

'Post-disaster economic development in Aceh: Neoliberalization and other economic-geographical imaginaries' by Nicholas A. Phelps, Tim Bunnell, and Michelle Ann Miller Geoforum

In this paper Tim Bunnell (Geography) and his co-authors examine the uneven patterns and processes of neoliberalization in post-disaster Aceh.

The Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 and a subsequent Memorandum of Understanding ending three decades of armed conflict has opened up Aceh to international aid, trade, ideas and potential investment. Klein (2008) argues such disasters have been exploited systematically by market-driven policies that come under the umbrella of 'neoliberalization'. Based on fieldwork in Aceh and Jakarta, this paper shows that while neoliberal elements are present in the economic development of post-disaster Aceh, they are intertwined with and exceeded by other conceptions or 'imaginaries'.

The authors draw attention to the theoretical importance of a fuller understanding of such imaginaries, their origin and reach, content and the actors and mechanisms associated with their promulgation. Four economic-geographical imaginaries of the future of Aceh are presented: (1) Aceh as newly (re)opened to overseas investors; (2) Aceh as a site of revivable trade connections to the Malay and Islamic worlds; (3) Aceh as a self-governing economic space; (4) Aceh as a united territory of diverse cultures and districts. The first of these is most closely associated with processes of neoliberalization. However, it is exceeded by the three others which, taken together, unsettle any singular script of a "disaster capitalism complex" at work in the reconstruction of Aceh.

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