

Title: People of the Philippines v. Arturo Mendoza

Facts:

Arturo Mendoza was married to Jovita de Asis on August 5, 1936. While still married to Jovita, he married Olga Lema on May 14, 1941. Jovita de Asis passed away on February 2, 1943. Mendoza subsequently married Carmencita Panlilio on August 19, 1949. Mendoza was prosecuted and convicted of bigamy for his marriage to Panlilio since it was deemed that the marriage to Lema was still subsisting, notwithstanding Mendoza's contention that his marriage to Lema was void because it was bigamous.

Procedural Posture:

Mendoza was convicted of bigamy by the Court of First Instance of Laguna. He was sentenced to an indeterminate prison term ranging from 6 months and 1 day to 6 years. Mendoza appealed to the Supreme Court of the Philippines, arguing that his second marriage to Olga Lema was void ab initio due to it being bigamous and that his third marriage to Carmencita Panlilio should not be the basis for a bigamy charge, as it occurred after the death of his first wife.

Issues:

1. Whether a bigamous marriage, contracted during the lifetime of the first spouse, should be subject to a judicial declaration of nullity in order to be considered void.
2. Whether a person can be charged and convicted of bigamy for entering into a marriage after the death of the first spouse, even if the second (bigamous) marriage was void.

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court reversed the judgment of the lower court. The Court ruled that based on Section 29 of the Marriage Law (Act 3613), a marriage contracted by a person during the lifetime of his first spouse is illegal and void from its performance, and no judicial decree is necessary to establish its invalidity. The Court found that Mendoza's second marriage was void ab initio and, as such, his third marriage cannot be bigamous.

Doctrine:

The Supreme Court established that a subsequent marriage contracted by a person during the lifetime of the first spouse is illegal and void from its conception, and such a marriage does not require a judicial decree to establish its invalidity.

Class Notes:

- Bigamy is defined under Article 349 of the Revised Penal Code as contracting a second

marriage before the former marriage has been legally dissolved.

- Void ab initio marriages do not require judicial declaration of nullity to be considered invalid.
- The principle of “Void if Null Otherwise” applies such that a marriage that is null and void for being bigamous is not subject to judicial annulment—it is automatically void and does not exist in the eyes of the law from its inception.
- In cases of bigamous marriages, the validity of the marriage cannot be determined by the parties themselves but must be judged by a competent court.

Historical Background:

The case underlines the complexities of marital laws in the Philippines during the time and the evolving legal interpretations on when a marriage is considered void and the implications on subsequent marriages. It also touches on issues of judicial authority in declaring the validity or nullity of marriages, reflecting the societal importance of the marriage institution and the state’s interest in overseeing its regulations.