

Global Mindanao: Understanding an Obscure Region Through Its Built Environment

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Abstract

Over the centuries, trade across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, South China Sea, Straits of Malaca, Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea integrated the Philippines, in itself full of diversity, into a global network of economic and sociocultural exchanges. However, often overlooked in the narratives and imagination of this long-distance and cross-cultural exchanges is the fact that these encounters were set in Mindanao, a region in the Southern part of the Philippines whose people engaged the wider world long before colonialism. A sociomateriality approach which recognizes that the social affects the material and vice versa will illustrate how the built environment of Mindanao cities encapsulates conjunctures of pre-colonial place-making, colonial town building, and post-colonial settlements. These built environments range from the dispersed habitat of indigenous settlers to the concentrated space of Islamized communities, from the Spanish plaza and church complex to American-era transformations in public spaces, to post-World War II settlements driven by capitalist ventures and intranational and international mobilities, including Korean immigration to the Philippines. The sociomaterial analysis of Mindanao in the contemporary world helps unpack the outcomes of global encounters that have been obscured in the Metro Manila-centric imagination of the nation. In doing so, it contributes to a more wholistic appreciation of a region that is typically but mistakenly understood as divided into two: one that is fragile and troubled; the other as the proverbial land of promise. It offers an alternative understanding of a region and a country that have a global history and broader links, relevance, and possibilities for the future.

Bionote

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