

A critical discourse analysis of Mahathir Mohamad's speeches on the "war on terror"

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Abstract: This article is a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of the discursive strategies employed by Mahathir Mohamed, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, in 10 of his speeches that express resistance and challenge to the former U.S. President, George W. Bush's military ideology of "war on terror" post September 11, 2001. The study is guided by CDA's focus on power relations and power struggle that are manifested in language. On speaking against terrorism, Mahathir's dislike for the Bush administration's handling of the issue is viewed as a platform to further his own ideology. The analysis reveals how Mahathir's arguments fall within the human rights rhetoric that calls on general norms, freedom, human rights, and justice, supported with biases towards the plight of Muslims and the Middle East. Mahathir's resistance to Bush reveals repetitive use of national rhetoric, self-glorification, comparison moves, and references to shared history and shared presuppositions, and his criticisms towards the "others" fall within the ideological construction of a positive self-presentation of himself as Prime Minister of Malaysia and a Muslim leader to be emulated.

Keywords: 9/11; ideology; language and power; political speeches; war on terror.

Abstrak: Kajian ini menerapkan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA) untuk mengkaji strategi percakapan dan langkah-langkah perbincangan oleh bekas Perdana Menteri Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, dalam 10 ucapan beliau yang meluahkan penentangan dan cabaran terhadap ideologi ketenteraan "perang ke atas keganasan" oleh bekas Presiden Amerika Syarikat, George W. Bush, selepas peristiwa September 11, 2001. Kajian ini berpandukan fokus Analisis Wacana Kritis terhadap hubungan kuasa dan pergelutan

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kuasa yang dinyatakan melalui bahasa. Analisis ini mendedahkan bagaimana perbahasan Mahathir dikategorikan sebagai retorik hak asasi manusia yang berpandukan hujahan norma-norma umum, kebebasan, hak asasi dan keadilan yang berpihak kepada kaum Muslim dan Timur Tengah. Penentangan dan kredibiliti Mahathir sebagai cabaran terhadap Bush mendedahkan penggunaan *retorik nasional, pujian terhadap diri sendiri, perbandingan cara* dan rujukan terhadap sejarah dan andaian. Beliau begitu kritikal mengenai cara *mereka* (terhadap kuasa-kuasa besar dan kaum Muslim) menentang dan mencabar pendokong perang dan telah dikategorikan sebagai pembinaan ideologi positif terhadap diri sendiri sebagai Perdana Menteri Malaysia dan pemimpin Muslim yang dikagumi.

Kata kunci: 9/11; ideologi; bahasa dan kuasa; ucapan politik; perang ke atas keganasan.

Former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (b. 1925), was at an important stage in his career before retiring from his official duty as the Prime Minister post-September 11. In 2001, when the U.S. former President, George W. Bush, unleashed his “war on terror” on Afghanistan and Iraq, Mahathir’s vocal display of resistance and condemnation was apparent in his public speeches, interviews, and comments, culminating in the formation of the Perdana Peace Forum in 2002 which aimed at “Criminalising War”. This platform addressed issues of injustice to challenge and resist Bush’s political agenda and all those who abused their power. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysts, such acts by Mahathir can be viewed as a struggle or a challenge for power. By leveraging his position as the Prime Minister to address the conditions of injustices, the act of representing the counter-power to the super powerful makes him, according to Haque and Khan (2004, p. 184) a “bona fide CDA analyst” himself. Guided by the CDA framework, this paper provides a critical discourse analysis of Mahathir’s speeches on the “war on terror”, comprising his reconstruction of 9/11 and terrorism, and his positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation.

A critical discourse analysis approach

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach to analysing discourse structures (written or spoken) that involves a study of the way social or political power, dominance, inequality, bias or resistance to such practices are mediated through the linguistic system (Van Dijk,

1993, 2009.). From the perspective of CDA, language is exploited by individuals or groups of people in a society as a means to achieve a particular goal. That is, through conscious selection of particular linguistic features, such as a lexical item, or a certain way of disclosing things to elicit a particular meaning (semantics), a certain purpose is achieved by the language user which may be ideological (Khan, 2003). Hence, racism is enacted with negative lexical choices to discuss immigration and ethnic issues in parliament debates (Van Dijk, 1998), in the media, or and even in the dictionary (Krishnamurthy, 1996). Such practices result in support, legitimisation, or enactment of racist talk and the spread of racist ideology, especially when the media or popular discourse re-contextualises and reproduces racist discourse for public consumption.

From this proposition, the critique in the word "critical" in CDA is aimed at a powerful group of people in a society who use language to maintain, exercise, or reproduce power. They are termed "elite" by CDA proponents and are defined as groups of people who have wide access and control over specific communicative events, e.g. media, parliamentary debates, text books, and the law. They use these means to gain influence and in turn to influence public opinion (Van Dijk, 1993, 1997, 2009). Through it, the elites' power and influence are integrated in laws, rules and norms, hence taking the form of hegemony. Dominance, on the other hand, occurs when power is abused, such as when the elites use their position to convey their own ideology to serve their own interest (Van Dijk, 1993; Weiss & Wodak, 2003). Critical Discourse Analysts take to expose such practices. While conducting a critical discourse analysis, the analysts must take up, "an explicit socio-political stance: they spell out their points of view, perspectives, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 252). This is achievable through expressions of support for the oppressed or the non-dominant in the analysis with the main aim to ultimately resist social inequality.

Framework

This study has adopted CDA principles and several concepts on ideology introduced by Teun A. Van Dijk (1993, 1997, 2009) in his work on ideology and prejudice. In constructing an ideology, the *positive self-*

presentation and *negative other-presentation* are employed in the discourse. In the former, as the name indicates, the “self” is presented positively. The concept of “self” is understood as the language user’s group that a person belongs to. The groups may range from political, racial, ethnic, to gender. Van Dijk (1997) lists *national rhetoric*, *self-glorification* and *justification* amongst others as typical semantic strategies or “moves” for a *positive self-presentation* in argumentative discourses where emphasis is laid on *Our* good properties or actions whilst emphasising and invoking *Their* bad properties and action simultaneously (presenting a negative *other* presentation through a *critical of them* move). This also means that any of *their* positive actions are hedged, mitigated or even omitted. This premise is applied in studies by Said (1981), Karim (2000), Poole (2002), Khan (2003) and Amer (2009), which reveal negative portrayals of Muslims as the *other* in Western movies, documentaries, books, newspapers and magazines.

It is important to note here that the *other* does not necessarily mean the non-whites or non-Western as purported by Van Dijk. In a study by Garbelman (2007), Osama bin Laden describes the Americans and Bush as the *other* to legitimise the 9/11 bombings on the U.S. The *negative other* has also become a tool for resistance as found in studies on the Middle East media which were especially apparent as a reaction against the controversial 2006 Prophet Muhammad’s (SAW) cartoon depiction (Hakam, 2009; Mazid, 2008). On the other hand, in a study on Turkish newspapers, Evre and Parlak’s (2008) findings show an attempt to create an *otherisation* within the notion of “we” by showing that there exist “good” Muslims and “bad” Muslims.

In his analysis of anti-racist discourse, other concepts introduced by Van Dijk (1998) are the *critical of us* strategy where he finds that anti-racism arguments by politicians carry humanitarian norms and values e.g. emphasising “equality for all”, which can even lead to the *ad hominem* move of accusing the anti-immigrant politicians as racist - this meant criticising people who are of equal status as the speaker in a *critical of us* move.

As CDA does not have a unitary single framework, this study suggests that Mahathir brings issues such as his assessment and reframing of the 9/11 attack, the “war on terror” and the terrorists as ways to resist and combat inequality. Because a linguistic analysis must

integrate all available background information within the analysis and interpretation, this paper will ground the analysis in context by studying how Mahathir imposes his criticisms (*critical of us* and *critical of them*) as a politician through a *positive self-presentation* of being a politician. His aim is to bring about a positive change - a goal that is shared by all CDA practitioners. To meet the nature of CDA, this study is both supportive and critical of Mahathir's agenda.

Context of Mahathir's leadership and his role in the Muslim world post 9/11

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was the longest serving Prime Minister of Malaysia (1981-2003) which also entailed two major positions: Head of the coalition government, namely the Barisan National (BN), and president of the ruling party; the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). His 22-years in leadership led him to develop Malaysia into becoming one of the wealthiest nations in Asia. To the public at large, Mahathir is labelled as a "Third World Spokesman" and a Muslim leader to be emulated (Dhillon, 2009, p. 195). Further adding to his public persona was his rhetoric which was regarded as frank, abrasive, open, courageous and even controversial regardless of the audience (Kamila, 2004). In his anti-West invective, Mahathir depicts the "morally bankrupt West as the essentialised "Other" of Islamic civilisations" (Schottmann, 2013, p. 57).

When the World Trade Centre in New York was hit by two planes on September 11, 2001, the U.S., under President George W. Bush, launched the "war on terror" by sending military troops to two Muslim nations: Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Bush and the pro-war U.S media reminded people of the 9/11 attack through repeated footages of the collapsing World Trade Centre and assaulted the Islamic faith, triggering an intense Islamophobic phenomenon. It did not help that George W. Bush called the "war on terror" a "crusade," a loaded term that evokes the history of the Christians' medieval wars against Muslims (Moten, 2010). In Britain, newspapers dating between 1998-2009 described Muslims as sensitive, different, and hostile towards non-Muslims (Baker, Garbrielatos & McEnary, 2012). Islam was represented as a homogenous threat (Poole, 2002) and this allowed Mahathir to lay out his open criticisms of the U.S.'s call for military action of "war on terror". However Mahathir's agenda is not without its criticisms.

The period between 1997 to 2001 was marred not only by the 1997 Asian financial crisis but also “the ugliest personal episode in the country’s political history” - that of the case of Mahathir versus (former) Deputy Prime Minister, the ousted Anwar Ibrahim (Jeshurun, 2008, p. 288). With Anwar Ibrahim’s controversial dismissal, trial and imprisonment in 1999, many Malaysian citizens began lending support to the opposition party, the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) as they called for a nationwide government reformation. The period was a critical test for the Barisan National government and a personal attack against his credibility. Mahathir was labelled by Farish A. Noor (cited in Wain, 2009, p. 218) as *Mahazalim*, *Mahakejam* and *Mahafiraun* (The Great Oppressor, the Cruel One, and the Great Pharaoh). To critics, Mahathir desperately needed to repair his tarnished reputation. He needed to be viewed and be revered once more as a Muslim political leader in the eyes of the Malaysians. In 2001, Mahathir declared Malaysia an Islamic state (Wain, 2009).

It was important for Mahathir to oppose the “war on terror” for two reasons: one was to prove that his government had experienced in dealing with domestic terrorism, and second for an ideological agenda which was to prove that under his leadership and governance, Malays practised peaceful and proper Islam (Dhillon, 2009). The benefits reaped from his stance on the “war on terror” were evident at the domestic level when Mahathir’s position was so strengthened that after 22 years in leadership, he was able to retire gracefully in October 2003. The extent of how much Mahathir has gained through his critical anti-war discourse is further examined in this article.

Data

The corpus in this study comprises of Mahathir’s 10 speeches on terrorism issues and is extracted from the book entitled *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad Prime Minister of Malaysia* compiled and edited by Hashim Makaruddin (Mahathir bin Mohamad, 2003). The speeches are confined to the period of post September 11, 2001 when Mahathir was still the Prime Minister of Malaysia up to his retirement from office in 2003.

The title of the speeches, date and place of delivery as given in the book are as follows:

1. "The Need to Identify Terrorists and Remove the Causes of Terrorism," a speech delivered at the Conference on Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on November 16, 2001 (Text 1).
2. "Islam, Terrorism and Malaysia's Response," a speech delivered at the Asia Society Dinner in New York, United States, on February 4, 2002 (Text 2).
3. "Terrorism is as Globalised as Trade and Investment," a speech delivered at the Asia Society Dinner in New York, United States, on February 4, 2002 (Text 3).
4. "Islam Condemns Acts of Terror," a speech delivered at the Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia, on April 1, 2002 (Text 4).
5. "Malaysia Has No Tolerance for Terrorists," a speech delivered at the US-Asean Business Council Dinner in Washington, D.C., United States, on May 14, 2002 (Text 5).
6. "Making the World Safe Again," a speech delivered at the meeting of the U.S. Congress' Malaysia-America Friendship Caucus at Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C, United States, on May 14, 2002 (Text 6).
7. "The New Threat of Economic Terrorism," a speech delivered at the Langkawi International Dialogue 2002 in Langkawi, Malaysia, on August 1, 2002 (Text 7).
8. "World in the Midst of 'World War III'", a speech delivered at the Plenary Session on "Trust and Governance for a New Era", organised by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 23, 2003 (Text 8).
9. "Impact of Terrorism on the World," a speech delivered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 24, 2003 (Text 9).
10. "No Longer Just a War against Terrorism," a speech delivered at the XIII Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on February 24, 2003 (Text 10).

For the purpose of the analysis, the speeches are denoted as Text 1-10, respectively. The use of quotes and excerpts from the speeches are incorporated together with the speech number (Text) and page number from the book, i.e., page 60. An example is text 4:60. Any emphasis to illustrate a point are italicised by the researcher. Excerpts

are chosen based on the emerging themes of 9/11, terrorism, *positive self-presentation* and *negative other-presentation*. A linguistic analysis entails looking at the overall lexical and semantic choices that Mahathir makes. The study is by no means exhaustive and is subjected to biases with a commitment to expose social inequality.

Analysis of Mahathir's reframing of 9/11 and terrorism

In this section, the analysis investigates the ways that Mahathir reframes the 9/11 event and terrorism amidst the "war on terror" context. In commenting on the issues, Mahathir was speaking at a time when the 9/11 attack was still new and the impact still reverberating strongly especially in the Western world. Mahathir acknowledges the profound impact it has not only on the Americans but "the world" by linking its effect on the economy and on the people as in the example:

The attacks of September 11 *affects the whole world* and damages not just buildings in a particular country and the people in them but it also *struck at the very foundation of the world's economy and it has resulted in death and destruction for the country and people believed to be the base of the attacks*. It has shattered the confidence of the world and has left an atmosphere of fear. The fallout from that terror attack is not over yet. *Others will suffer, will lose their freedom, their rights and will lose their lives too*. They will have to flee from their countries and live in misery in *subhuman conditions* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:60).

What is interesting about the excerpt above is how Mahathir manages to express sympathy for the civilians of 9/11, but also in the same paragraph, he extends sympathy for the people who are the prime suspects of the 9/11 attack. Through the use of the modality "will", Mahathir predicts that the suspects, innocent until proven guilty, will suffer such tragic consequences for the acts that they may not have committed. To Mahathir, such a degree of suffering endured by them and their countrymen are against human rights and morality as can be seen through his choice of words such as "freedom", "rights", and living in "subhuman conditions".

In the following example, Mahathir employs *statistics* to explicitly suggest that many civilians have died from terrorism in Bosnia long before 9/11 in the United States. He also exploits the term "attacks" as in the following example to show that Muslims have also been victims:

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, more than a hundred thousand Muslims were massacred in full view of television viewers and for a long time nothing was done. The Muslims were actually prevented from acquiring weapons to defend themselves because this might result in more killings i.e. the death of their enemies might affect the number of casualties. If only Muslims were killed and the Serbs saved then obviously the casualties would be less... elsewhere Muslim countries are subjected to attacks and economic sanctions resulting in many deaths from deprivations of all kinds (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:67).

By comparing 9/11 to the Bosnian plight, Mahathir attempts to put the 9/11 event into context, namely that the suffering and deaths of civilians has occurred long before 9/11 and that the powerful elites have done nothing to ease the sufferings of war victims. He also uses the *comparison move* by referring to history to imply that the U.S. is now on the receiving end of what other countries have long endured. Another line of argument Mahathir takes is to *justify* the terrorist attack on the U.S. - to Mahathir, the terrorists are acting out against acts of terror by the U.S. government who had either ignored their suffering or caused such suffering, such as the U.S. support for the formation of the Israel State and the terrorist acts Israel continues to commit against the Palestinians - an issue that is largely ignored by the U.S. government. Mahathir explicitly points out that the Muslims are angry and seeking retribution because of it:

Many Muslims are involved in acts of terror simply because presently Muslims and the Islamic countries are being oppressed the most. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Libya, Iran, India and Chechnya, it is the Muslims who are the injured parties. In fact, their terrorism is their reaction to what is to them acts of terror against them (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:43).

This blatant double-standards is what infuriates Muslims, infuriates them to the extent of launching their own terror attack.... And the last straw which caused them to resort to futile and destructive terror attacks is the blatant support for state terrorism as practised by Israel and others (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10:114-117).

The examples Mahathir gave is to put the terrorist act of 9/11 into the context of the present state of the world. It can be interpreted as Mahathir's way of implying that the super powers have caused injustice to the people who, in an act of defiance, resort to terrorism. Mahathir is, therefore, implying that the U.S., in its support for the state of Israel, is responsible for triggering the 9/11 attack.

In his evaluation of the term "terrorists", Mahathir uses the personal pronoun "we" (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:63) and the adverbial phrase "of course" (Mahathir, 2003, Text 2:47) to show that it is a well-known fact that terrorists can also be called freedom fighters as in the following excerpts:

We already know that it is entirely possible for freedom fighters struggling against oppression to be mistaken for and to be deliberately labelled as terrorists by their oppressors. Thus, *Jomo Kenyatta, Robert Mugabe, Nelson Mandela and Sam Nujomo* were all labelled as terrorists, were hunted and faced jail sentences if they were captured. But *we know that today they are accepted as respected leaders of their countries* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:63).

And of course terrorists like *Jomo Kenyatta, Mugabe, Nujomo and Mandela* are now acknowledged as legitimate leaders of their countries (Mahathir, 2003, Text 2:47).

The use of "we" in the excerpts above is a form of generalising a presupposed shared knowledge that "we" make mistakes, "we" are politically motivated and "we" are subjected to our own biases. By mentioning the names of past "terrorists" who are now acknowledged as "respected leaders" makes it easier for the audience to understand that the given definition and mental representation of terrorists are volatile and subject to a biased interpretation rather than on facts. In the case of Robert Mugabe, for example, the Western media labelled him a violent terrorist who killed white citizens in Africa (Toolan, 1988). However, after a democratic election where Mugabe won, the Western media, like *The Times*, cast Mugabe in an entirely different light. As Toolan (1988, p. 237) points out, "Now Mugabe appeared reasonable after all, educated and religious: his two Western degrees were emphasised, as was his devout Catholicism". Such virtues of Mugabe are highlighted positively because they conform to Western norms and values, which is to be educated in the West and to be Catholic.

In another speech, Mahathir employs another move which is to highlight the ambiguity of the term "terrorists" to illustrate that the interpretation of the word depends on who is doing the interpreting, at which point in time and the political agenda it serves:

Examples of the *ambivalence* in the definition of terrorists are many. The Jewish Haganah, Irgun Zeva'i Le'umi and Stern Gang were at one time regarded as terrorists and were hunted by the British. *But later they became respected leaders of Israel.* The Irish Republican Army (IRA) is a terrorist organisation in the eyes of the British *but is regarded as freedom fighters worthy of financial support* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:30).

Mahathir's line of argument is that the word itself causes confusion and is subject to the ideology constructed by the dominant force. Such misleading interpretation has led to stereotyping:

The terrorists of today *are not wild-eyed, illiterate fanatics* who merely obey the orders of their evil leaders (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:65).

Mahathir is referring to the negative representation of Muslims in the Middle East to exploit the way an outsider views the Middle East. In the above excerpt, Mahathir uses *imagery* ("wild eyed, illiterate fanatics") and *sarcasm* ("merely obey", "evil leaders") to point out that the Bush administration seems to regard the 9/11 terrorists as coming from a deficient culture, or as villains caricaturised in movies. Instead, Mahathir redefines terrorists as being "normal" like everybody else. In fact, they conform to the Westerners ideals of a "civilised" society:

They are *educated, well-off, normal people with wives and families* to love and look after. We cannot know they are terrorists until they have committed their horrible crimes (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:65).

Mahathir also regards the tendency by the Bush administration to generalise the cause of terrorism by attributing it to jealousy towards the dominant power as a reflection of ignorance. Instead of pointing it out openly, he resorts to the *politeness strategy* of "saving face", as seen below where he implies that such beliefs held by the Bush administration lack "deep knowledge" of terrorism:

Jealousy does not reflect deep knowledge of the terrorist mind (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:37).

In a way, Mahathir implies that unlike the Bush administration, he himself has a better understanding of the cause of terrorism. Apart from pointing out ignorance and prejudices that are deeply rooted and practised in Western discourse and ideology, Mahathir suggests a redefining of the word “terrorists”, as in the following example:

I would like to suggest here that armed attacks or other forms of attacks against civilians must be regarded as acts of terror and the perpetrators regarded as terrorists. Whether the attackers are attacking on their own or on the orders of their governments, whether they are regular or irregulars, if the attack is against civilians, then they must be considered as terrorists (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:64).

According to this definition of terrorism, *the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11, the human bomb attacks by Palestinians and the Tamil Tigers, the attacks against civilians by Israeli forces, the killings of Bosnian Muslims and others* must be considered as acts of terror and the perpetrators *must be condemned as terrorists*. And anyone supporting them must be considered as terrorists, too. *Where states are behind the acts of terrorism, the whole government must stand condemned* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:65).

As opposed to the Bush administration that specifically identified Al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and Muslims as terrorists, Mahathir says the opposite - that the terrorist has no specific ethnicity, religion or origin. It could be anybody: an individual, group, or government who attacks civilians. His implied argument is that the “war on terror” is an attack on civilians. Noted here is also Mahathir’s implied suggestion that Bush and his government are terrorists too. It is important to note that Mahathir’s text production and interpretation of the world are based on his mental representation of experiences, events and situations which means that the ways in which he frames the “war on terror” are influenced by the existing knowledge he has about wars, history, Islam, and a shared general attitude he has with his group and identification with the oppressed. His mental model which is unique, personal, and contextualised explains how Mahathir produces or understands the event. In examining Mahathir’s attempts at providing a counter-

definition to terrorists and terrorism, CDA would perceive that because Mahathir has open access to the mass media to resist the dominant's ideology, he is on equal footing or experiencing a power struggle with Bush and his allies.

Analysis of Mahathir's positive self-presentation

In this section, the analysis of the speeches focuses on the lexicogrammatical features and the semantic moves employed by Mahathir as he constructs a *positive self-presentation* of himself amidst the context of the "war on terror". This is necessary to assert his credibility and authority as a leader of the resistance. For this, only content that mentions himself with reference to his various political identities through the use of pronouns are selected for analysis.

His identity as Prime Minister of Malaysia is signalled with the use of the possessive pronoun "we", "I" and "our" in several of his speeches to illustrate the Malaysian government's glorious past dealings with terrorism. This move can be categorised as *national self-glorification* that falls under the semantic strategy of *positive self-presentation* as in the following:

Malaysia is familiar with terrorism and the war against terrorists...we defeated them...we carried out a campaign to win the hearts and minds of the people so as to ensure that the terrorists lost their civilian support...the government of Malaysia did not just fight them with arms...We took remedial action (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:34).

The use of the pronoun "we" when making reference to Malaysia's fight against terrorism, i.e., "we defeated" and "we fought" has two ideologically political functions. First, it is political because as Mahathir talks about Malaysia's past success in dealing with terrorism, he speaks as if it is shared common knowledge that "all Malaysians" were involved and had worked as a united front to overcome terrorism issues even though, as history has revealed, "we" actually refers to the ruling government at that point in time. In addition, by generalising this presupposed commonly known historical success and back ground as if it is an agreed fact (using the past tense), Mahathir also implies that the government of Malaysia has found the answer and therefore has the solution, which is the second political function of *asserting credibility* on overcoming terrorism. By doing so, he reinforces the impression that

the audience listening to his arguments share his view of the “historical” account of Malaysia’s fight against terrorism.

The excerpt below needs to be viewed from Mahathir’s view of the historical context. Here, he describes how Malaysia dealt with terrorists for “42 long years to force acceptance of the ideology” (Mahathir, 2003, Text 2:41) which is by giving them citizenship and fair treatment. The action taken by the Malaysian government is described below:

The independent Malaysian government gave more than a million citizenship to the Chinese, protected them, provided land for them....and gave them a meaningful participation in the government of the country. This was what the Malaysian government refers to as winning the hearts and minds of the people. And the Chinese were won over (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:68).

The outcome of Malaysia’s handling of terrorists is presented in the present tense with positive words as illustrated in the example below:

Today, Malaysians of Chinese origin are peace-loving people and are loyal to the country (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:68).

By implying that the Chinese were “terrorists” in Malaysia’s past and comparing it to the present time (that the Chinese today are peace-loving and loyal), Malaysia is presented as tolerant of other ethnicities, therefore, it is truly a fair and democratic country.

Mahathir further illustrates Malaysia’s firm stance against terrorists by using the modality “will” and the present tense. The effect is to warn how Malaysia will deal with terrorists to prove further that Malaysia is a fair, non-discriminating country. The example is as follows:

We are firm when dealing with terrorists, whether they are Chinese, Indians or Malays, Muslims or non-Muslims. If anyone plots terror in Malaysia he will be arrested under the laws of our country (Mahathir, 2003, Text 5:76).

Thus far, the examples indicate how Mahathir presents himself as a wise leader of Malaysia. In doing so, he promotes that under his leadership, Malaysia is peaceful. However, Mahathir has a second implied role as a Muslim leader and spokesman for the oppressed. He does this by arguing from the viewpoint of the innocent “other”. Here, Mahathir’s speeches reveal repetitive examples of the plight of the Afghans and the

use of rhetorical questions to provoke the audience to see his argument that their suffering will worsen when the "war on terror" on them results in a greater loss of innocent lives. The following extract illustrates this:

The Afghans must be living in a state of terror, waiting for the bombs to rain on them, to maim and kill them, their children and their friends. Can we say that because other innocent people had been killed therefore it is right to retaliate by killing other innocent people? Terrorists are unprincipled, despicable people. Should civilised people do unprincipled, despicable things because the terrorists did? (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:32).

Mahathir compares Bush (ironically calling him "civilised") to terrorists by asking a rhetorical question whether they would like to be likened to terrorists too ("unprincipled" and "despicable") because terrorists kill innocent people similar to how a military strike on Afghanistan will result in the mass killing of innocent Afghan citizens. The use of the phrase "civilised people" to refer to Bush and his allies and their "war on terror" agenda can also be seen as *sarcasm* and a persuasive tactic to reveal Bush's hidden agenda.

As for declaring openly what Mahathir thinks about the "war on terror", he uses the *present tense* and "we" to speak on behalf of the Muslims the worldwide:

We hate to say it but it is beginning to look more and more like a war against Muslims (Mahathir, 2003, Text 1:33).

To justify why he thinks the "war on terror" is an anti-Muslim war, he speaks as *a victim of prejudice* as he draws on his Muslim identity:

In the first place, *only Muslim terrorists are linked to their religion*. No one ever mentioned the religions of the terrorists of Northern Ireland, of Sri Lanka, of Japan, of Germany and of many other countries or people. They are always called Muslim terrorists (Mahathir, 2003, Text 2:42).

Furthermore, by presenting himself as a leader of Muslims and championing their cause, it allows him to motivate the Muslims to rise and react. Here, he uses the imperative "must" with the pronoun "we":

Bitter and angry though we may be, we must demonstrate to the world that Muslims are rational people when fighting for

our rights and we do not resort to acts of terror. But Muslims everywhere *must* condemn terrorism once it is clearly defined. Terrorising people is not the way of Islam, certainly killing innocent people is not Islamic. Terrorism must be identified by their acts, and nothing else. And *we as responsible Muslims must* contribute to the fight against terrorism and who the terrorists are (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:69).

Mahathir also invites Muslims to obey the true calling of the faith, to spread peace, and to become an example by invoking the Islamic principles to explain the phenomenon from the perspective of a Muslim. He does so by invoking the Arabic words *ummah* to mean Islamic nation, and *Allah* to mean God to remind them of their true duty and responsibility to their faith:

We have a duty here to the Muslim Ummah, to Islam and Allah. Let us put aside other considerations and *strive for consensus in our fight* against the blight of blind anger and frustration and prove that *Islam is indeed a way of life that will bring about well-being* and glory to Muslims and to Mankind as a whole (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:69).

However, in aligning with the Muslims, Mahathir is also *critical of us*, describing Muslims as weak and disunited.

The September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C are unmitigated disaster for Muslims all over the world. *Our image* which had not been good has been made worse. It does not help that *we are all weak and disunited* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:69).

Mahathir scrutinises the situation he presupposes is shared by the people of the developing nations, saying that they have been misusing their independence and squabbling over irrelevant matters, causing people to misunderstand them, hence, Mahathir calls for the need to claim responsibility:

We have not used our independence and freedom to develop our countries for the good of our people. Instead *we have been busy overthrowing our governments, setting up new governments which in turn would be overthrown.* *We have even killed our own people* by the millions. And frequently frustrated with anarchic democracy *we resort to autocratic governments, exposing ourselves to much vilification* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10: 117).

But the developing countries must admit that we are responsible for the mess the world is in today (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10: 117).

At the same time, by showing his alignment with the Muslims, he also attempts to portray Islam positively to show that it is not the faith that is at fault, as Bush and the Western media have implied in their discourse:

Terrorising people is not the way of Islam. Certainly killing innocent people is not Islamic (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:69).

By defining real Muslims, Mahathir is also critical of the terrorists who come from the oppressed nations. He describes what will happen if the Muslims do not do anything - "they" will end up turning against Muslims hence Muslims need to take action:

We may want to remain uninvolved and to avoid incurring the displeasure of the powerful countries. But our people are getting restless. They want us to do something. If we don't, then they will, and they will go against us. They will take things into their own hands. Unable to mount a conventional war they will resort to guerrilla war, to terrorism, against us and against those they consider to be their oppressors (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10:118).

By creating "they" and polarising "us" (real Muslims) against "them" (bad Muslims), Mahathir creates distance between the identity of the terrorists and the identity of "we". Here, he has created the notion of the "otherisation" within the "we".

Thus far, his arguments, which mainly consists of the polarising of "us" and "them", interchangeably and implicitly place himself in the positive light allows him to take a critical view of the present state of the world. Instead of allowing Bush and the Western media to derogate Islam, Mahathir takes it upon himself to redefine the religion and criticise the Muslims who do not adhere to the religion by taking on the identity of a fellow Muslim. The next analysis examines how Mahathir constructs the *negative other*.

Analysis of the construction of the negative other presentation

In the *negative other-presentation*, it is important that Mahathir presents the *other* as the Bush administration and those who support any form of terrorism. In some of Mahathir's speeches, the Bush administration is

addressed as “they” who are, according to Mahathir, selfish, exploitative and greedy:

They do not really care whether we buy their products or not because their markets are mainly *they* themselves, *the rich countries* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 7:90).

Capitalists now can do what they like and what they like is *simply to make more money for themselves* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 8:101).

Mahathir’s descriptions of the superpower elites reflect how he personally views the capitalists. They are said to violate basic human rights norms, principles, and values. There are also instances where Mahathir uses the word “evil” to highlight the prejudiced perceptions the West have towards the non-whites (i.e. who are viewed as “evil”).

The exploitation of the world by the greedy, the double standards and the hypocrisy about human rights and respect for human lives, the *oppression* of the weak by the strong, the disregard for human suffering, the *expropriation* of other peoples’ land and the *expulsion* of the people, all these have been aggravated by the ending of the Cold War and the victory of the righteous over *the evil* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 8:103).

Mockery is also employed to challenge Bush when Mahathir reuses the term “axis of evil” (as used by the U.S. government to refer to Iraq, Iran and North Korea for their possession of nuclear weapons) to come up with his own label for the U.S. He calls them “Satan”, which is synonymous with evil. He pronounces that all forms of evil must be destroyed:

Actually we are in the midst of “World War III”, not the war against terrorists but the war between terrorists and the peace-loving anti-terrorists alliance, the war between the “*axis of evil*” and *Satan*. Both sides are convinced that they are right, that theirs is the fight against evil. *Evil and Satan* must be destroyed (Mahathir, 2003, Text 8:100).

Other examples of mockery are found below when Mahathir describes the powerful nations as war-mongering and uncivilised. He does this by comparing *them* to those who lived during the Stone Age period:

Just as in the Stone Age the man with the biggest club rules, in our *modern and sophisticated Global Village* the country

with the biggest killing power rules (Mahathir, 2003, Text 8:101).

War solves nothing. War is primitive. *Today's war is more primitive than the wars fought during the Stone Age* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10:118).

By drawing an analogy between the "war on terror" and the wars in the Stone Age, Mahathir wants to make it clear that the elites are not as civilised or developed as they think; perhaps they are far worse than the developing nations. In fact, he attempts to prove that their past is marred by terrorism as he makes further references to history to prove that the Westerners are neither different nor superior compared to the non-Westerners by implying that they themselves have resorted to terrorism to maintain power in the past. Worst still, they are still doing so as he recounts history in the following excerpt:

If we care to think back, there was no systematic campaign of terror outside Europe until the Europeans and the Jews created a Jewish state out of Palestinian land. Incidentally, *terrorism was first used by the Haganah and Irgun Zera'i Le'umi to persuade the British to set up Israel* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 10:113).

Mahathir also makes a *comparison* of some Western countries to Afghanistan who are regarded by the West as terrorists. He uses the *counter-factual move* to indirectly mean that the Western countries are also "violent" as in the following:

In the liberal Western countries, there are quite a few terrorist cells working in support of terrorist organisations in other countries. *They are not too different from Afghanistan which provided a haven for the al-Qaeda terrorists* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 4:63).

The above example reflects Mahathir's ability to discern prejudiced acts by the West. This is why he presents the example of Western countries that are doing the exact same thing that Afghanistan is accused of. Further examples of mockery and sarcasm are his use of the adjective "big" as a euphemism (to describe the West) and a form of personification to describe how the West will soon meet with an ill-fated ending, and deservingly so:

Big is beautiful again. *Big* is good. Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the *big* will not cheat, will not fall, *will not go bankrupt* (Mahathir, 2003, Text 8:102).

Mahathir's perception of the *other* as the West's tendency to resort to terrorism shows his stance and position as spokesperson and leader for the oppressed. However, despite the heavy criticisms against the powerful, there are instances in his speeches where he is also critical of Malaysians. This time, the *other* is presented as those who are against Malaysia's ruling government. Below are several descriptions of the *negative other*:

Now there is an attempt by a small group of Muslim Malays to mount a violent struggle to take over the Government of the country. They are almost all young members of the opposition Pan Islamic Se-Malaysia Party. These young people do not believe that democratic elections would ever bring their party to power so they can install their version of an Islamic country (Mahathir, 2003, Text 2:45).

The example above is Mahathir's criticism of the opposition party, the Pan Islamic Se-Malaysia Party (PAS), which is the ruling government's biggest threat. It seems that Mahathir is reluctant to admit that there is friction and a power struggle between the government and PAS as can be seen in his choice of words that belittles PAS such as the adjective "small" and repetition of the word "young" to show their insignificance. It also reflects that he thinks they are irrelevantly small in number. He is also quick to undermine them with negative descriptions ("violent" and undemocratic) to reassure the audience that the government will overcome this minor problem. According to Dhillon (2009), the threat from PAS supporters who may be pro-Taliban (the suspected terrorists behind 9/11) was overcome by imprisoning PAS members and sympathisers without trial under the Internal Security Act laws. Another brief example of belittling the opposition group is seen here where Mahathir compares PAS to the Taliban:

Recently, Malaysia had to deal with another source of terrorism: *extremist Muslim groups* who claim that our government is not Islamic and want to replace it with a *Taliban-style state* spanning Malaysia, Indonesia and the southern Philippines (Mahathir, 2003, Text 5:75).

By saying PAS is like the Taliban, Mahathir implies that PAS is a threat to democracy similar to the Western view of the Taliban from

Afghanistan. At the same time, this comparison allows Mahathir to imply that the government under his leadership is democratic - a value that is held high by most Western governments. Interesting to note here is that these two striking examples also become a point of argument to show that he, as a Malaysian Prime Minister, has some experience of handling terrorism that continues to infiltrate Malaysia even today. Such brief remarks can also be a way of criticising the *other* while making a *positive self-presentation*.

Discussion and conclusion

Against the background of Bush's "war on terror" campaign, this essay examines how Mahathir seeks to redefine the 9-11 attack and to construct terrorists and terrorism through his position in power as a politician: as Prime Minister of Malaysia and a Muslim leader. The analysis also attempts to determine whether there are traces of reproduction of dominance in Mahathir's speeches, and whether this is hidden, presupposed or explicit.

From the perspective of CDA, Mahathir Mohamad speaks as a member of the elite mainly because of his position as Prime Minister of Malaysia, and because he has control of the communicative events where he is allowed to present his speeches against the military action taken by the U.S. on Afghanistan and Iraq under the pretext of "war on terror". It is important to note that the angle taken for the study is an assumption that Mahathir has written the speeches himself which means that his power and authority are asserted by his controlled access to the topic, content, title and arguments in his speeches. What this also means, from the perspective of CDA, is that Mahathir uses his power to define and view events according to his own ideology, therefore allowing him to make proposals or recommend actions.

In his *positive self-presentation* as a political leader, Mahathir implicitly refers to his role as champion of human rights, which is to speak from a moral angle and to play the script of a virtuous, morally upstanding leader - a leader who is confident of himself and who sees himself as the agent of change who does not want to repeat the history of violence that has been happening around the world. The underlying ideological stance he takes is that the government of Malaysia, hence, his own role in it, has been crucial in the maintenance of peace, and that his experience in dealing with domestic terrorism gives him

the authority to speak to the audience on terrorism. By referring to terrorists as “they” and in the *negative other*, he implicitly distances his personal and political identity from terrorists. Citing examples of Malaysia’s present problem with domestic terrorists whom Mahathir labels as extremists, is a strategic move to show that his government is not extremist, that he has knowledge of what constitutes extremists and therefore is on the right path to prescribe a solution. Mahathir can be viewed, therefore, as a person who is struggling for power himself whilst furthering his own hegemonic agenda, aptly so at a time when he and his government needed to repair their ill-reputation in Malaysia during the 1997-2001 period. The struggle that he attempts to put forth, therefore, is that he, as Prime Minister and a Muslim leader, represents a large segment of the population in the world who are against the “war on terror” and any form of war and killings by a state or individual. He identifies with these groups of people, namely, the civilised, democratic citizens of the world. This then contributes to the overall *positive self-presentation* of himself as a credible leader representing a challenge against Bush and his allies by constructing them negatively in his speeches. Despite arguing against stereotyping Muslims as terrorists, Mahathir does acknowledge that the perpetrators of 9/11 come from the Middle East. They are Muslims who are angry at the injustice incurred on them and are seeking retribution. At the same time, however, Mahathir does not want the acts by the perpetrators to stereotype the entire Muslim and Middle Eastern population that he finds especially offensive when the stereotype comes from Bush and his allies.

The analysis of the 10 speeches also reveals that Mahathir’s arguments fall within the framework of a human rights rhetoric. He does this by calling on general norms and universal values of freedom, human rights and justice. He calls for Muslims and the rest of the world to take responsibility whilst giving descriptive analogies of the sufferings in the Muslim world. In championing the rights of whom he considers are the oppressed, Mahathir makes direct and indirect accusations against the West by employing a *negative “other” presentation*. These are sometimes supported with anti-imperialist remarks, mockeries and sarcasms. These strategies are interpreted as Mahathir’s attempts to show that the 9/11 attack on the U.S. is the West’s own fault for the sufferings they had themselves inflicted on Muslims in the Middle East.

A CDA perspective may question Mahathir's vested interest in his demand for peace. The answer provided by critics is that self-interest explains his position. Based on this article, self-interest may indeed be the answer, but so too is Mahathir's realisation that his powerful position and his reputation as spokesperson for the Muslim nations and the developing nations should be used to bring about a positive change to the world. Mahathir is, therefore, conscious of the need to exercise his power and calls on the people to empower themselves. This meant, at times, presenting himself positively to appear credible and authoritative as a resistant leader, even to the point of derogating the opposition party (PAS) and criticising Muslims in the hope to prove he has the best interest of his country and the world at heart. Whether this leads him to pull the biggest electoral victory in his two decades in power is not highlighted as an issue, but what can be emphasised here is his desire and courage to make an effective change that is in the spirit of CDA, thus, leaving his mark as one of the "Muslim world's most iconic postcolonial leaders" (Schottmann, 2013, p. 58).

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