CPL § 20.20(2)(b): Criminal Jurisdiction Exercised Over Out-of-State Assault Committed Aboard an In-Flight Aircraft

St. John's Law Review

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/lawreview

This Recent Development in New York Law is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in St. John's Law Review by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.
the Berlin court inadvertently may have engaged in an unwarranted act of judicial legislation.

**Criminal Procedure Law**

**CPL § 20.20(2)(b): Criminal jurisdiction exercised over out-of-state assault committed aboard an in-flight aircraft.**

Section 20.20(2)(b) of the CPL provides that a New York court may exercise jurisdiction over a criminal offense in which no criminal conduct occurred in the state if "[t]he statute defining the offense is designed to prevent the occurrence of a particular effect in this state and the conduct constituting the offense committed was performed with intent that it would have such effect." This potentially broad jurisdictional grant is limited by CPL § 20.10(4) which defines a "particular effect" as "a materially harmful impact upon the governmental processes or community welfare of a particular jurisdiction." Despite the restrictive effect of this definition, the New York City Criminal Court, Queens County, in *People v.*
Corsino,\textsuperscript{104} expansively construed section 20.20(2)(b), holding that New York may criminally prosecute an assault committed on board a jet aircraft in airspace outside the territorial jurisdiction of the State.\textsuperscript{105}

Jose Corsino was charged with two counts of assault in the third degree,\textsuperscript{106} and one count of harassment\textsuperscript{107} for allegedly striking a flight steward employed by American Airlines. The incident giving rise to the prosecution took place aboard a flight originating in the Dominican Republic and bound for John F. Kennedy Airport in Queens County. Since the plane was not in New York airspace at the time of the event in question, defendant contended that the criminal court lacked jurisdiction to try him.\textsuperscript{108} Remarking that the issue was one of first impression,\textsuperscript{109} Judge Zelman ruled that CPL § 20.20(2)(b) provided a basis for jurisdiction because "[m]isdemeanor assaults that occur on planes en route to New York could have a materially harmful impact upon the welfare of New York's community."\textsuperscript{110} By creating the "threat of physical harm to visitors and to residents . . . who use the airports as a means of ingress to the State,"\textsuperscript{111} the court reasoned, such assaults have a particular effect in New York within the meaning of CPL § 20.20 (2)(b).\textsuperscript{112} Therefore, Judge Zelman denied defendant's motion to dismiss and directed that the action proceed to trial.\textsuperscript{113}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{104} 91 Misc. 2d 46, 397 N.Y.S.2d 342 (N.Y.C. Crim. Ct. Queens County 1977).
\item \textsuperscript{105} Id. at 49, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344.
\item \textsuperscript{106} N.Y. PENAL LAW § 120.00 (McKinney 1975).
\item \textsuperscript{107} Id. § 240.25.
\item \textsuperscript{108} 91 Misc. 2d at 47, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 343. Had the assault occurred in New York airspace, jurisdiction would have been available under CPL § 20.20(1)(a), which extends the power of the State criminal courts to conduct occurring within "New York State as its boundaries are prescribed in the state law, and the space over it." CPL § 20.10(1).
\item \textsuperscript{109} 91 Misc. 2d at 47, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344. Although the CPL has been in effect for over 6 years, the "particular effect" provision rarely has been the subject of judicial interpretation. It appears, however, that Judge Zelman overlooked two recent New York cases which constrained this statute. See Steingut v. Gold, 54 App. Div. 2d 481, 388 N.Y.S.2d 622 (2d Dep't 1976); People v. Puig, 85 Misc. 2d 228, 378 N.Y.S.2d 925 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County 1976), discussed in notes 118-120 and accompanying text infra.
\item \textsuperscript{110} 91 Misc. 2d at 48, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344.
\item \textsuperscript{111} Id. In order to convict Corsino of the offenses with which he was charged, the criminal court first had to establish that it had jurisdiction pursuant to § 20.20 of the CPL, which prescribes the criminal jurisdiction of the state. Since the remaining subsections of CPL § 20.20 were inapplicable to the circumstances of Corsino, see CPL § 20.20, the court had to fit the case within the language of § 20.20(2)(b) or dismiss for lack of jurisdiction.
\item \textsuperscript{112} 91 Misc. 2d at 49, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Id. at 50, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 345. It would seem that defendant Corsino could have been prosecuted under the Federal Aviation Act, 49 U.S.C. §§ 1301-1542 (1970 & Supp. V 1975). Section 1472(j) of that Act provides:
\end{itemize}
SURVEY OF NEW YORK PRACTICE

It would seem that the *Corsino* court erroneously applied the statutory formula of section 20.20(2)(b). To the extent that it confers criminal jurisdiction over extraterritorial acts merely threatening to have an effect in New York, section 20.20(2)(b) appears to be derived from the protective theory of jurisdiction. Under this principle, a state may prosecute conduct occurring totally without its borders if such conduct might have an adverse impact upon the governmental processes of the state.114 Protective jurisdiction classically would be exercised only over activities proscribed by statutes enacted to preserve the sovereignty of the state or uphold other important state interests.115 Similarly, CPL § 20.20(2)(b) may be

Whoever, while aboard an aircraft within the special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States, assaults . . . any flight crew member or flight attendant (including any steward or stewardess) of such aircraft, so as to interfere with the performance by such member or attendant of his duties . . . shall be fined . . . or imprisoned. Id. § 1472(j) (1970). The “special aircraft jurisdiction of the United States” includes “any . . . aircraft within the United States” as well as “any other aircraft outside the United States that has its next scheduled destination or last point of departure in the United States, if that aircraft next actually lands in the United States . . . while that aircraft is in flight.” Id. § 1301(34)(c), (d), (e) (Supp. V 1975). An examination of federal cases indicates that assaults upon aircraft crew members have been prosecuted under 49 U.S.C. § 1472(j). See, e.g., United States v. Meeker, 527 F.2d 12 (9th Cir. 1975) (assault upon pilot of private plane); Mims v. United States, 332 F.2d 944 (10th Cir.), cert. denied, 379 U.S. 888 (1964) (assault upon flight crew member).

In sustaining the exercise of jurisdiction in *Corsino*, the court rejected the argument that this federal criminal statute preempted state prosecution of in-flight crimes. 91 Misc. 2d at 49, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344-45 (citing H.R. Rep. No. 958, 87th Cong., 1st Sess. 4, reprinted in [1961] U.S. Code Cong. & Ad. News 2564), wherein Congress declared its intention that the state criminal law coexist with the federal statute. The *Corsino* court noted that a state statute will not be deemed to have been preempted in the absence of either a congressional intent to occupy the entire field or a direct conflict between the state and federal legislation. 91 Misc. 2d at 49, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344. Accord, Head v. New Mexico Bd. of Examiners, 374 U.S. 424, 430 (1963). See also Note, The Preemption Doctrine: Shifting Perspectives on Federalism and the Burger Court, 75 Colum. L. Rev. 629 (1975). Finding neither of these factors present in the instant situation, Judge Zelman concluded that New York may prosecute defendant for an in-flight assault. 91 Misc. 2d at 49-50, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 345.

114 As traditionally stated, the protective theory empowers a state “to prescribe a rule of law attaching legal consequences to conduct outside its territory that threatens its security as a state or the operation of its governmental functions, provided the conduct is generally recognized as a crime under the law of the states that have reasonably developed legal systems.” *Restatement (Second) of the Foreign Relations Law* § 33 (1965) [hereinafter cited as *Restatement*].

115 See note 114 supra. The protective theory was exhaustively treated in a landmark study of the principles of criminal jurisdiction. See *Harvard Research in International Law, Jurisdiction with Respect to Crime*, 29 Am. J. Int’l L. 435 (Supp. 1935) [hereinafter cited as *Harvard Research*]. According to this study, protective jurisdiction renders states competent to legislate for the punishment of crimes threatening the “security, integrity, or independence” of the state. Id. at 543. See United States v. Pizzarusso, 388 F.2d 8, 10-11 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 399 U.S. 936 (1969); *Restatement, supra* note 114, § 33, Comment d at 93. But see United States v. Daniszewski, 380 F. Supp. 113 (E.D.N.Y. 1974), wherein the court, in the course of upholding federal criminal jurisdiction, indicated that the purview of the protec-
invoked as a jurisdictional predicate when “[t]he statute defining the offense is designed to prevent the occurrence of” conduct having a “materially harmful impact upon the governmental processes or community welfare of a particular jurisdiction.” As construed in several recent New York decisions, this language authorizes criminal prosecution of extraterritorial offenses violative of enactments “designed to uphold the integrity of governmental or judicial processes of the State or its subdivisions;” it does not permit the exercise of jurisdiction over offenses defined by penal statutes relating to the general community welfare.

The protective theory must be distinguished from another principle of jurisdiction known as the objective territorial theory. Pursuant to the latter principle, a state may prosecute an individual for extraterritorial conduct that actually produces adverse effects in the state. See, e.g., Ford v. United States, 273 U.S. 593 (1927); Strassheim v. Daily, 221 U.S. 280 (1911); United States v. Fernandez, 496 F.2d 1294 (5th Cir. 1974); RESTATEMENT, supra note 114, § 18. In contrast, where the out-of-state conduct only has a potentially adverse effect upon the governmental processes of the state, the proper basis for jurisdiction is the protective principle. Id., § 33, Comment d at 93.

The federal courts have made extensive use of the protective and objective territorial theories to prosecute foreign perpetrators. See, e.g., United States v. Fernandez, 496 F.2d 1294 (5th Cir. 1974) (jurisdiction under objective territorial theory to try defendant for uttering in Mexico forged checks drawn on the United States Treasury); United States v. Williams, 464 F.2d 599 (2d Cir. 1972) (objective territorial theory relied upon to prosecute Jamaican citizen for aiding illegal aliens to gain entry into the United States); United States v. Pizzarusso, 388 F.2d 8 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 392 U.S. 936 (1968) (federal district court has jurisdiction under the protective principle to try a Canadian citizen for knowingly falsifying a visa application at the consulate in Montreal); Rocha v. United States, 288 F.2d 545 (9th Cir.), cert. denied, 366 U.S. 948 (1961) (jurisdiction available under the protective theory to try defendants for conspiracy to gain unlawful entry into the United States).

The provisions of the CPL also embody other principles of jurisdiction. For example, CPL § 20.20(2)(b) are premised upon the objective territorial principle of jurisdiction. Thus, New York criminal courts may prosecute extraterritorial conduct where “[t]he offense committed was a result offense and the result occurred within [New York],” id. § 20.20(2)(a), or where an overt act in furtherance of an out-of-state conspiracy to commit a crime in New York occurred within this State. Id. § 20.20(2)(d). In both of these situations an “effect” actually is produced within New York, as is required under the objective territorial principle. See note 115 supra.

In Steingut v. Gold, 54 App. Div. 2d 481, 388 N.Y.S.2d 632 (2d Dep’t 1976) the Appellate Division, Second Department, had occasion to construe CPL § 20.40(2)(c), which apportions the “jurisdiction” of counties within New York State. Under CPL § 20.40(2)(c), a criminal...
It is suggested that the sections of the penal law punishing assault in the third degree and harassment were not promulgated to preserve the integrity of the state and therefore are not within the class of offenses over which CPL § 20.20(2)(b) jurisdiction may be exercised. Unfortunately, the Corsino court failed to consider whether the offenses of assault and harassment are within the ambit of section 20.20(2)(b). Instead, the court focused its analysis upon the harmful effect in New York of a physical act of assault committed aboard an in-flight aircraft. In so doing, Judge Zelman apparently reached an incorrect decision to uphold jurisdiction over Corsino's allegedly criminal conduct.

The court of a particular county may exercise jurisdiction over conduct occurring outside the county if "[s]uch conduct had, or was likely to have, a particular effect upon . . . [the county in which the court is sitting] and was performed with intent that it would . . . have such particular effect therein." Id. (emphasis added). Although Steingut does not deal specifically with CPL § 20.20(2)(b), the case is pertinent because it interprets the term "particular effect," which is contained in § 20.20(2)(b) as well as § 20.40(2)(c). The Steingut court found that for conduct to have a particular effect, it "must cause a harmful impact, not on any individual or individuals, but on a whole community and the harm must be to governmental processes (i.e., the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government) or to the welfare of an entire community." 54 App. Div. 2d at 488, 388 N.Y.S.2d at 627. The court stressed that the impact must be "definable and important." Id.

Thus, under both the Steingut and Puig readings of the words "particular effect," there is no jurisdiction over out-of-state conduct under CPL § 20.20(2)(b) unless such conduct violates a statute intended to protect the integrity of the state. This view is in accord with the legislative history of CPL § 20.20(2)(b), which indicates that the section was intended to protect the governmental processes of the state. See Temporary Comm’n on Revision of the Penal Law and Criminal Code, Proposed New York Criminal Procedure Law § 10.20(3), Staff Comment at 41 (1967), wherein it was stated: "The kinds of offenses contemplated by [the section] are exemplified by bribery and perjury, the 'effects' of which are confined to corruption of New York's governmental and judicial processes."

See People v. Puig, 85 Misc. 2d 228, 378 N.Y.S.2d 925 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County 1976), wherein the court held that § 20.20(2)(b) jurisdiction does not extend to extraterritorial conduct violative of the controlled substance sections of the penal law; CPL § 20.20(2)(b), commentary at 48 (McKinney 1971); note 118 supra.

See 91 Misc. 2d at 48, 397 N.Y.S.2d at 344. The court in People v. Puig, 85 Misc. 2d 228, 378 N.Y.S.2d 925 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County 1976), warned against this improper application of § 20.20(2)(b) when it stated that "[t]he [subsection] does not speak . . . in terms of the possible impact of the out-of-State conduct alleged in the indictment, but rather in terms of the design or intent of the statute defining the offense." 85 Misc. 2d at 233, 378 N.Y.S.2d at 934 (emphasis added).

There exists another reason for questioning the Corsino result. A second requirement for § 20.20(2)(b) jurisdiction is that defendant have an intent to bring about a particular effect in New York. CPL § 20.20(2)(b). See CPL § 20.20(2)(b), commentary at 48 (McKinney 1971); R. PTLER, NEW YORK CRIMINAL PRACTICE UNDER THE CPL § 1.8 (1972). No inquiry was conducted by the court, however, concerning defendant's state of mind at the time he performed the relevant conduct. It is somewhat unlikely that defendant, who was alleged to have been involved in a mid-air assault, had an intent to cause a particular effect in New York. In any event, it is submitted that the court's failure to consider this issue renders its decision suspect.
By failing to apply properly the jurisdictional predicate contained in CPL § 20.20(2)(b), it is submitted that the Corsino court extended New York's extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction to a situation not envisioned by the legislature nor justified by the language of the statute. It is hoped that future decisions will adhere to the test established by the CPL and thereby limit criminal jurisdiction to the bounds prescribed by the legislature.

**FAMILY COURT ACT**

*Family Court Act §§ 413-414: Divorced mother must share in the financial support of her children.*

As a consequence of the current focus upon equal treatment of the sexes, courts have been faced with an increasingly large number of equal protection challenges directed at statutes employing sex-based classifications. It is not surprising, therefore, that sections 413 and 414 of the Family Court Act, which seem to place the primary obligation for child support upon the father, have

---

122 See note 118 supra.
123 See notes 114-118 and accompanying text supra.
126 New York courts also have been confronted with equal protection attacks upon various statutes. See, e.g., People v. Moss, 80 Misc. 2d 633, 365 N.Y.S.2d 522 (Sup. Ct. Kings County 1975); In re Louise B., 68 Misc. 2d 95, 326 N.Y.S.2d 702 (Family Ct. Monroe County 1971).
128 N.Y. FAM. CT. ACT § 413 (McKinney 1975) provides in pertinent part:

>The father of a child under the age of twenty-one years is chargeable with the support of his child and, if possessed of sufficient means or able to earn such means, may be required to pay for such child's support a fair and reasonable sum according to his means, as the court may determine.

129 Id. § 414 states that

>"[i]f the father of a child is dead, incapable of supporting his child, or cannot be found within the state, the mother of such child is chargeable with its support where such child has not attained the age of twenty-one years and, if possessed of sufficient means or able to earn such means, may be required to pay for its support a fair and reasonable sum according to her means, as the court may determine. The court may apportion the costs of the support of the child between the parents according to their respective means and responsibilities.

130 Prior decisions, reflecting the early common law position, found that the obligation