

Mythical Ship, Mountain, and City: Of Spirit, Things and Modernity in Bikol

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Abstract

Anthropological fieldwork in coastal villages in the Bikol region of the Philippines uncovered archaeological remnants of state and foreign-sponsored logging companies at the turn of the twentieth century. In visiting each of the local spaces which bore significant artifacts, the locals shared their life-stories which disclose their understanding of these objects and their crafting of narratives about themselves and the community. There is a struggle deeply implicated in the historical context of American colonial rule in the Philippines. They represent the impact of an industrial modernity introduced through the development of the railway and the entry of steamships- its main drivers- for a logging production to supply the need of the United States during the period of rebuilding after World War I.

The paper shall deal with the various reports of the Governors-General to the United States Congress, focusing on the expansionism of American lumber firms. From an initial report by the Philippine Commission to the Secretary of War in the United States in 1911, until President Woodrow Wilson promulgated a decree for such regular reporting in 1916, followed reports from 1921 through 1934 disclosing the operation of American lumber mills, their establishment of sawmills, and lumber production and collection. New ports were opened for the purpose of intensifying production, collection and the transmission of Philippine hardwood from the Bikol countryside to the capital city, Manila and beyond.

Following Marx, and following local lore, the tracing of the detritus of these logging companies become reveal 'cities' as a master symbol of capitalist modernity.