

FLORA LAURON, ANUNCIACION LAURON, RAFAEL LAURON, PEDRO LAURON, SALVADOR LAURON, FLORITA LAURON, EN-RIQUE LAURON, AURELIO LAURON, JU-LIETA LIRADO, CORAZON LIRADO, LEONOR LIRADO; ...

G.R. NO. 62021. April 06, 1990

Ponente: NARVASA, J.

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NARVASA, J.:

In this case there is once again an attempt to have this Court review and reverse factual conclusions of the Court of Appeals. This the Court will not do, as it has in so many instances in the past declined to do. For it is a long established and observed axiom that subject only to a few well defined exceptions, the findings of fact of the Court of Appeals are conclusive even on this Court and are not therefore reviewable by it.[1]

The factual conclusions which petitioners wish reviewed are set forth in the Decision of the Court of Appeals dated October 12, 1982 in CA-G.R. No. 65492-R, entitled “Flora Lauron, et al. v. Andres Loot, et al.”[2] That decision reversed the judgment of the then Court of First Instance of Iloilo rendered on September 16, 1978 in Civil Case No. 7842 entitled “Flora Lauron, et al. v. Andres Lacuesta Loot, et al.”[3]

The verdict of the Court of Appeals was arrived at after an extensive review of the evidence presented by the parties at the trial on the fundamental issue of the origin and ownership of three (3) lots located at Barrio Bondoc, Lambunao, Iloilo. These lots are identified as Lots 4888, 5656 and 5655 of the Lambunao Cadastre, with respective areas of 87,802 square meters, 13,257 square meters, and 12,270 square meters.

Claiming to be the owners thereof, the petitioners, Flora Lauron, et al., brought suit in the Court of First Instance of Iloilo to vindicate their title and recover the lots from their possessors, namely: Andres Loot, as regards Lots 4888 and 5656, and defendant Rene Latog, as regards Lot 5655. According to the petitioners, they were owners of the property by inheritance from their late grandfather, Maximo Legarda.

Both Andres Loot and Rene Latog denied the petitioners’ pretensions to the property. Andres Loot claimed ownership of the land sought to be recovered from him (Lots 4888 and 5656), and of much more besides, by inheritance from his deceased predecessor, Lupo Loot who, in his lifetime, and over a period extending from 1929 to 1945, had acquired title to land with an aggregate area of 1,571,358 square meters. Rene Latog also claimed title to Lot 5655, grounded on a deed of sale executed in his favor on December 12, 1964 by a certain Jaime Limoso, which deed Latog had registered in accordance with the provisions of Act 3344 on December 29, 1972, and said Limoso having, in turn, acquired the property from Andres Loot by deed dated May 20, 1958.

The Court of Appeals adjudged the evidence of petitioners Lauron, et al. to be inferior to Loot’s and Latog’s proofs. It opined that other than a tax declaration (No. 3969) -- the probative value of which was considerably reduced by the claims of others over the same property therein described, as shown, e.g., by Tax Declaration No. 12222 in the name of other persons, covering properties east of the Casibucawan Creek which petitioners claim to

be theirs under said Tax Declaration No. 3969 -- and a plan of dubious veracity which had never been approved by the Bureau of Lands and was demonstrably inaccurate -- the petitioners had not presented any persuasive proof of their ownership of the lots in dispute. In truth, said that Court, the testimony of a disinterested witness, Judith Latosa, belied material aspects of petitioners' evidence.

On the other hand, in the Appellate Court's view, Loot and Latog had established by preponderance of evidence the validity of their claims of title. According to the Court, the testimonial evidence by them adduced, corroborated by documents not shown to be other than authentic, prove that Lots 4888 and 5656 are part of a 30-hectare property purchased by Lupo Loot from the spouses Encarnacion Lorca and Operiano Bereno in virtue of a deed of sale executed as early as 1929, and that the realty taxes on the property had been continuously paid by the Loots and their predecessor-in-interest. As regards Lot 5655, the Court of Appeals declared that the evidence on record sufficiently established that it had been purchased by Rene Latog from Jaime Limoso in virtue of a deed dated October 12, 1964, that the sale had been registered under Act 3344 on December 29, 1972, and that Limoso had earlier acquired the land from Andres Loot by virtue of a Deed of Adjudication with Sale on May 20, 1958, which sale was also registered pursuant to Act 3344.

It should thus be apparent that the decision of the Court of Appeals turned upon the basic issue of the comparative weight of the parties' respective proofs in substantiation of their conflicting claims of title to the lots in question. This circumstance bars a review of its judgment by this Court.

To be sure, the Trial Court differs with the Court of Appeals as regards and interpretation and appreciation of the evidence. No persuasive argument has however been put forth to show why the former's findings should be accepted in preference to the latter's. Indeed, the analysis by the Court of Appeals of the evidence on record, and the process by which it arrived at its findings on the basis thereof, impel conferment of this Court's approval on said findings, on account of the intrinsic merit and cogency thereof no less than that Court's superior status as a review tribunal.

What the petitioners are now essaying in this Court is to give to essentially factual issues the appearance of legal questions. They pose such questions, for instance, as whether the Court of Appeals "can reverse the findings of fact of the lower court (which) *** are well-supported by the evidence on record *** (and) stipulated facts," and whether "the factual findings of the *** Court of Appeals based on incompetent evidence is an error in law subject to *** review by the *** Supreme Court." It need only be pointed out that the premises assumed as true in these questions -- i.e., that the evidence does support the trial court's factual conclusions, while those of the appellate court do indeed rest on incompetent proofs -- are themselves factual propositions at issue in this case, and without inquiring into the validity of those assumptions, the "legal issues" arising therefrom cannot be resolved. At bottom, therefore, the petitioners seek this Court's ruling on what they allege to be errors of the Court of Appeals in the appreciation of the evidence. They seek an opportunity to persuade this Court of the correctness of their own version of the facts. That they cannot have in this forum.

As was pointed out in this opinion's first paragraph, factual conclusions of Court of Appeals are not reviewable. There are, to be sure, exceptions to the rule, but none has been shown to obtain here.

WHEREFORE, the petition is DENIED, with costs against the petitioners.

SO ORDERED.

Cruz, Gancayco, Griño-Aquino, and Medialdea, JJ., concur.

[1] Manlapaz v. C.A., et al., 147 SCRA 236; Maclan v. Santos, 156 SCRA 542; Remalante v. Tibe, 158 SCRA 138; Hernandez v. C.A., et al., 160 SCRA 821; Apex Investment and Financing Corp. v. I.A.C., G.R. No. 69723, Oct. 18, 1988; Republic v. C.A. G.R No. 62680, Dec. 8, 1988; Reynolds Phil. Corp. v. C.A., G.R No. 38187, Jan. 17, 1989; France v. C.A., G.R. No. 76093, March 21, 1989; SSS v. C.A., L--46192, Aug. 29, 1989

[2] The judgment was written for the Court by Hon. Rodolfo A. Nocon (then Associate, now Presiding, Justice of the Court of Appeals), with whom concurred Pascual and Sison, JJ.

[3] The decision was rendered by Hon. Ricardo M. Ilarde, then presiding over Branch V of said Court of First Instance of Iloilo

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