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On the other hand, it is not disputed that there is a government infrastructure project in progress traversing Lot 5155, which has been enjoined by the writ of injunction issued by the trial court.

WHEREFORE, the Court *REVERSES* the decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G.R. SP No. 30630, and *DISMISSES* the complaint in Civil Case No. 93-143 of the Regional Trial Court, Makati.

No costs.

SO ORDERED.

Pardo, Puno, Kapunan, and *Ynares-Santiago, JJ.,* concur.

FIRST DIVISION

[G.R. No. 115747. November 20, 2000]

REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES, represented by the DIRECTOR OF LANDS AND BUREAU OF FOREST DEVELOPMENT, *petitioner, vs.* **THE HON. COURT OF APPEALS, MARIA NATIVIDAD ALIÑO, substituted by NIEVES, ELISA, BIENVENIDO, ANTONIO, RENATO, and LEONARDO, all surnamed ALIÑO-BUHAY,** *respondents.*

[G.R. No. 116658. November 20, 2000]

BENIGNO G. OLLERES and HEIRS OF ESTANISLAO TEMENIA, *petitioners, vs.* **COURT OF APPEALS and HEIRS OF NATIVIDAD ALIÑO, substituted by NIEVES, ELISA, BIENVENIDO, ANTONIO, RENATO and LEONARDO, all surnamed ALIÑO-BUHAY,** *respondents.*

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SYNOPSIS

Maria Natividad Aliño, who claimed to be the owner in fee simple of parcels of land situated at Sitio Tagum, Barrio of Taguan, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro, filed LRC No. N-72 seeking the registration of five parcels of land containing an aggregrate area of 37,7216 hectares. The application was opposed by private petitioners and petitioner Republic and the Bureau of Forest Development. Applicant Aliño having died, she was substituted by her heirs. After trial, the court *a quo* denied the application. On appeal by the Heirs of Aliño, the Court of Appeals rendered its decision reversing the appealed decision and granting the application for confirmation and registration of title over the subject parcels of land in favor of the applicants. Hence, this appeal, the issue raised being whether respondent Heirs of Natividad Aliño have registerable title as owners of the five parcels of land applied for with an area of 377,216 square meters.

The Supreme Court ruled that an applicant seeking to establish ownership of land must conclusively show that he is the owner in fee simple, for the standing presumption is that all lands belonging to the State. In this case, the land in question is admittedly public. Neither the applicant Natividad Aliño nor her predecessors-in-interest had any title or grant from the Spanish sovereign, not even an imperfect or incomplete title. Applicant and her predecessor-in-interests had not been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession of the land in question under a *bona fide* claim of ownership since June 12, 1945, immediately preceeding the filing of the application. From the evidence, the applicant failed to prove the fact of possession by herself and her predecessors-in-interest since June 12, 1945 before the filing of the application. Applicant failed to prove specific acts showing the nature of the possesion of her predecessors-in-interest. Facts constituting possession must be duly established by competent evidence. In fact, applicant's possession over the subject parcels of land was contradicted by several oppositors, who claimed that they were in open, exclusive, adverse and continuous possession of the areas respectively claimed by them and personally cultivated by them. While it may be true that applicants purchased the subject property in 1913, the same could not have ripened into ownership because only 14 years thereafter, portions of the land were classified as forest land. The application for

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registration of applicant Natividad Aliño, substituted by her heirs, was denied, and the subject parcels of land were declared to be public lands belonging to the State.

SYLLABUS

1. **CIVIL LAW; LAND REGISTRATION; AN APPLICANT SEEKING TO ESTABLISH OWNERSHIP OF LAND MUST CONCLUSIVELY SHOW THAT HE IS THE OWNER IN FEE SIMPLE.** — An applicant seeking to establish ownership of land must conclusively show that he is the owner in fee simple, for the standing presumption is that all lands belong to the State, unless acquired from the Government either by purchase or by grant, except lands possessed by an occupant and his predecessors since time immemorial, for such possession would justify the presumption that the land had never been part of the public domain or that it had been private property even before the Spanish conquest. "The standing presumption, we must not forget, is that land pertains to the State, and any person seeking to establish ownership over land must conclusively show that he is the owner."

2. **ID.; PROPERTY; POSSESSION; FACTS CONSTITUTING POSSESSION MUST BE DULY ESTABLISHED BY COMPETENT EVIDENCE.** — Applicant failed to prove specific acts showing the nature of the possession of her predecessors in interest. "Actual possession of land consists in the manifestation of acts of dominion over it of such a nature as a party would naturally exercise over his own property." "The applicant must present specific acts of ownership to substantiate the claim and cannot just offer general statements which are mere conclusions of law than factual evidence of possession." The bare assertion of witnesses that the applicant of land had been in the open, adverse and continuous possession of the property for over thirty (30) years is hardly "the well-nigh incontrovertible" evidence required in cases of this nature. Facts constituting possession must be duly established by competent evidence.

3. **ID.; ID.; OWNERSHIP; THE POSSESSION OF FOREST LAND, HOWEVER LONG, NEVER CONFERS TITLE UPON THE POSSESSOR BECAUSE THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS WITH REGARD TO PUBLIC LAND DOES NOT RAN AGAINST THE STATE, UNLESS THE OCCUPANT CAN**

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PROVE A GRANT FROM THE STATE. — In 1927, seventy three thousand six hundred and eighteen (73,618) square meters of subject property had been classified as part of timberland (forest land). Such insufficient identification of the portion of land claimed in absolute ownership by the applicant cannot ripen into ownership. Possession as a means of acquiring ownership, while it may be constructive, is not a mere fiction. While it may be true that applicant purchased the subject property in 1913, the same could not have ripened into ownership because only fourteen (14) years thereafter, portions of the land were classified as forest land. The possession of forest land, however long, never confers title upon the possessor because the statute of limitations with regard to public land does not ran against the State, unless the occupant can prove a grant from the State.

APEARANCES OF COUNSEL

The Solicitor General for petitioner in G.R. No. 115747.
Eliseo M. Cruz for Olleres, et al. in G.R. No. 116658.
Oscar I. Mercado for private respondents in G.R. No. 115747.

D E C I S I O N

PARDO, *J.*:

These are separate appeals of the parties *via certiorari* seeking to reverse the decision of the Court of Appeals granting the application for confirmation and registration of title of Natividad Aliño, substituted by her heirs, to five (5) parcels of land, with an area of 377,216 square meters, situated at Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro.[1]

We state the facts, taken from the findings of the Court of Appeals, as follows:

"On December 16, 1976, Maria Natividad Aliño filed L.R.C. No. N-72 seeking the registration of five parcels of land containing an aggregate area of 37,7216 hectares under the Land Registration Act

[1] In CA-G. R. CV No. 30605, promulgated on May 31, 1994, Lagamon, J., *ponente*, Herrera, M. and Luna, *JJ.*, concurring, G. R. No. 115747, *Rollo*, pp. 42-50; G. R. No. 116658, *Rollo*, pp. 27-43.

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and/or Section 48(b), Chapter VIII of Act 141 as amended in lieu of a previous application docketed as L.R.C. Case No. N-67 which was ordered amended by the Court.

"In her application Maria Natividad Ali–o claims that she is the owner in fee simple of the parcels of land situated at Sitio Tagun, Barrio of Taguan, Municipality of Mamburao, Province of Occidental Mindoro, more particularly described as follows:

"a. Lot 1 (Psu-04-005173) with an area of 39,570 square meters, bounded as follows:

South West — by the property of Emerenciana S. Lumanlan (Psu-140310, Lot 1 (Portion); 759 Instruccion, Samp., Mla.

North — by Creek and by Lot 2

South East — by the property of Emerenciana S. Lumanlan (Lot 619, Pls-21)

South — by the property of Emerenciana S. Lumanlan (Lot 617, Pls-21) both of Mamburao Public Land Subdivision (Port, Lot 1, Psu-140310)

"b. Lot 2 (Psu-04-005173) with an area of 150,212 square meters, bounded as follows:

North West — by portion of Lot 2, Psu-140310 Maria Natividad Aliño

North East — by the property of Maria Natividad Aliño

South East — by property of Emerenciana S. Lumanlan, Lot 619, Pls-21 of 759 Instruccion, Mla.

South — by Creek and on the other side by Lot 1

"c. Psu-4A-000233, with an area of 54.521 square meters bounded as follows:

South — by Lot 619, Pls-21, property of Emerenciana S. Lumanlan (Psu-140310) 759 Instruccion, Mla.

West — by Lot 2, Psu-04-005173, property of Maria Natividad Aliño

North — by Psu-4A-000331, property of Maria Natividad Aliño

East — by Taguan Creek

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"d. Psu-4A-000232, with an area of 61,669 square meters bounded as follows:

West — by the property of Maria Natividad Aliño

North and East — by Taguan Creek

South — by the property of Maria Natividad Aliño (Psu-4A-000231)

"e. Psu-4A-000231, with an area of 71,244 square meters bounded as follows:

West — by Lot 2, Psu-04-005153 property of Maria Natividad Aliño

North — by Psu-4A-000232 by property of Maria Natividad Aliño

East — by Taguan Creek

South — by Psu-4A-000233 property of Maria Natividad.

"Applicant Maria Natividad Aliño further asserts that the aforesaid parcels of land are covered by Tax Declaration No. 262; that, applicant being the only surviving daughter of Patricio Aliño obtained her title over the said parcels of land by way of inheritance from her father; that, applicant has exclusive possession of said parcels of land and, together with her predecessor-in-interest, her possession is peaceful, continuous, public and adverse to the whole world and in the concept of an owner since time immemorial, i.e. even prior to 1890; that they have used the said parcels of land for residential and agricultural purposes up to the present time. (p. 3 Records)

"Maria Natividad Aliño's application was opposed by Attorney Amando Y. Azul, Honofre Cobarrubias, Estanislao Temenia, Benigno Olleres, the Bureau of Forest Development and the Republic of the Philippines.

"Oppositor Amando Y. Azul, a resident of Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro claims that he is the actual occupant of a parcel of land containing an area of eight (8) hectares more or less which is included in the application for title under LRC No. N-72; that, he acquired the said parcel of land from a certain Estanislao Temenia, who was the previous occupant for more than thirty (30) years; that, he has caused the survey of the land which was recorded as Psu-230336, which is pending approval before the Bureau of Lands; that, he has commenced occupying the said land since 1963, continuously up to the present without having been molested, disturbed or questioned by anyone,

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including registration applicant; and, that applicant Maria Natividad Aliño has never set foot in the area covered by his opposition nor introduced a single improvement therein. Attorney Amando Y. Azul, therefore, prays that the application for registration be denied so far as it includes the eight (8) hectares he has actually occupied and improved. (pp. 49-50, Records)

"Oppositor Honofre Cobarrubias, for his part avers that the application for registration includes a parcel of land with an area of six (6) hectares more or less situated at *sitio* Ligang, *barrio* of San Luis, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro, which parcel of land he has actually occupied and improved without having been molested, disturbed or questioned by anyone, including the registration applicant, since 1958 when he purchased said land from Mr. Estanislao Temenia; that, at the time of the sale in his favor the said land has been fully cultivated to upland riceland by the vendor whose occupation has been open, peaceful, adverse and in the concept of an owner since the last thirty years; and, that applicant Maria Natividad Aliño has never set foot in the area covered by his opposition nor introduced a single improvement therein. Honofre Cobarrubias, therefore, prays that the registration application be dismissed in so far as it affects the area of six (6) hectares which he owns. (pp. 51-52, Records)

"Oppositor Benigno Olleres contends that he is a resident of Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro and that he is the actual physical possessor of a parcel of agricultural land situated in Sitio Taguan, Barrio San Luis, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro embraced under the plans submitted by the applicant, with an area of more or less 17,7759 hectares declared for taxation purposes under Tax Declaration No. 1547 in his name; that, he has possessed the said property openly, publicly, continuously and adversely against the whole world and under a *bona fide* claim of acquisition of ownership by himself and his predecessor-in-interest for more than thirty (30) years immediately preceding the filing of the instant application without having been disturbed by anybody much less the applicant, except only sometime June of 1977 when a certain Conrado Alvarez, alleged caretaker of the applicant tried to gain a foothold on his property, resulting in his filing of a Forcible Entry case against said Conrado Alvarez, which case is still pending trial in the lower court of Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro; that, when he first entered the land it was forested and cogonal and thereafter, he has uprooted the trees thereon, planted fruit trees and has converted a portion of the same to an irrigated field; that, he has been religiously paying the taxes due the government

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for the land subject of his opposition. Benigno Olleres, thus, prays that the application be dismissed and the land subject of his opposition be decreed in his favor. (pp. 83-84, Records)

"Oppositor Estanislao Temenia, a resident of Barangay 7, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro alleges that he is the actual and physical possessor of a parcel of agricultural land situated at Sitio Taguan, Barrio San Luis, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro, with an area of 154,460 square meter; that, he inherited the said parcel of land from his parents and that he and his predecessors-in-interest have been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession and occupation thereof since the time immemorial under a *bona fide* claim of acquisition of ownership without being disturbed by anybody; that, he has declared the said parcel of land for taxation purposes under Tax Declaration No. 2411; that, the said land was still a primeval virgin land when he and his predecessors-in-interest first set foot on it, which thereafter they converted into a rich agricultural land; that, the aforesaid parcel of land is included in the land sought to be registered by herein applicant under plans Psu-04-005173, Psu-4A-000231, Psu-4A-000232, Psu-04-000233; that, Maria Natividad Aliño has never taken possession of the land which are objects of her application whether actual or constructive and therefore, not entitled to a registerable right over the same. Estanislao Temenia therefore prays that the application for registration with regard to the parcels of land subject of his opposition be denied and that he be declared the lawful possessor thereof. (pp. 116-117, Records)

"As for the Bureau of Forestry, its Opposition is hinged on the following:

> "2. That neither the applicant nor her predecessors-in-interest possess sufficient title to acquire ownership in fee simple of the land or lots applied for, the same not having been acquired by any of the various types of title issued by the Spanish Government, such as (1) '*titulo real,*' or royal grant, (2) the '*concession especial*' or special grant, (3) that '*compcession con el estado titulo*' or adjustment title, (4) the '*titulo de compra,*' or title by purchase, and (5) the '*information possesoria*' or possessory information under Royal Decree of February 13, 1984, or any other recognized mode of acquisition of titles over property.
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> x x x x x x x x x
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> "4. That, consequently, the applicant may not avail of the provisions of Section 48 of the Public Land Act, as amended, for failure to fulfill the requisites prescribed therein;

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"5. That, the aforementioned properties are a portion of the public domain belonging to the Republic of the Philippines, not subject to private appropriation.

"They therefore pray that the application for registration with regard to the lands subject of their opposition be denied and that the same be declared part of the public domain belonging to the Republic of the Philippines. (pp. 112-113, Records)

"Finally, for its part the Republic of the Philippines, opposes Maria Natividad Aliños application on the following grounds:

"1. That neither the applicant/s nor his/her/their predecessors-in-interest have been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession and occupation of the land in question since June 12, 1945 or prior thereto (Sec. 48 (b), C.A. 141, as amended by P. D. 1073);

"2. That the muniment/s of title and/or the tax declaration/s and tax payment/s receipt/s of applicant/s if any, attached to or alleged in the application, do/es not constitute competent and sufficient evidence of a *bona fide* acquisition of the lands applied for, or of his/her/their open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession and occupation thereof, in the concept of owner, since June 12, 1945, or prior thereto. Said muniment/s of title do/es not appear to be genuine and the tax declaration/s and/or tax payment receipts indicate the pretended possession of applicant/s to be of recent vintage;

"3. That the claim of ownership in fee simple on the basis of Spanish Title or grant can no longer be availed of by the applicant/s who have failed to file an appropriate application for registration within the period of six (6) months from February 16, 1976 as required by Presidential Decree No. 892. From the records, it appears that the instant application was filed on December 16, 1976.

"5. That the parcel/s applied for is/are portions of the public domain belonging to the Republic of the Philippines not subject to private appropriation."

Meantime, the original applicant, Natividad Garcia Aliño, died on May 26, 1985, and was substituted by her heirs Nieves,

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Elisa, Bienvenido, Antonio, Renato and Leonardo, all surnamed Aliño-Buhay.[2]

"After trial, on September 17, 1990, the court *a quo* rendered the assailed decision, which in part states:

> "Documentary evidence presented consists of the application requisites from stage to stage, until the application was filed, on December 16, 1976, Survey Plans, Technical Descriptions, Tax Receipts, and Certificates of Ownership of Large Cattle.
>
> "The individual oppositors likewise submitted Tax Declarations and Tax Receipts and copies of deed of sale.
>
> "An exhaustive study of the voluminous record showed that before the case was referred to this Branch on Judge Marin's inhibition, it had been set for the presentation of rebuttal evidence. That was therefore pursued in this Branch, in its Order of May 17, 1988, but from time to time some circumstance or other arose, resetting was asked for, which gave the impression that the party concerned did not intend to present rebuttal evidence anymore. Parenthetically, it bears to be mentioned that some statements made in the Memorandum need concrete proof.
>
> "The pleadings, the evidence on file as above outlined and all the papers of record now render it justifiable to maintain oppositor-parties in possession of the areas claimed by them. An additional ground for this exists with regard to those cases where some papers have been filed with the Bureau of Lands. (Atty. Armando Azul and Honofre Cobarrubias)
>
> "Along the same vein, the opposition by the Bureau of Forest Development point to applicant's failure to assert her claim, if any, before the lapse of six months from February 16, 1976 should not be ignored.
>
> "The application is therefore denied.
>
> "Let copy hereof be sent to parties, aside from each counsel. The copy for Atty. Azul, who has been mentioned as deceased in Atty. Adora's pleading, should be sent to c/o Honofre Cobarrubias, who is hereby requested to have the copy delivered to Mrs. Azul.

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[2] Applicant-Appellant's Brief, par. 8, CA *Rollo*, pp. 41-59, at pp. 48-49.

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"SO ORDERED."[3]

In time, applicant heirs of Aliño interposed an appeal to the Court of Appeals.[4]

On May 31, 1994, the Court of Appeals promulgated its decision reversing the appealed decision and granting the application for confirmation and registration of title over the subject parcels of land in favor of applicants pursuant to Section 48 (b) of Commonwealth Act No. 141.[5]

Hence, the appeal by the parties.[6]

The issue raised is whether respondent heirs of Natividad Aliño have registerable title as owners of the five (5) parcels of land applied for with an area of 377,216 square meters, situated at sitio Tagum, Barrio Taguan, Mamburao, Occidental Mindoro.

In its decision, the Court of Appeals ruled that "Maria Natividad Aliño and her predecessor-in-interest had been in actual, open, continuous and notorious possession of the land by virtue of the *escritura de venta* dated May 31, 1913, and that applicants-appellants' completion of the requisite period of at least thirty (30) years of possession since 1913 *ipso jure* and without the need of judicial and other sanctions converted the public land into private property in accordance with Section 48(b) of Commonwealth Act No. 141 even prior to the classification of the said portion of land into forest land in 1952." Hence, the Court of Appeals ordered that a certificate of title for the subject parcels of land be issued in favor of applicants-appellants.

The ruling is erroneous. An applicant seeking to establish ownership of land must conclusively show that he is the owner

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[3] Petition, Annex "A", G. R. No. 115747, *Rollo*, pp. 41-57; Petition, Annex "A", G. R. No. 116658, *Rollo*, pp. 27-43.

[4] Docketed as CA-G. R. CV No. 30605.

[5] Petition, Annex "A", G. R No. 115747, *Rollo*, pp. 41-57; Petition, Annex "A", G. R No. 116658, *Rollo*, pp. 27-43.

[6] Filed on August 3, 1994, Petition, G. R. No. 115747, *Rollo*, pp. 6-40; filed on September 3, 1994, Petition, G. R. No. 116658, *Rollo*, pp. 7-25. On February 1, 1995, we gave due course to the petition of the Republic.

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in fee simple,[7] for the standing presumption is that all lands belong to the State, unless acquired from the Government either by purchase or by grant, except lands possessed by an occupant and his predecessors since time immemorial, for such possession would justify the presumption that the land had never been part of the public domain or that it had been private property even before the Spanish conquest.[8]

"The standing presumption, we must not forget, is that land pertains to the State, and any person seeking to establish ownership over land must conclusively show that he is the owner."[9]

In this case, the land in question is admittedly public. Neither the applicant Natividad Aliño nor her predecessors in interests had any title or grant from the Spanish sovereign — not even an imperfect or incomplete title — and the only basis of her claim of ownership is possession allegedly since time immemorial.

Nonetheless, applicant anchors her application for registration on the provisions of Act No. 496, or in the alternative Com. Act No. 141, Section 48 (b), as amended by Rep. Act No. 1942, which allows "those who by themselves or through their predecessors in interest have been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession and occupation of agricultural lands of the public domain, under a *bona fide* claim of acquisition of ownership for at least thirty years immediately preceding the filing of the application" to apply for judicial confirmation and registration of title.[10]

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[7] *De Ralla v. Director of Lands*, 83 Phil. 491, 501 [1949], citing *Director of Lands v. Penales*, 63 Phil. 1065 [1936]; *Republic v. Lee*, 197 SCRA 13, 19 [1991].

[8] *Republic v. Court of Appeals*, G. R. No. 130174, July 14, 2000, citing *Oh Cho v. Director of Lands*, 75 Phil. 890, 892 [1946], *citing Carino v. Insular Government*, 212 U.S. 449; *Director of Lands v. Reyes; Alinsunurin v. Director of Lands*, 68 SCRA 177, 195 [1975]; *Director of Lands v. Intermediate Appellate Court*, 219 SCRA 339, 346-347 [1993]; *Gordula v. Court of Appeals*, 348 Phil. 670, 685 [1998].

[9] *Director of Forestry v. Muñoz*, 132 Phil. 637, 664 [1968], citing *De Ralla v. Director of Lands*, 83 Phil. 491, 501 [1949].

[10] Application, par. 6, CA *Rollo*, pp. 78-81, at p. 80. By P.D. No. 1073, enacted on January 25, 1977, the thirty-year period prescribed in

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However, applicant and her predecessors in interests had not been in open, continuous, exclusive and notorious possession of the land in question, under a *bona fide* claim of ownership since June 12, 1945, immediately preceding the filing of the application.

Analyzing the evidence submitted, we note that the applicant failed to prove the fact of possession by herself and her predecessors in interest since June 12, 1945 before the filing of the application.

Applicant failed to prove specific acts showing the nature of the possession of her predecessors in interest. "Actual possession of land consists in the manifestation of acts of dominion over it of such a nature as a party would naturally exercise over his own property."[11] "The applicant must present specific acts of ownership to substantiate the claim and cannot just offer general statements which are mere conclusions of law than factual evidence of possession."[12]

The bare assertion of witnesses that the applicant of land had been in the open, adverse and continuous possession of the property for over thirty (30) years is hardly "the well-nigh incontrovertible" evidence required in cases of this nature.[13] Facts constituting possession must be duly established by competent evidence.[14]

In fact, applicant's possession over subject parcels of land was contradicted by several oppositors, who claimed that they were in open exclusive, adverse and continuous possession of the areas respectively claimed by them, and said parcels of land were personally cultivated by them. The land applied for even encroached on the pasture land of Mary Y. Azul.

Com. Act No. 141, Sec. 48 (b), as amended by R.A. 1942, was further amended to "since June 12, 1945." See *Republic v. Doldol*, 295 SCRA 359, 364 [1998].

[11] *Ramos v. Director of Lands*, 39 Phil. 175 [1918].

[12] *Republic v. Court of Appeals*, 167 SCRA 150, 156 [1988].

[13] *Republic v. Lee, supra*, Note 7.

[14] *Republic v. Court of Appeals, supra*, Note 8.

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It is important to notice the uncertainty as to the particular area occupied by applicant and her predecessors in interests, and the exact area thereof. The area applied for is 337,216 square meters (33.7216 hectares). The applicant has not clearly identified the precise metes and bounds of the property sought to be registered as the application covered thirty seven hectares while the "*escritura de venta*" on which it is based, referred to land with an area of sixty five (65) hectares.

In 1927, seventy three thousand six hundred and eighteen (73,618) square meters of subject property had been classified as part of timberland (forest land). Such insufficient identification of the portion of land claimed in absolute ownership by the applicant cannot ripen into ownership. Possession as a means of acquiring ownership, while it may be constructive, is not a mere fiction.[15]

While it may be true that applicant purchased the subject property in 1913, the same could not have ripened into ownership because only fourteen (14) years thereafter, portions of the land were classified as forest land. The possession of forest land, however long, never confers title upon the possessor because the statute of limitations with regard to public land does not ran against the State, unless the occupant can prove a grant from the State.[16]

WHEREFORE, the Court *REVERSES* the decision of the Court of Appeals in CA-G. R. CV No. 30605, *DENIES* the application for registration filed by applicant Natividad Aliño, substituted by her heirs Nieves, Elisa, Bienvenido, Antonio, Renato and Leonardo, all surnamed Aliño-Buhay, and declares the subject parcels of land to be public lands belonging to the State.

No costs.

SO ORDERED.

Davide, Jr., C.J., Puno, Kapunan, and *Ynares-Santiago, JJ.,* concur.

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[15] *Lasam v. Director of Lands*, 65 Phil. 367-373 [1938].

[16] *Susi v. Razon*, 48 Phil. 424 [1925].