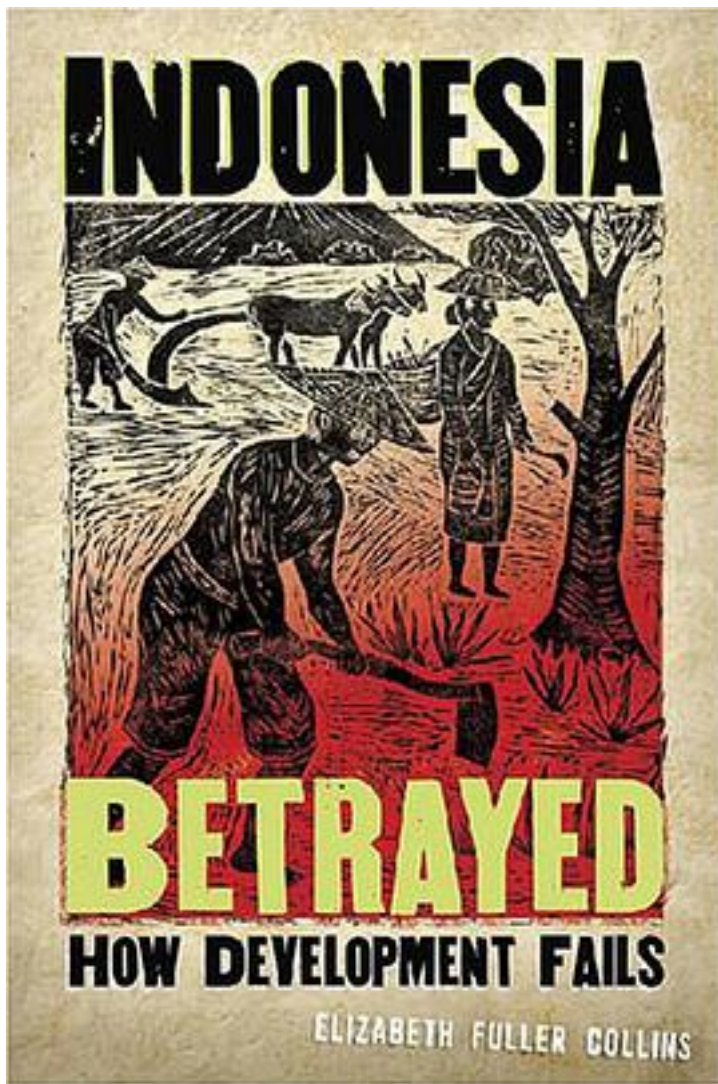


Indonesia Betrayed



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Supporters of neoliberalism claim that free markets lead to economic growth, the creation of a middle class, and the establishment of democratically accountable governments. Critics point to a widening gap between rich and poor as countries compete to win foreign investment, and to the effects on the poor of neoliberal programs that restrict funding for health, education, and welfare. This book offers a ground-level view from Sumatra of the realities behind these debates during the final years of Suharto's New Order and the beginning of a transition to more democratic government. The author's wealth of primary data from ten years of interviews and local newspaper reportage (1994-2004) shows how farmers and laborers were dispossessed by both government policies and crony capitalism. Elizabeth Collins relates the stories of populist efforts in South Sumatra to combat "development" policies responsible for producing extreme poverty and allowing corruption to flourish. She describes how student-led NGOs worked with farmers fighting to retain their livelihoods in the lowland forests of South Sumatra. She reports on a local branch of the Indonesian Environmental Forum as it battled multinational companies and Indonesian conglomerates responsible for damage to the environment; on contract workers protesting exploitation by a company with ties to a Suharto crony; and on systemic corruption under the New Order, which spread throughout all levels of government and into civil society organizations. She examines the sometimes strained relationships between Islamists and human-rights activists, arguing that there is no inherent contradiction between Islam and democratic politics. Collins concludes that for real change to occur, neoliberal capitalism must be recognized as a utopian ideology; democracy, imperfect as it is, offers the best hope for sustainable development in Indonesia.

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