

FIRST DIVISION

[G.R. No. 229087, June 17, 2020]

**PEOPLE OF THE PHILIPPINES, PLAINTIFF-APPELLEE, VS.
JEFFREY LIGNES Y PAPILLERO, ACCUSED-APPELLANT.**

DECISION

PERALTA, C.J.:

On appeal is the Decision^[1] dated August 31, 2016 of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CR-HC No. 07011, which affirmed the Decision^[2] of the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Quezon City, Branch 94, in Criminal Case No. Q-12-179191, finding accused-appellant Jeffrey Lignes y Papillero guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of *Robbery with Homicide* under Article 294 of the Revised Penal Code.

The antecedent facts, as culled from the records, are as follows:

Jeffrey Lignes y Papillero (*Lignes*) and a Child In Conflict with the Law (CICL) were charged with Robbery with Homicide in an Information,^[3] which read:

That on or about the 13th day of October 2012, in Quezon City, Philippines, the above-named accused, JEFFREY LIGNES y PAPILLERO[,], conspiring [and] confederating with [CICL XXX], a minor, 16 years old, but acting with discernment, and mutually helping each other, with intent to gain[,], and by means of force, violence against and/or intimidation of persons, did, then and there, willfully, unlawfully[,], and feloniously take the personal properties of one JOVEN LAURORA y RANCES in the manner as follows: while complainant was inside his house at Block 7, Kaingin I, Brgy. Pansol, this City, accused[,], pursuant to their conspiracy[,], robbed and divested him of his following items, to wit: one (1) unit Acer laptop with charger worth P30,000.00; one (1) unit cellphone iPhone 4s with charger worth P40,000.00; one (1) unit cellphone Samsung Corby worth P7,000.00; black wallet containing his personal identification cards; one (1) pair of leather shoes; one (1) bottle of kingsgate perfume; one (1) tin of Johnson baby powder; one (1) small black flashlight; one (1) color green [ball pen]; one (1) black coin purse containing P62.25 coins; one (1) unit [screwdriver]; one (1) checkered [backpack] (Jansport); and cash money of P12,560.00, all valued in the total amount of P89,622.25, Philippine Currency; that the accused[,], by reason or on occasion of [,], and in the course of the commission of the said robbery, did, then and there, with intent to kill[,], with evident premeditation, treachery[,], and abuse of superior strength, attack, assault, and employ personal violence upon said Joven Laurora y Ranees, by[,], then and there[,], stabbing him several times in the body, thereby inflicting upon him serious and mortal wounds which were the direct and immediate cause of his untimely death, to the damage and prejudice of the heirs of the said victim.

CONTRARY TO LAW.

Accused-appellant pleaded not guilty, and thus, trial ensued.

Prosecution

The prosecution established that on October 12, 2012, at around 9:00 or 10:00 p.m., Raul Jayson (*Jayson*), Ryan Libo-on (*Libo-on*), and Jonathan Verdadero (*Verdadero*) were having a conversation in their house when two (2) persons asked them where the house of Kagawad Joven Laurora (*Laurora*) was located. They pointed to the house of Laurora, who was their neighbor. Thereafter, they closed the gate of their house and had a drinking spree.

The following day, at around 1:00 a.m., Jayson, Libo-on, and Verdadero heard someone shouting and moaning inside the house of Laurora. Verdadero went out of the house and saw somebody waving a flashlight inside Laurora's house, as if looking for something. This prompted him to call Jayson and Libo-on. They immediately went out of their house and was joined by Francisco Villamor, Jr. (*Villamor*), another neighbor who was also stirred up from his sleep when he heard the shouting and moaning coming from Laurora's house. Verdadero then left to get help from the *barangay*.

While waiting if somebody would come out of the house of Laurora, Villamar, Jayson, and Libo-on heard someone washing inside the house, and they noticed that the water coming out therefrom was red in color. A few minutes later, a man wearing a black t-shirt and carrying a backpack, followed by another man wearing a green shirt and carrying a pair of shoes, came out of the house of Laurora. Libo-on and Jayson immediately ran after them unto the basketball court, and saw that the two were already on board a black Yamaha motorcycle. Luckily, Verdadero arrived with the *barangay tanod* and immediately accosted the two men.

Libo-on, Jayson, and Verdadero recognized the two as the same persons who asked them earlier about the location of Laurora's house. The man wearing black shirt was identified as the accused-appellant, while the one wearing green shirt was identified as CICTL XXX. Recovered from their possession was a Jansport backpack containing several personal items owned by Laurora, *i.e.*, one (1) Acer laptop with charger, one (1) iPhone 4s with charger, one (1) Samsung Corby, black wallet containing his personal identification cards and credit cards, one (1) bottle of perfume, one (1) tin of baby powder, one (1) small black flashlight, one (1) ballpen, one (1) black coin purse containing Sixty-Two Pesos and Twenty-Five Centavos (P62.25), and cash money of Twelve Thousand Five Hundred Sixty Pesos (P12,560.00). Accused-appellant was further frisked and a screw driver was found in his possession.

Villamor then asked a certain Cora, Laurora's laundrywoman, to check on Laurora. When she returned, she told them that Laurora was killed. Cora also identified that the green shirt worn by CICTL XXX belongs to Laurora.

Dr. Rhodney G. Rosario, the officer who conducted the autopsy on the body of Laurora, found that the latter's death was caused by the multiple stab wounds in the head, neck, trunk, and upper extremities of Laurora.^[4]

Defense

Both accused opted not to present evidence despite careful explanation of the RTC as to the possible consequences of their action and the possible impossible penalty.

Ruling of the RTC

The trial court rendered judgment against the accused-appellant and CICTL XXX. Its decision read –

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the court finds accused Jeffrey Lignes y Papillero and CICTL XXX guilty beyond reasonable doubt of the crime of Robbery with Homicide[,] defined and penalized under Article [2]94 of the Revised Penal Code. Accused Lignes is sentenced to suffer the penalty of *reclusion perpetua* and to pay the cost.

In view of the minority of CICTL XXX[,] and taking into consideration the Indeterminate Sentence Law, he is hereby sentenced to suffer the penalty of Eight (8) Years and One (1) Day of *prision mayor*[,] as minimum, to Twelve (12) Years and One (1) Day of *reclusion temporal*[,] as maximum, and to pay the cost.

Accused Lignes and CICTL XXX are further ordered to jointly and severally pay the heirs of the victim Joven Laurora y Ranees [the amount of] P177,742.00 as actual damages, P75,000.00 as moral damages[,] and P25,000.00 as exemplary damages.

Considering that CICTL XXX was a minor at the time of the commission of the crime and [is] still below twenty-one (21) years of age, his sentence is hereby suspended. He is committed to the National Training School for Boys (NTSB), Sampaloc, Tanay, Rizal. The NTSB is directed to submit the corresponding report.

x x x x.

SO ORDERED.^[5]

The trial court held that the prosecution was able to prove the guilt of the accused Lignes and CICTL XXX of the offense charged beyond reasonable doubt through circumstantial evidence.

The circumstances established by the prosecution, all taken together are consistent with the hypothesis that accused Lignes and CICTL XXX are guilty, and at the same time inconsistent with the hypothesis that they are innocent.

Aggrieved, accused Lignes filed an appeal before the Court of Appeals.

Ruling of the CA

In its Decision dated August 31, 2016, the CA denied Lignes's appeal and affirmed with modification the ruling of the trial court.

It held that the circumstantial evidence proven by the prosecution sufficiently established that the accused-appellant committed the offense charged, and that these circumstances make out an unbroken chain which leads to but one fair and reasonable conclusion which points to the accused appellant and CICL XXX as the perpetrators of the crime, to the exclusion of all other conclusions.

Thus, the present appeal.

Before Us, both Lignes and the People manifested that they would no longer file their Supplemental Brief, taking into account the thorough and substantial discussions of the issues in their respective appeal briefs before the CA.^[6]

Issues

The accused-appellant Lignes raises the following issues:

1. Whether or not the court *a quo* gravely erred in convicting him of Robbery with Homicide based on circumstantial evidence; and
2. Whether or not the court *a quo* gravely erred in convicting him of Robbery with Homicide despite the prosecution's failure to prove his guilt beyond reasonable doubt.^[7]

Our Ruling

The appeal lacks merit.

Essentially, accused-appellant maintains that the prosecution's evidence failed to prove that he took Laurora's personal properties with violence or intimidation against a person and to establish with moral certainty that the killing was by reason of or on the occasion of the Robbery. He points out that the totality of evidence cannot be considered as an unbroken chain leading to the conclusion that he committed the crime charged.

We are not persuaded.

The crime for which appellant was charged and convicted was Robbery with Homicide. It is a special complex crime against property.^[8] It exists when a homicide is committed either by reason, or on the occasion, of the robbery. In charging Robbery with Homicide, the *onus probandi* is to establish: (a) the taking of personal property with the use of violence or intimidation against a person; (b) the property belongs to another; (c) the taking is characterized with *animus lucrandi* or with intent to gain; and (d) on the occasion or by reason of the robbery, the crime of homicide, which is used in the generic sense, was committed.^[9]

Admittedly, there was no direct evidence to establish appellant's commission of the crime charged. However, direct evidence is not the only matrix wherefrom a trial court may draw its conclusion and finding of guilt.^[10] It is a settled rule that circumstantial evidence is sufficient to support a conviction, and that direct evidence is not always necessary. This Court has, recognized the reality that in certain cases,