

**THE PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS, PLAINTIFF AND APPELLEE, VS. HIGINO LAUAS, DEFENDANT AND APPELLANT.***G.R. No. 38942. November 14, 1933*

Ponente: STREET, J.

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This appeal has been brought to reverse a judgment of the Court of First Instance of Benguet, finding the appellant, Higino Lauas, guilty of the offense of homicide and sentencing him to undergo imprisonment for twelve years and one day, reclusion temporal, with the accessory penalties prescribed by law, and requiring him to indemnify the heirs of the deceased, Juanito Mangeyew, in the amount of one thousand pesos, and requiring him to pay the costs.

On the morning of June 28, 1932, the body of an Igorot boy, named Juanito Mangeyew, was found in an unfrequented place on a creek, distant about two and one-half or three kilometers from the barrio of Acupan, in the municipal district of Itogon, Benguet, Mountain Province. The next morning the justice of the peace, a Constabulary officer, and the health officer of the subdistrict of Benguet went out to where the body had been found for the purpose of conducting an investigation. The deceased appeared to have had the age of 13 or 14 years, and the body had been pretty well hacked to pieces with a bolo or other sharp-bladed instrument. The right arm was completely severed at the shoulder joint. The head was almost decapitated at the base of the skull, and only the front portion of the neck still connected the head with the body. The right arm had been cut off, and in the left scapular region of the back a cut had been made through the scapular bone into the cavity of the chest.

Investigations were set afoot and in less than a month the appellant, Higino Lauas, a native Igorot of Cadaclan, Natonin, Bontoc, of the age of 19 years, was arrested for the crime. Upon being quizzed by Constabulary officers, he signed a statement before M. Montilla, a justice of the peace of Trinidad, which is in substance as follows:

"On the 20th day of June, 1932, Nachogwat, William Maykas and myself left Cadaclan for Baguio. My two companions are my cousins. I came with the intention of looking for work, while my two cousins intended to continue their studies. We hiked from Cadaclan to Bontoc for two days. We stopped for one or two days in Bontoc in the house of my niece, the wife of private Bacnag, Constabulary soldier at Bontoc. Then we rode in a PU-car of Representative Erving from Bontoc to Trinidad, stopping at the Farm School. I stayed in the farm school for two nights and one day.

"On Sunday morning, June 26, I left my companions at the Farm School and went to Acupan to look for work. I know Acupan because I had been there already about a year ago. Upon arrival in Acupan, I stopped in the bunkhouse where my cousin Moises lives. Moises was not there as they say he went to Baguio. I slept that night in the room of Moises. On Monday morning, June 27, I ate breakfast with Melencio Malengta, William Maykas and Dionisia Lepaya.

"After breakfast, I went down to the office at Acupan to present myself for work. I left William Maykas in the bunk house. When I presented for work, they asked me my cedula, but I left it in Cadaclan, so I was not accepted. I proceeded to the Mill Site at Balatoc to present again for work. But I was told that there was no

vacancy. So I returned to the bunk house, and while there I again decided to go to Sangilo to try my luck in looking for work. I followed the trail just above the bunk house. Upon reaching the brook, I met the boy (the deceased) and asked him from what town he was. He answered that he was from Mankayan and that he was looking for dried wood but there was none. I asked him further whether he knew the boy who wounded Fructuoso Kinidiong at Hartwell last March, and again answered that he was his third cousin. I again asked him why his cousin was not imprisoned, and he answered that his cousin was not found guilty. So right then and there, I thought of killing him in order to revenge the wounding of Kinidiong who is my second cousin. I then invited the boy to go with me to show him the place where there were plenty of dried wood. We followed the brook on the left side going to Sangilo, and upon reaching the highest part of the brook near the hill, I forgot myself and got my bolo and slashed him three times—one on the back of the head, another on the right shoulder which also cut the right ear at the same time, and another on the back just below the left shoulder. After killing him, I did not proceed anymore to Sangilo as I was afraid, and instead, I went down to Balatoc, passing the short cut on the top of the mountains. On the bridge at Balatoc, I met Malota, my townmate and we had a little conversation. We did not talk very long because I was in a hurry to go to Baguio and there was a truck at Balatoc. So I rode in the truck for Baguio. Upon arrival, I met an Igorot from Benguet and sold him my bolo with which I killed the boy, for P3.

"From Baguio I hiked to Trinidad Farm School where I stayed for one night only. The following day I rode in a truck of Dangwa for Bontoc and stopped for the night in the house of private Bacnag. The next day I proceeded to Cadaclan by hiking and arrived there after two days.

"Three days after my arrival in Cadaclan, I held a 'cañao' in the house of Chamias, my sister's daughter, to celebrate the killing I had done in Acupan, but of course, I did not tell anybody in my town what I had done. On July 14, 1932 while I was in my house at Cadaclan, four soldiers under corporal Gayad of Bontoc came and told me that I was wanted in Trinidad, Benguet, for investigation."

Among the Igorots employed at the Balatoc mine, near Baguio, was one Malota, who was acquainted with Higino Lauas, because they came from the same place. Malota's duty at the mine was to take care of the Igorot bunk house and to clean it up after it had been used by the occupants. One forenoon, as Malota was crossing a bridge on the road nearby, he met Lauas. Malota greeted him and indicated a disposition to talk, but Lauas was uncommunicative and pale. After a few moments, however, Lauas stated that he had killed some one without giving the name, and said that he was leaving for Cadaclan. At this time Malota had no knowledge of the fact that Juanito Mangeyew had been slain, but after the body of the youth had been discovered, Malota informed the investigators that the act had been done by Higino Lauas and that he had returned to his native place. This information led a few days later to the arrest of Lauas, and upon being questioned he at first denied his responsibility. Later he said that the deed had been committed by him in conjunction with Malota and Malengta. These two were accordingly then arrested and questioned about the killing, but they denied their guilt and it soon became evident that the statement of Higino Lauas implicating them was false. Lauas then made the confession quoted above, in which he took the responsibility for the crime upon himself alone.

It will be noted that, in his conversation with Malota, Lauas did not give the name of the person he had killed. The obvious reason for this is that he probably did not know the name of the boy, who was a total stranger.

The defense is rested exclusively on the proposition that the confession of Lauas was extorted from him by the Constabulary through physical mistreatment. In support of this contention Malota, as well as the appellant, were used as witnesses. The principal item in the charge is that they were made to sit on air, which means that they were placed in a sitting posture without support, a position which would undoubtedly become quite uncomfortable if protracted. Malota pretended that one of his teeth had been knocked out by a Constabulary soldier. The court examined his mouth and found two teeth wanting and all loose. In this connection we note that the purpose of the officers in quizzing Malota was to get an admission from him that he had taken part in the perpetration of the

crime.

The trial judge discredited the proof tending to show that Lauas's confession was not voluntary; and while we cannot express our approval of all that was apparently done in handling these prisoners, we are of the opinion that the confession is admissible and that the trial judge committed no error in attaching some weight to it. It will be observed that apart from the confession of Lauas we have the admission made by him to Malota that he had killed some one, and the discovery of the mutilated body of Mangeyew without any suggestion that any one else had been killed in that vicinity points to Lauas as the perpetrator of the offense. It will also be noted that, although Malota had been subjected to the same kind of mistreatment as is claimed to have been used upon the appellant, that mistreatment was not sufficiently rude to induce Malota to confess participation on his own part in the crime. We are of the opinion that the confession of Lauas was not due to mistreatment but resulted from consciousness of his guilt.

In this jurisdiction where the trial judge passes upon the weight as well as the admissibility of a confession, he may, in weighing the confession, take into account the conditions under which it was obtained and it is not necessary to pass upon the admissibility of the confession as a separate preliminary issue. The rule excluding confessions when not voluntarily given grew up at a time when accused persons were not admissible as witnesses in their own behalf. In that period, of course, the courts were careful to guard accused persons from the inferences that might be drawn from thoughtless words capable of being twisted into an admission or confession of guilt. With the abolition of the rule which totally disqualified accused persons, it would seem to be no longer necessary to preserve the old doctrine with respect to the admissibility of confessions in its full rigor, since the accused, now, being competent to testify in his own behalf, may explain the words of confession or admission in their proper sense or deny their force altogether. At any rate the rule applicable in our courts is that it is the duty of the court to weigh the proof as to the conditions under which the confession was made, and to reject it if it was not found to be voluntary; but if voluntary, to attach such weight to it as appears to be proper. In the case before us we think that the written confession of the appellant is admissible and that, taken in connection with his oral admission to Malota that he had killed some one, it sufficiently proves that he is the individual who committed this crime.

As to the qualification of the offense, it savors strongly of murder, but in view of the lack of details as to the facts connected with the killing, it must be qualified as homicide only. The trial court appreciated in favor of the accused the mitigating circumstance of lack of instruction and placed the penalty in the minimum degree appropriate to homicide. The concession to the appellant of this mitigating circumstance was proper, for the confession itself shows that the appellant, in committing this homicide, acted upon an impulse drawn from the sources of uncivilized life, and although he had received instruction in the schools that are now established among the non-Christian people of the Mountain Province and had attained a respectable command of the English language, this veneer of education had not changed his fundamentally savage character.

The judgment will therefore be affirmed, and it is so ordered, with costs against the appellant.

Malcolm, Villa-Real, Abad Santos, Hull, Vickers, and Imperial, JJ., concur.

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## DISSENTING

### BUTTE, J.:

The defendant, Higino Lauas, is a poor, ignorant Igorot boy, 19 years of age. Although he received primary grade instruction in a missionary school, the trial court and this court granted him the benefit of the mitigating circumstance of lack of instruction. It is indicated in the opinion of the majority: "this veneer of education had not changed his fundamentally savage character." It is also stated that the defendant "acted upon an impulse drawn from the sources of uncivilized life." This Igorot boy belongs to a class who are the wards of the government, toward whom a special duty of considerate and just treatment is due from their superior civilized rulers in whose courts they are tried for their liberty and their lives.

Lauas was convicted and sentenced to twelve years and one day of imprisonment solely upon his alleged confession and his alleged admission to one Malota. It is stated in the majority opinion: "while we cannot express our approval of all that was apparently done in handling these prisoners, we are of the opinion that the confession is admissible and that the trial judge committed no error in attaching some weight to it," and the majority have come to the conclusion that the defendant's confession "taken in connection with his oral admission to Malota that he had killed some one" sufficiently proves the defendant's guilt.

I respectfully dissent. This court said in the case of *United States vs. Lio Team* (23 Phil., 64, 66, 67):

"Where a crime has been committed, the admissions of a party charged with the crime, deliberately made, are always admissible for the purpose of showing the guilt of the accused.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Confessions of guilt should always be scrutinized carefully. Courts should be slow to accept them. They should be weighed with the greatest care in relation to all of the facts and circumstances presented in the evidence. \* \* \*"

What does the evidence in this case show?

The alleged confession is dated July 26, 1932. At the preliminary investigation before justice of the peace Ortega, on August 5, 1932, Lauas made the following statements to the justice: "I do not know who killed Juanito Mangeyew. I did not kill anybody. I signed the affidavit because I was afraid of the Constabulary soldiers." At the trial in the Court of First Instance, he swore that he did not even know the deceased; that he was arrested in his home in Cadaclan on July 14, 1932, whence he was taken by soldiers to the Constabulary barracks at Trinidad (a distance of 212 kilometers) arriving at the latter place on July 16; that although repeatedly grilled by the soldiers and officers who burned his knee, pulled his hair, shackled his legs and beat him, he consistently denied his guilt until exhausted and intimidated, he signed the alleged confession. The Solicitor-General, in his brief in this court says: "The defendant's story of the alleged maltreatment was corroborated by Malota (pp. 14, 16, 18, t. s. n.)."

The alleged confession was prepared by the Constabulary lieutenant. The "investigation" of the defendant was carried on in a mixture of local dialect and English. The defendant's knowledge of English not being sufficient to make the confession entirely in English, the Constabulary lieutenant translated the statements of the defendant from Ilocano into English. The Solicitor-General says: "It is for this reason and for the further fact that the lieutenant had also corrected the grammatical mistakes of the document that the English in said document seems to be perfect."

The concluding paragraph of the alleged confession is in the stereotyped formula, so familiar to this court, with which these officially prepared confessions usually end. It is as follows:

"In proof to the truth of the above, which I have declared upon my free will, voluntarily and without being forced to do so, neither intimidated nor promised any reward or leniency, I hereby sign my name below, this 26th day of July, 1932, in the presence of two witnesses." (Let it be noted here that no witness signed the document.)

I think it is obvious that this Igorot boy was not the author of the paragraph quoted and that it was put there to seal his mouth and discredit his testimony should he ever narrate the circumstances under which the confession was obtained.

To cite only a few of these circumstances, the following" is taken from the testimony of the accused:

"P. Demuestre usted al Juzgado esa parte que usted dice que recibio el puñetazo.—R. Most of my body was swollen after the punching, and near my eyes is the only visible mark that can be seen.

"Sr. AROMIN. Pedimos que se haga constar que el testigo presenta señales cardinales debajo del ojo izquierdo.

"JUZGADO. Hagase constar que aparece cierta parte negruzca debajo del ojo izquierdo, que es lo que indica el testigo como la señal que habia tenido con motivo del puñetazo.

"P. Bueno, usted dijo que casi la mayor parte de su cuerpo ha tenido varias señales. ¿Hay otras señales en otras partes de su cuerpo? ¿Puede usted demostrar al Juzgado?—R. One of the corporals had been pulling my hair while I was lying down (indicando la cabeza), and most of the hair were taken off. Here also (indicando la pantorrilla).

"JUZGADO. Tambien aparece una parte negruzca del tamaño de 10 centimos en la pantorrilla del pie izquierdo cerca de la rodilla.

"P. ¿Que es lo que ha causado este que tiene en la pantorrilla? Aclare usted bien.—R. The corporal burned this part with his tobacco pipe.

"P. ¿Quien era ese corporal, de la Constabularia o de policia?—R. De la Constabularia.

"P. Como se llama ese cabo de la Constabularia?—R. I do not know the name, but I know his face.

"P. ¿Y por que le han dado esos punetazos en la cara, y por que, tambien, le ha quemado con su pipa en su pie? —R. Because they were forcing me to confess that I was the one who committed the crime.

"P. ¿Cuando fue usted arrestado por la Constabularia?

"Sr. FISCAL. The witness did not say that he was arrested.

"P. ¿Y que paso cuando usted fue presentado a ese sargento? —R. They asked me if I was the killer, and then they put me three shackles around my legs.

"P. Demuestre usted al Juzgado como le han puesto las esposas en sus pies. —R. They put one shackle on each leg, and there was another at the back to which I was tied.

"P. ¿Despues de puestas las esposas? —R. They made me sit on the air with my arms stretched.

\* \* \* \* \*

"P. ¿Y que hizo el teniente en su oficina?—R. The lieutenant pulled me by the hair, asking me why I would not admit my guilt.

"P. ¿Y que dijo usted cuando le cogio por los pelos, obligandole para que aceptara su culpabilidad?—R. I did not say anything.

"P. ¿Despues de haberle hecho eso ¿que sucedio?—R. Then I was made to sit on the air again.

"P. Al siguiente dia de su llegada en Trinidad, ¿le paso a usted algo, o no?—R. The lieutenant told me that if I would not admit the guilt, I would be made to sit the same position, and to suffer as a result of that, and they ordered that I should not be fed.

"P. ¿Es verdad que no le han dado de comer?—R. Si, señor.

"P. Cuantos dias no le han dado de comer a usted?—R. Nine days.

"P. ¿Y que paso cuando usted ha sufrido nueve dias en esa forma sin comer y con esas torturas?—R. If I did not talk they kicked me.

\* \* \* \* \*

"R. Then the special police (Afangca) asked me why I did not admit my guilt, and I told him that I did not do anything. Then, he told me that if I would not tell the truth he would blow out my brain and kill all my relatives.

"P. Lo que le pregunto a usted es si, cuando usted fue llevado ante el Juez de Paz Ortega y este le investigo a usted, ¿usted admitio su culpabilidad o no?—R. I never admitted.

"P. Por eso le llevaron a usted a ese cuarto pequeño; ¿es lo que quiere usted decir?—R. Yes, sir; special policeman Afangca asked me why I was not admitting my guilt, and after that he kicked me, and, as a result, I was thrown against the wall.

\* \* \* \* \*

"P. You have been sleeping in the office of Lieut. Silerio?—R. I never slept because they tied me with my G-string, so that I would not even fall, and even if I fell on one side, still I was in the same position because my G-string was tied."

The evidence of the defendant as to the intimidation and maltreatment which led to his signing the alleged confession is corroborated by Malota who was a government witness.

In addition to this corroborative testimony of maltreatment, it is an undeniable fact that the alleged confession was obtained while the boy was under the duress of arrest, grilled by officers and soldiers of superior astuteness, more than two hundred kilometers from his home, and deprived of the advice of counsel and the assistance of friends.

Further suspicion is cast upon the alleged confession and the conduct of his captors by the unquestionable fact that at the time the alleged confession was signed (and for some days prior thereto), the boy was arbitrarily held under arrest by the officers who obtained his confession, in plain violation of article 125 of the Revised Penal Code.

In the light of the foregoing evidence in the record, can it be justly said that Higinio Lauas acted "deliberately" when he signed the alleged confession? Can we justly say that the confession was "voluntary"?

Turning now to the only corroboratory evidence in the case, namely, the testimony of Malota, the vague and inconclusive character of that testimony may be seen from the following portions:

"Q. You stated that you are now residing in Balatoc. Do you remember having met the accused Higinio Lauas in Balatoc?—A. I do not remember meeting him again.

"Q. My question is: Have you ever met him?—A. Yes, sir; once.

"Q. Where did you meet him?—A. At the bridge, in Balatoc.

"Q. When you met him on the bridge, did you have a chance to talk to him?—A. Yes, sir; I talked with him.

"Q. What did you talk about?—A. I wanted to talk to him but he did not answer me.

"Q. What happened during your meeting with him at the bridge in Balatoc?—A. When I met him, I greeted him, but he did not talk; but after a little while he told me it was like this what he did.

"Q. What was that that he did which he told you?—A. He told me that he killed someone.

"Q. When he told you that he killed someone, did you not ask him whom he killed?—A. He did not tell the name.

"Q. After he told you that he killed someone, what did you do?—A. I went away.

"Q. What time of the day did you meet the accused at that bridge?— A. It was in the morning.

"Q. Did you notice if the accused Lauas, when you met him, had anything with him?—A. I did not notice anything.

"Q. What day was that when you met him; do you know?—A. I do not know the date, nor the month.

"Q. How long ago when you met him?—A. Long time ago.

"Q. Do you remember how many months ago?—A. I do not remember.

"Q. Was it sometimes this year?—A. This year.

"Q. About the middle of the year?—A. I do not know the month, whether it was at the middle of this year.

"Q. How did the accused look and appear at the time when he told you that he killed someone?—A. Pale.

"Q. Did he look excited?—A. He was not running."

The foregoing is all the testimony of Malota relating to the alleged admission made to him by Higinio Lauas. Immediately following this testimony, an unusual incident occurred. Malota, on cross-examination, confessed that his testimony against Lauas on direct examination was false. A few passages from his testimony are here quoted:

"P. ¿Es verdad que fue usted arrestado por la Constabularia y le han llevado en su cuartel en Trinidad?—R. Yes, sir; it is true.

"P. Ahora diga usted al Juzgado todo lo que ha pasado. No tenga usted miedo; el Sr. Juez le protege a usted aqui. ¿Es verdad que fue usted maltratado por los soldados de la Constabularia para declarar en contra de Higinio Lauas?—R. Yes, sir.

"P. Diga usted que es lo que le han hecho a usted los constabularios; no tenga usted miedo; esta usted delante del Juez.—R. They slapped us.

"P. How many times did they slap you?—R. It could not be counted.

"P. But they were many slaps?—R. They were many, because whenever they asked us and we did not talk, they slapped us.

"P. How many times did they ask you and slapped you?—R. Once.

"P. Es verdad que usted perdio un diente porque le dieron puñetazo en la boca?—R. Si, señor.

"P. ¿Quien le dio a usted ese punetazo por el cual usted perdio un diente?—R. El sargento.

"P. Y esos soldados de la Constabularia que le diern esos puñetazos por los cuales cayo un diente de usted, lo

hicieron porque ellos querian que usted declarara contra Lauas; ¿no es asi?—R. It is because Lauas was arrested and he wanted to find out the companions of Lauas; so I was arrested also.

"P. Can you tell why the soldiers gave you those punches in your mouth?—R. Because they wanted me to tell the truth.

"P. What truth did they want you to tell?—R. They wanted me to confess that I also committed the crime with Lauas because Lauas told them.

"P. But you did not commit that crime, so you denied?—R. It was because I was innocent, because since I entered the work I always worked everyday.

"P. De modo que cuando usted ya estaba muy torturado por los maltratos de los soldados, ¿entonces penso usted que lo mejor es decir que Lauas es el autor para que le suelten a usted o paren de maltratarle?—R. The soldiers told me that Higino Lauas told the soldiers that we all committed the crime and they insisted that I was with Lauas.

"P. Entonces, creyendo que Lauas le habia inculcado diciendo que era usted el que mato: ¿usted dijo que Lauas fue el autor?—R. Si, señor.

"P. How long have you and Malengta been in that position, sitting on the air?—R. Long time.

"P. Toda la noche, ¿no es verdad?—R. It was from the afternoon until night.

"P. ¿Hasta media noche?—R. Just getting dark.

"P. ¿Es verdad que cuando ustedes trataban de sentarse, los soldados constabularios les daban puntapiés y puñetazos?—R. Because I was tired, then I began to sit; then they pulled my hair and pulled me up, and they boxed my legs.

"P. ¿Cuántas veces se tumbo y para levantarlo le agarraban los pelos y le daban puñetazos?—R. Two times.

"P. Después de esos maltratos, entonces los soldados prepararon un affidavit, una declaración de usted; ¿no es así?—R. Si, señor.

"P. Also you admitted or stated to the Constabulary soldiers that you met Lauas on the bridge of Balatoc only because of the maltreatment or because of your fear to the Constabulary soldiers; is that not true?—R. Yes, sir; because I heard that when some one is arrested for a crime they maltreat the one arrested, and I was afraid."

In view of the defendant's firm denial that he met or had any conversation with Malota on the bridge and Malota's own confession on cross-examination that no such meeting or conversation occurred, and in view of the presumption of innocence which the law raises on behalf of every person charged with crime and which accompanies him throughout the trial, I have grave doubt that the defendant should be convicted on such testimony. I am unable to determine in my own mind whether Malota told the truth on direct or on cross-examination. The testimony of Malota on his direct examination could be justly rejected on either of the following grounds: First, if his story on cross-examination is true, his testimony on direct examination was given under the influence of intimidation and duress; second, if his story on cross-examination is false, he is either a bold, reckless liar or a dreamer of dreams—in either case, no faith should be put in any of his testimony.

The Constabulary officers were faced with the problem of finding a solution to a horrible crime which was shrouded in mystery. Although they carried on their investigation for a month, they did not produce upon trial of the defendant a single item of corroboratory evidence resulting from their investigation. The alleged confession without which Higino Lauas could not be convicted as the perpetrator of this horrible crime furnished a convenient and easy solution. There being no evidence against him except the confession and Malota's testimony,

the defendant should have been acquitted on the ground of reasonable doubt, to put it mildly.

Viewing this case in its larger aspects, I cannot bring myself to the belief that a so-called Christian and civilized government is fulfilling its mission toward a backward and helpless people when it holds up before them, as its ideal of humanity and justice, the sentence which it has pronounced upon the foregoing evidence against Higinio Lauas.

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