

not explore this lineage sufficiently; the absence of the past leaves a question mark on what it suggests about the future of rights as a project. In spite of revealing with sophistication and verve how discursive obscurities emanate from both Asia and the West, it does not quite succeed in offering a theory of rights.

And without theory, whither practice?

ASAD LATIF
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***Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir.* By R.S. Milne and Diane Mauzy.**
London and New York: Routledge, 1999. 225pp.

The first book on Malaysian politics that this reviewer read was R.S. Milne's *Government and Politics in Malaysia*, published in 1966, when the author was teaching at the University of Singapore. In the late 1970s, Milne was joined by Diane Mauzy in writing an expanded volume — *Politics and Government in Malaysia* — which took into account the great changes during the previous decade. The new work, under review here, brings the story up to 1998 and focuses on the Mahathir era.

The long experience of both authors as observers of Malaysian politics is reflected in this book. It is noted in passing that Milne's first interviews with Malaysian politicians were conducted in 1964 and the footnotes indicate that both authors have had access to most of Malaysia's important political leaders since then. The book is full of comments and evaluations that indicate the "feel" for Malaysian politics that the authors have acquired over several decades. Milne and Mauzy are, therefore, very well placed to interpret recent developments in proper long-term historical context. Their judgements are generally very sound.

The book surveys the major events and issues that arose during Dr Mahathir's long and unfinished tenure as Prime Minister until 1998. Mahathir's confrontations with the sultans and the judiciary are covered in some detail. His battles within his party are also discussed at length, particularly the events leading to the party split in the late 1980s and, more tentatively, the crisis that resulted from Mahathir's deteriorating relations with his then deputy, Anwar Ibrahim, in 1997-98. Attention is devoted to the New Economic Policy and particularly to Mahathir's

initiatives in the economic field, such as his “Look East” policy, privatization, the heavy industries policy, and the current aspiration to build a “Multimedia Super Corridor”. The authors also examine the approach of the Mahathir government to Islamization, Malay–Chinese relations, the position of the East Malaysian states, and human rights. Mahathir’s role on the world stage as a leader of the “South” is covered in a separate chapter.

Despite the detailed exposition of government policies and approaches under Mahathir, the picture of the man himself that emerges from this book is not always clear. Contradictory views are presented but not adequately resolved. For example, the *Far Eastern Economic Review* is quoted — apparently with approval — as believing that for Mahathir “power has to be absolute” (p. 159), yet the authors’ discussion of the way that the Malaysian political system works indicates that the Malaysian Prime Minister enjoys far from absolute power. Tengku Razaleigh is quoted as saying that Mahathir “thrives on crisis and confrontation” (p. 161), but the authors themselves note an aversion to competition on Mahathir’s part which, they hint, might have originated from his “dislike of competitive games” as a schoolboy (p. 160). As an example of his aversion for competition, they cite Mahathir’s assertion in 1995 that he would not accept a challenge for the UMNO leadership until 1999 (p. 160). But in different circumstances in the early 1980s, Mahathir himself promoted competition within the party when he allowed highly competitive and divisive contests for the deputy leadership on two occasions. After asserting Mahathir’s dislike of competition, the authors’ ambivalence is apparent when they say that, “A possible speculation is that Mahathir’s preference for confrontation over consensus may be that ample consensus, and even planning, in some projects, resembles polemics too much for it to form part of his style” (p. 163). It seems that Mahathir likes confrontation but avoids polemics.

The authors note briefly an apparent “mellowing” in Mahathir’s attitude to Malaysia’s Chinese and other non-Malay communities (p. 166). Especially after his announcement of his “Vision 2020”, which envisaged Malaysia as a developed country by 2020, Mahathir’s attitude indicated “greater ethnic liberality”. Mahathir’s appointment as Deputy Prime Minister in 1976 had been met with a marked lack of enthusiasm — or even hostility — by the Chinese community but by the 1990s he was widely perceived as a friend of the Chinese. The transformation of Mahathir’s image among non-Malays is one of the most remarkable developments during his prime ministership but the authors provide only limited analysis of this change. The main weight of their explanation seems to be placed on Mahathir’s perception of “the West” rather

than “the Chinese” as the “enemy” of Malay nationalism. Thus, the authors suggest, “If the Chinese were no longer to be the enemy, clearly it was best to have them as enthusiastic collaborators” (p. 134). Incidentally, I was puzzled by the authors’ claim that “some high positions were opened to non-Malays” including those of “armed forces chief-of-staff, police chief, and state government secretary” (p. 95).

It is one of the occupational hazards of political scientists writing about contemporary politics in countries like Malaysia that last-minute revisions need to be incorporated to take into account major developments which occur just before, or just after, the manuscript is sent to press. In this case, the initial draft of Chapter 7, headed “The succession to Mahathir: Anwar Ibrahim”, must have required some amendment to take into account the events of September 1998 when Anwar was not only dismissed from office but placed under arrest to face extraordinary charges. The chapter runs through the main developments from the rise of Anwar to the growing signs of tension between the Prime Minister and his deputy, and finally to Anwar’s dismissal. Understandably, it reads more like a mere recording of events than an analysis of why they happened and ends with an unanswered question: “What aspects of such a system could lead to so bizarre an outcome?”

This book draws on the authors encyclopaedic knowledge of Malaysian politics to present an informed picture of political developments under the leadership of Dr Mahathir. The book provides a valuable guide to the major events and issues that need to be understood by anyone concerned with Malaysian politics today. The reverse side of their approach, however, is that they do not give themselves enough space to examine fully some of the bigger issues that arise from their study. The topic “Democracy and authoritarianism in Malaysia” gets only three pages; there is no focused overall assessment of how and why Malaysia has avoided serious ethnic violence since 1969; and there is little thorough analysis of how Malaysia’s political structures might have contributed to both rapid economic growth before 1997 and the collapse that followed. Instead, the authors prefer to provide brief ad hoc judgements along the way and show little inclination to take advantage of the theoretical insights that might be derived from comparative studies of these questions in other countries.

Nevertheless, this book succeeds in meeting the need to provide an up-to-date overview of Malaysian politics during the Mahathir era.

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