

SECOND DIVISION

[G.R. No. 149243, October 28, 2002]

LOLITA B. COPIOSO, PETITIONER, VS. LAURO, DOLORES, RAFAEL, ESTEBAN, AND CORAZON, ALL SURNAMED COPIOSO, AND COURT OF APPEALS, RESPONDENTS.

DECISION

BELLOSILLO, J.:

This petition for review assails the Decision^[1] of the Court of Appeals in CA G.R. SP No. 62090 which dismissed petitioner's petition for certiorari as well as its Resolution denying reconsideration thereof.

On 4 July 2000 respondents Lauro, Dolores, Rafael, Esteban and Corazon, all surnamed Copioso, filed a complaint^[2] for reconveyance of two (2) parcels of coconut land situated in Banilad, Nagcarlan, Laguna, against Lolita B. Copioso, spouses Bernabe and Imelda Doria, and the estate of deceased Antonio Copioso, as well as vendees Dolores Reduca, Mercedes Reduca, Rosario Pascua, Elvira Bombasi and Federico Casabar.

Respondents alleged that they together with their deceased brother Antonio Copioso were co-owners of the subject property having inherited the same from their parents, and that through fraud and machination Antonio had the property transferred to his name and that of spouses Bernabe and Imelda Doria who subsequently sold the same to third parties. They thus prayed for the reconveyance of the property by virtue of their being co-owners thereof.

When respondents claimed in a manifestation with motion for bill of particulars that the assessed value of the subject property was P3,770.00, petitioner Lolita Copioso and spouses Bernabe and Imelda Doria separately moved to dismiss the complaint on the ground that it was the Municipal Trial Court (MTC) and not the Regional Trial Court (RTC) that had jurisdiction over the case considering that the assessed value of the property was lower than P20,000.00.

The trial court in its twin orders of 5 and 12 September 2000 denied the motions to dismiss holding that since the subject matter of the action was beyond pecuniary estimation it was properly within its jurisdiction.^[3] Lolita Copioso's Motion for Reconsideration was denied,^[4] hence, she filed with the Court of Appeals a petition for certiorari and prohibition praying for the annulment of the twin orders of the trial court which denied the motions to dismiss and at the same time maintaining her position that the RTC had no jurisdiction over the case because the assessed value of the property was below P20,000.00.

The appellate court denied the petition thus affirming the jurisdiction of the RTC over the complaint for reconveyance. Motion for reconsideration thereon was similarly denied by the appellate court, hence this petition.

Petitioner Lolita Copioso anchors her argument on Sec. 33, par. (3), of B.P. Blg. 129 otherwise known as *The Judiciary Reorganization Act of 1980* as amended by Sec. 3 of RA 7691 which provides —

Sec. 33. Jurisdiction of Metropolitan Trial Courts, Municipal Trial Courts and Municipal Circuit Trial Courts in Civil Cases. – Metropolitan Trial Courts, Municipal Trial Courts and Municipal Circuit Trial Courts shall exercise: x x x x (3) Exclusive original jurisdiction in all civil actions which involve title to, or possession of, real property, or any interest therein where the assessed value of the property or interest therein does not exceed twenty thousand pesos (P20,000.00) or, in civil actions in Metro Manila, where such assessed value does not exceed fifty thousand pesos (P50,000.00) exclusive of interest, damages of whatever kind, attorney's fees, litigation expenses and costs: Provided, that in cases of land not declared for taxation purposes, the value of such property shall be determined by the assessed value of the adjacent lots.

Petitioner argues that the complaint for reconveyance cannot be resolved unless the trial court delves upon the issues of "title, possession and interests" of each of the stakeholders over the subject parcels of land. She asserts that the allegations and relief prayed for in the complaint coupled with the assessed value of the disputed property place the action within the exclusive jurisdiction of the MTC and not the RTC.

In turn, private respondents anchor their position on Sec. 19, par. (1), of the same law which provides —

Sec. 19. Jurisdiction in civil cases. – The Regional Trial Courts shall exercise exclusive original jurisdiction: In all civil actions in which the subject of the litigation is incapable of pecuniary estimation: x x x

Simply, they claim that the instant complaint for reconveyance is a case of joinder of causes of action which include the annulment of sale and other instruments of false conveyance incapable of pecuniary estimation thus within the legal competence of the RTC.

The law on jurisdiction of trial courts over civil cases is neither ambiguous nor confusing. Sec. 33, par. (3), in relation to Sec. 19 par. (2) of B.P. 129 as amended by RA 7691, deals with civil cases capable of pecuniary estimation. On the other hand, Sec. 33, par. (3), in relation to Sec. 19, par. (1), applies to cases incapable of pecuniary estimation.

Sec. 33, par. (3), in relation to Sec. 19, par. (2), of B.P. 129, as amended by RA 7691, provides that in civil cases involving sum of money or title to, possession of, or any interest in real property, jurisdiction is determined on the basis of the amount of the claim or the assessed value of the real property involved, such that where the sum of money or the assessed value of the real property does not exceed P20,000.00, or P50,000.00 in Metro Manila, jurisdiction lies with the MTC; and where it exceeds that amount, jurisdiction is vested with the RTC.

Indeed, the present dispute pertains to the title, possession and interest of each of the contending parties over the contested property the assessed value of which falls within the jurisdictional range of the MTC. Nonetheless, the nature of the action