

G.R. No. L-19671 (With Resolutions of July 26, 1966 And Sept. 14, 1966). November 29, 1965 (Case Brief / Digest)
Title: Pastor B. Tenchavez vs. Vicenta F. Escaño, et al.

Facts:

In this 1965 landmark case, Pastor B. Tenchavez, a 32-year-old engineer and former military officer, appealed the denial of legal separation and his claim for damages against his estranged wife Vicenta Escaño and her parents, Mamerto and Mena Escaño. Vicenta, a 27-year-old second year commerce student from a wealthy and socially prominent family, had married Tenchavez in a secret ceremony without her parents' knowledge. The marriage was registered, but shortly after, the relationship soured due to a letter exposing Tenchavez's alleged infidelity. Vicenta sought annulment but never signed the petition, leading to its dismissal. She later went to the US, declared herself single, and obtained a divorce on grounds of "extreme cruelty, entirely mental in character". She then married an American, Russel Leo Moran. Vicenta's actions - obtaining a divorce and remarrying, while the first marriage was still recognized under Philippine law - prompted Tenchavez to seek legal redress.

Issues:

1. Whether a foreign divorce decree obtained by Filipino citizens is recognized in the Philippines?
2. Whether Vicenta's second marriage can be considered valid in the Philippines?
3. The legal standing of the parents with respect to their alleged influence over Vicenta's decision.
4. Vicenta's claim for damages based on the alleged groundless accusations and injury caused to her reputation by the suit.
5. The propriety of the claim for moral damages and attorney's fees for both plaintiff and defendants.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court recognized the validity of Tenchavez and Escaño's marriage under Philippine law. It held that the foreign divorce obtained by Vicenta was not recognized under Philippine Law, and therefore, her marriage to Tenchavez stands. Thus, Vicenta's remarriage was found to be technically adulterous under Philippine law, giving Tenchavez grounds for legal separation.

The Court did not find sufficient evidence that would hold Vicenta's parents, Mamerto and Mena Escaño, liable for alienation of affections against Tenchavez. However, Tenchavez was held liable for P5,000 as damages to Vicenta's parents for unfounded allegations against

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them.

Vicenta was ordered to pay Tenchavez P25,000 for moral damages and attorney's fees, acknowledging that her wrongful conduct entitled him to damages.

Doctrine:

The doctrine established was that foreign divorce decrees between Filipino citizens secured after the enactment of the Civil Code of the Philippines are not recognized as valid in the Philippines, thus not dissolving the marriage tie in respect to Filipino laws.

Historical Background:

The historical context of this case highlights the strong influence of Catholic doctrines and the Spanish Civil Code on the Philippine legal system, reflecting the country's colonial past. The non-recognition of foreign divorce underscores the reluctance of the State to dissolve marital bonds and adheres to a conservative view on marriage, where legal separation does not sever the bond of matrimony.

Class Notes:

Relevant legal provisions for this case stem primarily from the Civil Code of the Philippines, particularly on laws concerning marriage and family relations. Key provisions include Article 15, which binds Filipino citizens to their national laws even when abroad, and Article 17, which does not allow laws or judgments from a foreign country to render ineffective prohibitive laws concerning persons, their acts or property, addressing public order, policy, and good customs. Article 2176 covers obligations arising from wrongful acts or negligence.

In summary, Philippine law at the time of the case did not recognize absolute divorce and maintained that the marriage bond, once forged, is indissoluble except by death. The case also exemplifies the implications of such policies on personal status and the limitations placed on recognition of foreign judgments contravening local policies.