

WILLIAM UY AND RODEL ROXAS, PETITIONERS, VS. COURT OF APPEALS, HON. ROBERT BALAO AND NATIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY, RESPONDENTS.

G.R. No. 120465. September 09, 1999

Ponente: KAPUNAN, J.

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KAPUNAN, J.:

Petitioners William Uy and Rodel Roxas are agents authorized to sell eight parcels of land by the owners thereof. By virtue of such authority, petitioners offered to sell the lands, located in Tuba, Tadiangan, Benguet to respondent National Housing Authority (NHA) to be utilized and developed as a housing project.

On February 14, 1989, the NHA Board passed Resolution No. 1632 approving the acquisition of said lands, with an area of 31.8231 hectares, at the cost of P23.867 million, pursuant to which the parties executed a series of Deeds of Absolute Sale covering the subject lands. Of the eight parcels of land, however, only five were paid for by the NHA because of the report[1] it received from the Land Geosciences Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) that the remaining area is located at an active landslide area and therefore, not suitable for development into a housing project.

On 22 November 1991, the NHA issued Resolution No. 2352 cancelling the sale over the three parcels of land. The NHA, through Resolution No. 2394, subsequently offered the amount of P1.225 million to the landowners as daños perjuicios.

On 9 March 1992, petitioners filed before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Quezon City a Complaint for Damages against NHA and its General Manager Robert Balao.

After trial, the RTC rendered a decision declaring the cancellation of the contract to be justified. The trial court nevertheless awarded damages to plaintiffs in the sum of P1.255 million, the same amount initially offered by NHA to petitioners as damages.

Upon appeal by petitioners, the Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the trial court and entered a new one dismissing the complaint. It held that since there was “sufficient justifiable basis” in cancelling the sale, “it saw no reason” for the award of damages. The Court of Appeals also noted that petitioners were mere attorneys-in-fact and, therefore, not the real parties-in-interest in the action before the trial court.

xxx In paragraph 4 of the complaint, plaintiffs alleged themselves to be “sellers’ agents” for several owners of the 8 lots subject matter of the case. Obviously, William Uy and Rodel Roxas in filing this case acted as attorneys-in-fact of the lot owners who are the real parties in interest but who were omitted to be pleaded as party-plaintiffs in the case. This omission is fatal. Where the action is brought by an attorney-in-fact of a land owner in his name, (as in our present action) and not in the name of his principal, the action was properly dismissed (*Ferrer vs. Villamor*, 60 SCRA 406 [1974]; *Marcelo vs. de Leon*, 105 Phil. 1175) because the rule is that every action must be prosecuted in the name of the real parties-in-interest (Section 2, Rule 3, Rules of Court).

When plaintiffs Uy and Roxas sought payment of damages in their favor in view of the partial rescission of Resolution No. 1632 and the Deed of Absolute Sale covering TCT Nos. 10998, 10999 and 11292 (Prayer complaint, page 5, RTC records), it becomes obviously indispensable that the lot owners be included, mentioned and named as party-plaintiffs, being the real party-in-interest. Uy and Roxas, as attorneys-in-fact or apoderados, cannot by themselves lawfully commence this action, more so, when the supposed special power of attorney, in their favor, was never presented as an evidence in this case. Besides, even if herein plaintiffs Uy and Roxas were authorized by the lot owners to commence this action, the same must still be filed in the name of the principal, (Filipino Industrial Corporation vs. San Diego, 23 SCRA 706 [1968]). As such indispensable party, their joinder in the action is mandatory and the complaint may be dismissed if not so impleaded (NDC vs. CA, 211 SCRA 422 [1992]).[2]

Their motion for reconsideration having been denied, petitioners seek relief from this Court contending that:

I. COMPLAINT FINDING THE RESPONDENT CA ERRED IN DECLARING THAT RESPONDENT NHA HAD ANY LEGAL BASIS FOR RESCINDING THE SALE INVOLVING THE LAST THREE (3) PARCELS COVERED BY NHA RESOLUTION NO. 1632.

II. GRANTING ARGUENDO THAT THE RESPONDENT NHA HAD LEGAL BASIS TO RESCIND THE SUBJECT SALE, THE RESPONDENT CA NONETHELESS ERRED IN DENYING HEREIN PETITIONERS' CLAIM TO DAMAGES, CONTRARY TO THE PROVISIONS OF ART. 1191 OF THE CIVIL CODE.

III. THE RESPONDENT CA ERRED IN DISMISSING THE SUBJECT COMPLAINT FINDING THAT THE PETITIONERS FAILED TO JOIN AS INDISPENSABLE PARTY PLAINTIFF THE SELLING LOT-OWNERS.[3]

We first resolve the issue raised in the third assignment of error.

Petitioners claim that they lodged the complaint not in behalf of their principles but in their own name as agents directly damaged by the termination of the contract. The damages prayed for were intended not for the benefit of their principals but to indemnify petitioners for the losses they themselves allegedly incurred as a result of such termination. These damages consist mainly of "unearned income" and advances.[4] Petitioners, thus, attempt to distinguish the case at bar from those involving agents or apoderados instituting actions in their own name but in behalf of their principals.[5] Petitioners in this case purportedly brought the action for damages in their own name and in their own behalf.

We find this contention unmeritorious.

Section 2, Rule 3 of the Rules of Court requires that every action must be prosecuted and defended in the name of the real party-in-interest. The real party-in-interest is the party who stands to be benefited or injured by the judgment or the party entitled to the avails of the suit. "Interest," within the meaning of the rule, means material interest, an interest in the issue and to be affected by the decree, as distinguished from mere interest in the question involved, or a mere incidental interest.[6] Cases construing the real party-in-interest provision can be more easily understood if it is borne in mind that the true meaning of real party-in-interest may be summarized as follows: An action shall be prosecuted in the name of the party who, by the substantive law, has the right sought to be enforced.[7]

Do petitioners, under substantive law, possess the right they seek to enforce? We rule in the negative.

The applicable substantive law in this case is Article 1311 of the Civil Code, which states:

Contracts take effect only between the parties, their assigns, and heirs, except in case where the rights and obligations arising from the contract are not transmissible by their nature, or by stipulation, or by provision of

law. x x x.

If a contract should contain some stipulation in favor of a third person, he may demand its fulfillment provided he communicated his acceptance to the obligor before its revocation. A mere incidental benefit or interest of a person is not sufficient. The contracting parties must have clearly and deliberately conferred a favor upon a third person. (Underscoring supplied.)

Petitioners are not parties to the contract of sale between their principals and NHA. They are mere agents of the owners of the land subject of the sale. As agents, they only render some service or do something in representation or on behalf of their principals.[8] The rendering of such service did not make them parties to the contracts of sale executed in behalf of the latter. Since a contract may be violated only by the parties thereto as against each other, the real parties-in-interest, either as plaintiff or defendant, in an action upon that contract must, generally, either be parties to said contract.[9]

Neither has there been any allegation, much less proof, that petitioners are the heirs of their principals.

Are petitioners assignees to the rights under the contracts of sale? In *McMicking vs. Banco Español-Filipino*,[10] we held that the rule requiring every action to be prosecuted in the name of the real party-in-interest

x x x recognizes the assignments of rights of action and also recognizes that when one has a right of action assigned to him he is then the real party in interest and may maintain an action upon such claim or right. The purpose of [this rule] is to require the plaintiff to be the real party in interest, or, in other words, he must be the person to whom the proceeds of the action shall belong, and to prevent actions by persons who have no interest in the result of the same. xxx

Thus, an agent, in his own behalf, may bring an action founded on a contract made for his principal, as an assignee of such contract. We find the following declaration in Section 372 (1) of the Restatement of the Law on Agency (Second):[11]

Section 372. Agent as Owner of Contract Right

(1) Unless otherwise agreed, an agent who has or who acquires an interest in a contract which he makes on behalf of his principal can, although not a promisee, maintain such action thereon as might a transferee having a similar interest.

The Comment on subsection (1) states:

a. Agent a transferee. One who has made a contract on behalf of another may become an assignee of the contract and bring suit against the other party to it, as any other transferee. The customs of business or the course of conduct between the principal and the agent may indicate that an agent who ordinarily has merely a security interest is a transferee of the principals rights under the contract and as such is permitted to bring suit. If the agent has settled with his principal with the understanding that he is to collect the claim against the obligor by way of reimbursing himself for his advances and commissions, the agent is in the position of an assignee who is the beneficial owner of the chose in action. He has an irrevocable power to sue in his principal's name. x x x. And, under the statutes which permit the real party in interest to sue, he can maintain an action in his own name. This power to sue is not affected by a settlement between the principal and the obligor if the latter has notice of the agent's interest. x x x. Even though the agent has not settled with his principal, he may, by agreement with the principal, have a right to receive payment and out of the proceeds to reimburse himself for advances and commissions before turning the balance over to the principal. In such a case, although there is no formal assignment, the agent is in the position of a transferee of the whole claim for security; he has an irrevocable power to sue in his principal's name and, under statutes which permit the real party in interest to sue, he can maintain an action in his own name.

Petitioners, however, have not shown that they are assignees of their principals to the subject contracts. While they alleged that they made advances and that they suffered loss of commissions, they have not established any agreement granting them “the right to receive payment and out of the proceeds to reimburse [themselves] for advances and commissions before turning the balance over to the principal[s].”

Finally, it does not appear that petitioners are beneficiaries of a stipulation pour autrui under the second paragraph of Article 1311 of the Civil Code. Indeed, there is no stipulation in any of the Deeds of Absolute Sale “clearly and deliberately” conferring a favor to any third person.

That petitioners did not obtain their commissions or recoup their advances because of the non-performance of the contract did not entitle them to file the action below against respondent NHA. Section 372 (2) of the Restatement of the Law on Agency (Second) states:

(2) An agent does not have such an interest in a contract as to entitle him to maintain an action at law upon it in his own name merely because he is entitled to a portion of the proceeds as compensation for making it or because he is liable for its breach.

The following Comment on the above subsection is illuminating:

The fact that an agent who makes a contract for his principal will gain or suffer loss by the performance or nonperformance of the contract by the principal or by the other party thereto does not entitle him to maintain an action on his own behalf against the other party for its breach. An agent entitled to receive a commission from his principal upon the performance of a contract which he has made on his principal's account does not, from this fact alone, have any claim against the other party for breach of the contract, either in an action on the contract or otherwise. An agent who is not a promisee cannot maintain an action at law against a purchaser merely because he is entitled to have his compensation or advances paid out of the purchase price before payment to the principal. x x x.

Thus, in *Hopkins vs. Ives*,^[12] the Supreme Court of Arkansas, citing Section 372 (2) above, denied the claim of a real estate broker to recover his alleged commission against the purchaser in an agreement to purchase property.

In *Goduco vs. Court of Appeals*,^[13] this Court held that:

x x x granting that appellant had the authority to sell the property, the same did not make the buyer liable for the commission she claimed. At most, the owner of the property and the one who promised to give her a commission should be the one liable to pay the same and to whom the claim should have been directed. xxx

As petitioners are not parties, heirs, assignees, or beneficiaries of a stipulation pour autrui under the contracts of sale, they do not, under substantive law, possess the right they seek to enforce. Therefore, they are not the real parties-in-interest in this case.

Petitioners not being the real parties-in-interest, any decision rendered herein would be pointless since the same would not bind the real parties-in-interest.^[14]

Nevertheless, to forestall further litigation on the substantive aspects of this case, we shall proceed to rule on the merits.^[15]

Petitioners submit that respondent NHA had no legal basis to “rescind” the sale of the subject three parcels of land. The existence of such legal basis, notwithstanding, petitioners argue that they are still entitled to an award of damages.

Petitioners confuse the cancellation of the contract by the NHA as a rescission of the contract under Article 1191 of the Civil Code. The right of rescission or, more accurately, resolution, of a party to an obligation under Article

1191 is predicated on a breach of faith by the other party that violates the reciprocity between them.[16] The power to rescind, therefore, is given to the injured party.[17] Article 1191 states:

The power to rescind obligations is implied in reciprocal ones, in case one of the obligors should not comply with what is incumbent upon him.

The injured party may choose between the fulfillment and the rescission of the obligation, with the payment of damages in either case. He may also seek rescission, even after he has chosen fulfillment, if the latter should become impossible.

In this case, the NHA did not rescind the contract. Indeed, it did not have the right to do so for the other parties to the contract, the vendors, did not commit any breach, much less a substantial breach,[18] of their obligation. Their obligation was merely to deliver the parcels of land to the NHA, an obligation that they fulfilled. The NHA did not suffer any injury by the performance thereof.

The cancellation, therefore, was not a rescission under Article 1191. Rather, the cancellation was based on the negation of the cause arising from the realization that the lands, which were the object of the sale, were not suitable for housing.

Cause is the essential reason which moves the contracting parties to enter into it.[19] In other words, the cause is the immediate, direct and proximate reason which justifies the creation of an obligation through the will of the contracting parties.[20] Cause, which is the essential reason for the contract, should be distinguished from motive, which is the particular reason of a contracting party which does not affect the other party.[21]

For example, in a contract of sale of a piece of land, such as in this case, the cause of the vendor (petitioner's principals) in entering into the contract is to obtain the price. For the vendee, NHA, it is the acquisition of the land.[22] The motive of the NHA, on the other hand, is to use said lands for housing. This is apparent from the portion of the Deeds of Absolute Sale[23] stating:

WHEREAS, under the Executive Order No. 90 dated December 17, 1986, the VENDEE is mandated to focus and concentrate its efforts and resources in providing housing assistance to the lowest thirty percent (30%) of urban income earners, thru slum upgrading and development of sites and services projects;

WHEREAS, Letters of Instructions Nos. 555 and 557 [as] amended by Letter of Instruction No. 630, prescribed slum improvement and upgrading, as well as the development of sites and services as the principal housing strategy for dealing with slum, squatter and other blighted communities;

x x x

WHEREAS, the VENDEE, in pursuit of and in compliance with the above-stated purposes offers to buy and the VENDORS, in a gesture of their willing to cooperate with the above policy and commitments, agree to sell the aforesaid property together with all the existing improvements there or belonging to the VENDORS;

NOW, THEREFORE, for and in consideration of the foregoing premises and the terms and conditions hereinbelow stipulated, the VENDORS hereby, sell, transfer, cede and convey unto the VENDEE, its assigns, or successors-in-interest, a parcel of land located at Bo. Tadiangan, Tuba, Benguet containing a total area of FIFTY SIX THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED NINETEEN (56,819) SQUARE METERS, more or less x x x.

Ordinarily, a party's motives for entering into the contract do not affect the contract. However, when the motive predetermines the cause, the motive may be regarded as the cause. In *Liguez vs. Court of Appeals*,[24] this Court, speaking through Justice J.B.L. Reyes, held:

xxx It is well to note, however, that Manresa himself (Vol. 8, pp. 641-642) while maintaining the distinction and upholding the inoperativeness of the motives of the parties to determine the validity of the contract,

expressly excepts from the rule those contracts that are conditioned upon the attainment of the motives of either party.

The same view is held by the Supreme Court of Spain, in its decisions of February 4, 1941, and December 4, 1946, holding that the motive may be regarded as causa when it predetermines the purpose of the contract.

In this case, it is clear, and petitioners do not dispute, that NHA would not have entered into the contract were the lands not suitable for housing. In other words, the quality of the land was an implied condition for the NHA to enter into the contract. On the part of the NHA, therefore, the motive was the cause for its being a party to the sale.

Were the lands indeed unsuitable for the housing as NHA claimed?

We deem the findings contained in the report of the Land Geosciences Bureau dated 15 July 1991 sufficient basis for the cancellation of the sale, thus:

In Tadiangan, Tuba, the housing site is situated in an area of moderate topography. There [are] more areas of less sloping ground apparently habitable. The site is underlain by x x x thick slide deposits (4-45m) consisting of huge conglomerate boulders (see Photo No. 2) mix[ed] with silty clay materials. These clay particles when saturated have some swelling characteristics which is dangerous for any civil structures especially mass housing development.[25]

Petitioners content that the report was merely “preliminary,” and not conclusive, as indicated in its title:

MEMORANDUM

TO:

EDWIN G. DOMINGO

Chief, Lands Geology Division

FROM:

ARISTOTLE A. RILLON

Geologist II

SUBJECT:

Preliminary Assessment of Tadiangan Housing Project in Tuba, Benguet[26]

Thus, page 2 of the report states in part:

x x x

Actually there is a need to conduct further geotechnical [sic] studies in the NHA property. Standard Penetration Test (SPT) must be carried out to give an estimate of the degree of compaction (the relative density) of the slide deposit and also the bearing capacity of the soil materials. Another thing to consider is the vulnerability of the area to landslides and other mass movements due to thick soil cover. Preventive physical mitigation methods such as surface and subsurface drainage and regrading of the slope must be done in the

area.[27]

We read the quoted portion, however, to mean only that further tests are required to determine the “degree of compaction,” “the bearing capacity of the soil materials,” and “vulnerability of the area to landslides,” since the tests already conducted were inadequate to ascertain such geological attributes. It is only in this sense that the assessment was “preliminary.”

Accordingly, we hold that the NHA was justified in cancelling the contract. The realization of the mistake as regards the quality of the land resulted in the negation of the motive/cause thus rendering the contract inexistent.[28] Article 1318 of the Civil Code states that:

Art. 1318. There is no contract unless the following requisites concur:

- (1) Consent of the contracting parties;
- (2) Object certain which is the subject matter of the contract;
- (3) Cause of the obligation which is established. (Underscoring supplied.)

Therefore, assuming that petitioners are parties, assignees or beneficiaries to the contract of sale, they would not be entitled to any award of damages.

WHEREFORE, the instant petition is hereby DENIED.

SO ORDERED.

Davide, C.J., (Chairman), on leave. Puno, Pardo, and Ynares-Santiago, JJ., concur.

[1] Exhibit “4.”

[2] Rollo, pp. 26-27. Underscoring in the original.

[3] Id., at 11.

[4] Petitioners alleged in their complaint:

14. Exhausted with the procrastinations and unjustified positions being assumed by the defendant NHA, herein plaintiffs hereby acquiesce to the notice of rescission handed down by the defendant NHA, through its General Manager Robert Balao, subject to the award of a reasonable and fair amount of damages.

14.a. Unearned Income: Had defendant NHA paid for the last three parcels of land covered by Res. No. 1632, and the deeds of absolute sale referred to in par. 10 above, herein plaintiffs would have made an income of approximately P6.4 Million. Defendant NHA should be held answerable to the plaintiffs for this unearned income as shall be proven in the course of the trial.

14.b. Opportunity Loss: Had defendant NHA paid for the subject parcels of land within a reasonable time from February 1989, herein plaintiffs could have invested their income of P6.4 Million and earn at a conservative return on investment of 2%/year or at least P4.6 million over the last three years. Again, defendant NHA should be required to indemnify the herein plaintiffs for this lost opportunity as shall be proven in the course of the trial.

14.c. Expenses: Through the last three years, herein plaintiffs had consistently and unhesitantly spent reasonable sums of money by way of representations, advances to landowners, advances for clearing of titles subject of the herein transactions, advances to sub-agents, logistical expenses and lawyer’s fees; in the process, they also incurred loans to finance these expenses-total expenses incurred prior to the filing of the present case being

estimated at P1.3 million. Defendants should be required to reimburse the plaintiffs for these expenses as shall be proven in the course of the trial.

15. Plaintiffs had suffered and continue to suffer prolonged agony and mental anguish from the defendant NHA's previous procrastinations and condescending approach to the herein plaintiffs' plight for which defendant NHA should be charged moral damages in favor of the plaintiffs in the amount of P600,000.00.

16. To set an example, and to prevent the recurrence of the herein circumstances, defendant NHA should be charged exemplary damages in the amount of P600,000.00 in favor of the herein plaintiff.

17. To vindicate their rights in the premises, plaintiffs had to contract the services of herein counsel, and to incur cost of suit, as shall be proven in the course of the trial. Defendant NHA should be held liable to the plaintiffs for these amounts by way of attorney's fees in the amount of P1 million. (Records, pp. 4-5.)

[5] *Filipinas Industrial Corp. vs. San Diego*, 23 SCRA 706 (1968); *Brown vs. Brown*, 3 SCRA 451 (1961); *Marcelo vs. De Leon*, 105 Phil. 1175 (1959); *Esperanza and Bullo vs. Catindig*, 27 Phil. 397 (1914).

[6] *University of the Philippines vs. Ligot-Telan*, 227 SCRA 343 (1993); *Ralla vs. Ralla*, 199 SCRA 495 (1991); *Rebollido vs. Court of Appeals*, 170 SCRA 800 (1989).

[7] *I Francisco*, *The Revised Rules of Court in the Phil.*, ed., p. 211. See also *Lubbock Feed Lots, Inc. v. Iowa Beef Processors*, 630 F. 2d 250 (1980).

[8] Article 1868, Civil Code.

[9] *Marimperio Compañia Naviera, S.A. vs. Court of Appeals*, 156 SCRA 368 (1987). See also *I Moran*, *Comments on the Rules of Court*, 1979 ed., p. 157.

[10] 13 Phil. 429 (1909).

[11] As adopted and Promulgated by the American Law Institute at Washington, D.C., May 23, 1957.

[12] 566 S.W. 2d 147.

[13] 10 SCRA 275 (1964).

[14] *Filipinas Industrial Corporation vs. San Diego*, 23 SCRA 706 (1968).

[15] See: *Arroyo and Granada and Gentero*, 18 Phil. 484 (1911).

[16] *Romero vs. Court of Appeals*, 250 SCRA 223 (1995).

[17] *Boysaw vs. Interphil Promotions, Inc.*, 148 SCRA 635, cited in *Romero vs. Court of Appeals*, *supra*.

[18] See *Ocampo vs. Court of Appeals*, 233 SCRA 551 (1994). See also *Power Commercial and Industrial Corp. vs. Court of Appeals*, 274 SCRA 597 (1997), and *Massive Construction, Inc. vs. Intermediate Appellate Court*, 223 SCRA 1 (1993).

[19] *Basic Books (Phil.), Inc. vs. Lopez, et al*, 16 SCRA 291 (1966), citing *General Enterprises Inc. vs. Lianga Bay Logging Co.*, 11 SCRA 733 (1964).

[20] *Id.*, citing 3 *Castan*, 4th ed., p. 347.

[21] *Republic vs. Cloribel*, 36 SCRA 534 (1970). See also Article 1351, Civil Code.

[22] Article 1350, Civil Code. In onerous contracts, the cause is understood to be, for each contracting party, the

prestation or promise of a thing or service by the other. x x x.

[23] Exhibits “B,” “C,” and “D.”

[24] 102 Phil. 577 (1957), cited in *E. Razon Inc. vs. Philippine Ports Authority*, 151 SCRA 233 (1987). See also *Philippine National Construction Corp. vs. Court of Appeals*, 272 SCRA 183 (1997), where the Court held that “xxx As a general principle, the motive or particular purpose of a party in entering into a contract does not affect the validity nor existence of the contract; an exception is when the realization of such motive or particular purpose has been made a condition upon which the contract is made to depend.” xxx

[25] Records, p. 32. Underscoring supplied.

[26] *Id.*, at 31. Underscoring supplied.

[27] *Id.*, at 32. Underscoring supplied.

[28] Note that said contract is also avoidable under Article 1331 of the Civil Code which states:

Art. 1331. In order that mistake may invalidate consent, it should refer to the substance of the thing which is the object of the contract, or to those conditions which have principally moved one or both parties to enter into the contract.

x x x

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