

# Authoritarian Populism in Malaysia

Anne Munro-Kua



8020 01



First published in Great Britain 1996 by

**MACMILLAN PRESS LTD**

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS  
and London

Companies and representatives  
throughout the world

A catalogue record for this book is available  
from the British Library.

ISBN 0-333-64491-3



First published in the United States of America 1996 by

**ST. MARTIN'S PRESS, INC.,**

Scholarly and Reference Division,

175 Fifth Avenue,  
New York, N.Y. 10010

ISBN 0-312-15826-2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Munro-Kua, Anne, 1948-

Authoritarian populism in Malaysia / Anne Munro-Kua.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-312-15826-2

1. Malaysia—Politics and government. 2. Democracy—Malaysia.  
3. Authoritarianism—Malaysia. 4. Populism—Malaysia. 5. Malaysia—  
Economic conditions. 6. Capitalism—Malaysia. I. Title.

JQ1062.A91M85 1996

320.9595—dc20

96-15990

CIP

© Anne Munro-Kua 1996

All rights reserved. No reproduction, copy or transmission of  
this publication may be made without written permission.

No paragraph of this publication may be reproduced, copied or  
transmitted save with written permission or in accordance with  
the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988,  
or under the terms of any licence permitting limited copying  
issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency, 90 Tottenham Court  
Road, London W1P 9HE.

Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this  
publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil  
claims for damages.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
05 04 03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96

Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Antony Rowe Ltd, Chippenham, Wiltshire

M 832056/

320.9595 24

ALON

Pustaka Negara

Dedicated to all victims of detention without trial

# Contents

<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
<i>Glossary</i>	xvi
<i>Maps of Malaysia</i>	xviii
<b>1 Introduction: Capitalist Economic Success and Democracy</b>	<b>1</b>
The Semblance of Political Stability	2
Weaknesses of Traditional Academic Analyses	4
The Authoritarian Populist State	5
Can Malaysia be Described as Democratic?	6
Class and Communalism	7
The Limits of Malaysian Democracy	8
<b>2 The Colonial Roots of Authoritarian Populism</b>	<b>10</b>
Communal Strategy of British Colonialism	11
Capitalist Development and Ethnic Divisions	13
The Radical Nationalist Movement	16
The Emergency: Precedent for Authoritarianism	18
The Alliance Formula and Populism	22
<b>3. The Post-Colonial State</b>	<b>26</b>
The Post-Colonial Economy	27
Preventive Detention	31
The Ideology of 'National Security'	36
<b>4 Suppression of Political Opposition</b>	<b>40</b>
Disaffection with the Alliance Coalition	40
The Opposition Challenge	42
Raising the Communist Bogey	45
Opposition to the Creation of Malaysia	50
Crisis of the Power Bloc, 1969	54
<b>5 Restructuring the State and Society</b>	<b>58</b>
The 1969 Crisis and the National Operations Council	59
The New Economic Policy as Populist Reform	62

	The State Communalizes the Poverty Issue	66
	The Costs and Effects of Bumiputra Trusteeship	71
	Bumiputraism and Cultural Policies	76
<b>6</b>	<b>State Repression in the Seventies</b>	<b>81</b>
	Crackdown on Students and Academics	81
	Executive Interference in the Judicial Process	84
	The Death Penalty under ESCAR	85
	Criminalizing Political Dissent	88
	The Campaign against ESCAR	95
	Suppression of Trade Union Activists	100
<b>7</b>	<b>Charismatic Leadership and Authoritarian Populism</b>	<b>105</b>
	Capitalist Restructuring in the Eighties	106
	Authoritarian Populism under Dr Mahathir Mohamad	112
	Nationalism and the National Question	115
	Islam, Populism and the Malay Masses	118
	The Media and Ideological Mediation	121
<b>8</b>	<b>Class Contradictions and Popular Protest</b>	<b>126</b>
	Protest against the ISA	126
	Tensions and Crises	130
	State Repression as a Resolution of Crisis	133
	United Against the ISA	137
	Executive Manipulation of Power	138
<b>9</b>	<b>Conclusion and Postscript</b>	<b>143</b>
	<i>Appendix: Theoretical Considerations</i>	154
	<i>Notes</i>	167
	<i>Bibliography</i>	183
	<i>Index</i>	194