

FIRST DIVISION

[G.R. No. 142950, March 26, 2001]

EQUITABLE PCI BANK, FORMERLY EQUITABLE BANKING CORPORATION, PETITIONER, VS. ROSITA KU, RESPONDENT.

D E C I S I O N

KAPUNAN, J.:

Can a person be evicted by virtue of a decision rendered in an ejectment case where she was not joined as a party? This was the issue that confronted the Court of Appeals, which resolved the issue in the negative. To hold the contrary, it said, would violate due process. Given the circumstances of the present case, petitioner Equitable PCI Bank begs to differ. Hence, this petition.

On February 4, 1982, respondent Rosita Ku, as treasurer of Noddy Dairy Products, Inc., and Ku Giok Heng, as Vice-President/General Manager of the same corporation, mortgaged the subject property to the Equitable Banking Corporation, now known as Equitable PCI Bank to secure Noddy Inc.'s loan to Equitable. The property, a residential house and lot located in La Vista, Quezon City, was registered in respondent's name.

Noddy, Inc. subsequently failed to pay the loan secured by the mortgage, prompting petitioner to foreclose the property extrajudicially. As the winning bidder in the foreclosure sale, petitioner was issued a certificate of sale. Respondent failed to redeem the property. Thus, on December 10, 1984, the Register of Deeds canceled the Transfer Certificate of Title in the name of respondent and a new one was issued in petitioner's name.

On May 10, 1989, petitioner instituted an action for ejectment before the Quezon City Metropolitan Trial Court (MeTC) against respondent's father Ku Giok Heng. Petitioner alleged that it allowed Ku Giok Heng to remain in the property on the condition that the latter pay rent. Ku Giok Heng's failure to pay rent prompted the MeTC to seek his ejectment. Ku Giok Heng denied that there was any lease agreement over the property.

On December 8, 1994, the MeTC rendered a decision in favor of petitioner and ordered Ku Giok Heng to, among other things, vacate the premises. It ruled:

x x x for his failure or refusal to pay rentals despite proper demands, the defendant had not established his right for his continued possession of or stay in the premises acquired by the plaintiff thru foreclosure, the title of which had been duly transferred in the name of the plaintiff. The absence of lease agreement or agreement for the payment of rentals is of no moment in the light of the prevailing Supreme Court ruling on the matter. Thus: "It is settled that the buyer in foreclosure sale becomes the absolute owner of the property purchased if it is not redeemed during the

period of one (1) year after the registration of the sale is as such he is entitled to the possession of the property and the demand at any time following the consolidation of ownership and the issuance to him of a new certificate of title. The buyer can, in fact, demand possession of the land even during the redemption period except that he has to post a bond in accordance with Section 7 of Act No. 3155 as amended. Possession of the land then becomes an absolute right of the purchaser as confirmed owner. Upon proper application and proof of title, the issuance of a writ of possession becomes a ministerial duty of the court. (David Enterprises vs. IBAA[,] 191 SCRA 116).^[1]

Ku Giok Heng did not appeal the decision of the MeTC. Instead, he and his daughter, respondent Rosita Ku, filed on December 20, 1994, an action before the Regional Trial Court (RTC) of Quezon City to nullify the decision of the MeTC. Finding no merit in the complaint, the RTC on September 13, 1999 dismissed the same and ordered the execution of the MeTC decision.

Respondent filed in the Court of Appeals (CA) a special civil action for *certiorari* assailing the decision of the RTC. She contended that she was not made a party to the ejectment suit and was, therefore, deprived of due process. The CA agreed and, on March 31, 2000, rendered a decision enjoining the eviction of respondent from the premises.

On May 10, 2000, Equitable PCI Bank filed in this Court a motion for an extension of 30 days from May 10, 2000 or until June 9, 2000 to file its petition for review of the CA decision. The motion alleged that the Bank received the CA decision on April 25, 2000.^[2] The Court granted the motion for a 30-day extension "counted from the expiration of the reglementary period" and "conditioned upon the timeliness of the filing of [the] motion [for extension]."^[3]

On June 13, 2000,^[4] Equitable Bank filed its petition, contending that there was no need to name respondent Rosita Ku as a party in the action for ejectment since she was not a resident of the premises nor was she in possession of the property.

The petition is meritorious.

Generally, no man shall be affected by any proceeding to which he is a stranger, and strangers to a case are not bound by judgment rendered by the court.^[5] Nevertheless, a judgment in an ejectment suit is binding not only upon the defendants in the suit but also against those not made parties thereto, if they are:

- a) trespassers, squatters or agents of the defendant fraudulently occupying the property to frustrate the judgment;
- b) guests or other occupants of the premises with the permission of the defendant;
- c) transferees *pendente lite*;
- d) sub-lessees;
- e) co-lessees; or

f) members of the family, relatives and other privies of the defendant.^[6]

Thus, even if respondent were a resident of the property, a point disputed by the parties, she is nevertheless bound by the judgment of the MeTC in the action for ejectment despite her being a non-party thereto. Respondent is the daughter of Ku Giok Heng, the defendant in the action for ejectment.

Respondent nevertheless claims that the petition is defective. The bank alleged in its petition that it received a copy of the CA decision on **April 25, 2000**. A Certification dated June 6, 2000 issued by the Manila Central Post Office reveals, however, that the copy "was duly delivered to and received by Joel Rosales (Authorized Representative) on **April 24, 2000**."^[7] Petitioner's motion for extension to file this petition was filed on **May 10, 2000**, sixteen (16) days from the petitioner's receipt of the CA decision (April 24, 2000) and one (1) day beyond the reglementary period for filing the petition for review (**May 9, 2000**).

Petitioner however maintains "its honest representation of having received [a copy of the decision] on April 25, 2000."^[8] Appended as Annex "A" to petitioner's Reply is an Affidavit^[9] dated October 27, 2000 and executed by Joel Rosales, who was mentioned in the Certification as having received the decision. The Affidavit states:

(1) I am an employee of Unique Industrial & Allied Services, Inc. (Unique) a corporation duly organized and existing under Philippine laws with principal place of business at 1206 Vito Cruz St., Malate, Manila, and I am assigned with the Equitable PCI Bank, Mail and Courier Department, Equitable PCI Bank Tower II, cor. Makati Avenue and H.V. dela Costa St., Makati City, Metro Manila;

(2) Under the contract of services between the Bank and Unique, it is my official duty and responsibility to receive and pick-up from the Manila Central Post Office (CPO) the various mails, letters, correspondence, and other mail matters intended for the bank's various departments and offices at Equitable Bank Building, 262 Juan Luna St., Binondo, Manila. This building, however, also houses various other offices or tenants not related to the Bank.

(3) I am not the constituted agent of "Curato Divina Mabilog Niedo Magturo Pagaduan Law Office" whose former address is at Rm. 405 4/F Equitable Bank Bldg., 262 Juan Luna St., Binondo, Manila, for purposes of receiving their incoming mail matters; neither am I any such agent of the various other tenants of the said Building. On occasions when I receive mail matters for said law office, it is only to help them receive their letters promptly.

(4) On April 24, 2000, I received the registered letter sent by the Court of Appeals, covered by Registry Receipt No. 125234 and Delivery No. 4880 (copy of envelope attached as Annex "A") together with other mail matters, and brought them to the Mail and Courier Department;

(5) After sorting out these mail matters, on April 25, 2000, I erroneously