# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Following the 9/11 attack on the United States in 2001, the discourse of former American President George W. Bush and the U.S. legitimization of the wars on Iraq and Afghanistan (the 'war on terror') have been studied under various disciplines including within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Under CDA, analysts generally take a 'top-down' approach which focuses on the ways the powerful elites use language to maintain social inequality and dominance in the political, cultural, class and racial spheres. In the context of 'war on terror', past CDA and Discourse Analysis researches had focused on the ways Bush's discourse reflected and resulted in unequal power relations between he and his allies (the powerful elite) and the less powerful namely the casualties in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Despite the tendency for CDA analysts to focus on the powerful elites' use of language and abuse of power, this study is inspired by the call by van Dijk, a CDA proponent, to study counter-power and strategies of resistance in discourse. According to van Dijk, this 'is crucial for our understanding of actual power and dominance relations in society' (1993:250). In this study, counter-power and resistance is represented by Mahathir Mohamad, who takes advantage of his powerful standing as the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, hence a member of the international elite community of political leaders, and his access to international events to pose as a challenge and resistor to the discourse of Bush's 'war on terror' post 9/11. A CDA analysis of his speeches can reveal the ways in which Mahathir discursively constructs a definition of 9/11, terrorism, 'war on terror' and his role as resistant leader.

## 1.2     Background to the Study

This section provides a brief overview of the 9/11 attack and a description of Mahathir Mohamed's character and his rhetoric that can help give insight into Mahathir's anti-war stance.

Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed became the fourth Prime Minister of Malaysia in 1981. This entailed a position as head of the coalition government, the Barisan National (National Front), and president of the ruling party the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). His 22-years in leadership has earned him the title as the longest serving Prime Minister of Malaysia. He also helped developed Malaysia into one of the richest nations in Asia (Haque and Khan, 2004). To the public at large, Mahathir is viewed as a champion of the Third World nations and a Muslim leader to be emulated (Dhillon, 2008). His rhetoric, whether in the domestic or the international front, were viewed as frank, open and even controversial (Kamila, 2004). For example, his book entitled *The Malay Dilemma,* written before he was Prime Minister, was banned by the government because of his open criticisms of the Malays.  Later when he became Prime Minister, he went on to continue his style of open criticisms of anybody he felt needed changing. This included open criticisms of the U.S. policy. Khoo Boo Teik in his book entitled *Paradoxes of Mahathirisms* (quoted in Dhillon, 2008) said this of Mahathir:

> His performances on international forums were articulate and courageous, intelligent and polished. He had a quick wit and a sharp tongue. He had a steady opinion on anything and held a strong position on everything. He was seldom slow to castigate the powerful or to shame the hypocritical. (2008:202)

Sometimes, Mahathir's open criticisms led to a general view that he held resentments against the West and the powerful elites. Some attributed Mahathir's criticism of the West to the fact that he lived through the British colonisation period in Malaysia. Policies under his premiership that may reflect a measure of resentment against the British whilst showing Malaysian nationalistic pride were the 'Buy British Last', and the 'Look East Policy' (Kamila, 2004).

Descriptions of Mahathir's rhetoric on the political front provide further confirmation of how Mahathir presented himself in public speeches locally and abroad. Dhillon (2008) in his study of Mahathir's direct influence on the Malaysian Foreign Policy, observed that Mahathir's reputation as 'the spokesman of the Third World allowed for an assertiveness, robustness and directness which suited Mahathir's confrontational style' (2008:202). The Western media like the *USA Today* (March, 2003) describes Mahathir as 'an honest critic of U.S. foreign policy'. *The Economist* (October, 2003) describes Mahathir Mohamad, as 'a man not afraid to speak his mind, to call a spade a spade, to stand up against foreign pomposity and bullying. He speaks his mind and makes sure Washington knows when he thinks it has gone astray.' Mahathir's style of leadership and rhetoric has even become a brand called 'Mahathirism' (Khoo Boo Teik, 2001; Hilley, 2001). In a study on Mahathir's leadership, Hilley (2001) adopted the Gramscian concept of power and hegemony to show that Mahathir used consensual legitimacy to remain a leader for 22 years, and not coercive repression. Maznah Mohamad (2002) in her critique of Hilley's findings argued against the findings by pointing out that Mahathir did use coercion which are 'in the form of repressive detention laws, the curtailment of public assembly and the passing of new electoral laws to severely rein in the opposition — all fortuitously, even uncannily "legitimated" by the events of September 11' (2002:643). Maznah calls for a

better definition of 'Mahathirism' calling it instead an 'ideology of political pragmatism, even "Machiavellianism"' (2002:644). She provides a provocative conclusion to Mahathir the man which is that despite being hailed a hero and a phenomenon, the credit, she says, should actually go to the Malaysians:

> Perhaps, the enigma is not in the man, but rather in a country and a people which has allowed for the emergence of such a political persona. (2002:643)

When the World Trade Centre in New York was hit by two planes on 11 September 2001, the U.S. under President George W. Bush launched the 'war on terror' by sending military troops to two Muslim nations: Afghanistan 'for giving sanctuary to bin Laden and his al-Qaida' (Osman, 2005:108), and Iraq, 'purportedly to remove Saddam Hussein from power because of his possession of weapons-of-mass-destruction' (Osman, 2005:108). The 'war on terror' presented an opportunity for Mahathir to again lay out his open criticisms of the U.S.' call for military action, under the pretext of 'war on terror'. But Mahathir's agenda is not without its criticisms. Dhillon's view is that Mahathir was out to prove that he was 'a global Islamic state man' (2008:236). Mahathir also needed to strengthen his popularity in Malaysia that was declining during 1997-2001 (Hilley 200; Osman 2005; Dhillon, 2008). During that period, Malaysia's political scene was marred by a political upheaval, that of the case of Mahathir versus (former) Deputy Prime Minster, the ousted Anwar Ibrahim. With Anwar Ibrahim's dismissal, trial and sentencing by April 1999, many Malaysian citizens began lending support to the opposition party, the Pan Islamic Malaysia (PAS). Hilley (2001) described the times as a critical test for the Barisan National (National Front) government, notably its ruling party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). To critics, Mahathir needed to repair his tarnished reputation.

In Osman's (2005) point of view, Mahathir's stance against the 'war on terror' is partly because he placed importance on being viewed as a Muslim political leader in the eyes of the Malaysians. As Osman states:

> Domestic politics was without doubt an important factor influencing Mahathir's decision to oppose the U.S military operation. No Malay-Muslim leader concerned about political support from his community could afford to be seen taking even a 'neutral' stand in the conflict. Mahathir was concerned about possible militant reactions from Muslims in his country and the sectarian exploitation of the issue by opposition parties. (2005:114)

It was important for Mahathir to oppose the 'war on terror' for two reasons; one was to prove that his government had experience in dealing with domestic terrorism, secondly for an ideological agenda which was to prove that under his governance, Malays practised peaceful and proper Islam (Dhillon, 2008). Furthermore, evidence of an ideological struggle between PAS' version of Islam and Mahathir's brand of Islam is found in his speeches and interviews where he would portray the opposition groups negatively by imposing his negative evaluation of them where possible:

> The rhetoric allowed Mahathir to draw from the less than perfect Islamic world, compare and contrast 'the problems' of Islam abroad with the successes of Islam created by his regime at home. It allowed Mahathir to cajole, warn, scold and plod Malay Muslims of Malaysia to support his regime. The problems of Islam abroad served as warnings of what might happen in Malaysia if local Muslims did not unite (read: support his regime), fall prey to different interpretations and used by other local Muslims (read: PAS) to divide them. (Dhillon, 2008:237)

The benefits reaped from his stance against '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 will be further examined in this study.

## 1.3    Statement of the Problem

According to Mazid (2008), Bush's post 9/11 discourse was 'predominantly moralising, divisive and absolutist — absolutely good fighting absolutely evil; what is absolutely evil must be destroyed' (2008:449). Past studies revealed how Bush capitalised on 9/11 by talking about defending civilisation, freedom, justice and humanity, whilst inciting fear among the people in order to legitimise the 'war on terror' on Afghanistan and Iraq (Chomsky, 2001; Woodwards, 2002; Kellner, 2005). In his 2001 speech inviting support for the 'war on terror', U.S. President Bush polarised the supporters and anti-supporters declaring:

> Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbour or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime. (cited in Poole, 2002:2)

The pro-war U.S. media lent its propagandist support by playing repeated footages of the collapsing World Trade Centre as a form of reminder for the people of the necessity to act against the perpetrators of 9/11. The Western media also assaulted the Islamic faith, triggering an intense Islamophobic phenomenon across the United States and Europe. Poole described the media's message as this: 'Islam has come to be represented as a homogenous threat' (2002:40). As a result of the September 11 2001 attack, wars led by the U.S. ensued in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Thereafter whilst Bush continued to cite the importance of the wars on the Middle East equating it with freedom and democracy, Mahathir, on the other hand, perceived it as organised crime. His display of resistance to Bush's vision and conduct was apparent in his public speeches, interviews, comments, and published speeches, even with his formation of the Perdana Peace Forum in 2002 aimed at 'Criminalising War'. This platform was used to address issues of injustice and to challenge and resist Bush and all those who abuse their power. From the perspective of CDA, such acts by Mahathir are seen as a struggle or a challenge for power (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Also using his position to address the conditions of injustices, representing the counter-power to the super powerful, is an act that makes him a 'bona fide CDA analyst' himself (Haque and Khan, 2004:183). However, despite an overall admiration for doing so, Mahathir is also criticised for his agenda and his political aspiration to be admired and revered by both the east and the west. According to Dhillon (2008), the aforementioned are reflections of 'his unremitting desire in wanting to put Malaysia and his regime on the map of the world dominated by former colonial powers and their materialistic culture' (2008:202). On speaking against terrorism and defending the Palestine issue, Mahathir's dislike for the Bush administration's handling of the issue is viewed as a platform to further his own ideology.

A critical discourse analysis of Mahathir's strategy of resistance can help uncover any hidden ideology as he challenges the 'war on terror' discourse produced and reproduced by the dominant elite. Against the background of Bush's 'war on terror' campaign, this study aims to examine how Mahathir sought to redefine terrorism in his discourse and how he presents himself in the discourse.

## 1.4    Purpose of the Study

This research aims to examine the discursive strategies and argumentative moves employed by Mahathir to resist and challenge Bush's ideologies on 'war on terror' from the perspective of CDA. It aims to demonstrate how Mahathir discursively formulates his own assessment of the 9/11 attack and the 'war on terror' by constructing an alternative meaning to a given ideology, namely through a bottom-up approach of resistance and counter-challenging the dominant discourse of Bush, with the aim of bringing about a positive change — a goal that is shared by all CDA practitioners. This is to support the view that CDA 'takes explicit position and wants to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality' (van Dijk, 1998a:1). The counter-power in this study is represented by Mahathir, former Prime Minister of Malaysia. To achieve this objective, the construction of himself as a political and authoritative voice amidst the event is also discussed. Findings may reveal traces of discursive reproduction of dominance by Mahathir himself albeit his stance against the dominance of Bush. Taking this into consideration, and following the common tradition of CDA practitioners of taking an explicit socio-political stance, this study takes the position of anti-war and anti-power abuse practised by any party. In light of that, this study serves to show that CDA is a useful tool to explore how counter-power and counter-ideologies appear in discourse.

## 1.5    Research Questions

The corpus comprises ten speeches by Mahathir which were extracted from the book entitled *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad Prime Minister of Malaysia*.   The selected speeches are confined to the

period Mahathir was Prime Minister of Malaysia, post September 11 2001. This study will address the following research questions:

1) How does Mahathir offer an alternative 'truth' to Bush's construction of 'truth'?

2) What discoursal strategies are used to resist and challenge Bush's 'war on terror' ideology?

3) How does Mahathir maintain 'Positive Self-Presentation' of himself as a political leader and of Malaysia whilst communicating political differences?

To answer the research questions posed, this study will focus on the language used by Mahathir.

## 1.6    Significance of the Study

Studying Mahathir's discursive strategies and argumentative moves can reveal the mind of a powerful representative of a third world nation and his role in shaping history thus far shaped mostly by the superpowers. Insights into what he said and how he said it may influence future leaders to be as courageous as he was in speaking and expressing his views.  Additionally, a critical discourse analysis of Mahathir's speeches can also illustrate the dynamics of CDA as a tool to analyse socially and historically significant events in the world as seen and viewed by a world leader of resistance. It is hoped that this study can help contribute to the existing pool of knowledge and broader theory on power and counter-power within the context of CDA, hence providing further insight into 'strategies of resistance and challenge' which as van Dijk stated are 'crucial to understand power and dominance relations in society' (1993:250). It is also hoped that the findings will form part of the evidence of the struggle for dominance.

## 1.7    Limitations of the Study

The study is limited to only ten speeches from the book entitled *Terrorism and the Real Issues: Selected Speeches of Dr Mahathir Mohamad,* edited by Hashim Makaruddin. Although the content of the speeches may have been changed during the delivery by Mahathir, this study will not dwell on that. This study will also not look into the concept of the multiple identities of the audience of the speeches. Rather it is a broad analysis of the recurring patterns of arguments and salient textual properties in the actual published speech that are relevant to the research purpose. The analysis may thus be subjected to the researcher's own biases and commitment to expose social inequality. The analysis and discussion is therefore open ended.

## 1.8    Summary

This study is a Critical Discourse Analysis of the discursive strategies and argumentative moves deployed by Mahathir Mohamed, former Prime Minister of Malaysia, as he resists Bush's ideologies on 'War on Terror' post September 11 2001. The themes of this study are Mahathir's assessment of the 9/11 attack, the construction of terrorists and terrorism and his description of the political and social actors involved amidst the background of 'war on terror', which includes himself. This chapter has provided the background to Mahathir Mohamed's personality and rhetoric as well as a brief summary of the 9/11 attack and the consequences of 9/11 leading to Mahathir's discourse of resistance. The following chapters will address the issues put forth in this chapter. Thus, a background review of CDA, its objectives and relevant findings from past researchers are found in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 contains an explanation of the research design, while Chapter 4 comprises the analysis and discussion of Mahathir's

ten speeches, and lastly Chapter 5 is the conclusion — a discussion of how CDA can be

used as a tool to examine discourse of resistance.