



Republic of the Philippines
Supreme Court
Manila

THIRD DIVISION

ULYSSES P. NERI and ESTER
B. NERI (DECEASED),*

Petitioners,

G.R. No. 256392

Present:

- versus -

CAGUIOA, J., Chairperson,
INTING,
GAERLAN,
DIMAAMPAO, and
SINGH,** JJ.

ANNAMAE** N. BAHINTING,
Respondent.

Promulgated:

MAY 08 2025

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D E C I S I O N

INTING, J.:

Before the Court is a Petition for Review on *Certiorari*¹ under Rule 45 of the Rules of Court assailing the Court of Appeals (CA) Decision² dated January 8, 2021, and the Resolution³ dated April 13, 2021, in CA-G.R. CV No. 05422-MIN. The CA reversed the Decision⁴ dated

* Rollo, p. 17. As stated in the Petition Ester B. Neri died on April 5, 2019; *id.* at 51, *see also* Certification (Annex “C” of the Petition) dated June 29, 2021.

** “Anna Mae” in some parts of the records.

*** On leave

¹ Rollo, pp. 15–35.

² *Id.* at 36–48. Penned by Associate Justice Richard D. Mordeno and concurred in by Associate Justices Loida S. Posadas-Kahulugan and Lily V. Biton of the Special Twenty Second-Division, Court of Appeals, Cagayan de Oro City.

³ *Id.* at 49–50. Penned by Associate Justice Richard D. Mordeno and concurred in by Associate Justices Edgardo T. Lloren and Loida S. Posadas-Kahulugan of the Former Special Twenty-Second Division, Court of Appeals, Cagayan de Oro City.

⁴ CA rollo, pp. 100–117. Penned by Presiding Judge Jaime B. Caberte.

April 22, 2019, of Branch 23, Regional Trial Court (RTC), Molave, Zamboanga del Sur in Civil Case No. 2014-20-530.

The Antecedents

Ulysses P. Neri (Neri) and Ester B. Neri (collectively, petitioners) filed a Complaint⁵ dated August 29, 2014 for the Declaration of Nullity of Decree No. N-233377 and Original Certificate Title (OCT) No. O-3,443⁶ against Annamae N. Bahinting (Annamae) and the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City before Branch 23, RTC. The Complaint alleged that sometime in the 1950s, while overseeing a property belonging to his uncle, Capistrano Parojinog, in Barangay Makuguihon, Molave, Zamboanga del Sur, petitioner Neri discovered a vacant and unoccupied lot known as Lot No. 7493, TS-222 (subject property). He immediately took possession and exercised acts of ownership over it. Because it was submerged in water, he gradually added landfill materials through the years to elevate and level it with the road. He also planted some trees and built a perimeter fence around it.⁷

Sometime in the 1970s, Neri went to the Municipal Assessor's Office in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur, to pay realty taxes on the subject property. However, it refused to accept the payment and advised him to first secure a decree over it before he could be issued a tax declaration and have his payment of taxes accepted.⁸

In 1978, Neri discovered that a tax declaration had been issued to a certain Domingo Mutia, who had not been paying any taxes on the subject property.⁹ He then began the process of securing a decree over it with the RTC of Pagadian City (cadastral court).¹⁰ The property was adjudicated to him by virtue of the Decision Adjudicating Non-contested Lot¹¹ dated March 28, 1998, and the Order for the Issuance of Decree in Cadastral Case¹² dated April 20, 1998.¹³

⁵ *Rollo*, pp. 53–63.

⁶ RTC records, p. 96.

⁷ *Rollo*, p. 54; RTC records, p. 100, Judicial Affidavit of Ulysses P. Neri dated January 13, 2015

⁸ *Id.* at 55.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.* Docketed as Cadastral Case No. N-4, LRC CAD Record No. N-64, Lot No. 7493, TS-222.

¹¹ RTC records, p. 12.

¹² *Id.* at 13.

¹³ *Id.* at 14.

After the adjudication in his favor, he waited for the decree or title to be released to him. However, upon verification with the Office of the Land Registration Authority (LRA), he learned about an Order for the Issuance of Decree¹⁴ dated August 26, 2003, which was issued in favor of Annamae. The Order was based on an Amended Decision¹⁵ dated July 26, 2003, which reversed the previous adjudication in his favor and instead adjudicated the property in favor of Annamae.¹⁶ Annamae is Neri's niece-in-law, being married to his nephew.¹⁷

His discovery alarmed him, prompting him to file a Motion for Clarification with the cadastral court.¹⁸ On January 22, 2006, the cadastral court issued an Order¹⁹ stating that the adjudication in favor of Neri would prevail, and that the Amended Decision in favor of Annamae was issued by mistake and would be canceled.²⁰

Despite several follow-ups with the Office of the LRA, no decree or title was issued in his name. Later, he learned that a title over the subject property would be issued in the name of Annamae. When he inquired with the LRA about it, he was issued a Certification²¹ that no final decree of registration had been issued over the subject property as of August 1, 2013.²²

He then sought to verify and obtain a copy of Annamae's title from the Office of the Register of Deeds for the Province of Zamboanga del Sur, believing it was under the Provincial Register of Deeds, given that the subject property is located in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur. However, for reasons unknown to him, OCT No. O-3,443²³ was issued by the Register of Deeds of the City of Pagadian, rather than the Provincial Register of Deeds, on June 4, 2013.²⁴ This prompted him to file a Complaint²⁵ dated August 29, 2014, seeking the nullification of Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 110.

¹⁵ RTC records, p. 15.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ *Rollo*, p. 60.

¹⁸ RTC records, p. 103.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 16.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.* at 17.

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.* at 96.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ *Id.* at 1-11.

Annamae, for her part,²⁶ defended the validity of her title, as follows: in 1973, Domingo Mutia, the awardee and original claimant of the subject property, sold it on an installment basis to Mr. and Mrs. Anastacio M. Bahinting, Annamae's parents, and turned over possession to them that same year. The Bahinting spouses then began developing the subject property, which was previously underwater. Domingo Mutia never returned to collect the unpaid balance of the purchase price.²⁷

In 2001, Ulysses Mutia, son of Domingo Mutia, approached the Bahintings, informing them that his father, Domingo Mutia, had passed away and that he was the sole heir and adjudicatee of the property by order of the cadastral court. He opposed the original sale, claiming that the price was too low, and instead offered to resell the subject property for PHP 150,000.00. To settle the matter, the Bahintings agreed to pay Ulysses Mutia the amount in installments. Ulysses Mutia requested a down payment of PHP 50,000.00, which they complied with. As a gift to Annamae upon her college graduation, her parents transferred the subject property to her.²⁸

Annamae added that, in a Decision Adjudicating Non-contested Lot²⁹ dated August 20, 1994, the same cadastral court, in the same cadastral case, adjudicated the subject property to Ulysses Mutia, which was followed by the issuance of an Order for the Issuance of Decree³⁰ on September 20, 1994.

Later on, Ulysses Mutia signed a Waiver³¹ dated March 14, 2001, of the said cadastral court's Decision in favor of Annamae. On December 29, 2011, the subject property was fully paid, and Ulysses Mutia executed an Absolute Deed of Sale.³² Prior to this, he had executed an Affidavit of Self-Adjudication³³ as the sole heir of Domingo Mutia.³⁴

²⁶ *Id.* at 184–190. *See* 1st Amended Answer dated July 10, 2015.

²⁷ *Id.* at 187.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* at 206.

³⁰ *Id.* at 207.

³¹ *Id.* at 217.

³² *Id.* at 53.

³³ *Id.* at 52.

³⁴ *Id.*

By reason of the said waiver, Annamae sought the amendment of the adjudication over the subject property. Hence, on July 26, 2003, an Amended Decision³⁵ was rendered by the cadastral court, modifying the adjudication of the subject property from Ulysses Mutia to Annamae. A Certification³⁶ dated July 8, 2015, from the Office of the Clerk of Court, RTC, Pagadian City, confirms that the subject property was initially adjudicated to Ulysses Mutia on August 20, 1994, and later amended in favor of Annamae on July 26, 2003.³⁷

Annamae likewise disputed petitioners' claims in their Complaint as follows: at the time Neri claimed to have discovered the subject property in the 1950s, he was merely a young child. Born on June 21, 1946, as evidenced by his Voter[']s Certification,³⁸ he would have been only four years old in 1950. Moreover, the same certification indicates that he arrived in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur only in 1975.³⁹ Further, the Municipal Assessor's Office of Molave was established only in 1974. Additionally, the subject property was declared for taxation under Domingo Mutia, who was also an awardee thereof from the Bureau of Lands. Domingo Mutia's actual, peaceful, and adverse possession is evidenced by his consistent tax payments.⁴⁰

With respect to the allegation in the Complaint concerning the issuance of OCT No. O-3,443 by the Register of Deeds of the City of Pagadian, Annamae asserted that she had previously filed a Verified Petition before Branch 20 of the RTC in Pagadian City for the correction of errors in the title. These errors were subsequently corrected by Branch 20 in an Order⁴¹ dated February 3, 2015 in LRC 474-2K14, which has since become final.⁴²

Annamae emphasized that Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443 enjoy the presumption of regularity and have already attained finality. She argued that petitioners have no cause of action to challenge them, contending that they were mere squatters on the subject property.⁴³

³⁵ *Id.* at 15.

³⁶ *Id.* at 210.

³⁷ *Id.*

³⁸ *Id.* at 192.

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 184–185.

⁴¹ *Id.* at 213–215. Penned by Presiding Judge Dennis P. Vicoy.

⁴² *Id.* at 186.

⁴³ *Id.* at 189.

Ruling of the RTC

On April 22, 2019, the RTC rendered a Decision⁴⁴ declaring the Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443, both issued in favor of Annamae, as null and void. Thus:

WHEREFORE, premises considered, Decree No. N-233377 issued by the Land Registration Authority (LRA) on [the] 2nd day of May 2013 in favor of Annamae N. Bahinting and Original Certificate of Title (OCT) No. O-3,443 issued on [the] 4th day of June 2013 by the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City in the name Annamae N. Bahinting are declared NULL and VOID.

No cost against defendant Annamae N. Bahinting.

SO ORDERED.⁴⁵

The RTC, noting the contradictions among the records and issuances in the cadastral case, expressed doubt as to their regularity. It held that all decisions issued by the cadastral court were irregularly rendered and, therefore, null and void.

Dissatisfied, Annamae appealed⁴⁶ to the CA. She argued that the RTC erred in nullifying Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443, asserting that they had already become incontrovertible. She emphasized that the one-year period to contest a decree had lapsed, as the decree was issued on May 2, 2013, while the case was filed only in September 2014.⁴⁷

Annamae reiterated that petitioners' claims were baseless and fabricated, drawing attention to inconsistencies revealed during the trial. Specifically, she pointed out that Neri's house is situated on Lot 7494, which is located behind the subject property (Lot 7493). Despite Neri's assertion of having purchased Lot 7494, he failed to present any proof of ownership. Annamae argued that it is illogical for Neri to build his house on a lot he does not own while leaving the lot he claims to own—the subject property—idle. This incongruity becomes particularly glaring in light of Neri's own testimony that it is not in his nature to build a house

⁴⁴ *Id.* at 669–686. Penned by Presiding Judge Jaime B. Caberte.

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 686.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 687–694. See Notice of Appeal dated May 8, 2019.

⁴⁷ CA rollo, pp. 93–94.

on a lot he does not own.⁴⁸ Hence, she inferred that Neri avoided building on the subject property because he lacked a genuine ownership claim.⁴⁹

Annamae added that, despite the glaring inconsistencies and implausibilities, the RTC chose to believe Neri, who testified in open court that he obtained the adjudication in his favor without the assistance of a lawyer, without filing an answer in the cadastral case, without the benefit of proceedings or trial, without presenting any witnesses, and without ever taking the witness stand himself.⁵⁰ He simply went to court and submitted the requirements.⁵¹

In addition, Annamae asserted that Neri is not entitled to the issuance of a decree. Citing Section 14(1)⁵² of Presidential Decree No. 1529,⁵³ she contended that Neri, along with his witnesses and documents, failed to prove open, continuous, and exclusive possession of the subject property.⁵⁴

Ruling of the CA

In a Decision⁵⁵ dated January 8, 2021, the CA granted Annamae's Appeal and reversed the ruling of the RTC. In effect, it upheld the validity of Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443.

It held that OCT No. O-3,443 carries a strong presumption that the legal requirements for land registration have been satisfied. It is presumed to be valid and serves as proof of an indefeasible title in favor of Annamae. Moreover, after the one-year period from the issuance of the decree of registration on which it is based, the title becomes incontrovertible.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ TSN, Ulyssess P. Neri, June 28, 2016, p. 19.

⁴⁹ CA *rollo*, p. 95. See Appellant's Brief.

⁵⁰ TSN, September 27, 2016, pp. 32–35.

⁵¹ CA *rollo*, pp. 95–96.

⁵² SECTION 14. *Who may apply.* – The following persons may file in the proper Court of First Instance an application for registration of title to land, whether personally or through their duly authorized representatives:

Those who by themselves or through their predecessors-in-interest have been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession and occupation of alienable and disposable lands of the public domain under a bona fide claim of ownership since June 12, 1945, or earlier.

⁵³ AMENDING AND CODIFYING THE LAWS RELATIVE TO REGISTRATION OF PROPERTY AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES. Also known as the "Property Registration Decree."

⁵⁴ CA *rollo*, pp. 96–97.

⁵⁵ *Rollo*, pp. 36–48.

⁵⁶ *Id.* at 44.

It further held that the subject land is covered by OCT No. O-3,443 in Annamae's name. The issuance of Decree No. N-233377 carries the presumption that the Amended Decision dated July 26, 2003, had become final and executory. The adjudication of the subject land to Annamae can be traced back to a prior adjudication to Ulysses Mutia, who later waived his rights in her favor. Neri, seeking to nullify Decree No. N-233377 and its title, bore the burden of proving that the Amended Decision had not attained finality. However, the records show that Neri neither appealed nor opposed the cadastral court's Amended Decision dated July 26, 2003, which adjudicated the land to Annamae. He also failed to present evidence that the Decision and Decree had not become final. Consequently, ownership of the land vested in Annamae upon the expiration of the appeal period.⁵⁷

It further held that no decree or title was issued in Neri's name. The Amended Decision explicitly stated that the prior adjudication of the land in Neri's favor was amended to reflect Annamae as the rightful claimant. This Amended Decision clearly superseded the Decisions dated August 20, 1994, and March 28, 1998.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, the CA held that given Neri's claims, he may pursue an action for reconveyance, which respects the incontrovertibility of the decree of registration but seeks to transfer the property to its rightful owner or the party with a better right.⁵⁹

Accordingly, the CA decreed the following:

WHEREFORE, the appeal is GRANTED. The 22 April 2019 Decision of the Regional Trial Court, Branch 23, Molave, Zamboanga del Sur, in Civil Case No. 2014-20-530, which nullified Decree No. N-233377 issued by the Land Registration Authority (LRA) on 2 May 2013 in favor of Annamae N. Bahinting and OCT No. O-3,443 by the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City in the name of Annamae N. Bahinting, is REVERSED and SET ASIDE.

SO ORDERED.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Id.* at 44–45.

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 46.

⁵⁹ *Id.* at 47.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 48.

Neri sought a reconsideration,⁶¹ but the CA denied it in a Resolution⁶² dated April 13, 2021.

Hence, Neri filed the present Petition.

In this Petition, Neri contends that there is no record of a cadastral proceeding pertaining to Annamae. He faults the CA for failing to consider that he had already been adjudicated the same property through the March 28, 1998 Decision Adjudicating Non-Contested Lot and that an Order for the Issuance of Decree dated April 20, 1998, had been issued in his favor. Whereas, Annamae's claim to the subject property can only be traced back to the July 26, 2003 Amended Decision.⁶³

He avers that fraud attended the registration of the property in Annamae's name, pointing to the fact that a mere motion to amend was used as the basis to annul the aforesaid 1998 adjudication of the subject property in his favor. Moreover, when the Decision was amended, his name was removed and was no longer mentioned. As a result, he was unable to participate in the proceedings, as he was never notified. He also points out that the subject property is located in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur, but Annamae's title was issued by the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City.⁶⁴

He further contends that the March 28, 1998 Decision and the April 20, 1998 Order became final and executory, as no appeal was taken therefrom.⁶⁵

In her Comment, Annamae essentially reiterated her assertions in her Answer before the RTC and her Appeal before the CA.

The Issue

The issue for the Court's resolution is whether the CA correctly upheld the validity of Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443.

⁶¹ CA rollo, pp. 318–319. See Motion for Reconsideration dated January 28, 2021.

⁶² Rollo, pp. 49–50.

⁶³ *Id.* at 24.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 25.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 27.

The Ruling of the Court

In a petition for review on *certiorari* under Rule 45 of the Rules of Court, only questions of law may generally be raised, as this Court is not a trier of facts. Whether fraud attended the registration of the subject property in Annamae's name is a factual issue. As a rule, the Court defers to the *uniform* factual findings of the trial and appellate courts. However, an exception arises when there is a conflict in their findings, warranting a re-examination of the evidence. In the case, the RTC and the CA reached divergent conclusions regarding Decree No. N-233377 and OCT No. O-3,443. Given this inconsistency, a review of the records and evidence is necessary.

Upon a careful examination of the records, the Court finds the Petition unmeritorious and finds no error on the part of the CA in upholding Annamae's title to the subject property.

In resolving this Petition, the Court reiterates the guiding principle in land registration that a certificate of title serves as evidence of an indefeasible title to a registered land, as explained in *Heirs of Brusas v. Court of Appeals*:⁶⁶

It is a fundamental principle in land registration that the certificate of title serves as evidence of an indefeasible and incontrovertible title to the property in favor of the person whose name appears therein. A title once registered under the Torrens System cannot be defeated even by adverse, open and notorious possession; neither can it be defeated by prescription. It is notice to the whole world and as such all persons are bound by it and no one can plead ignorance of the registration.

The real purpose of the Torrens System of land registration is to quiet title to land and stop forever any question as to its legality. Once a title is registered the owner may rest secure without the necessity of waiting in the portals of the court, or sitting on the *mirador de su casa*, to avoid the possibility of losing his land. Indeed, titles over lands under the Torrens system should be given stability for on it greatly depends the stability of the country's economy. *Interest reipublicae ut sit finis litium*.⁶⁷ (Emphasis in the original, citation omitted)

⁶⁶ 372 Phil. 47 (1999).

⁶⁷ *Id.* at 54.

Indeed, “[w]ith the emergence of the Torrens System, the integrity and conclusiveness of a certificate of title may be guaranteed and preserved.”⁶⁸

It must be borne in mind that the subject property is already titled in the name of Annamae. As the registered owner, Annamae is protected under the Torrens System. To stress, a certificate of title serves as evidence of the indefeasibility and incontrovertibility of one’s title to a registered land. Here, Decree No. N-233377 was issued on May 2, 2013, while OCT No. O-3,443 was issued on June 4, 2013.⁶⁹

Considering the foregoing, the Court finds no compelling reason to invalidate Annamae’s title, especially in light of the doubtful nature of Neri’s claims.

As demonstrated by Annamae, the records reveal several inconsistencies and misrepresentations in Neri’s claims as follows: *First*, in the 1950s where Neri claimed to have discovered the subject property while he was overseeing his uncle’s (Capistrano Parojinog) property, he was still a young child as he was born on June 21, 1946.⁷⁰ *Second*, Capistrano Parojinog was neither the declared owner for taxation purposes nor the registered owner of the said property that Neri purportedly managed.⁷¹ *Third*, per Neri’s Voter Certification issued on September 19, 2014, he had resided in the Municipality of Molave for only 22 years and six months as of that date, or only in 1992. *Fourth*, he testified that he moved to Lot 7494, which is adjacent to the subject property, in 2010 or thereabouts.⁷² Notably, his house stands on Lot 7494—a lot he does not own—while the subject property, Lot 7493, lies in front of it.

Verily, Annamae aptly argued if Neri truly owned Lot 7493, it would be illogical for him to build his home on a different lot that he does not own, leaving idle the property he claims as his own. Further refuting Neri’s assertion is the fact that Domingo Mutia, who held a tax declaration over the subject property since the 1950s, had consistently paid taxes thereon⁷³—an observation even noted by the RTC.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ *Hrs. of L. Latoja v. Hrs. of G. Latoja*, 898 Phil. 663, 671 (2021).

⁶⁹ RTC records, p. 19.

⁷⁰ TSN, Ulysses P. Neri, June 28, 2016, pp. 11, 13.

⁷¹ *Id.* at 14.

⁷² *Id.* at 19–20.

⁷³ CA rollo, p. 95.

⁷⁴ RTC records, pp. 248, 674.

Notably, Neri failed to address these implausibilities at any point during the proceedings. To the Court's mind, such failure significantly undermines the merits of his complaint.

In contrast, Annamae has sufficiently demonstrated that her claim to the subject property did not merely originate from the Amended Decision. The Court finds her version more credible, as it is duly supported by the records.

To recall, Ulysses Mutia, the son of Domingo Mutia, was adjudicated the subject property by the same cadastral court in a Decision Adjudicating Non-Contested Lot dated August 20, 1994. Subsequently, he waived his rights under that Decision in favor of Annamae. As a result, Annamae sought the amendment of the Decisions Adjudicating Non-contested Lot dated March 28, 1998, and August 20, 1994, as well as the corresponding Orders for the Issuance of the Decree dated April 20, 1998, and September 20, 1994. In response, the cadastral court issued the Amended Decision dated July 26, 2003, adjudicating the subject property to Annamae, followed by the Order for the Issuance of the Decree dated August 26, 2003.⁷⁵ Pursuant thereto, Decree No. N-233377 was issued on May 2, 2013.⁷⁶

For reference, the Decision Adjudicating Non-Contested Lot respectively dated August 20, 1994, and March 28, 1998, as well as the Amended Decision dated July 26, 2003 are quoted below:

Decision Adjudicating Non-contested Lot dated August 20, 1994 in favor of Ulysses Mutia:

DECISION ADJUDICATING NON-CONTESTED LOT

LOT NO. 7493, TS-222, is pending hearing in the above-entitled case.

At the hearing before a commissioner appointed by the Court, claimant satisfactorily proved by both oral and documentary evidence his continuous, adverse, open, public and notorious possession of this lot for more than thirty (30) years tacked with the possession of his predecessor-in-interest. Taxes have been paid by him regularly.

⁷⁵ *Rollo*, p. 66.

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 71.



WHEREFORE, the Court hereby adjudicates LOT NO. 7493-TS-222, with all the improvements existing thereon to ULYSSE[S] R. MUTI[A], [of] legal age, Filipino, single, a resident of Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

SO ORDERED.⁷⁷

Decision Adjudicating Non-contested Lot dated March 28, 1998 in favor of Neri:

DECISION ADJUDICATING NON-CONTESTED LOT

LOT NO. 7493, TS-222, is pending hearing in the above-entitled case.

At the hearing before a commissioner appointed by the Court, claimant satisfactorily proved by both oral and documentary evidence his continuous, adverse, open, public and notorious possession of this lot for more than thirty (30) years tacked with the possession of his predecessor-in-interest. Taxes have been paid by him regularly.

WHEREFORE, the Court hereby adjudicates LOT NO. 7493, TS-222, with all the improvements existing thereon to ULYSSES P. NERI, of legal age, Filipino, married to Ester [B.] Neri, a resident of Dagohoy St. Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

SO ORDERED.⁷⁸

Amended Decision dated July 26, 2023 in favor of Annamae:

This is a motion filed by the undersigned claimant ANNAMAE N. BAHINTING, praying for the amendment of the decision dated March 28, 1998 and August 20, 1994, and the order for the issuance of decree dated April 20, 1998 and September 20, 1994.

The records shows [sic] that Lot No. 7493, TS-222 was originally adjudicated in favor of Ulysses P. Neri on March 28, 1998 the decision which reads as follows:

WHEREFORE, the court hereby adjudicates Lot No. 7493, TS-222, with all the improvements existing thereon to Ulysses P. Neri, of legal age, Filipino, married to Ester [B.] Neri, a resident of Dagohoy St., Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

⁷⁷ RTC records, p. 206.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 12.



WHEREFORE, the court hereby adjudicates Lot No. 7493, TS-222, with all the improvements existing to Ulysses Mutia, of legal age, Filipino, single, a resident of Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

Claimant Annamae N. Bahinting, prayed that the above-mentioned decision be amended and all the exhibits presented by the adjudicatee in the proceeding dated May 10, 2003 to be adopted.

WHEREFORE, finding the motion justified and well taken, the decision dated March 28, 1998 and August 20, 1994 and the order for the issuance of decree April 28, 1998 and September 20, 1994 are hereby amended, the amended decision to reads [sic] as follows:

LOT NO. 7493, TS-222, with all the improvements existing thereon to ANNAMAE N. BAHINTING, of legal age, Filipino, single, a resident of Makugihon, Molave, Zamboanga del Sur.

SO ORDERED.⁷⁹

How the cadastral court arrived at its seemingly confusing issuances remains unclear. While these discrepancies have created ambiguity, the Court is not inclined to invalidate a land title on this basis alone—particularly where the registered owner, Annamae, has sufficiently established her legitimate claim to the subject property. Her entitlement to the property is evidenced not only by a certificate of title under her name, but also by a clear factual foundation and a prior adjudication. In contrast, the challenge against her title rests on dubious and unsubstantiated grounds.

It is important to emphasize that, although Neri relies on the March 28, 1998 Decision Adjudicating Non-Contested Lot and the April 20, 1998 Order for the Issuance of Decree, no Torrens title was ever issued in his name. As such, these issuances do not confer upon him any legal advantage at this stage.

As to Neri's allegation that the issuance of Annamae's title by the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City—despite the property being located in Molave, Zamboanga del Sur—is another indication of fraud, it bears noting that Annamae had filed a Petition before Branch 20, RTC, Pagadian City, seeking the correction of erroneous entries in OCT No. O-3,443. Among the errors sought to be corrected were: (a) the indication that the title was issued by the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City, instead of the Province of Zamboanga del Sur, where the property is

⁷⁹ *Id.* at 15.

actually located; and (b) the property's location being listed as "City of Pagadian" instead of "Barangay Makuguihon, Municipality of Molave, Zamboanga del Sur."⁸⁰ In an Order⁸¹ dated February 3, 2015, Branch 20 found sufficient basis to correct the errors and directed their amendment accordingly, thus:

With respect to the entry referring to the Office of the Register of Deeds of Pagadian City which is claimed to be an erroneous entry, the court notes however that the same entry is not erroneous considering that based from the said entry, the City Register of Deeds should be the proper office since the land[,] subject matter of the title[,] is located within its territorial jurisdiction, which is, in Pagadian City, though erroneous, as it should have been Barangay Makuguihon, Molave, Zamboanga del Sur. Given the facts obtaining, what is reasonable here to remedy the situation is, only to place the subject title to its right office after incorporating therein the necessary corrections herein below mentioned. The Office of the Register of Deeds of Pagadian, being the issuing office, has the authority to make its necessary corrections, and to thereafter transmit the subject Certificate of Title No. O-3,443 to the proper office, where it should properly belong.

WHEREFORE, foregoing premises considered, in accordance with Sec. 108 of P.D. 1529, as amended, judgment is rendered ordering the Register of Deeds for the City of Pagadian to correct the erroneous entries in the said title as follows:

- a. The location of the property: "from City of Pagadian to Barangay Makuguihon, Municipality of Molave, Province of Zamboanga del Sur";
- b. Address of the owner: "from Makuguihon, Molave, Zamboanga del Sur to Makuguihon, Molave, Zam[oa]nga del Sur";
- c. The technical description at the back of the subject title: "from Lot No. 7495 to Lot No. 7494".

Thereafter, the same office is directed to exercise its discretion to place the subject OCT No. O-3,443 to the appropriate Register of Deeds, i.e., the Office of the Register of Deeds of Zamboanga del Sur.

SO ORDERED.⁸²

Based on the foregoing, it appears that Neri's contention on the matter has already been addressed by Branch 20.

⁸⁰ *Id.* at 214.

⁸¹ *Id.* at 213–215.

⁸² *Id.* at 215.

As earlier discussed, the purpose of land registration laws is to finally settle title to real property, so that once the title is registered, the owner may rest secure in his or her ownership and possession. To achieve this purpose, it is essential to presume that the land registration proceedings leading to the issuance of a registration decree were carried out regularly and in accordance with proper procedures.⁸³ To overturn this legal presumption would not only undermine judicial stability but also contravene the fundamental principle of the Torrens system. In effect, it would reduce the doctrine of indefeasibility of Torrens titles to mere empty rhetoric.⁸⁴

Litigation must come to an end at some point, and titles under the Torrens system should be given stability, as the country's economy largely depends on it.⁸⁵

It is well-settled that, upon the expiration of the one-year period to challenge the decree of registration, the decree—and the corresponding title issued pursuant thereto—becomes incontrovertible and may no longer be changed, altered, or modified.⁸⁶ Here, Decree No. N-233377 was issued on May 2, 2013, and OCT No. O-3,443 was issued on June 4, 2013. Both had attained finality by the time Neri filed his Complaint dated August 29, 2014.

Given these circumstances, the Court finds no basis to grant the remedy presently sought by petitioners. Doing so would undermine the very foundation and stability of our land registration laws.

ACCORDINGLY, the Petition for Review on *Certiorari* is **DENIED**. The Decision dated January 8, 2021, and the Resolution dated April 13, 2021, of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. CV No. 05422-MIN are **AFFIRMED**.

SO ORDERED.


HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING
Associate Justice

⁸³ See *Azurin v. Quitariano*, 81 Phil. 261 (1948).

⁸⁴ *Id.* at 266.

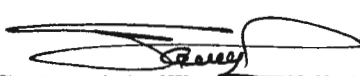
⁸⁵ See *Sps. Aboitiz v. Sps. Po*, 810 Phil. 123, 155 (2017).

⁸⁶ See *Vengaso v. Buencamino*, 109 Phil. 206, 211 (1960), citing *Director of Lands v. Gutierrez David*, 50 Phil. 797, 802 (1927).

WE CONCUR:



ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice



SAMUEL H. GAERLAN
Associate Justice

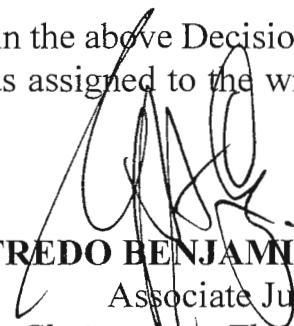


JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO
Associate Justice

On leave
MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH
Associate Justice

ATTESTATION

I attest that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.



ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA
Associate Justice
Chairperson, Third Division

CERTIFICATION

Pursuant to Article VIII, Section 13 of the Constitution, and the Division Chairperson's Attestation, I certify that the conclusions in the above Decision had been reached in consultation before the case was assigned to the writer of the opinion of the Court's Division.



ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO
Chief Justice

