

**MANUEL B. RUIZ, MARCIAL QUIÑONES, FILOMENA QUIÑONES,
MACARIO QUICIO AND ALEJANDRA BALICO, PETITIONERS, VS. THE
HONORABLE COURT OF APPEALS, THE HONORABLE JUDGES
VICENTE BULLECER ...**

G.R. No. L-29213. October 21, 1977

Ponente: CASTRO, C.J.

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CASTRO, C.J.:

This is a petition for certiorari filed by the herein petitioners Manuel B. Ruiz, Marcial Quiñones, Filomena Quiñones and the spouses Macario Quicio and Alejandra Balico against the resolution of the Court of Appeals dated April 8, 1968 in CA-G.R. No. 41028-R which orders the dismissal of the petition for prohibition and mandamus filed therein by the herein petitioners against the orders of the herein respondent Judges Vicente Bullecera and Alfredo I. Gonzales, and denies the petitioners' motion to dismiss the complaint filed against them by the herein private respondents Jovencio Q. Tancontian, Socorro T. Aguilon, Salvacion T. Diao, Imelda T. Noel, Jesus Aguilon and Alfredo Noel, Jr.[1]

It appears that on March 21, 1966, the herein private respondents filed in the Court of First Instance of Davao (docketed as civil case 5003) an action for the recovery of a parcel of land against the herein petitioners containing, inter alia, the following allegations:

"x x x

"4. That Lucrecia Quiñones, Baldomero Quiñones and Meliton Quiñones are the legitimate children of Florentino Quiñones and Micaela Barrios, all deceased;

"5. That Meliton Quiñones was the absolute owner of a parcel of land containing an area of 100,006 square meters or 10 hectares located in Davao City, having inherited the same from his deceased father ...;

"6. That on December 20, 1941, said Meliton Quiñones died intestate, without any debts or obligations and without any ascendants or descendants, leaving as his only surviving legal heirs his nephews and nieces, namely, the plaintiffs Jovencio Q. Tancontian, Socorro T. Aguilon, Salvacion T. Diao and Imelda T. Noel, as the legitimate children of Lucrecia Quiñones, and the defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones, as the legitimate children of Baldomero Quiñones, who succeeded as owners and successors-in-interest to the above-described parcel of land, in their own rights and in equal shares;

"7. That on September 27, 1952, defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones, claiming to be the legal heirs of Meliton Quiñones to the exclusion of plaintiffs, filed a complaint with the Court of First Instance of Davao, for recovery of ownership of the above-described parcel of land with damages against Vedasto Corcuera, which was then covered by Transfer Certificate of Title No. 201 in the name of Vedasto Corcuera, assisted by defendant Manuel B. Ruiz as their lawyer, which case was docketed as Civil Case No. 904 ...;

"8. That defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones, with the able assistance of their counsel, defendant, Manuel B. Ruiz, won the case in court and succeeded in recovering the ownership of the

above-described parcel of land from Vedasto Corcuera in the early part of 1956 when the decision in Civil Case No. 904 became final and executory;

“9. That shortly after recovery of the property from Vedasto Corcuera. Transfer Certificate of Title No. 201 in the name of Vedasto Corcuera was cancelled and a new Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-6549 ... was issued in the names of defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones;

“10. That such color of ownership was short-lived, for instead of partitioning the said parcel of land among the surviving legal heirs, who are the defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones and the plaintiffs Jovencio Q. Tancontian, Socorro T. Aguilon, Salvacion T. Diao and Imelda T. Noel, in equal shares, the said parcel of land should have been divided into six (6) equal shares, said defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones, with the active participation and influence and pressure of their counsel, defendant Manuel B. Ruiz, occupying a vantage position as their counsel in Civil Case No. 904, the latter succeeded to press and dictate his terms upon his clients, who are ignorant and illiterate as shown by the fact that they could not even write their names, and in breach of the rule so amply protective of the confidential relations which must necessarily exist between attorney and client, confederating and conniving with defendant Macario Quicio, who is not in a financial position to negotiate the sale of the above-described parcel of land, succeeded in making defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones execute a simulated and fictitious deed of sale of the said parcel of land in favor of defendant Macario Quicio in April, 1956, a few days after the decision in Civil Case No. 904 had become final and executory ...;

“11. That with the execution of this deed of sale (Annex 'B'), Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-6549 in the names of Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones was cancelled and a new Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-6550 and later changed to Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-6588 of the Register of Deeds of Davao was issued in the name of defendant Macario Quicio;

“12. That considering the ignorance and illiteracy of defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones, they were practically made to be parties to a simulated and fictitious sale in favor of defendant Macario Quicio, the fact being that the real purchaser of the said parcel of land was their counsel, defendant Manuel B. Ruiz;

“13. That it was indeed unusual that after defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones had won their case to recover the ownership of the land from Vedasto Corcuera, which took them several years of waiting, immediately after the decision had become final and executory, they had to sell the land for an inadequate and unconscionable consideration without even the pleasure of taking possession of the land and the enjoyment of the fruits thereof even for a month's time, since the alleged sale in favor of Macario Quicio took place on April 10, 1956, shortly after the decision in their favor had become final;

“14. That the alleged consideration of P15,000.00 appearing in the deed of sale (Annex 'B'), assuming it to be true, is not only inadequate and unconscionable, but has all the earmarks of a forced sale upon the harassed clients of defendant Manuel B. Ruiz, considering not only that the land contains 10 hectares which is fully planted with coconuts, but is located in the residential area of Davao City and could have been sold for a much higher price, as borne out by the fact that the market value of this parcel of land is not less than P20.00 per square meter or P2,000,000.00 for the entire area;

“15. That defendant Manuel B. Ruiz ought to know and should know the execution of this deed of sale in favor of Macario Quicio, since the document was prepared in his own law office and notarized by his own brother and law associate Atty. Alejandro B. Ruiz on April 10, 1956;

“16. That after the execution of the deed of sale in favor of defendant Macario Quicio, said Macario Quicio never took possession of the land as the owner thereof and gathered the fruits therefrom but defendant Manuel B. Ruiz, a subsequent fact confirming that said deed of sale in favor of Macario Quicio was fictitious and to give a color of transfer to an innocent purchaser in good faith and for value;

“17. That on December 10, 1956, barely eight months after the alleged simulated sale in favor of defendant Macario Quicio, said defendant Macario Quicio executed another simulated and fictitious deed of sale over the same parcel of land covered by Transfer Certificate of Title No. 6588 in favor of defendant Manuel B. Ruiz a transaction designed to show that defendant Manuel B. Ruiz was a purchaser for value and in good faith...;

“18. That by virtue of this deed of sale,(Annex 'C') executed by defend-ant Macario Quicio and Alejandra Balico, his wife, in favor of defendant Manuel B. Ruiz, the latter succeeded in the cancellation of Transfer Certi-ficate of Title No. T-6588 in the name of Macario Quicio and a new Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-7355 was issued to defendant Manuel B. Ruiz;'

“19. That when defendant Manuel B. Ruiz sold a portion of the said land to his brother, Atty. Alejandro B. Ruiz, Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-7355 was cancelled and a new Transfer Certificate of Title No. T-16126 was issued in the name of defendant Manuel B. Ruiz ...;

“20. That the alleged deed of sale (Annex 'B') executed by defendants Manuel Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones in favor of defendant Macario Quicio was null and void from the very begin-ning, not only because it is simulated and fictitious but a design to cir-cumvent the prohibition of the law (Article 1491, Civil Code of the Philippines), the purpose of which was to feign transfer by defendants Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones to defendant Macario Quicio, as a stranger, and to make it appear that defendant Macario Quicio was a purchaser for value and in good faith and to avoid the prohibition against lawyers from purchasing the property involved in the litigation in which defendant Manuel B. Ruiz took part from the beginning until its termination by virtue of his profession, as confirmed by subsequent events;

“21. That this simulated deed of sale in favor of defendant Macario Quicio is a violation of law and legal ethics, an act which constitutes malpractice and punishable by our laws, is revealed by the fact that said defendant Macario Quicio, from April, 1956 up to December 10, 1956, when he allegedly executed a deed of sale in favor of defendant Manuel B. Ruiz, had never been in possession of the land in the exercise of his ownership, but all that time, it was defendant Manuel B. Ruiz who had been in possession of the land and had been gathering the fruits thereof;

“22. That defendant Macario Quicio was never the true purchaser of the land ... since he was not and still is not in a position financially to pay the said consideration of P15,000.00, if that were true, but that the true purchaser of the land was defendant Manuel B. Ruiz ...;

“23. That defendant Manuel B. Ruiz is neither a purchaser for value and in good faith, knowing fully well that Macario Quicio and his wife, Alejandra Balico, were merely tools of his design to avoid the provision of law prohibiting lawyers from acquiring by purchase, directly or indirectly, the land which has been the subject of the litigation in Civil Case No. 904 in which he had been the counsel;

“24. That defendant Manuel B. Ruiz was fully aware of his mode of (his) acquisition and the flaw of his title that invalidates the same, not only that his acquisition of the land of his clients was con-trary to law but a violation of legal ethics ...;

“25. That the deed of sale (Annex 'C') executed by defendants Macario Quicio and his wife, Alejandra Balico, is another simu-lated and fictitious sale to com-plete the plan to transfer the property to defendant Manuel B. Ruiz to give him a color of good faith and as a purchaser for value, since it appears that he had acquired the land by purchase from a supposed purchaser for value and in good faith and a stranger in Civil Case No. 904; said deed of sale however was prepared in his law office and notarized by one of the law assistants, Atty. Florencio Gaspar;

“26. That the deeds of sale (Annexes 'B' and 'C') in favor of Macario Quicio and subsequently in favor of Manuel B. Ruiz, are null and void from the beginning, and, therefore, said defendants Macario Quicio and Manuel B. Ruiz have never acquired any valid title of ownership to the land in question;

"x x x."

On April 13, 1966, the petitioners filed a motion to dismiss the foregoing complaint on the grounds that (a) the complaint did not state a cause of action; and (b) the cause of action, if any existed, was barred by the statute of limitations. This motion was heard by the trial court on April 16, 1966 in the absence of the plaintiffs, on which date an order was issued granting the same and dismissing the complaint in question.

The private respondents (as plaintiffs below) filed a motion for reconsideration, dated April 19, 1966, alleging that their counsel received a copy of the herein petitioners' motion to dismiss only on April 16, 1966 by registered mail. This was opposed by the petitioners who claimed that their counsel's messenger tried to deliver personally a copy of their (petitioners') motion to dismiss at the private respondents' counsel's office but the person in charge of the office refused to accept the same for which reason they sent a copy of their motion to dismiss by registered mail instead. The petitioners also argued that the mentioned motion for reconsideration should be treated as a petition for relief under Rule 38 of the Rules of Court and, as it was not accompanied by any affidavit of merit and was not verified, the same should be considered as a mere scrap of paper. In an order, dated April 29, 1966, the court a quo granted the private respondents' motion for reconsideration. The private respondents thereafter filed their opposition to the motion to dismiss.

On July 5, 1966 the court a quo issued another order apparently reconsidering again its previous stance and denying the motion to dismiss of the herein petitioners.

Subsequently, another motion to dismiss was filed by the herein petitioners with the trial court alleging that the private respondents failed to pay the correct docket fee corresponding to the amount of P2 million which was allegedly averred in the complaint in question as the value of the parcel of land in dispute. The private respondents filed their opposition stating that the assessed value of the mentioned land was only P12,620.00 according to the tax declaration issued to the herein petitioner Ruiz and that the statement in their complaint that the said land has a value of P2 million "is purely subjective and speculative." In an order, dated October 1, 1966, the trial court denied the second motion to dismiss of the herein petitioners.

Failing to secure a reconsideration of the orders of April 29 and July 5, 1966 from Judge Alfredo I. Gonzales,[2] the petitioners, on April 1, 1968, filed with the Court of Appeals a petition for prohibition and mandamus against the herein respondent judges Vicente Bullecer and Alfredo I. Gonzales. The Court of Appeals, however, in a resolution, dated April 8, 1968, dismissed their petition, stating that the court a quo did not commit any abuse of discretion and that The proper remedy for the petitioners to pursue is to assail the order denying their motion to dismiss in the appeal from the decision of the case on the merits. A motion to reconsider the said resolution having been denied, petitioners interposed the present petition for certiorari.

The petitioners contend that the Court of Appeals erred in ordering the dismissal of their petition below on mere procedural grounds rather than resolving the same on its merits.

On August 22, 1969, however, the petitioners Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones filed a motion in this Court praying that they be allowed to withdraw as co-petitioners herein on the grounds that they have withdrawn their authority to their co-petitioner Manuel B. Ruiz to appear as counsel in their behalf in civil case 5003, supra, and have filed a motion before the court a quo in the said case praying that they be dropped as party-defendants and be joined instead as party-plaintiffs therein. In the affidavits executed by Marcelo Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones and their proposed amended complaint in civil case 5003 which were filed in this Court in connection with their petition to withdraw as petitioners herein, they claim, in brief, that when they engaged the services of herein petitioner Ruiz as their counsel in the mentioned civil case 904 against Vedasto Corcuera, they offered to give him a share of the land in question as his attorney's fees, but that after they won the case, they were pressed

to agree on the sale of the land in question instead for only P2,000.00 and to thumbmark an undated deed of sale for a fictitious sum of P15,000.00 in favor of herein petitioner Quicio whom they have never known or seep.

On August 26, 1969, this Court granted the foregoing petition of Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones to withdraw as co-petitioners herein.

After considering the instant petition on its merits as urged by the petitioners herein, this Court finds no sufficient reason to reverse the order of dismissal complained of.

1. The settled rule where the dismissal of an action is sought on the ground that the complaint does not state a cause of action is that the insufficiency of the cause of action must appear on the face of the complaint (*Azur vs. Provincial Board*, 27 SCRA 56; *Dimayuga vs. Dimayuga*, 51 O.G. 2397; *Marabiles vs. Quito*, 52 O.G. 6507). And the test of the sufficiency of the ultimate facts alleged in the complaint, to constitute a cause of action, is whether or not, admitting the facts alleged, the court could render a valid judgment upon the same in accordance with the prayer of the complaint (*Ibid.*). For this purpose, the movant is deemed to admit hypothetically the truth of the facts thus averred (*Republic vs. Ramos*, 7 SCRA 50).

Admittedly, the phraseology of the questioned complaint leaves considerable space for improvement. Mere ambiguity in the averment of the cause of action is not, however, sufficient justification for the dismissal of the complaint. As we held in *Azur vs. Provincial Board*, *supra*, "though the allegations of the complaint are ambiguous, indefinite or uncertain, but, nevertheless, a cause of action can, in any manner, be made out therefrom, and plaintiff would be entitled to recover in any aspect of the facts or any combination of the facts alleged, if they were to be proved, then the motion to dismiss should be denied." In such cases, the defendant's remedy should be to request for a bill of particulars (*Cf. Amaro vs. Sumanquit*, 5 SCRA 708).

The basic elements of the theory that can be drawn from the herein private respondents' complaint below which, if proved, will permit recovery of the land in dispute, may be summed up thus: (a) that as legal heirs of their deceased uncle Meliton Quiñones who died without issue in 1941 the private respondents are equally entitled as their cousins Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones to the questioned land left by their late uncle; (b) that Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones were able to register the said land in their names after they won in the court suit over the said land against Vedasto Corcuera; in the said case herein petitioner Ruiz appeared as Marcial Quiñones' and Filomena Quiñones' counsel; they also claimed therein that they were the sole and exclusive heirs of the deceased Meliton Quiñones; and (c) that Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones sold the land in dispute under a deed dated April 10, 1956 to the herein petitioner spouses Macario Quicio and Alejandra Balico who later sold the same under a deed dated December 22, 1956 to herein petitioner Ruiz under circumstances indicating that both purported sales were absolutely null and void, such as: (1) the proximity of the dates appearing in the documents purporting to evidence the sales in question to each other as well as to the time when Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones won the suit against Vedasto Corcuera after a protracted litigation which lasted from 1952 to 1956; (2) the grossly inadequate price at which the questioned land was sold, that is, for only P15,000.00 when it has a fair market value of about P2 million consisting as it does of ten (10) hectares and located in the residential district of Davao City; (3) petitioner Quicio was not in a financial position to pay the said price of P15,000.00; (4) both sales were entered into in violation of article 1491 of the new Civil Code which prohibits lawyers from acquiring "property and rights which may be the object of any litigation in which they may take part by virtue of their profession;" and (5) the sales in question were executed as means of making it appear that the land in dispute was purchased by buyers in good faith.

The argument stressed by the petitioner Ruiz that since the sales of the land in question, as evidenced by notarized documents cited in the complaint, were executed after the decision in civil case 904 against Vedasto Corcuera

became final and conclusive, therefore, the sales were not void ab initio but merely voidable at the instance of the vendor under the rule laid down in *Wolfson vs. Estate of Enriquez* (20 Phil. 340), is of no consequence to the case at bar not only because the environmental milieu in the *Wolfson* case is not entirely identical and similar to the facts and motivations sought to be proved by the private respondents in their complaint, but also because the averments contained in the said complaint of the private respondents will sufficiently permit adducement of facts not only that the sale of the land in question to petitioner Ruiz, as counsel for the plaintiffs in civil case 904, was actually perfected while the land in dispute was still in litigation, but also that there was collusion among all the original petitioners herein to bring about the assailed sales transactions, induced primarily by the ascendancy exercised by petitioner Ruiz over his "uncouth" clients in order to make it appear that the said land was purchased by a buyer in good faith thereby precluding its legitimate owners from recovering the same in view of the protective provisions of the Land Registration Act towards purchasers in good faith and for value. Evidently, a contract entered into under such circumstances, to the extent that it prejudices third persons with legitimate claims, is null and void ab initio because its perfection and consummation constitute a violation of public policy due to the illegal purposes by which it was motivated and because such an agreement carries with it the patent badges of absolute simulation. At all events, Marcial Quiñones and Filomena Quiñones have now joined the private respondents in recovering the land in dispute from the herein petitioners Quicio and Ruiz, and this Court is satisfied, after a careful examination of the amended complaint which they submitted to the court a quo, that the same sufficiently states a cause of action against the petitioners Quicio and Ruiz.

2. The plea of prescription cannot likewise be sustained.

According to the present petitioners Quicio and Ruiz, under the facts alleged in the questioned complaint, the private respondents' cause of action accrued in 1941 so that for purposes of resolving whether or not the action below has prescribed, the old laws, specifically, Act 190, should govern as provided for in article 1116 of the new Civil Code. (See *Carillo vs. De Paz*, 18 SCRA 467; *Joaquin vs. Cojuangco*, 20 SCRA 769; *Parcotillo vs. Parcotillo*, 12 SCRA 435).[3] Under the mentioned Act 190, adverse possession either in good faith or bad faith ripened into ownership after the lapse of ten years in the same manner that an action to recover title to or possession of an immovable prescribed in the same period (See *Ongsiaco vs. Dallo*, 27 SCRA 165).

The foregoing principles cannot be applied, however, to the case at bar for the following reasons: (a) one of the causes of action of the private respondents against the herein petitioners is that the sales, contracts over the land in dispute in favor of petitioners Quicio and Ruiz, respectively, are null and void ab initio because they were calculated to deprive the former of their legitimate claims over the said property; under article 1410 of the new Civil Code "The action or defense for the declaration of the inexistence of a contract does not prescribe;" this was already a well-settled rule even before the enactment of the new Civil Code (See *Eugenio vs. Perdido*, 97 Phil. 43; *Angeles vs. Court of Appeals*, 102 Phil. 1011); (b) for purposes of acquisitive prescription in favor of petitioner Ruiz, it should be noted that less than ten (10) years have elapsed between the time the land in dispute was registered in the name of the herein petitioner Quicio in April, 1956 (from whom the herein petitioner Ruiz allegedly acquired the said land by purchase on December 22, 1956) and the time of the filing in court of the questioned complaint on March 25, 1966; the rules are well-settled in this jurisdiction that when a person through fraud succeeds in registering the property in his name, the law: (1) creates what is called a "constructive or implied trust" in favor of the defrauded party (see *Sevilla vs. de los Angeles*, 97 Phil. 877; *Bancairen vs. Diones*, 98 Phil. 122; *Marabiles vs. Quito*, L-10408, Oct. 18, 1956; *Cuison vs. Fernandez*, L-11764, Jan. 31, 1959; and *Malabanan vs. Mendoza*, L-12540, Feb. 28, 1959) and (2) grants the latter the right to recover the property fraudulently registered within a period of ten (10) years (*Diaz vs. Gorricho*, L-11229, March 29, 1958; *Candelaria vs. Romero*, L-12149, Sept. 30, 1960; *J.M. Tuason & Co., Inc. vs. Magdangal*, L-15539, Jan. 30, 1962; *Gonzalez vs. Jimenez*, L-19073, Jan. 30, 1965; *Buencamino vs. Matias*, 16 SCRA 849; *Cuaycong vs. Cuaycong*, 21 SCRA

1192 and *Alzona vs. Capunitan*, 4 SCRA 450); and (c) although under Article 1138 of the new Civil Code (Art. 1960 of the old Civil Code), it is provided that "in the computation of time necessary for prescription ... the present possessor may complete the period necessary for prescription by tacking his possession to that of his grantor or predecessor in interest," this provision applies only where there is privity between the successive possessors (*Razote vs. Razote*, 49 Phil. 182; and *Lacson vs. Government*, 39 Phil. 631). It does not apply to a case where, as the herein private respondents aim to prove at the trial of the case at bar, the present possessor came into possession of the land in dispute by virtue of a sale that is null and void ab initio because the sale was entered into contrary to public policy and was, furthermore, absolutely fictitious and simulated. In fact, even the vendors themselves -- *Marcial Quinones* and *Filomena Quinones* -- are impugning the validity of the sale made by them of the land in question to herein petitioner *Quicio* as well as the alleged sale that took place between petitioners *Quicio* and *Ruiz* concerning the same property.

ACCORDINGLY, the instant petition is denied. Without costs.

Teehankee, Makasiar, Muñoz Palma, Martin, Fernandez, and Guerrero, JJ., concur.

[1] Private respondents *Jesus Aguilon* and *Alfredo Noel, Jr.* are joined as respondents herein for being the husbands, respectively, of *Socorro T. Aguilon* and *Imelda T. Noel*.

[2] The province of *Davao* was divided into three (3) provinces during the pendency of the instant controversy below. As a result of the re-shuffling of cases that followed, civil case 5003 was transferred from the sala of Judge *Bullecer* to Judge *Gonzales*.

[3] Art. 1116 provides: "Prescription already running before the effectivity of this Code shall be governed by laws previously in force; but if since the time this Code took effect the entire period herein required for prescription should elapse, the present Code shall be applicable, even though by the former laws a longer period might be required." (Cf. Art. 2258, new Civil Code).

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