heard from a neighbor that he was accused of robbery with homicide. Jerrico denied any involvement in the incident.

Jayson narrated that he saw Jerrico on the day of the incident aboard a motorcycle wearing a blue jacket. Jerrico parked the motorcycle and alighted. Later, Jayson learned that Jerrico was looking for the motorcycle. Similarly, Imelda testified that she saw Jerrico at around 9:00a.m. on the day of the incident. Jerrico alighted from a motorcycle a few meters away from her. After an hour, a certain Marlon arrived and took the motorcycle.[9]

On September 25, 2017, the RTC convicted Jerrico and held that circumstantial evidence exist that he committed the crime,[10] viz.:

From the foregoing narration and portrayal of the events that took place on the date of the incident, a chain leading to the accused has been fashioned. More importantly, it is an unbroken chain which directly entangled the accused into its sphere. x x x. A judgment of conviction based on circumstantial evidence can be upheld when the circumstances established would lead to a fair and reasonable conclusion pointing to the accused to the exclusion of all others as being the author of the crime.

x x x x

Article 294 provides that "the penalty of reclusion perpetua to death, when by reason or on occasion of the robbery, the crime of homicide shall have been committed, x x x" However, with the enactment of RA 9346, only life imprisonment and fine shall be imposed upon the accused, without eligibility for parole.

As to the civil liability, the accused is adjudged to pay the heirs of the victim the following: 1) [P]100,000.00 as civil indemnity for the death of the victim; 2) [P]100,000.00 as moral damages; and 3) [P]100,000.00 as exemplary damages.

WHEREFORE, in view of the foregoing, the accused, Jerrico Juada [y] Navarro is found GUILTY beyond reasonable doubt for the crime of "Robbery with Homicide." Thus, said accused is hereby SENTENCED to suffer the penalty of Reclusion Perpetua.

The Court likewise adjudge accused to pay the heirs of the victim the following: 1) [P]100,000.00 as civil indemnity for the death of the victim; 2) [P]100,000.00 as moral damages; and 3) [P]100,000.00 as exemplary damages.

SO ORDERED.

Aggrieved, Jerrico elevated the case to the CA docketed as CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 10012. Jerrico claimed that the prosecution failed to prove his identity as the perpetrator of the crime, and that the RTC failed to consider his defense of denial and alibi. On June 20, 2019, the CA affirmed the RTC's findings,[11] to wit:

WHEREFORE, the appeal is DENIED. The assailed Decision dated September 25, 2017 of the Regional Trial Court, Malolos City, Bulacan, Branch 84, in Criminal Case No. 3948-M-2011, finding accused-appellant Jerrico Juada [y] Navarro guilty beyond reasonable doubt of Robbery with Homicide under Article 294 of the Revised Penal Code, as amended by RA No. 7659, is AFFIRMED in toto.

SO ORDERED.

Hence, this appeal. The parties opted not to file supplemental briefs considering that all issues have already been exhaustively discussed in their pleadings before the CA.[12]

RULING

In the prosecution of criminal offenders, conviction is not always based on direct evidence. The Rules of Court allows resort to circumstantial evidence provided the following conditions are satisfied, to wit: (a) there is more than one circumstance; (b) the facts from which the inferences are derived are proven; and (c) the combination of all the circumstances is such as to produce a conviction beyond reasonable doubt.[13] The Court explained that a judgment of conviction based on circumstantial evidence can be upheld only if the circumstances proved constitute an unbroken chain which leads to one fair and reasonable conclusion which points to the accused, to the exclusion of all others, as the guilty person. All the circumstances must be consistent with each other, compatible with the hypothesis that the accused is guilty and in conflict with the notion that he is innocent.[14] Here, none of the prosecution witnesses testified having seen Jerrico killed and robbed Florante. Yet, the corpus of

circumstantial evidence constitutes an unbroken chain of events pointing to Jerrico's guilt.

First, on December 18, 2011 at around 11:45a.m., Amalia saw a man wearing a white cap, red and blue jacket, and with his face covered with a blue handkerchief. The man shot Florante and took his bags containing money and gun. The man boarded a motorcycle and fled.[15]

Second, on even date at around 12:00noon, Angel witnessed the man wearing the same set of clothes arrived in the carinderia where she was working. The man requested to use the comfort room and grazed one of the dining tables which got stained with blood.[16]

Third, Angel watched the man as he was leaving the carinderia. Afterwards, Angel went to the comfort room and discovered that the man left the white cap, the red and blue jacket, and the blue handkerchief. Angel smelled blood on the garments.[17]

Fourth, Angel identified the man as Jerrico through his previous booking sheet at the police station and in open court.[18]

Fifth, the police officers recognized that the suspect used Marlon's motorcycle in committing the crime and recovered it together with Florante's bags at a trucking site.[19] The authorities also proceeded to the carinderia where they secured the suspect's cap, jacket and handkerchief.[20]

Sixth, Marlon testified that Jerrico borrowed his motorcycle on the day of the incident. At lunch time, Marlon received a call from his aunt advising him to go to the police station to get his motorcycle.[21]

Seventh, Jerrico apologized to Marlon and asked about the status of Florante's case.[22]

To the unprejudiced mind, these proven facts, when weaved together, lead to no other conclusion but of Jerrico's culpability for the crime. Amalia was sure that Florante's assailant wore a white cap, red and blue jacket, and face covered with a blue handkerchief. Angel positively identified Jerrico as the man in the carinderia wearing the same set of clothes. The police officers recognized that the suspect used Marlon's motorcycle. Marlon was certain that it was Jerrico who borrowed his motorcycle when the incident happened. It is also perplexing why Jerrico apologized to Marlon and inquired about Florante's case if he was totally unaware of the incident in the first place. More telling is the short interval of time between the witnesses' accounts that Jerrico borrowed the motorcycle and the commission of the crime. This forecloses a host of possibilities that a person, other than Jerrico, robbed and killed Florante.

Corollarily, Jerrico's defenses of denial and alibi cannot prevail over the positive declaration of the prosecution witnesses. These negative defenses are self-serving and undeserving of weight in law absent clear and convincing proof.[23] On this point, we stress that the CA and the RTC's assessment on the credibility of the witnesses and the veracity of their testimonies are given the highest degree of respect,[24] especially if there is no fact or circumstance of weight or substance that was overlooked, misunderstood or misapplied, which could affect the result of the case.[25] To be sure, the prosecution witnesses harbored no ill motive to falsely testify against Jerrico.[26] At any rate, Jerrico did not adduce evidence that he was somewhere else when the crime was committed and that it was physically impossible for him to be present at the crime scene or its immediate vicinity at the time of its commission.[27] Admittedly, Jerrico was in the same municipality of Bocaue, Bulacan at the time the crime was committed.[28]

Anent Jerrico's criminal liability, robbery with homicide is a composite crime with its own definition and special penalty. Apropos is Article 294, paragraph 1 of the Revised Penal Code, viz.:

ART. 294. Robbery with violence against or intimidation of persons – Penalties. – Any person guilty of robbery with the use of violence against or intimidation of any person shall suffer:

1. The penalty of reclusion perpetua to death, when by reason or on occasion of the robbery, the crime of homicide shall have been committed; x x x

In this kind of crime, the offender's original intent is to commit robbery and the homicide must only be incidental. The killing may occur before, during, or even after the robbery.[29] It is only the result obtained, without reference or distinction as to the circumstances, causes, modes or persons intervening in the commission of the crime, that has to be taken into consideration.[30] It is immaterial that the death would supervene by mere accident; or that the victim of homicide is other than the victim of robbery, or that two or more persons are killed or that aside from the homicide, rape, intentional mutilation, or usurpation of authority, is committed by reason or on the occasion of the crime. It is also of no moment that the victim of homicide is one of the robbers. The word "homicide" is used in its generic sense and includes murder, parricide, and infanticide.[31] As such, the crime is robbery with homicide when the killing was committed to facilitate the taking of the property or escape of the culprit, to preserve the possession of the loot, to prevent the discovery of robbery, or to eliminate witnesses in the commission of the crime.[32]

The special complex crime of robbery with homicide has the following elements, to wit: (1) the taking of personal property with violence or intimidation against persons; (2) the property taken belongs to another; (3) the taking was done with *animo lucrandi*; and (4) on the occasion of the robbery or by reason thereof, homicide was committed.[33] All the elements are present in this case. Jerrico, on board a motorcycle and armed with a gun, shot and divested Florante of his personal properties. Evidently, the taking was with intent to gain and was accomplished with violence against persons. Thereafter, Jerrico steered away and fled. Verily, the primary objective of Jerrico was to rob and the killing of the victim was only incidental to facilitate the taking of the property and to prevent apprehension.

Notably, the information for robbery with homicide against Jerrico alleged treachery but the RTC did not rule on the presence or absence of this aggravating circumstance. Further, the RTC pointed out that the crime of robbery with homicide carries the penalty of reclusion perpetua to death. The RTC then discussed that Republic Act (RA) No. 9346 prohibited the imposition of death penalty, and reminded that only reclusion perpetua or life imprisonment without eligibility for parole may be meted to the accused. Confusingly, the RTC imposed the penalty of reclusion perpetua but did not specify in the decretal portion of its decision that the accused is not entitled to parole. Also, the RTC awarded civil indemnity, moral damages and exemplary damages at P100,000.00 each to the heirs of the victim, which are granted only if the penalty is death but it cannot be imposed due to RA No. 9346. Curiously, the CA affirmed the RTC's findings as to the penalty and civil liability of the accused despite these baffling dispositions. We now clarify these matters.

There is treachery when the offender commits any of the crimes against persons, employing means, methods, or forms in the execution thereof which tend directly and specifically to insure its execution, without risk to himself arising from the defense which the offended party might make. The essence of treachery lies in the adoption of ways that minimize or neutralize any resistance, which may be put up by the offended party.[34] Here, the prosecution established that Jerrico shot Florante on his temple without warning. Florante was driving his owner-type jeep and was unsuspecting of the threat to his life. The unexpected onslaught from a masked assailant caught Florante off guard. The swiftness and stealth of the attack showed that Florante, who was unarmed, had no opportunity to defend himself or retaliate. The body of Florante even remained scrolled sideways inside the vehicle. The location of the gunshot wound likewise evinced that Florante was completely unaware of the danger that resulted in his untimely demise, thus, ensuring the execution of the crime.

In *People v. Escote, Jr.*,[35] the Court En Banc settled that treachery may be appreciated as a generic aggravating circumstance in robbery with homicide although it is classified as a crime against property, to wit:

Treachery is not an element of robbery with homicide. Neither does it constitute a crime specially punishable by law nor is it included by the law in defining the crime of robbery with homicide and prescribing the penalty therefor. Treachery is likewise not inherent in the crime of robbery with homicide. Hence, treachery should be considered as a generic aggravating circumstance in robbery with homicide for the imposition of the proper penalty for the crime.

x x x x

In fine, in the application of treachery as a generic aggravating circumstance to robbery with homicide, the law looks at the constituent crime of homicide which is a crime against persons and not at the constituent crime of robbery which is a crime against property. Treachery is applied to the constituent crime of "homicide" and not to the constituent crime of "robbery" of the special complex crime of robbery with homicide.

The crime of robbery with homicide does not lose its classification as a crime against property or as a special complex and single and indivisible crime simply because treachery is appreciated as a generic aggravating circumstance. Treachery merely increases the penalty for the crime conformably with Article 63 of the Revised Penal Code absent any generic mitigating circumstance. (Emphases Supplied)

In *People v. Baron*,^[36] the Court echoed that treachery is not considered as a qualifying circumstance in the crime of robbery with homicide but as a generic aggravating circumstance, the presence of which merits the imposition of the higher penalty, thus:

As thoroughly discussed in *People v. Escote, Jr.*, treachery is not a qualifying circumstance but "a generic aggravating circumstance to robbery with homicide although said crime is classified as a crime against property and a single and indivisible crime". Corollarily, "Article 62, paragraph 1 of the Revised Penal Code provides that in diminishing or increasing the penalty for a crime, aggravating circumstances shall be taken into account. However, aggravating circumstances which in themselves constitute a crime especially punishable by law or which are included by the law in defining a crime and prescribing a penalty therefor shall not be taken into account for the purpose of increasing the penalty". In the case at bar, "treachery is not an element of robbery with homicide". Neither is it "inherent in the crime of robbery with homicide". As such, treachery may be properly considered in increasing the penalty for crime.

In this case, the presence of treachery as a generic aggravating circumstance would have merited the imposition of the death penalty. However, in view of the subsequent passage of Republic Act (RA) No. 9346, entitled "An Act Prohibiting the Imposition of the Death Penalty in the Philippines," we are mandated to impose on the appellant the penalty of reclusion perpetua without eligibility for parole. (Emphases Supplied)

Similarly, in *People v. Layug*,^[37] the Court imposed a higher penalty for the crime of robbery with homicide because the victim was treacherously killed, viz.:

Again, robbery with homicide is classified as a crime against property. Nevertheless, treachery is a generic aggravating circumstance in said crime if the victim of homicide is killed treacherously. Thus, the aggravating circumstance of treachery is appreciated in the crime of robbery with homicide only as to the killing but not as to the robbery. x x x. The CA, therefore, is correct in appreciating the aggravating circumstance of treachery in imposing the higher penalty as it was shown that the killing of the victim was done treacherously, xxx. (Emphases Supplied)

To reiterate, the crime of robbery with homicide carries the penalty of reclusion perpetua to death. Under Article 63 of Revised Penal Code, in all cases in which the law prescribes a penalty composed of two indivisible penalties, the greater penalty shall be applied when in the commission of the deed there is present only one aggravating circumstance. In this case, the presence of treachery as a generic aggravating circumstance would have merited the imposition of the death penalty. In view of RA No. 9346, however, the Court is mandated to

impose on Jerrico the penalty of reclusion perpetua with qualification that he is not eligible for parole.[38] As to Jerrico's civil liability, the CA and the RTC properly awarded P100,000.00 civil indemnity, P100,000.00 moral damages, and P100,000.00 exemplary damages.[39] We also find it appropriate to grant temperate damages of P50,000.00 considering that no documentary evidence of burial or funeral expenses was submitted in court.[40] Lastly, all the monetary awards shall earn six percent (6%) interest per annum from finality of this Decision until fully paid.[41]

FOR THESE REASONS, the appeal is DISMISSED. The Court of Appeals' Decision dated June 20, 2019 in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 10012 is AFFIRMED. Accused-appellant Jerrico Juada y Navarro (Jerrico) is found GUILTY of robbery with homicide and is sentenced to suffer the penalty of reclusion perpetua without eligibility for parole. Jerrico is also DIRECTED to pay the heirs of the victim the amounts of P100,000.00 as civil indemnity, P100,000.00 as moral damages, P100,000.00 as exemplary damages, and P50,000.00 as temperate damages, all with legal interest at the rate of six percent (6%) per annum from the finality of this Decision until full payment.

SO ORDERED.

Gesmundo, C.J. (Chairperson), Caguioa, Lazaro-Javier, and J. Lopez, JJ., concur.

[1] *People v. Escote, Jr.*, 448 Phil. 749, 788 (2003).

[2] *Rollo*, p. 118.

[3] *Id.* at 59.

[4] *Id.* at 60 and 79.

[5] *Id.* at 63.

[6] *Id.* at 60 and 84.

[7] *Id.* at 61-62 and 87.

[8] *Id.* at 61, 93-94, and 124-125.

[9] *Id.* at 64-65.

[10] *Id.* at 65-69.

[11] *CA rollo*, pp. 117-128; penned by Associate Justice Gabriel T. Robeniol, with the concurrence of Associate Justices Ramon R. Garcia and Eduardo B. Peralta, Jr.

[12] *Id.* at 30.

[13] Section 4, Rule 133 of the Rules of Court.

[14] *People v. Geron*, 346 Phil. 14, 24 (1997). See also *People v. Dela Cruz*, 397 Phil. 401, 420 (2000).

[15] *TSN*, September 7, 2012, pp. 5-8.

[16] *TSN*, October 5, 2012, pp. 6-7.

[17] *TSN*, October 5, 2012, p. 8.

[18] *TSN*, March 10, 2014, p. 13.

- [19] TSN, May 17, 2013, pp. 5-7.
- [20] TSN, October 5, 2012, p. 9.
- [21] TSN, January 25, 2013, pp. 4-7.
- [22] TSN, January 25, 2013, pp. 8-10.
- [23] *People v. Togahan*, 551 Phil. 997 (2007).
- [24] *People v. Matignas, et al.*, 428 Phil. 834 (2002).
- [25] *People v. Orosco*, 757 Phil. 299, 310 (2015).
- [26] *People v. Abierra*, 833 Phil. 276 (2018).
- [27] *People v. Madelo Espina*, 383 Phil. 656 (2000).
- [28] CA rollo, p. 127.
- [29] *People v. Palema*, G.R. No. 228000, July 10, 2019, <<https://sc.judiciary.gov.ph/6040/>>
- [30] *People v. Mangulabnan*, 99 Phil. 992 (1956).
- [31] *People v. Ebet*, 649 Phil. 181 (2010).
- [32] *People v. Ibanez*, 710 Phil. 728 (2013).
- [33] *People v. Madrelejos*, 828 Phil. 732 (2018).
- [34] *People v. Cando*, 398 Phil. 225 (2000); and *People v. Ulep*, 474 Phil. 790 (2004).
- [35] 448 Phil. 749, 788 (2003).
- [36] 635 Phil. 608 (2010).
- [37] 818 Phil. 1021, 1032-1033 (2017).
- [38] A.M No. 15-08-02-SC or the Guidelines for the proper use of the phrase "without eligibility for parole" in indivisible penalties.
- [39] *People v. Jugueta*, 783 Phil. 806 (2016).
- [40] Id.
- [41] *Nacar v. Gallery Frames*, 716 Phil. 267 (2013).

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