

**MERCEDES TOLENTINO SOLIMAN, HEIRS OF ANGELES
TOLENTINO-ANGELES, NAMELY: GRACIA S. PANES, EDGAR T.
SALVOSA, BENJAMIN T. SALVOSA AND SONIA I. MENDOZA, HEIRS OF
RAFAEL TOLENTINO, N...**

G.R. Nos. 229164 & 229186. September 02, 2019

Ponente: REYES, J. JR., J.

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REYES, J. JR., J.:

The application of the doctrine of judicial stability is put forth as an issue in this Petition for Review on Certiorari[1] anent the Decision[2] dated April 29, 2016 and Resolution[3] dated November 23, 2016 of the Court of Appeals (CA) in CA-G.R. CV No. 102933.

The Relevant Antecedents

Stripped off the non-essential, the facts of the case are as follows:

Spouses Doroteo Tolentino and Engracia Dela Cruz (spouses Tolentino) were the registered owners of a parcel of land with an area of 200,944 square meters situated in San Vicente, Pili, Camarines Sur, covered by Original Certificate of Title (OCT) No. RO 529 (263). Their children are Ramon Tolentino (Ramon), Angeles Tolentino (Angeles), Rafael Tolentino (Rafael), Carmen T. Imperial (Carmen) and Mercedes T. Soliman (Mercedes).[4]

On the ground of OCT No. RO 529 (263)'s loss and destruction, Ramon filed a petition for its reconstitution before the Court of First Instance of Pili, Camarines Sur, Branch VI (CFI) on August 25, 1977. Among others, Ramon prayed that the reconstituted title be issued in his name.[5]

In an Order[6] dated January 20, 1978 (CFI Order), the CFI granted the petition and correspondingly ordered the issuance of a new title in the name of Ramon, to wit:

AS PRAYED FOR, the petition is granted. The original and owner's duplicate copy of Original Certificate of Title No. 263 in the name of the late spouses Doroteo Tolentino and Engracia de la Cruz are hereby declared lost and of no further legal force and effect; the Register of Deeds is hereby ordered to reconstitute said title based on the decree of registration (Decree No. 128031) in Land Registration Case No. 124 (G.L.R.O Record No. 21387) (Exh. "E") and thereafter, cancel the same and issue, in lieu thereof, a new title in the name of the herein petitioner, Dr. Ramon Tolentino, of legal age, Filipino, married to Dolores Imperial and residing at Pili, Camarines Sur, subject to such incumbrance as may be found subsisting.

SO ORDERED.[7]

On April 4, 1978, Transfer Certificate of Title (TCT) No. 3153 was issued in the name of Ramon.[8]

Thirty four years after or on August 29, 2012, Mercedes, the heirs of Angeles, and the heirs of Rafael (collectively referred to as petitioners) questioned the issuance of TCT No. 3153 and accordingly filed a petition for its annulment, enforcement of agreement of partition, reconveyance with damages, with prayer for the issuance of a

temporary restraining order and preliminary mandatory injunction against the heirs of Ramon.[9]

Petitioners contended that the land covered by TCT No. 3153 is co-owned by them as heirs of spouses Tolentino and that said co-ownership was terminated by the execution of an Agreement of Partition. The latter sprung from a confrontation which happened among the siblings when TCT No. 3153 was issued in the name of Ramon alone. As Ramon assured them that their shares in the property shall be fully protected despite the issuance of the title in his name, said Agreement, which gave each sibling a particular portion of the property, was executed.[10]

However, as the land was solely in the name of Ramon, the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR) placed a portion of the same under the Operation Land Transfer pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 27 and distributed the same to farmer-beneficiaries. Only Ramon received just compensation corresponding to the value of the expropriated land. Even then, petitioners' possession of their respective portions was never disturbed.[11]

Not soon thereafter, one of Ramon's heir, began claiming the land as exclusively belonging to his father and refused to acknowledge the Agreement among the siblings.[12]

Only Remigio Manchus (Remigio) and Antonio Tolentino (Antonio) filed their Answer.[13]

In their Answer with Special and Affirmative Defenses, Remigio and Antonio, as heirs of Ramon, insisted in their right as Ramon's lawful heirs. They asserted that Ramon has the exclusive ownership and possession of the property upon the demise of the spouses Tolentino because his other siblings were given their respective properties elsewhere.[14]

In an Order[15] dated February 22, 2013, the Regional Trial Court of Pili, Camarines Sur, Branch 33 (RTC) resolved the defenses laid down by the heirs of Ramon. It explicitly ruled on the invalidity of the CFI Order insofar as the issuance of a title in favor of Ramon is concerned for want of jurisdiction.

The Motion for Reconsideration filed by Remigio and Antonio was denied in an Order[16] dated April 15, 2013.

These Orders of the RTC were assailed in a Petition for Certiorari, docketed as CA-G.R. SP No. 130055, before the CA.[17]

On June 10, 2013, petitioners filed a Motion for Summary Judgment, praying that a judgment be rendered on the validity of the Order dated January 20, 1978, relative to the reconstitution and cancellation of OCT No. RO 259 (263) and the issuance of TCT No. 3153.[18]

In an Order[19] dated May 9, 2014 (RTC Order), the RTC declared the January 20, 1978 Order as valid only insofar as the reconstitution of the title is concerned. Accordingly, the issuance of TCT No. 3154 was declared void, thus:

WHEREFORE, foregoing premises considered, judgment is hereby rendered declaring that (a) the Order of January 20, 1978 relative to the reconstitution and cancellation of OCT No. RO-529(263) in the name of Sps. Doroteo Tolentino and Engracia [Dela] Cruz is VALID and (b) the issuance of a Transfer Certificate of Title No. 3153 in the name of Ramon Tolentino, in lieu of OCT No. RO-259(263) is VOID, for having been issued for want of jurisdiction.

SO ORDERED.[20]

Antonio and Remigio filed an appeal, docketed as CA-G.R. CV No. 102933, assailing the authority of the RTC to annul, amend or modify the Order dated January 20, 1978 issued by the CFI.[21]

The CA consolidated the appeal and the Petition for Certiorari filed by Antonio and Remigio and rendered a Decision[22] dated April 29, 2016. Applying the doctrine of non-interference, the CA held that the RTC erred in

declaring void the CFI Order, issued by a co-equal court. The fallo thereof reads:

WHEREFORE, the Orders dated February 22, 2013 and April 15, 2013, subject of CA-G.R. SP No. 130055, are ANNULLED and SET ASIDE. The Order dated May 29, 2014, subject of CA-G.R. CV No. 102933, is REVERSED and SET ASIDE. The complaint for annulment of Certificate of Title No. 3153 is DISMISSED.

SO ORDERED.[23]

Aggrieved, petitioners filed a Motion for Reconsideration, which was, however, denied in a Resolution[24] dated November 23, 2016.

Hence, this petition.

The Issue

Petitioners raised the lone issue of whether or not the CA erred in dismissing petitioners' complaint for annulment of title by applying the doctrine of non-interference.[25]

The Court's Ruling

To ensure the orderly administration of justice, the quintessential doctrine of judicial stability or non-interference between concurrent and coordinate courts is being enforced in our jurisdiction. It provides that the judgment of a court of competent jurisdiction could not be interfered with by any court of concurrent jurisdiction.[26] Acting as an "insurmountable barrier,"[27] it strongly proscribes the exercise of jurisdiction of a court of competent jurisdiction as regards cases relative to that already decided by another co-equal court.

Rooted on the concept of jurisdiction, a court that acquires jurisdiction over the case and renders judgment therein has jurisdiction over its judgment, to the exclusion of all other coordinate courts, for its execution and over all its incidents, and to control, in furtherance of justice, the conduct of ministerial officers acting in connection with this judgment.[28]

Alternatively put, the orders and decisions of a competent court cannot be altered, modified or amended by another court of concurrent jurisdiction.[29]

Fortifying these tenets, Section 9 (2) of Batasang Pambansa (B.P.) Blg. 129 was promulgated, to wit:

Section 9. Jurisdiction. -The Court of Appeals shall exercise:

x x x x

2. Exclusive original jurisdiction over actions for annulment of judgments of Regional Trial Courts; x x x

Significantly, B.P. Blg. 129 does not specifically provide for any power of the RTC to annul judgments of quasi-judicial bodies.[30]

Petitioners insist that what was annulled in the RTC Order was mere TCT No. 3153, and not the CFI Order itself. Hence, there was no interference made by the RTC against the then CFI.

This Court does not agree.

Petitioners' reckless attempt to persuade this Court to rule in their favor is unavailing. The records of the case reveal that what was being assailed in the complaint for annulment of title was the issuance of TCT No. 3153 in the name of Ramon, which stemmed from the CFI Order. Citing its February 22, 2013 Order, the RTC found that the CFI Order is "null and void" for lack of jurisdiction insofar as it ordered the issuance of a new certificate of title. The basis for said ruling was the fact that the CFI exceeded its authority when it issued a new certificate of

title in the name of Ramon when the prayer was for mere reconstitution of title, which should be in the name of the original owners.

Verily, this pronouncement of the RTC interfered with the judgment of the then CFI. By declaring "null and void" the judgment of the CFI insofar as the issuance of title is concerned, the RTC amended the earlier decision of the CFI, which is a clear violation of the doctrine of non-interference.

In the case of *Adlawan v. Joaquin*,^[31] this Court already clarified that a petition for annulment of title which was filed and granted subsequent to an earlier decision of the RTC which granted the petition for reconstitution of title constitutes a violation of the doctrine of judicial stability, viz.:

Since the assailed reconstituted title in this case, from which the petitioner's title originated was ordered issued by the RTC Branch 14, Cebu City, the respondents' complaint to annul said title — by reason of the doctrine of non-interference — should have been filed with the CA and not with another RTC branch. Evidently, the RTC Branch 17, Cebu City, as a co-equal court, has no jurisdiction to annul the reconstitution of title previously ordered by the RTC, Branch 14, Cebu City. In fact, the CA was of the same view that the RTC, Branch 17, Cebu City, exceeded its jurisdiction when it declared the order of reconstitution issued by the RTC, Branch 14, Cebu City, as null and void.^[32]

As the RTC Order was issued in violation of this aforementioned doctrine, it bears no legal effect as it is considered as a void judgment, which cannot be a source of any right or the creator of any obligation.

WHEREFORE, premises considered, the petition is DENIED. Accordingly, the Decision dated April 29, 2016 and the Resolution dated November 23, 2016 of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CV No. 102933 are AFFIRMED in toto.

SO ORDERED.

Carpio, (Chairperson), Caguioa, Reyes, J. Jr., Lazaro-Javier, and Zalameda, JJ., concur.

[1] Rollo, pp. 22-39.

[2] Penned by Associate Justice Ramon F. Barza, with Associate Justices Danton Q. Bueser and Agnes Reyes-Carpio, concurring; id at 43-57.

[3] Id. at 58-61.

[4] Id. at 45.

[5] Id.

[6] Penned by Judge Esteban Lising; id. at 111-113.

[7] Id. at 112-113.

[8] Id. at 46.

[9] Id.

[10] Id. at 47.

[11] Id.

[12] Id.

[13] Id. at 46.

[14] Id. at 48.

[15] Penned by Judge Marvel C. Clavecilla; id. at 64.

[16] Id. at 65.

[17] Id. at 52.

[18] Id.

[19] Penned by Judge Marvel C. Clavecilla; id. at 62-63.

[20] Id. at 63.

[21] Id. at 53.

[22] Supra note 2.

[23] Id. at 56-57.

[24] Supra note 3.

[25] Id. at 30.

[26] Pinausukan Seafood House Roxas Blvd., Inc. v. Far East Bank & Trust Company, 725 Phil. 19, 29 (2014).

[27] Panlilio v. Judge Salonga, 303 Phil. 494, 499 (1994).

[28] Adlawan v. Joaquin, 787 Phil. 599, 607 (2016).

[29] Id.

[30] Springfield Development Corporation, Inc. v. Hon. Presiding Judge of RTC, Misamis Oriental, Br. 40, Cagayan De Oro City, 543 Phil. 298, 309 (2007).

[31] Supra note 28, 608.

[32] Id.

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