

SECOND DIVISION

[G.R. No. 133102, October 25, 2001]

PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS. DINDO AMOGIS Y CRINCIA, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.

DECISION

BUENA, J.:

This is an appeal from the decision of the Regional Trial Court of Caloocan City, Branch 129, dated February 5, 1998, in Criminal Case No. C-51534, convicting Dindo Amogis of the crime of rape, the decretal portion of which reads:

"WHEREFORE, premises considered, this Court finds the accused guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime charged, as defined and penalized under Article 335 of the Revised Penal Code, in relation to Section 11 of R.A. No. 7659. Accordingly, he shall serve the penalty of *Reclusion Perpetua* with all the accessory penalties under the law, and shall pay the costs.

"By way of moral damages under Article 2219 of the Civil Code, the accused shall pay P50,000.00 to the complaining witness, without subsidiary imprisonment in case of insolvency.

"Pursuant to Section 7, Rule 117 of the 1985 Rules on Criminal Procedure, the period of accused's preventive detention shall be credited to him.

"Finally, let this Judgment serve as the Commitment Order for the City Jail Warden of Caloocan City to transfer the accused to the Bureau of Corrections, Muntinlupa City.

"SO ORDERED."^[1]

Appellant was charged by his "*kumare*" Helen Calupas, of rape, allegedly committed as follows:

"That on or about the 24th day of December 1996, in Caloocan City, Metro Manila and within the jurisdiction of this Honorable Court, the above-named accused, with lewd designs and by means of threats and intimidation, did then and there willfully, unlawfully and feloniously lie and have sexual intercourse with one HELEN CALUPAS y CHAVEZ against the latter's will and without her consent."^[2]

Upon arraignment, appellant, assisted by counsel, pleaded not guilty to the offense charged and waived pre-trial. Thereafter, trial ensued.

The prosecution's case which was anchored mainly on the testimony of complainant Helen shows that on the evening of December 24, 1996, Helen was cooking and cleaning her house at Bagong Silang, Caloocan City while her three children were sleeping at the sala. Her husband was in Manila where he was employed as a construction worker.^[3]

Helen decided to step out of the house where she saw appellant standing beside the door and smelling of liquor. She asked what he wanted but instead of making a reply, appellant pushed her inside the house, closed the door, pushed her further to a concrete wall and forcibly kissed her.^[4] She pleaded for him to stop but appellant pushed her to a room where he pulled out an ice pick. Pointing the weapon at Helen, appellant removed her T-shirt, jumper and her panty and ordered her to lie down on the floor. Still holding the ice pick, appellant ordered Helen to spread her legs and penetrated her and ejaculated. He remained in that position for thirty (30) minutes.^[5] After the initial gratification, he stood and knelt in front of Helen and kissed her vagina, lips and breasts. Then, he forced her to stay on top of him but she resisted, prompting him to place himself on top of her again and penetrated her for the second time. Thereafter, he stood and dressed up and warned her not to report the incident to her husband and brother otherwise he would come back. He then left the house.

Helen narrated the incident to her *kumare* on January 6, 1997 who advised her to report the matter to the Purok Leader and Barangay Officials. They also reported the incident to the Urduja Police Station where she was advised to get a medical certificate.^[6] She gave a sworn statement on January 10, 1997.^[7]

Appellant denied having raped Helen and claimed that on the night of December 24, 1996 at about 9 o'clock, he was sent by his mother to buy coke at a nearby store. After buying the coke, he sent his cousin to bring the coke to his mother because he was invited to a drinking spree at the store. Thereafter, Helen joined the group and invited him to eat supper in her house which he accepted. Then, both proceeded to Helen's house where she gave him "*biko*". Five (5) minutes later, they went back to the store and joined the others. Helen sat beside him. He asked Helen why her husband had not been coming home. She told him that she did not know why. Both talked for about thirty (30) minutes until some policemen arrived and arrested him based on a complaint for slight physical injuries filed by his uncle.

The testimony of appellant was corroborated by Charlo Linaga,^[8] Andrew Sinsoro,^[9] and Editha Obseñares,^[10] who testified that they saw appellant at about 9 o'clock in the evening of December 24, 1996 at a nearby store drinking liquor with other people. Helen was with the group although she was merely engaged in a conversation with appellant. After about fifteen (15) minutes, appellant and Helen left the store and proceeded to the latter's house which was about ten (10) meters away. Ten minutes later, the two emerged from the house and went back to the store. At about 10:30, on that same night, policemen arrived at the store and arrested appellant for physical injuries.

The trial court convicted appellant holding that "no married woman with three children would expose herself to humiliation and embarrassment if her accusations were not true."^[11] The trial court further rationalized:

"The accused did not deny having set foot into the complainant's house on Christmas eve of 1996. He alleged he was invited by complainant to eat '*biko*', a native delicacy for merienda, which he supposedly did. Based on the accused's attribution of hospitality to complainant, he now claims in effect that such hospitality turned into a rampaging act of hostility in the form of the impending indictment against him. The alleged act of hospitality on the part of complainant is a very clear indicium that the alleged reasons behind the supposed evil or improper motive in filing this case are mere figments of the accused's imagination. And assuming in gratia argumenti that he was actually invited by the complaining witness to partake of her '*biko*' inside her house with only her 3 sleeping minor children in her company, the question that arises is did he only eat '*biko*' or something else, causing the complainant to indict him for a serious offense? Simply stated, the accused's defenses are so diametrically opposed to each other that this Court is unable to see even a glimpse of any cogent reason to sustain his alleged innocence."^[12]

Appellant now pleads for the reversal of the decision alleging that the trial court gravely erred:

1.in giving full weight and credence to the incredible and unbelievable testimony of private complainant and in not considering the defense interposed by the accused-appellant.
2.in convicting accused-appellant of rape despite failure of the prosecution to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

The instant appeal dwells mainly on the credibility of complainant Helen. Appellant argues that the trial court ignored and overlooked discernible defects in Helen's testimony which proves that no rape was committed. He asserts that Helen concocted the charge of rape in order to save face because of the rumors in the neighborhood that they have an illicit relationship.^[13]

In the review of rape cases, the Court is guided by three (3) settled principles, to wit: (a) while an accusation for rape can be made with facility, it is difficult to prove and more difficult for the person accused though innocent to disprove; (b) in view of the intrinsic nature of the crime of rape where only two persons are usually involved, the testimony of the complainant must be scrutinized with extreme caution; (c) the evidence for the prosecution must stand or fall on its own merits and cannot be allowed to draw strength from the weakness of the evidence of the defense.^[14] Hence, to forestall the danger and impiety of falsehood, and to repel any influence that the story may have been a fabrication, every story of defloration must never be received with precipitate credulity.^[15]

"A: I do not know anymore what they did inside.

"Q: Do you know by chance how long did they stay inside the house of Helen Calupas?

"A: About 10 minutes, sir.

"Q: Why do you know that they stay (sic) inside for only 10 minutes?

"A: Because I was wearing a watch, sir."^[18]

After the two came out of Helen's house, 2 policemen arrested appellant for physical injuries filed by his uncle. Helen was present at the time of the arrest but she never reported the rape. Her silence only strengthens the Court's finding that no rape was committed.

Moreover, the prosecution never refuted the testimonies of the defense witnesses. Neither did they show any improper motive on the part of the said witnesses to falsely testify against Helen. It is an accepted rule that where there is nothing to indicate that a witness was actuated by improper motives, his positive and categorical declarations on the witness stand under solemn oath deserves full faith and credence.^[19]

Further, if indeed appellant had sex with Helen, the latter's testimony reveals that no force or intimidation was exerted upon her person. Helen candidly narrated that prior to the alleged sexual assault appellant's kisses were gentle for which she offered no resistance. Thus:

"Q You did not put up a fight or resist his kisses?

"A I am afraid that is why I was not able to shout.

"Q And kisses were gentle? That was the reason why you were still able to avoid them?

"A I tried to avoid the kisses by moving my head.

"x x x
x

x x x

x x

"Atty. Ongteco:

You were still able to avoid the kisses because they were still gentle kisses?

"A Yes, sir.

"Q And at that time or during that time that he was trying to kiss you and you were trying to avoid the kisses, nothing comes from