

**ANDREA M. MOSCOSO, PETITIONER, VS. COURT OF APPEALS AND
MAXIMINA L. MORON, RESPONDENTS.***G.R. No. L-46439. April 24, 1984*

Ponente: GUERRERO, J.

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Petition for review on certiorari of the decision of the defunct Court of Appeals[1] (now the Intermediate Appellate Court) in C.A.-G.R. No. 52187-B entitled "Application for Land Registration Under Act No. 496 - Andrea M. Moscoso, applicant-appellant versus Maximina L. Moron, et. al., oppositors-appellees" which affirmed the judgment of the Court of First Instance of Tacloban City in Land Registration Case No. N-134.

Sometime on March 22, 1966, petitioner applied for land registration of a 1,147 square meters residential lot situated in the poblacion of the municipality of Palo, province of Leyte, bounded and described in Survey Plan Psu-54699 of the then General Land Registration Office as verified and approved under date June 16, 1927. Her application substantially stated that petitioner is the owner in fee simple of the land and improvements thereon as her acquisition by inheritance from her father, the late Pascual Monge y Vigera who died on June 9, 1950, and that the same parcel of land is her share in a partial partition of estate she and her brothers and sisters executed on May 22, 1964 at Palo, Leyte (Exhibit "K"); that she and her predecessors in interest have been in continuous, public, actual and adverse possession of the land applied for since time immemorial until the present; that at the last assessment for taxation, said lot was assessed in her name under Tax Declaration No. 28260 dated May 24, 1964 (Exhibit "H") and that the taxes are fully paid up to the current year; that to the best of her knowledge and belief, there is no incumbrance or any kind whatsoever affecting said land nor any other person having interest therein, legal or equitable, in possession, remainder, reversion or expectancy; and that the land is now being rented by lessees of the applicant, namely, Angel Encenares, Olanda Bribe, Timoteo Noblejas, Felisa Adre, Celestina Solana, Baltazar Collado, all of Palo, Leyte.

After due publication of the Notice of Initial Hearing of the petition in the Official Gazette, Vol. 62, Nos. 46 and 47, issues dated November 14 and 21, 1966 (Exhibit "C"), only the Highway District Engineer of Leyte as public oppositors, and Concordia Lanuncia, Flaviano L. Marchadesch, Jr., and herein private respondent Maximina L. Moron as private oppositors appeared for the initial hearing before the trial court.

The trial court summarily dismissed the opposition of the Highway District Engineer who merely sought to secure a reservation for a road right-of-way in favor of the national government in view of petitioner's willingness to annotate the same on the certificate of title which might issue. The opposition of the private parties thus remained.

The written opposition substantially allege that they, including one Mrs. Apolonia L. Marchadesch who died in 1963 and survived by her only issue, oppositor Flaviano L. Marchadesch, are the illegitimate children of the late Zenona Lanuncia and the recognized natural children of the late Pascual Monge who died in 1950 and father of applicant Andrea M. Moscoso; that the Late Zenona Lanuncia, from the age of three, became a protegee of the late spouses, Saturnino Monge and Isidra Vigera Monge, legitimate parents of Pascual Monge and Juan Monge,

now deceased; that Isidra Vigera Monge was the original owner of the parcel of land applied for; that Isidra Monge, long before she died on April 15, 1915, and after Pascual Monge legally got married to the mother of the applicant and brother and sisters, and in order to provide a home and subsistence to the oppositors, their sister and mother, all of which are girls, effected a verbal partition of her lands with her sons, Pascual, Juan and with the herein oppositor, who were already at their teens, which, by virtue of said partition, the land herein applied for registration passed to the hands of the oppositors for their home; that the oppositors have no knowledge that this parcel of land forms part of the inheritance of the applicant and of a partial partition among the applicant and her brother and sisters; that the oppositors have, if not legal, an equitable title to the land as judged from the circumstances surrounding the oppositors' case; they deny the allegation that applicant and her predecessors in interest have been in continuous, public, actual and adverse possession of the land from time immemorial, the truth being that the oppositors exercised exclusive dominion over the land and are in actual and continuous possession over it from time immemorial to the present and that should the verbal partition effected before the death of Isidra Vigera Monge in 1915 being insufficient to pass title to the oppositor, then by virtue of acquisitive prescription caused by the open, continuous, uninterrupted, peaceful and adverse possession in favor of oppositors, they are entitled to the land invoking the benefits of Chapter VIII of Commonwealth Act No. 141.[2]

Upon the termination of the hearings on the merits, the Hon. Jesus N. Borromeo, then Presiding Judge of the CFI, Tacloban City, rendered his decision dated December 22, 1971, directing that the title over the land should not be registered exclusively in the name of the applicant since "it has been overwhelmingly established by them (the private oppositors) that they and their sister Apolonia, who died in 1963, are the children of Zenona Lanuncia and Pascual Monge resulting from the relations between the two prior to the marriage of the latter with Guadalupe Oliver, mother of herein petitioner and her brothers, Elpidio, Salvador, Remedios, Ruperto, and Abelardo (deceased), all surnamed Monge." [3] Hence, the judgment decreed:

"IN VIEW OF ALL THE FOREGOING, judgment is hereby rendered ordering the registration of title over the parcel of land situated in the poblacion of the municipality of Palo, Province of Leyte, as described in the Plan Psu-54699, Exhibit "E", and the technical description Exhibit "F", in the name of the co-ownership of: (1) Andrea M. Moscoso, Filipino citizen, of legal age, married to Salvador Moscoso, with postal address at Bugasong, Antique, for three-fourth (3/4) share; (2) Concordia Lanuncia, Filipino citizen, of legal age, single, and a resident of Palo, Leyte, for one-twelfth (1/12) share; (3) Maximina L. Moron, Filipino citizen, of legal age, married, and a resident of Palo, Leyte, for 1/12) share; and, (4) Flaviano L. Marchadesch, Jr., son of the late Apolonia L. Marchadesch, for one-twelfth (1/12) share, subject to a reservation of a road right-of-way in favor of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines.

After this judgment shall have become final, let the corresponding decree of registration be issued.

SO ORDERED." [4]

The trial court ruled that the verbal donation made by Isidra Vigera Vda. de Monge in favor of Zenona Lanuncia and the latter's daughters by Pascual Monge because they are of the weaker sex, was ineffectual to transmit title of ownership over the land in question add that their adverse claim of ownership even under extraordinary prescription of over thirty years could not favor them because such claim is disputable due to their failure to declare the property for tax purposes in their name after the death of Isidra Monge.

The trial court, however, gave significant weight to the carbon copy of a power of attorney executed and signed by the late Pascual Monge on February 11, 1945 (Exhibit "2," "2-A" to "2-C) in favor of Maximina L. Moron wherein he stated that Maximina is his daughter and appointed her as his Attorney-in-Fact to transact with the United States Armed Forces in the Philippines in his behalf for the collection of rentals and other war damage claims due and payable to him. The court ruled that the power of attorney was an authentic writing wherein

Maximina Lanuncia was voluntarily recognized as the daughter of Pascual Monge. As found by the trial court thus,

"Precisely, it would appear that, in his power of attorney executed on February 11, 1945 in favor of Maximina L. Moron, Exhibit "2", Pascual Monge stated that Maximina is his daughter. The contention of petitioner that said power of attorney was fraudulently altered in order to insert therein the words 'my daughter...' does not seem to be well-taken because, from an examination of the document, the Court does not notice concrete indications of alteration having been made in order to suit the ends of the herein oppositors.

"Thus, the Court is of the view that the late Pascual Monge, who had no impediment to marry Zenona Lanuncia when Maximina was conceived (Art. 119, Old Civil Code; Art. 269, New Civil Code) had voluntarily recognized Maximina Lanuncia Moron as his child when in his power of attorney executed on February 11, 1945, he mentioned her as his daughter. x x x."[5]

Petitioner assailed the Court's decision in his motion for reconsideration, contending that the disposition of the estate should be governed by the Old Civil Code (Spanish Civil Code of 1889) since he died on June 9, 1950 while the New Civil Code took effect only on August, 1950; that assuming that the New Civil Code applies in the case at bar, the power of attorney (Exhibit "2") is not an authentic document to support voluntary recognition because the words "my daughter" reveals a clear sign of erasure and is a product of falsification as presented in the rebuttal testimony of her brother Elpidio Monge and that said document is not even a public document because it was merely acknowledged by the Municipal Mayor of Palo, Leyte who had no authority to authenticate writings as public documents which could be done only by a notary public.

Acting upon the aforesaid motion for reconsideration, the Court modified its decision in the Order dated May 25, 1972 with the following dispositive portion:

"IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, the judgment of December 22, 1971 is hereby amended in the sense that the Court hereby orders the registration of title over the parcel of land situated in the poblacion of the municipality of Palo, Province of Leyte, as described in the Plan Psu-54699, Exhibit "E", and the technical description Exhibit "F" in the name of the co-ownership of (1) Andrea M. Moscoso, Filipino citizen, of legal age, married to Salvador Moscoso, with postal address at Bugasong, Antique, for 13/14 share; and (2) Maximina L. Moron for 1/14 share, subject to the reservation of a road right-of-way in favor of the Government of the Philippines.

After this judgment shall have become final, let the corresponding decree of registration be issued.

SO ORDERED."

Not satisfied with the amended judgment, petitioner elevated the case to the defunct Court of Appeals which affirmed the judgment of the lower court. Hence, the instant petition before Us.

Petitioner assigns practically the same errors allegedly committed by the trial court which were presented before the respondent Court of Appeals, to wit:

- I. The lower court erred in holding that Pascual Monge voluntarily recognized Maximina Lanuncia Moron as his natural child by virtue of the power of attorney (Exhibit "2") executed by him in favor of the latter.
- II. The lower court erred in holding that said power of attorney (Exhibit "2") is not materially altered when in fact it was erased to suit the ends of the oppositors.
- III. The lower court erred in appreciating said power of attorney (Exhibit "2") as a public document.
- IV. The lower court erred in making judicial pronouncements that Maximina Lanuncia Moron as the acknowledged natural child of Pascual Monge conferring upon her legal right to inherit from the whole estate

of the late Pascual Monge who died on June 9, 1950 when her claim over the land subject of this land registration proceeding is that it was given to their mother Zenona Lanuncia by Isidra Vigera and for their long continuous possession acquired the same by acquisitive prescription.

V. The lower court erred in making judicial pronouncement of recognition without a formal complaint, a hearing on the merit and neither has Maximina Lanuncia Moron the status of a continuous possession of a natural child.

VI. The lower court erred in ordering the registration of the land applied for registration in favor of the applicant, Andrea M. Moscoso, only 13/14 share and to oppositor Maximina Lanuncia Moron 1/14 share in co-ownership.

The principal or decisive issue to be resolved herein is whether or not oppositor-appellee Maximina L. Moron had been acknowledged by her illegitimate father, Pascual Monge (now deceased) in view of which, as held by the trial court and affirmed by the respondent appellate court, being an acknowledged natural daughter, she would be entitled to 1/14 share in the land in question as her inheritance. In resolving this issue, We are guided and must comply with the well-established rule that findings of fact of the Court of Appeals may not be reviewed by the Supreme Court in an appeal by certiorari where such findings are ably supported by substantial evidence on record, the same being binding, final and conclusive.[6]

Hence, the finding of the appellate court that the power of attorney, Exhibit "2", was not materially altered before the same was presented to the court below; that it is "more likely that a mistake was committed in the preparation thereof; that the person who typed the document had to make a slight erasure and correction in typing correctly the word "daughter"; and that the power of attorney, as corrected, was then given to Pascual Monge and Maximina L. Moron for their signature. As such, the correction cannot be considered a deliberate alteration or falsification as depicted by appellant", is a finding of fact which cannot be disturbed. We agree with the court that said power of attorney is an authentic writing wherein the father, Pascual Monge, voluntarily recognized Maximina L. Moron as his daughter, and since Pascual Monge had the legal capacity to contract marriage at the time of the conception, Maximina is a natural child, entitled to share in the inheritance of the property in question.

It may be so as argued by the petitioner that where the findings of the Court of Appeals are contrary to those of the trial court, a minute scrutiny by the Supreme Court is in order and resort to the duly proven evidence becomes necessary, citing *Gonzales vs. CA*, G.R. No. 37453, May 25, 1979, 90 SCRA 183 and cases cited therein. We have in fact noted that the trial court found no alteration in the power of attorney, Exhibit "2", when it ruled that "from an examination of the document, the court does not notice concrete indication of alteration having been made therein in order to suit the ends of the herein oppositor" (Decision, pp. 21-22, Record on Appeal), whereas respondent appellate court held that "(w)e find it more likely that a mistake was committed in the preparation of the power of attorney that the person who typed the document had to make a slight erasure and correction in typing correctly the word "daughter" and that the power of attorney, as corrected, was then given to Pascual Monge and Maximina L. Moron for their signature. As such, correction cannot be considered a deliberate falsification, as depicted by appellant." (CA Decision, p. 8)

We have indeed scrutinized minutely the documentary evidence in question, Exhibit "2", as We have ordered the elevation of the original records before Us. We affirm the holding of the appellate court that "What clearly appears to be the case, upon clear examination, is that there is no erasure of the portion whereon "my" was typed. If, really, such 14-letter word was erased and in lieu thereof the word "daughter" was typed or superimposed, the erasure would be very noticeable and visible as the word "daughter", which is shorter by six letters, cannot fully cover the space occupied by "administratrix". This could be easily seen by the naked eye when the document, as in the instant case, was executed more than 25 years ago and has turned yellow with age. But this is not the case."

There is no inconsistency between the two findings of the trial and appellate courts. Both support the authenticity of the document in ruling that there was no deliberate falsification, which We uphold.

Petitioner's contention that the Court of First Instance, acting as a land registration court, has no jurisdiction to pass upon the issue whether the oppositor is the acknowledged natural child of Pascual Monge, is untenable. We have a number of cases that answer petitioner's position. Thus, in the case of Florentino vs. Encarnacion, G.R. No. L-27697, Sept. 30, 1977, 79 SCRA 193, 204-205, We ruled:

"Petitioner-appellants' third assignment of error is not well-taken. Firstly, the otherwise rigid rule that the jurisdiction of the Land Registration Court, being special and limited in character and proceedings thereon summary in nature, does not extend to cases involving issues properly litigable in other independent suits or ordinary civil actions, has time and again been relaxed in special and exceptional circumstances. (See *Government of P.I. vs. Serafica*, 61 Phil. 93 (1934); *Caoibes vs. Sison*, 102 Phil. 19 (1957); *Luna vs. Santos*, 102 Phil. 588 (1957); *Cruz vs. Tan*, 93 Phil. 348 (1953); *Gurbax Singh Pabla and Co. vs. Reyes*, 92 Phil. 177 (1952)). From these cases, it may be gleaned and gathered that the peculiarity of the exceptions is based not alone on the fact that the Land Registration Courts are likewise the same Courts of First Instance, but also the following premises: (1) Mutual consent of the parties or their acquiescence in submitting the aforesaid issues for the determination by the court in the registration proceedings; (2) Full opportunity given to the parties in the presentation of their respective sides of the issues and of the evidence in support thereto; (3) Consideration by the court that the evidence already of record is sufficient and adequate for rendering a decision upon these issues. (*Aglipay vs. De Los Reyes*, L-12776, March 21, 1960) x x x."

Upon a scrutiny of the proceedings in the trial court, We find that petitioner filed a Motion for New Trial and/or Reconsideration wherein she assailed the ruling of the trial court that based upon Exhibit "2", the power of attorney, the oppositor was an acknowledged natural child of the late Pascual Monge and entitled to a portion of the land subject of the land registration proceedings. She claimed that the document was not authentic and not a public document. In effect, petitioner acquiesced in submitting the issue as to the status of the oppositor as an acknowledged natural child entitled to successional rights and had the full opportunity to dispute the authenticity of the document in question as in fact, applicant's brother, Elpidio Monge, gave rebuttal testimony to support petitioner's theory that the document was a product of a falsification, which the trial court did not believe. Moreover, the court considered and deemed the evidence already of record sufficient and adequate for rendering a decision upon the issue thus raised. In doing so, We find no abuse of discretion committed by the trial court.

In addition, considerations of speedy justice and avoidance of multiplicity of suits impel Us to hold and rule that under the facts of the case at bar, the trial court, acting as a land registration court, may adjudicate the land sought to be registered to either or both of the applicant and oppositor, in whole or in part, based on evidence submitted to the court showing that the party has proper title for registration. (Section 37, Act 496).

In any event, as the Supreme Court said in *Nicanor T. Santos vs. Rosa Ganayo*, L-31854, Sept. 9, 1982, 116 SCRA 431, "Whether a particular matter should be resolved by the Court of First Instance in the exercise of its general jurisdiction or of its limited jurisdiction as a special court (Probate, Land Registration, etc.) is in reality not a jurisdictional question. It is in essence a procedural question involving a mode of practice which may be waived." In meeting the issue raised by the oppositor as to her status as an acknowledged natural child as a result of her voluntary recognition appearing in Exhibit "2", the oppositor (now the petitioner herein) had waived the procedural question and she may not be allowed to raise the same in the present petition.

The proceedings for the registration of title to land under the Torrens system is an action in rem, not in personam, hence, personal notice to all claimants of the res is not necessary to give the court jurisdiction to deal with and dispose of the res, and neither may lack of such personal notice vitiate or invalidate the decree or title issued in a registration proceeding, for the State, as sovereign over the land situated within it, may provide for the

adjudication of title in a proceeding in rem or in the nature of a proceeding in rem, which shall be binding upon all persons, known or unknown. (*City of Manila vs. Lack et al.*, 19 Phil. 324, 337; *Roxas vs. Enriquez*, 29 Phil. 31; *Director of Lands vs. Roman Catholic Archbishop of Manila*, 41 Phil. 120; *Aguilar vs. Caogdan*, 105 Phil. 661).

Under the above doctrine, petitioner's assailment that "(t)he judicial pronouncement (referring to the holding that the oppositor Maximina L. Moron is the acknowledged natural child of Pascual Monge) which will become conclusive and far-reaching and in effect binds the other heirs of Pascual Monge consisting of the brothers and sisters as well as the nephews and nieces of the petitioner who are not parties in this proceeding," is untenable.

Earlier, We have affirmed the ruling of the appellate court that Exhibit "2" which is the power of attorney is an authentic writing wherein the father, Pascual Monge, voluntarily recognized Maximina L. Moron as his daughter, applying the provisions of Article 278, New Civil Code, which provides that recognition shall be made in the record of birth, a will, a statement before a court of record, or in any authentic writing. We apply Article 278, New Civil Code retroactively to the case of Maximina L. Moron although she was born before the effectivity of the New Civil Code in view of the provisions of Article 2260 of the New Civil Code which states:

"Art. 2260. The voluntary recognition of a natural child shall take place according to this Code, even if the child was born before the effectivity of this body of laws."

The reason for giving retroactive effect to Article 2260 is indicated in the Report of the Code Commission, page 169, thus: "The liberalized mode of recognition is in harmony with the aim of the proposed code to do justice to illegitimate children. Hence, its retroactive effect." (See *Civil Code Annotated by Padilla*, Vol. VII, 1975 Ed., p. 709).

In *Caridad Cruz Vda. de Sy-Quia vs. Court of Appeals and Jose Pedro Reynaldo Sy-Quia*, G. R. No. 62283, Nov. 25, 1983, the Supreme Court squarely held:

"x x x Article 2260 of (the Civil Code of the Philippines) provides that 'the voluntary recognition of a natural child shall take place according to this Code, even if the child was born before the effectivity of this body of laws' or before August 30, 1950. Hence, Article 278 may be given retroactive effect (p. 169, Report of the Code Commission, 7 Padilla, Civil Code, 1975 Ed., p. 709)."

Under the Spanish Civil Code of 1889, an acknowledged natural child is entitled to x x x "3. To receive the hereditary portion determined by this Code." (Article 134). This hereditary portion is fixed under Article 840 which states:

"Art. 840. When the testator leaves legitimate children or descendants, and also natural children, legally acknowledged, each of the latter shall be entitled to one-half of the portion pertaining to each of the legitimate children who have not received any betterment, provided that it may be included within the freely disposable portion, from which it must be taken, after the burial and funeral expenses have been paid."

The same share which is one-half of the legitime of each of the legitimate children or descendants is given to each of the acknowledged natural children under Article 895 of the New Civil Code, which reads:

"Art. 895. The legitime of each of the acknowledged natural children and each of the natural children by legal fiction shall consist of one-half of the legitime of each of the legitimate children or descendants."

The final adjudication made by the trial court in its Order dated May 25, 1975 (affirmed by the Court of Appeals) directed the registration of the land in question in the name of the co-ownership of petitioner Andrea M. Moscoso for 13/14 share and Maximina L. Moron, the oppositor, for 1/14 share in view of the court's realization that no documentary evidence was presented to prove that the other oppositors, Concordia Lanuncia and Apolonia Lanuncia (deceased) and mother of oppositor Flaviano Marchadesch, Jr. were acknowledged by Pascual Monge.

In the interest of justice, We must modify the above sharing in order to give the legal share of the oppositor as an acknowledged natural child.

Since there are six (6) legitimate children including the petitioner Andrea M. Moscoso who had previously acquired the shares of her five (5) co-heirs, and one (1) acknowledged natural child, the oppositor Maximina L. Moron, herein private respondent who is entitled to one-half (1/2) the share of each of the legitimate children (Article 840, Spanish Civil Code; Article 895, New Civil Code), the proper sharing should be 12/13 to Andrea M. Moscoso and 1/13 to Maximina L. Moron.

WHEREFORE, IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, the decision appealed from is hereby MODIFIED in the sense that the adjudication of the land subject of the land registration proceedings shall be in the co-ownership of petitioner-applicant Andrea M. Moscoso for 12/13 share and to oppositor private respondent Maximina L. Moron for 1/13 share. In all other aspects, the decision appealed from is hereby AFFIRMED. Costs against petitioner.

SO ORDERED.

Makasiar, (Chairman), Concepcion, Jr., De Castro, and Escolin, JJ., concur.

Aquino, J., see concurring opinion.

Abad Santos, J., no part.

[1] Fifth Division, penned by Domondon, J. and concurred by Reyes, L.B. and Gutierrez, H., JJ.

[2] Original Record on Appeal, pp. 2-5.

[3] Original Record on Appeal, pp. 12-13.

[4] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[5] Original Record on Appeal, p. 13.

[6] Lucero vs. Loot, 25 SCRA 687; Ramirez Tel. Corp. vs. Bank of America, 29 SCRA 191; Chan vs. CA, 33 SCRA 737; Perido vs. Perido, 63 SCRA 97; Spouses Dalida vs. CA, 117 SCRA 480.

CONCURRING OPINION

AQUINO, J.:

I concur. The land involved was acquired by Isidra Vigerá Vda. de Monge in 1907. She died in 1915, survived by her child, Pascual Monge, who married Guadalupe Oliver. Guadalupe died in 1941 while Pascual died on June 9, 1950 or before the effectivity of the Civil Code. He was survived by six children named Salvacion, Elpidio, Remedios, Ruperta, Abelardo (deceased) and Andrea, the petitioner herein.

Andrea Monge Moscoso claimed the land as her own because her brother and sisters transferred their shares to her (Exh. K).

Before his marriage to Guadalupe, Pascual had sexual relations with Zenona Lanuncia. He begot with her three children named Maximina, Concordia and Apolonia (survived by Flaviano L. Marchadesch, Jr.).

Only Maximina Lanuncia Moron can be considered Pascual's acknowledged natural child because of the power of

attorney which he had executed in 1945 in her favor. It is a "documento publico" within the meaning of article 131 of the old Code.

Pascual M. Monge's estate is governed by articles 840 and 942 of the old Civil Code under which each acknowledged natural child is entitled to a one-half portion pertaining to each of the legitimate children who have not received any betterment.

Hence, Andrea Monge Moscoso is entitled to 12/13 and Maximina Lanuncia Moron to 1/13 of the land.

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