

Aceh, Indonesia and Other Imagined Communities

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Abstract

This paper will reflect on the historical identity of Aceh, in juxtaposition with various larger imaginings within which Acehnese elites have seen themselves interacting. It will suggest that these elites had more international options than most Archipelago states and societies, at least until Batavia more-or-less succeeded in controlling its traffic with Pinang and Malaya in the 1890s. The succession of Java-based powers which established some kind of primacy among Archipelago states over several centuries, had only the 20th century to change the imaginings of Acehnese. Force was therefore used excessively, in ways which are now reaping a whirlwind. Nevertheless a powerful enthusiasm for Indonesia swept Acehnese elites in the 1930s and '40s, which in different conditions might have made Aceh a model province. How Indonesians reimagine their identities in the 21st century will determine how compatible these two visions are.