HEIRS OF ROLANDO N. ABADILLA, REPRESENTED HEREIN BY SUSAN SAMONTE ABADILLA, PETITIONERS,VS. GREGORIO B. GALAROSA, RESPONDENT.

G.R. NO. 149041. July 12, 2006

Ponente: AUSTRIA-MARTINEZ, J.

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AUSTRIA-MARTINEZ, J.:

Before us is a petition for review on certiorari assailing the Decision[1] of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CV No. 60766 promulgated on May 28, 2001 as well as its Resolution[2] dated July 17, 2001 denying petitioners' motion for reconsideration thereof. The CA reversed the Order[3] of the Regional Trial Court (RTC), Quezon City, Branch 84 dated February 16, 1998 which dismissed the Complaint of herein respondent on the ground that it is barred by prior judgment.

The facts are as follows:

Respondent Gregorio B. Galarosa (Galarosa) filed on February 8, 1990, a Petition for Reconstitution of Lost Title, Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) No. 261465, docketed as LRC Case No. Q-3536(90) before the RTC, Branch 105, presided by Judge Tomas V. Tadeo, Jr.. On September 25, 1990, Judge Tadeo issued an Order directing the Register of Deeds of Quezon City to reconstitute the original of TCT No. 261465, thus:

> WHEREFORE, premises considered, the Register of Deeds of Quezon City or his duly authorized representative is hereby ordered to reconstitute the original title that was burned, destroyed or lost from the said owner's duplicate copy of Transfer Certificate of Title No. 261465 to be presented by herein petitioner or counsel upon FINALITY of this ORDER. Let copies of the same be furnished the Register of Deeds of Quezon City and the Land Registration Authority.
>
> SO ORDERED.[4]

In issuing said Order, Judge Tadeo noted that: the concerned government agencies, namely, the Office of the Solicitor General, the Land Registration Authority (LRA), the Register of Deeds of Quezon City, the Director of Lands, and the City Prosecutor of Quezon City were duly served copies of Galarosa's Petition for Reconstitution; a representative from the Office of the City Prosecutor appeared at the hearing and interposed no objection thereto; Galarosa caused the publication of the court order setting the case for hearing in the Official Gazette dated June 25, 1990, July 2, 1990, and July 6, 1990; said court order was also posted at the main entrance of the Quezon City Hall, the Bulletin Boards of the Quezon City courts, the Sheriff's Office and at the hall of the barangay where the property is located; the Register of Deeds also issued a certificate that the original copy of TCT No. 261465 was burned, destroyed, or lost when the Office of the Register of Deeds was gutted by fire on June 11, 1988; the owner's duplicate copy of TCT No. 261465 was brought and presented before the court and upon verification was found to be genuine and authentic. [5]

When Galarosa presented the said court order together with his duplicate certificate of title to the Register of

Deeds of Quezon City, the latter, however, refused to comply prompting Galarosa to file on June 25, 1991 an urgent motion with the RTC seeking to compel the Register of Deeds of Quezon City to reconstitute his title.[6]

On September 16, 1993, RTC, Branch 105, this time through Judge Benedicto B. Ulep, issued an Order denying the motion of Galarosa, explaining as follows:

> While it is true that the Register of Deeds earlier issued a certification, this does not bar said office from refusing to reconstitute because [of] the supervening event, that is, the discovery of the spuriousness of the signature of then Register of Deeds Nestor Peña, has materially changed the situation so that if reconstitution will be ordered by this Court of a non-existent certificate of title, the same will be inequitable and unjust because the Court will be made an instrument in impairing the integrity of the torrens system. Once reconstituted, the spurious title may be conveyed to third persons who are innocent of the infirmities of the title and will have no better right to ownership of the property. It is basic under R.A. No. 26 that for reconstitution to be effected, the title must have been duly issued by the Register of Deeds and destroyed while it was still in force. Since the title, therefore, was spurious because it was not duly issued by the Register of Deeds (whose signature was simulated) and the judicial form used in the Deeds of Ozamis City (not Quezon City), then there was no valid title on file with the Register of Deeds of Quezon City which was in force at the time of the burning of Quezon City Hall.
>
> WHEREFORE, in the light of the foregoing, the urgent motion is denied.
>
> SO ORDERED.[7]

In refusing to compel the Register of Deeds to effect the reconstitution, the trial court gave weight to the (1) manifestation of the Register of Deeds of Quezon City, Samuel C. Cleofe, stating that it had to deny reconstitution of the original of TCT No. 261465 based on the findings of the LRA Administrator that said title, subject of the order for reconstitution, is of doubtful authenticity;[8] (2) the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) report finding that the signature that appears on TCT No. 261465 and the standard sample signatures of then Register of Deeds of Quezon City, Nestor Peña, were not written by one and the same person;[9] and the (3) Consulta of LRA Administrator Teodoro C. Bonifacio stating that Serial Number 4055240 which appears on the face of the owner's duplicate certificate of TCT No. 261465, was not assigned to the Registry of Deeds of Quezon City but was issued to the Registry of Deeds of Ozamis City.[10]

Galarosa filed a Motion for Reconsideration which was denied by the trial court in its Order dated April 19, 1994.[11]

Three years later, or on June 4, 1997, Galarosa filed a Complaint for Recovery of Ownership, Annulment of Title with Damages[12] seeking the annulment of TCT No. 60405 which is in the name of deceased Rolando N. Abadilla, docketed as Civil Case No. Q-97-31250 (hereafter CV No. Q-97-31250) and assigned to RTC Branch 84 of Quezon City. Galarosa claims that TCT No. 60405 is fraudulent, fake, and unauthorized under existing laws.[13]

The Heirs of Rolando N. Abadilla (Abadillas) filed an Answer on July 14, 1997, claiming that Galarosa's complaint states no cause of action and it is barred by prior judgment. The Abadillas cited the September 16, 1993 Order of RTC, Branch 105, which denied Galarosa's motion to compel the Register of Deeds to reconstitute his title after finding that said title is spurious, as well as the April 19, 1994 Order denying Galarosa's Motion for Reconsideration.[14]

On July 30, 1997, the Abadillas filed A Motion for Preliminary Hearing on Affirmative Defenses and to Cancel the Notice of Lis Pendens.[15]

On February 16, 1998, RTC, Branch 84 of Quezon City issued an Order dismissing CV No. Q-97-31250, as

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follows:

> LRC Case No. Q-3536(90) of Branch 105 of this Court is conclusive of the rights of the parties herein. The main issue was finally decided in the Orders of 16 September 1993 and 19 April 1994, both issued in LRC Case No, Q-3536(90). As a consequence, it can not be litigated anew. The present action is thus barred by a prior judgment.
>
> ACCORDINGLY, this case is dismissed. No costs.
>
> SO ORDERED.[16]

Galarosa appealed to the CA claiming that the trial court erred in dismissing his complaint and in refusing to rule that his title is genuine. He then prayed that the Order dated February 16, 1998 be reversed and set aside and that a new order be issued annulling TCT No. 60405.[17]

On May 28, 2001, the CA issued the herein assailed Decision granting the appeal and setting aside the order appealed from, thus:[18]

> A simple perusal of the case shows that there is no identity of cause of action. The first action is to reconstitute title, while the second one is for recovery of ownership, annulment of title with damages. There are other issues in the second case which must be resolved by the court. Hence, the first case cannot be considered as a bar to the resolution of the second case.
>
> Even assuming however that the second case is barred by prior judgment, yet judging from the facts presented by the present case, it is beyond doubt that serious injustice will be committed if strict adherence to procedural rules were to be followed.
>
> It is worthy to note that rules of procedure are but mere tools designed to facilitate the attainment of justice, such that when rigid application of the rules would tend to frustrate rather than promote substantial justice, this Court is empowered to suspend its operation.
>
> The other errors raised by the plaintiff-appellant need not be resolved by this Court as the same may be threshed out in the appropriate action that appellant may file in the proper court to protect his interest. The appellant should have filed an action for cancellation of title. As held by the Court in the case of Republic vs. Court of Appeals, a torrens title cannot be collaterally attacked. The issue of validity of a torrens title, whether fraudulently issued or not, may be posed only in an action brought to impugn or annul it. Unmistakable, and cannot be ignored, is the germane provision of Section 48 of P.D. 1529, that a certificate of title can never be the subject of a collateral attack. It cannot be altered, modified, or cancelled except in a direct proceeding instituted in accordance with law.
>
> WHEREFORE, the appeal is hereby GRANTED and the order appealed from is accordingly SET ASIDE.
>
> SO ORDERED.[19]

The Abadillas filed a Motion for Reconsideration to no avail.[20] Hence the present petition on the following grounds:

A.

> THE HONORABLE COURT OF APPEALS HAS DECIDED QUESTIONS OF SUBSTANCE IN A WAY PROBABLY NOT IN ACCORD WITH LAW AND/OR WITH THE APPLICABLE DECISIONS OF THE HONORABLE SUPREME COURT.
>
> B.

THE HONORABLE COURT OF APPEALS HAS SO FAR DEPARTED FROM THE ACCEPTED AND USUAL COURSE OF JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS AS TO CALL FOR AN EXERCISE OF THE POWER OF SUPERVISION.

DISCUSSION

I.

THE RTC OF QUEZON CITY, BRANCH 84, CORRECTLY DISMISSED CIVIL CASE NO. Q-97-31250 FOR BEING BARRED BY PRIOR JUDGMENT IN LRC CASE NO. Q-3536 (90) IN LIGHT OF THE FOLLOWING-

a) The principle of res judicata applies notwithstanding respondent's attempt to vary his form of action in Civil Case No. Q-97-31250;

b) Respondent filed Civil Case No. Q-97-31250 for recovery of ownership, annulment of title with damages to have his title validated in effect, in an indirect or subtle way of challenging the final and executory judgment in the reconstitution proceeding denominated as LRC Case No. Q-3536 wherein his title was declared as fake or spurious;

c) It was pointless for respondent to bring an action for recovery of ownership/annulment of title when he has not disproved the findings of the Register of Deeds of Quezon City, the NBI and the LRA Administrator that his title is fake or spurious;

d) Serious injustice will be caused not to respondent who holds a fake or spurious title, but to petitioners who have a genuine and valid title.[21]

Petitioners argue that: the CA erred in ruling that res judicata does not apply in this case as substantial identity of causes of action exists in the petition for reconstitution of title (LRC Case No. Q-3536[90]) and in the action for recovery of ownership/annulment of title with damages (CV No. Q-97-31250); "genuineness of title" has to be alleged and established in both cases; respondent's complaint for recovery/annulment is a mere attempt to vary the form of action from the reconstitution case and thereby avoid the effects of the final and executory judgment in the latter; res judicata or bar by prior judgment forecloses not only matters squarely raised and litigated but all such matters which could have been raised in the litigation but were not; proceedings in the reconstitution case are conclusive on the rights of the parties, particularly as to whose title is genuine; respondent did not controvert the manifestation of the Register of Deeds of Quezon City, the findings of the NBI, the Consulta of the LRA Administrator, neither did he present evidence to the contrary; respondent also did not appeal the Orders of Judge Ulep dated September 16, 1993 and April 19, 1994 which have become final and executory; respondent deliberately suppressed facts which give rise to suspicion that he is a party to a fraudulent scheme to validate/legitimize fake titles; respondent anchored his right of ownership on a deed of absolute sale executed by one Wilfredo Gener, an alleged agent of the heirs of Don Mariano San Pedro y Esteban; Don Mariano's claim however was predicated upon a Spanish title, which is no longer countenanced as indubitable evidence of land ownership.[22]

Petitioners then pray that the Decision of the CA dated May 28, 2001 and its Resolution dated July 17, 2001 be reversed and set aside, the appeal of Galarosa be dismissed for lack of merit, and the Order dated February 16, 1998 of the RTC be affirmed.[23]

Respondent in his Comment contends that: he did not appeal the Orders dated September 16, 1993 and April 19, 1994 as said Orders were null and void having been rendered by Branch 105 long after it had lost jurisdiction over the case; what respondent's counsel did then was to file a separate civil case for recovery of ownership, annulment of title with damages; the genuineness and authenticity of respondent's title is not an issue in this appeal; Act No.

496 as amended by Presidential Decree No. 1529, Sec. 48, provides that certificates of title are not subject to collateral attack and may not be altered, modified, or cancelled except in a direct proceeding in accordance with law; the principal issue in the present petition is whether the dismissal of the complaint in CV No. Q-97-31250 is meritorious, or whether the Orders dated September 16, 1993 and April 19, 1994 could properly constitute a bar to the filing of CV No. Q-97-31250; the issue of whose title is genuine has not been brought to the appropriate courts; there can be no identity of causes of action between LRC Case No. Q-3536(90) and CV No. Q-97-31250 as the first involves a court of limited jurisdiction while the latter involves a court of general jurisdiction.[24]

Respondent filed a Supplement to Comment, adding that: there can be no res judicata as there is no identity of causes of action between the first and the second case; even assuming that the genuineness of title should be established in both actions, in the latter case, not only genuineness of title must be looked into but recovery of ownership and damages as well; the two actions entail different pieces of evidence; a reconstitution proceeding is an action in rem while an action to recover title or possession of real property is not; respondent purchased the property from Wilfredo Gener in good faith and for valuable consideration; for as long as respondent can prove that he was issued a title which was destroyed, the trial court has no alternative but to grant the petition for reconstitution; the NBI report is not conclusive and the Register of Deeds has not presented evidence to disprove the existence of the title of respondent; in refusing to reconstitute the title of respondent, TCT No. 261465, the Register of Deeds acted illegally and violated his ministerial duty; there is no suppression of facts in this case as the same form part of the records which can easily be alleged by petitioners in their answer.[25]

Petitioners filed a Consolidated Reply insisting that Rolando Abadilla's acquisition of the property was valid and his title, TCT No. 60405, is genuine and authentic while Galarosa's acquisition of the same is dubious and his title, TCT No. 261465, is spurious as borne out by the findings of the Register of Deeds of Quezon City, LRA, NBI, and the RTC, Branch 105 of Quezon City.[26]

Stripped to its core, the issue that has to be resolved in the present petition is: Whether the CA erred in ruling that the Complaint for Recovery of Ownership, Annulment of Title with Damages, CV No. Q-97-31250, filed by Galarosa in 1997 is not barred by the Orders dated September 16, 1993 and April 19, 1994, in the reconstitution case, LRC Case No. Q-3536(90).

The Court rules against petitioners and upholds the assailed Decision and Resolution of the CA.

Res judicata, which is being invoked by petitioner, presupposes the existence of the following: (1) the judgment sought to bar the new action must be final; (2) the decision must have been rendered by a court having jurisdiction over the subject matter and the parties; (3) the disposition of the case must be a judgment on the merits; and (4) there must be as between the first and second action, identity of parties, subject matter, and causes of action.[27]

It has two aspects: first, "bar by prior judgment" which is provided in Rule 39, Section 47(b) of the 1997 Rules of Civil Procedure and second, "conclusiveness of judgment" which is provided in Section 47(c) of the same Rule, to wit:

> Sec. 47. Effect of judgment or final orders. —The effect of a judgment or final order rendered by a court of the Philippines having jurisdiction to pronounce the judgment or final order, may be as follows:
>
> x x x x
>
> (b) In other cases, the judgment or final order is, with respect to the matter directly adjudged or as to any other matter that could have been raised in relation thereto, conclusive between the parties and their successors in interest by title subsequent to the commencement of the action or special proceeding, litigating for the same thing and under the same title and in the same capacity; x x x

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> (c) In any other litigation between the same parties or their successors in interest, that only is deemed to have been adjudged in a former judgment or final order which appears upon its face to have been so adjudged, or which was actually and necessarily included therein or necessary thereto.

Petitioners claim that the civil case for recovery of ownership should be barred by the orders of the trial court in the reconstitution proceedings; or at the very least, that the doctrine of conclusiveness of judgment be applied in this case.

The Court finds that there is neither a bar by prior judgment nor conclusiveness of judgment.

There is "bar by prior judgment" when there is identity of parties, subject matter, and causes of action, between the first case where the judgment was rendered, and the second case which is sought to be barred. Under this principle, the judgment in the first case constitutes an absolute bar to the second action, i.e., the judgment or decree of the court of competent jurisdiction on the merits concludes the litigation between the parties, as well as their privies and constitutes a bar to a new action or suit involving the same cause of action before the same or any other tribunal.[28]

As correctly pointed out by the CA, there is no identity of causes of action between the reconstitution case and the civil action for recovery of ownership and annulment of title with damages. Thus, there can be no bar by prior judgment in this case.

A cause of action is the act or omission by which a party violates a right of another.[29] It is determined by the facts alleged in the complaint and not by the prayer therein.[30] The test to determine if there is identity of causes of action is to consider whether the same evidence would sustain both causes of action, i.e., whether the same evidence which is necessary to sustain the second action would have been sufficient to authorize a recovery in the first, even if the forms or nature of the two actions be different.[31] When evidence to sustain the respective causes of action in the two cases is not exactly the same, there is no identity between the causes of action.[32]

The nature of judicial reconstitution proceedings is the restoration of an instrument or the reissuance of a new duplicate certificate of title which is supposed to have been lost or destroyed in its original form and condition.[33] Its purpose is to have the title reproduced after proper proceedings in the same form they were when the loss or destruction occurred and not to pass upon the ownership of the land covered by the lost or destroyed title.[34] Possession of a lost certificate of title is not the same as ownership of the land covered by it, and the certificate does not vest ownership but merely evinces title over a particular property.[35] Indeed, registering land under the Torrens System does not create or vest title because registration is not a mode of acquiring ownership.[36]

The civil action filed by respondent is for Recovery of Ownership and Annulment of Title with Damages. It principally delves on the issue of ownership of the land covered by the title of Rolando Abadilla. Such issue of ownership of Abadilla was not touched upon in the reconstitution proceedings.

On the other hand, the doctrine of "conclusiveness of judgment" provides that issues actually and directly resolved in a former suit cannot again be raised in any future case between the same parties involving a different cause of action.[37] Under this doctrine, identity of causes of action is not required but merely identity of issues. Otherwise stated, conclusiveness of judgment bars the relitigation of particular facts or issues in another litigation between the same parties on a different claim or cause of action.[38]

Readily apparent is the fact that the parties are not the same in the reconstitution proceedings and the civil case for recovery of ownership and annulment of title with damages. In any case, the applicability of the doctrine of "conclusiveness of judgment," in this case, is immaterial as the genuineness of the transfer certificate of title of

Galarosa, which is the subject of the reconstitution proceeding, is not determinative of the outcome of the civil case for recovery of ownership and annulment of title.

The issue of ownership must be threshed out in a separate civil suit and should not be confused with reconstitution proceedings.

As pronounced by this Court in Lee v. Republic of the Philippines[39]

> [A] reconstitution of title is the re-issuance of a new certificate of title lost or destroyed in its original form and condition. It does not pass upon the ownership of the land covered by the lost or destroyed title. Any change in the ownership of the property must be the subject of a separate suit. Thus, although petitioners are in possession of the land, a separate proceeding is necessary to thresh out the issue of ownership of the land.[40]

In the Heirs of De Guzman Tuazon v. Court of Appeals[41] the Court also explained that:

> [I]n x x x reconstitution under Section 109 of P.D. No. 1529 and R.A. No. 26, the nature of the action denotes a restoration of the instrument which is supposed to have been lost or destroyed in its original form and condition. The purpose of the action is merely to have the same reproduced, after proper proceedings, in the same form they were when the loss or destruction occurred, and does not pass upon the ownership of the land covered by the lost or destroyed title. It bears stressing at this point that ownership should not be confused with a certificate of title. Registering land under the Torrens System does not create or vest title because registration is not a mode of acquiring ownership. A certificate of title is merely an evidence of ownership or title over the particular property described therein. Corollarily, any question involving the issue of ownership must be threshed out in a separate suit, which is exactly what the private respondents did when they filed Civil Case No. 95-3577 ["Quieting of Title and Nullification and Cancellation of Title"] before Branch 74. The trial court will then conduct a full-blown trial wherein the parties will present their respective evidence on the issue of ownership of the subject properties to enable the court to resolve the said issue.[42] x x x

WHEREFORE, the petition is DENIED. The Decision dated May 28, 2001 and Resolution dated July 17, 2001 of the Court of Appeals setting aside the Order dated February 16, 1998 of the Regional Trial Court, Quezon City, Branch 84 in Civil Case No. Q-97-31250, are AFFIRMED. The trial court is ordered to proceed with the trial of Civil Case No. Q-97-31250.

No costs.

SO ORDERED.

Panganiban, (Chairman), Ynares-Santiago, Callejo, Sr., and Chico-Nazario, JJ., concur.

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[1] Penned by Associate Justice Eubolo G. Verzola (deceased) and concurred in by Associate Justices Marina L. Buzon and Bienvenido L. Reyes; rollo, pp. 42- 50.

[2] Id. at 52.

[3] Records, p. 88.

[4] Id. at 10-11.

[5] Id. at 10.

[6] See RTC, Br. 105 Order, dated September 16, 1993, id. at 26.

[7] Id. at 27-28.

[8] Id. at. 26.

[9] Id. at 35-36.

[10] Id. at 32; See also RTC Br. 105 Order, dated September 16, 1993, id. at 27.

[11] Id. at 29-30.

[12] Entitled, "Gregorio B. Galarosa, Plaintiff, v. The Heirs of Rolando N. Abadilla (represented by his wife, Susan Samonte), Defendants."

[13]Id. at 1-3.

[14] Id. at 17-22.

[15] Id. at 44-46.

[16] Id. at 88.

[17]CA rollo, pp. 6-14.

[18] Rollo, p. 50.

[19] Id. at 49-50.

[20] Id. at 52.

[21]Id. at 22-23.

[22] Id. at 23-36.

[23] Id. at 37.

[24] Id. at 124-127.

[25] Id. at 140-149.

[26] Id. at 200.

[27] Oropeza Marketing Corp. v. Allied Banking Corp., 441 Phil. 551, 564 (2002).

[28]Id.

[29] 1997 Rules of Court, Rule 2, Sec. 2.

[30]Supra note 27, at 567.

[31] Supra note 27, at 568; Carlet v. Court of Appeals, 341 Phil. 99, 110 (1997).

[32]Id.

[33] Puzon v. Sta. Lucia Realty and Development, Inc., G.R. No. 139518, March 6, 2001, 353 SCRA 699, 710; Heirs of De Guzman Tuazon v. Court of Appeals, G.R. No. 125758, January 20, 2004, 420 SCRA 219, 228; Stilianopulos v. City of Legaspi, 374 Phil. 879, 893-894 (1999); Lee v. Republic of the Philippines, 418 Phil. 793, 803 (2001).

[34] Puzon v. Sta. Lucia, supra; Heirs of De Guzman Tuazon v. Court of Appeals, supra; Lee v. Republic, supra.

[35] Puzon v. Sta. Lucia, supra note 33.

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[36] Heirs of De Guzman Tuazon v. Court of Appeals, supra note 33.

[37] Tan v. Court of Appeals, 415 Phil. 675, 681-682 (2001).

[38]Id.

[39] Supra note 33.

[40] Id. at 803.

[41] Supra note 33.

[42] Id. at 228.

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