

**NATIONAL UNITY IN MULTI-ETHNIC MALAYSIA: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE  
ANALYSIS OF TUN DR. MAHATHIR'S POLITICAL SPEECHES**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the discourse of a former Prime Minister (PM), Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, in order to study the ways Tun Dr. Mahathir (henceforth TDM) constructed national unity in multi-ethnic Malaysia through his public discourses over the years as a Statesman. This paper gives particular emphasis to issues in national unity. A Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be used to analyze the spoken and written public discourses of TDM that were published in newspapers and books. The findings reveal that one of the goals of TDM's discourses was to create a sense of oneness and a sense of nationhood among the various ethnic groups in the country.

**Keywords:** Tun Dr. Mahathir, Malaysia, national unity, ethnicity, Critical Discourse Analysis

## 1. Introduction

A leader's public discourse might create national unity or disunity among the various ethnic groups, depending on how individual members understand and perceive the message. Thomas et al. (2004) argued that the role of discourse is to shape the beliefs of people who establish certain ideologies as common sense, ideologies as common sense, which in turn influence their behaviour. It is hypothesized that a former Malaysian Prime Minister's construction of group realities through his discourse influenced Malaysian attitudes about their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups. Ghazali (2004) defines the modern notion of power as the ability to influence and control people not by force but by mind management. Macionis (2001) posits that discourse by people in power can cause competition and negative perceptions of the other. Power plays a crucial role in discourse because it tends to control the social beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of people of a certain society (van Dijk, 1988). Politics influences most types of discourses and all issues presented in any type of discourse can be classified as political issues. Politics is after all concerned with power: the power to make decisions, control resources, control other people's behavior and, frequently, to control their values (Thomas, et al, 2004). Therefore, politics is always connected to power.

Politics is viewed as a struggle for power and cooperation. Politics exists for those who seek to assert and maintain their power and for those who resolve clashes of interest over money, influence, liberty and the like (Chilton, 2004). It is evident that politics is demonstrated and observed through language. Therefore politics and language are interlinked and in fact, some political activities cannot exist without the use of language.

Language can be powerful, particularly if a speaker tries to exercise control over other speakers. From the moment they start asserting their ideologies to their constituents, politicians in particular are keenly aware that they must use powerful or persuasive language.. More powerful linguistic devices such as the metaphor, euphemism, parallelism and the use of the pronoun are needed increase the potency and persuasiveness of language. (Thomas, et al. 2004).

Ideologies influence power and language plays an important role in constructing and deconstructing ideologies. Ideology is a term developed in the Marxist tradition that describes how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the

maximum control with the minimum of conflict (Lye, 2007). It can be defined as a set of beliefs, perceptions, assumptions, and values that provide members of a group with an understanding and explanation of their world (Beard, 2005:118). Ideologies involve *communication* of ideas and therefore, language plays a central role in constructing and maintaining discrimination and oppression. In fact it must be emphasized that language can never be '*neutral*' as it bridges our personal and social worlds (van Dijk, 1988). For instance, in a democratic political system, the language that is used is collective in nature because it represents the well-being of its constituents. However, in an autocratic political system, the language that is used is authoritative because it imposes power, control and authority towards people. A person's ideology is disclosed through his/her use of language. At times, leaders propagate their own ideologies. They normally have certain beliefs that they think must be propagated and transmitted to their constituents. Frequently, politicians socially reconstruct reality based on professional and personal ideologies. Their political messages carry powerful but coded meanings and messages and these messages reinforce individual beliefs and behaviors and collective ideologies which inevitably affect the formation of public policies and organizational practices. Within contemporary ideological constructs, ideas about race, gender, and class are produced, preserved, and promoted. These ideas form the basis for social behavior. Therefore, understanding ideology is crucial to an understanding of the marginalization, exclusion, and domination of different races of people within a nation.

Ideology is also related to language and unity. The use of language to communicate ideology can unify people, especially people who live in a multiethnic and multicultural society. However, unity in a multiethnic society is not easy to achieve due to differences in culture. Unity is best understood when it is contrasted with the notion of disunity. The discourse of powerful individuals can foster notions of in-group unity and out-group disunity. Ethnocentrism, which originates from intergroup relations, often results in group disunity (see Sherif, 1962). Ethnocentrism is also defined as a belief that the in-group is the center of the social world and superior to the out-groups (Taylor, Peplau, and Sears, 2006). People who belong to the same group may have positive and favorable evaluations and attributions of themselves as members of the in-group and less favorable evaluations and attributions of the out-group. Ethnocentrism may lead to prejudice where the members of the in-group have and

hold a less favorable judgment about the other group. It is likely that as a result of this, conflict among ethnic groups may arise and this could in turn, over time, result in disunity.

The term 'group' signifies a cluster of similar elements shared by its members. Members who do not share similar traits as the in-group are labeled as out-group members. Hence, it is common that in-group members frequently address themselves as 'we' while out-group members are referred to as 'them' (c.f. David and Zuraidah, 2005). The in-group is "a social group commanding a member's esteem and loyalty" while the out-group is "a social group toward which one feels competition or opposition" (Macionis, 2001: 169).

This study analyzes the public discourses of a former Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in relation to politics, power, and ideology. The analysis of the former Prime Minister's public discourses can help current and future prime ministers and other influential political leaders realize the importance of language in establishing and promoting national unity, constructing positive feelings towards other ethnic groups.

### ***1.1 Background of Dr. Tun Mahathir Mohamad***

Mahathir served in the government of the second Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak from 1970-1976; as Minister of Education from 1974 – 1977 and under the third Prime Minister Tun Hussein Onn; as Deputy Prime Minister from 1976 –1981; and Minister of Trade and Industry from 1977 – 1981. In 1981, he succeeded Hussein Onn as Prime Minister and President of UMNO and served the country for about 22 years. As Prime Minister, he brought a new vigor to government and economic management (Adshead, 2009). Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the first Malaysian Prime Minister, who did not come from the Malay aristocracy and was not educated in Britain, tilted at the special relationship with Britain and the constitutional privileges of Malaysia's king and sultans, while his then radical "Look East" policy was inspired by Japan's economic success.

## **2. Methodology**

This study examines the manner in which the speeches of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad constructs national unity among different ethnic groups in Malaysia . The tools of critical

discourse analysis such as implicatures and presupposition are used in each of the speeches to examine how TDM uses his ideology, power, and authority to influence his constituents in favor of the objective to unify multi-ethnic Malaysians. The qualitative technique is used to conduct a textual analysis of the speeches. Fairclough's (1995) framework in analyzing discourse is used.

A corpus of selected speeches of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad from 1982-2007 were analyzed. There were compilations of selected speeches of Dr. Mahathir from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. The speeches were selected based on issues of unity among the diverse ethnic groups in Malaysia. Only those speeches that have relevance on the specific issue of unity were chosen for analysis.

### ***2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis***

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an offshoot of applied linguistics rooted in the tradition of critical social scientific theory (Khan and Hare, 2006: 70). This approach analyses discourses from the real world and studies 'social problems' such as dominance, inequality, racism, and powerlessness. Several studies on critical discourse analysis have been conducted by Fairclough, Van Dijk, Wodak, and Chilton which present social dominance, inequality, racism, and powerlessness. Fairclough's (1989) *Language and Power* discusses how power and dominance are enacted by the speaker. He discusses the methodological framework for analyzing discourse and emphasizes three dimensions when analyzing discourse, that is, description, interpretation and explanation. On the other hand, Van Dijk (1993) in his research on discourse and racism analyzes how racism is enacted by speakers through oral discourse. He emphasizes the structure of the text, while Ruth Wodak in her work on racism and antisemitism emphasizes the importance of a historical dimension in critical discourse studies (see Wodak, 2007).

CDA is an analytical tool that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, resisted and assisted by text and talk in social and political contexts (Van Dijk, 2001: 352). CDA is used to study the influence of such discourse on the larger society. A critical language perspective takes into consideration not only the abstract structure of language, but also its use as discourse within a social and historical context. This perspective also explains how the use of language and society influence each

other (Fairclough, 1990). To analyze the discourse, this paper examines presupposition and implicatures in the speech.

## ***2.2 Presupposition and Implicature***

The concepts of implicitness and assumptions are normally associated with linguistic pragmatics (Blakemore, 1992; Levinson, 1983; Verschueren, 1999; as cited in Fairclough, 2003: 57). Linguistic pragmatics is the study of “language in relation to its users” (Mey, 1993, as cited in Fairclough, 2003: 57). Linguistic pragmatics has produced valuable insights about assumptions (presuppositions, implicatures), speech acts and so forth, which have been drawn upon in critical discourse analysis (cf. Fairclough, 1992). This study will analyse assumptions in Tun Dr. Mahathir’s discourse by explicitly stating whether it is a presupposition or an implicature.

It is always the objective of political leaders to persuade and attract their constituents in order to propagate and sustain their ideologies. To achieve one’s political agenda, most political leaders aid their constituents in making assumptions and implications from their messages which are not explicitly stated. In short, the hearers or listeners normally presuppose and often get the implicature.

Presupposition and implicature both play an integral part in every communicative event. Presupposition is defined as a background assumption embedded within a sentence or phrase (Thomas, et al. 2004). It is further defined as “a thing which is assumed, but not stated, at the beginning of a line of argument” (Beard, 2005: 118). Occasionally the hearer or listener may perceive his or her assumptions to be true regardless of whether the entire phrase, clause or sentence is true.

## **3 Analysis**

This analysis uses a historical approach to analyze the data according to the year the speech was made. The analysis is separated according to the following years : 1982, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2003. The aim is to determine how Mahathir forms and

constructs unity among the three major ethnic groups in Malaysia through his published discourse from 1982 to 2003.

### ***3.1 Analysis from 1982- 1989: National Unity in Diversity***

From 1982-1989, Tun Dr. Mahathir, T.D.M. emphasizes the importance of national unity despite the ethnic diversity in the country. During the first few years of T.D.M's term as Malaysia's Prime Minister, he notes the impact of unity on economic, social and political progress. Apart from that, it is a known fact that good governance in a multi-ethnic society must ensure the confluence of various ethnic groups to achieve national unity (Prem Misir, 2007). Such a call for unity is evident in T.D.M's speeches, where some ideological implications in his linguistic choices become evident, particularly through the use of pronoun markers.

#### ***3.1.1 Ideological Implications and Pronoun Markers***

In his campaign speech, Tun Dr. Mahathir focused on some issues, particularly the issue of ethnic unity in Malaysia. When one says "we have achieved success... various races and from all walks of life", this conveys the idea that success belongs not only to one ethnic group, but to all Malaysians, regardless of their group affiliation. In addition, T.D.M went on to say, "*to fulfill this dream we will have to further develop our infrastructure*", which implies that all Malaysians from various ethnic groups must work together to achieve such success. It is also noted that T.D.M's use of pronouns such as "we and our" reveals his intent of unifying all the people of Malaysia by not focusing on any one single ethnic group. Such a strategy is seen in the extract which follows:

*"We have achieved success ... various races and from all walks of life"*

*"Our task will be a formidable one. To fulfill this dream we will have to further develop our infrastructure. We will have to penetrate the more remote areas of the country with roads and transport facilities. We will need to expand our power generating capacity and extend distribution networks. We will need new water supply systems. We will need to establish new towns and communities and equip them with houses, hospitals, schools and other social amenities. We will need more technicians, engineers, medical personnel, teachers and community leaders."*

*“Our workers want a better quality of life, employers want more profits and the government wants to achieve the socio-economic objectives of the Fourth Malaysia Plan.”*

His messages imply that the Malays, Chinese, and Indians have all been successful in their endeavors. The use of “we” and “our” in his speech encompasses the listeners or even the readers, thus making them subjects of the discourse. Basically, the pronoun “we” and “our” refer to the speaker and his constituents, who are the target audience. For instance politicians use the phrase, “**We** have achieved..., **Our** task..., **Our** workers..., **We** will have to penetrate” as a common strategy to make their constituents become part of the discourse or the focus of their discourse.

When hearers assume that the “we” and “our” includes them, the speaker’s ideology is transmitted to the hearers and eventually they become convinced of the speaker’s argument or reasoning. The use of pronouns is a linguistic means of including the people. It also aids in giving people a role and acknowledges their contribution to the work achieved to date. In short, as the audience feels acknowledged, they might feel greater loyalty to a government that expresses gratitude for and acknowledges their help. In this way, people will have stronger support for the government.

### *3.1.2 Malaysian Citizenship and National Unity*

The existence of different schooling systems in Malaysia has resulted in polarization and people tend to gravitate toward their own ethnic group. This results in ethnic stereotypes of the out-group. T.D.M. may have noted this and one way of unifying people is to convince them that they are all Malaysians. The need to emphasise this - that Malaysia is the country for all regardless of ethnicity- presupposes that there are Malaysians who do not feel that this is so and have to be given reassurance. Perhaps, special rights to the Bumiputeras have fueled this sentiment. People already have the schema that the bumiputeras are privileged and that others are treated as second class citizens. There is a feeling of ethnic otherness where the other races can be classified as not belonging to the in-group. Perhaps, this kind of mindset is brought about by group-fulfilling prophecies, where certain stereotypes are associated with some ethnic groups. The statement “*Malaysia is our country*” contests this ideology. It is evident that Tun Dr. Mahathir is disseminating his ideology and trying to influence the



people's ideology that every Malaysian citizen has a right to claim that Malaysia is their country. This is evident when T.D.M. says:

*"Malaysia is our country."*

*"Our national wealth can be expressed, not just in terms of money, but more meaningfully in terms of the quantity of goods and services that we produce."*

*"Our national productivity level could be raised by as much as 15% or even 20%."*

*"But Malaysia is our country, the country of the Malays, the Bumiputeras, and Malaysians of Chinese origin, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other ethnic groups (The New Straits Times, 28 September 1985:p.17).*

When one says *"Malaysia is our country, the country of the Malays, the Bumiputeras, and Malaysians of Chinese origin, Indians, Ibans, Kadazans and other ethnic groups"* this has an implicature that regardless of ethnic origin we are all Malaysians. Ethnic differences should not hold back a sense of nationhood. Through his choice of words he tries to unite everyone irrespective of race and or religion.

Such implicatures and presuppositions are further enhanced through the use of the possessive pronoun, 'our'. This use is significant as Tun Dr. Mahathir is using the inclusive pronoun to forge a closer link between himself and his audience, thus creating solidarity between both parties. The use of the pronoun 'our' presupposes possession by the noun referents like the Malays, Bumiputeras, Malaysian Chinese, Indians, Ibans and other ethnic groups. It indicates that the government recognizes all ethnic groups as Malaysians who have the right to claim that Malaysia is their homeland. It does not suggest that Malaysia is owned solely by the Malays. Tun Dr. Mahathir is trying to deconstruct the prevailing schema that has been implanted in the hearts and minds of the populace that the non-Malays are immigrants or *pendatang*- an ideology that has been transmitted through the mass media and the discourse of politicians. Thus, the use of the pronoun marker 'our' is all inclusive and intentional. It is hoped by Dr. Mahathir that a pronoun marker creates a sense of belonging and oneness, regardless of one's ethnic background.

The concept of unity is emphasized in Tun Dr. Mahathir's speech. He projects an image of being fair to various ethnic groups in Malaysia by recognizing them as part of the larger social fabric. He states,

*“In Malaysia our administration is not contrary to the principles of Islam in taking the contemporary situation into account, including the situation where half of the people of this country are non-Muslims.” (The New Straits Times, 28 September 1985:17).*

He describes Malaysia as a country that is not only owned by the Muslims because half of the population is composed of non-Muslims. Although the Islamic principle of governance is mentioned, a certain sensitivity to other religious groups is also given importance and it is recognized that they also play a crucial role in the government. The construction of power and dominance when it comes to religion is fairly presented in Tun Dr. Mahathir’s speech, and this helps in reducing tensions which arise from religious differences. By impicature, Dr. Mahathir’s speech makes the suggestion that the country has to recognize other people as well and respect various cultures and religions. It can be argued that respect of other people’s religious beliefs may help in creating inclusiveness and unity. Furthermore, the emergence of the pronoun “*our*” in this excerpt is also intentional and implies all inclusiveness- an important ideology to promote when governing a multiracial country.

In the second paragraph, he says

*“I like to reiterate that Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious country. While Islam is recognized as the country’s official religion, other religions can freely be practiced by their respective followers. Besides, Muslims are protected from the spread of other religions. On the contrary, in spreading and increasing the number of Muslims, the use of force is completely out.”*

The need to assert that Malaysia is a “*multi-racial and multi-religious country*” infers that there is a need for assurance. And this follows in the next sentence where T.D.M. points out that free religious practice is permitted and there is no coercion on non-Muslims to become Muslims. When T.D.M says “*in spreading and increasing the number of Muslims, the use of force is completely out*” this presupposes that forced conversion to Islam to increase the

number of Muslims in Malaysia has been an issue that must be dealt with. The message clarifies the issue of equality of religious practice which might aid in making people content.

T.D.M's claim is enhanced with his use of the pronoun "I" which suggests subjectivity on the part of the speaker but a strong leader can assert his will on others. Tun Dr. Mahathir's repetition and reassertion that Malaysia is a multi-racial and multi-religious country suggests that he wants to construct an ideology of one nation- many kinds of people. At the same time, he walks a dangerous path and has to assure the large majority, i.e. the Muslims that Islam is recognized as the country's official religion and that they are protected from the spread of other religions. In short, they do not need to fear. This implicature is to reassure those who might fear the ideology he is constructing of recognising the existence of the outsiders –the non-Muslims.

### ***3.2 Analysis from 1990 - 1999: National Unity and Economic Stability***

After a few years of serving the country from 1982 to 1989, T.D.M's discourses were focused not only on national unity, but also on the economic stability of the country. Upon seeing the role of national unity as an important step towards achieving economic stability, the Prime Minister used the economic factor as a strategy to create unity among the Malays, Chinese, Indians and other ethnic groups.

#### ***3.2.1 Unity and Economic Success (1995)***

In 1995, Tun Dr. Mahathir made another speech at the National Seminar on Public Service in Kuala Lumpur on 1 September 1995. He provided an overview of public service and then introduced the "Malaysian Incorporated concept". Dr. Mahathir Mohamad states,

*"The public servants are partners in the Corporation. If the Corporation, i.e. the Nation prosper, then as partners, they will enjoy the dividends. More than that, they will enjoy greater pride as the prosperity and success of the nation is, to a considerable extent, the result of the service provided by the Public servants."*

*"Under the Malaysia Incorporated Concept, the whole nation is regarded as a corporation and both the public servants and private sector people are responsible for the success of the corporation. They have to work together for this success. The public*

*servant understands that the failure of the private sector would result in loss of revenue for the government.”*

The statement, “*the public servants are partners in the corporation*” has an implicature that both the public servants, who are predominantly ethnic Malays, and partners in corporation, who are mainly Chinese, must work together in order to succeed. In this way, TDM motivates both the Malays and the Chinese to work together so as to succeed. This idea is substantiated when he states, “*under the Malaysia Incorporated Concept, the whole nation is regarded as a corporation and both the public servants and private sector people are responsible for the success of the corporation.*” The implicature is that as the public sector is made up of majority Malays (unstated but in known schema of Malaysians) and the private sector has more non-Malays, then cooperation with the latter by the former is vital for economic success.

### *3.2.2 Racial and Economic Equality (1996)*

Dr. Mahathir Mohamad delivered a speech at the Inauguration Ceremony of the Chair of Malay Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand on March 27, 1996. He thanked the University for having a Chair of Malay Studies and provided a brief description of Bahasa Malaysia and how it had evolved as a language which shares some of the linguistic features with other Asian and Pacific languages. Apart from the linguistic aspect he discussed the “New Economic Policy” (NEP). He said:

*“The programme goes under the name of the “New Economic Policy” (NEP). The moment it was announced it came in for scathing comments especially from the Western media. Since bringing up the indigenous people required discrimination in their favour, it was condemned as racist and anti-Chinese. But strangely the majority of the Chinese did not take offence. They in fact cooperated and helped the process of affirmative action and the equitable structuring of the race-base economic functions. After 20 years of the NEP, Malaysia is much more balanced economically, stable politically and the race relations are much improved. By*

*comparison with other multiracial countries, Malaysia is a haven of peace and racial harmony.”*

In his speech, he emphasizes that Malaysia as a multiracial country has achieved its goal of unifying people of different races. When one says “*since bringing up the indigenous people required discrimination in their favour, it was condemned as racist and anti-Chinese*” it presupposes that tension among the other ethnic groups had occurred. He rationalised the NEP policy and argued that the Malaysian Chinese had cooperated in this process of affirmative action. By implicature, economic equality among the major races can help in healthy relations amongst the peoples of the country.

### *3.2.3 Economic Disparity*

TDM makes a strong argument in favour of the NEP policy in that it helps to reduce economic disparity among ethnic groups, particularly between the Malays and Chinese. In the same speech Dr. Mahathir said:

*“But the beneficiaries of the NEP are not only the millionaires and billionaires .Literally, hundreds of thousands of indigenous business people have benefited through special training, loans, licences, contracts and guidance by Ministries set up for this purpose.”*

The message presupposes that there is a possibility that, apart from the millionaires/ billionaires, others too have benefited from the NEP. Implicit in the statement is awareness that the man in the street has criticised the NEP and it is seen as benefiting only wealthy Malays and not the average Malay.

At the same time this utterance makes it clear that the government works hard to improve the lives of people representing the indigenous population of Malaysia, who are less economically fortunate. It is clear that much effort and attention is given to the Bumiputeras as compared to the other races with the aim of uplifting their economic status so that they enjoy the same economic benefits enjoyed by the Chinese. Dr. Mahathir openly discusses the bias and prejudice against the “brown” Malays. He says:

*“One talks so much now about the equality of races. Colour should not differentiate us. But the fact is that many people associate colour with intellectual and other attributes. Thus the remarkable achievement of the Southeast Asia is attributed to the overseas Chinese. The brown Malays who are indigenous to Southeast Asia are dismissed as quite irrelevant to the progress and achievements of ASEAN. The prejudice is very much there.”*

By implication, the fact that *“Colour should not differentiate us”* suggests that it still does. And in this way he rationalises the special help given to one community.

#### *3.2.4 Race and Religion*

Race and religion play an important role in achieving unity. People who share the same race or religion could easily group themselves due to similarity of cultural practices (Healey, 2010). As a result, T.D.M’s discourses emphasize that there is a need to minimize racial and religious differences. In his speech he convinced investors to come to Malaysia. He emphasized the uniqueness of Malaysia as compared to the other countries in Southeast Asia, that of being both multilingual and multicultural.

On April 25, 1997, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad delivered a speech on Majlis Ulangtahun Ke-50 Majlis Gereja-Gereja Malaysia at PWTC, Kuala Lumpur. He said:

*“We are very fortunate that this multi-racial and multi-religious society of ours has had a long experience and tradition of living in harmony with each other. As a direct result we have achieved tremendous economic progress that has considerably lifted the quality of life of our people. This cooperation regardless of race and religion will further reinforce our capacity to build a more liberal and tolerant society.”*

When one says *“we are very fortunate that this multi-racial and multi-religious society of ours has had a long experience and tradition of living in harmony with each other”*, it implies that racial and religious conflicts no longer exist in Malaysia, and that economic progress has

been achieved. Words like “multi-racial”, “multi-religious” are linked to “harmony” which in turn brings “*tremendous economic progress*”. The covert message is that in order to succeed Malaysians must be united and tolerant.

Foregrounding Islam and the teachings of Islam vis-à-vis other religions he says: - “*Islam teaches us to allow complete freedom of worship to other religious groups who are willing to live in a Muslim country. Islam teaches us that all humans are created from the same parents, Adam and Eve.*” As Islam is the religion of the majority of Malaysians this concession presupposes that Malaysia is a tolerant country and allows freedom of worship. By being tolerant, Malaysia has reduced group differentiation.

Religion is further emphasized by TDM as a bridge to unify the ethnic groups. When one states “all humans are created of the same parents “Adam and Eve”, it has an implicature that people are brothers even if they hold different religious beliefs or affiliations. Therefore, there is something in common among people regardless of ethnicity and religion. This infers that unity is possible, notwithstanding religious and cultural differences.

As a democratic country, Malaysia has practiced mutual tolerance and respect to all, regardless of ethnicity and religion. He said, “*It is obviously based on such teachings that we in Malaysia practice tolerance and mutual respect for one another. Our non-Muslim friends, such as the Buddhist and Hindus enjoy the freedom to live according to their cultural values and religious norms in a way that is not possible in many other countries.*”

The message is clear that religious freedom helps to minimize religious conflicts. TDM takes pride in saying that “*our non-Muslim friends, such as the Buddhist and Hindus enjoy the freedom to live according to their cultural values and religious norms in a way that is not possible in many other countries.*” This implies that such freedom is only possible in Malaysia as compared to other Muslim countries where people of different religious orientations are not allowed to practice their faith.

### **3.3 Analysis from 2000 - 2007: National Unity and Success**

After Malaysia’s recovery from economic crisis in the mid 90s, economic progress became visible and so T.D.M. convinced his constituents that economic disparities had been reduced. He implies that inequality among ethnic groups has been reduced as well. Such

discourse would mean that national unity and economic progress always go together, thus encouraging Malaysians to minimize ethnic divisions.

### 3.3.1 Government and its People (2000-2007)

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2003, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad delivered a speech at the 54<sup>th</sup> UMNO General Assembly at Putra World Trade Centre, Kuala Lumpur. He states that Malaysians live in harmony and that the government has achieved its goal of uplifting the poor Malays. He says “*the multiracial people of Malaysia live in peace and harmony.*” which presupposes that various ethnic groups have been united. In addition, his message implies that the Malaysian government had succeeded in achieving its goal of unifying Malaysians. He further mentioned that “*the Bumiputera padi farmers and the fishermen now have children who are professionals, high ranking government officials, and professors, generals in the armed forces and millionaires in business*” which implies that equality among Malaysians have been achieved. He also stated:

*“The multiracial people of Malaysia live in peace and harmony, thanks to the policy of the first Prime Minister, YTM Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra. The disparities in the economic wealth of the different races have been reduced. The Bumiputera padi farmers and the fishermen now have children who are professionals, high ranking government officials, and professors, generals in the armed forces and millionaires in business.”*

Peace and harmony are again highlighted when he says, “*the multiracial people of Malaysia live in peace and harmony.*” Since the audience was predominantly Malays, Dr. Mahathir infers that the Malay community was catching up with the Chinese economically when he says that:- “*The disparities in the economic wealth of the different races have been reduced*”. He emphasizes that the Malays and non-Malays are working together when he says:

*“Petronas, fully-owned Government Company is managed by Malay managers and senior executives together with non-Malays.”*



It is evident that the government's program has succeeded in bringing the different races, particularly the Malays and the Chinese to work together in businesses. Unity among people from different races brings economic success.

The discourses of T.D.M from 1980-2007 reflect his major concern of uniting the ethnic groups in Malaysia. It is evident in his discourses that TDM spread the ideology that through unity Malaysia can achieve its vision of becoming an industrialized country by 2020. In the 1980s, TDM's goal was to foster good relationships among the major ethnic groups so as to achieve unity. Good governance was also emphasized as a stepping stone towards unity and economic success. The call for national unity and better relationships among ethnic groups were the focus of the intent behind the discourse.

However, in the 1990s, the discourse shifted its focus to economic stability. This is understandable since Malaysia experienced an economic crisis at that time. One way of recovering from the crisis was to make the people feel united and help each other to help the government recover quickly from economic instability.

In 2000, TDM's discourse also notes the emphasis on unity and economic success in. With globalization the call for national unity among the ethnic groups for Malaysia so as to achieve Malaysia's 2020 vision was intensified..

#### **4. Conclusion**

The discourse of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in three different periods, 1980s, 1990s and 2000s suggests that Prime Minister's major goal was to create a sense of oneness, a sense of nationhood. His construction of a country which is successful economically and because there are harmonious relationships among the major ethnic groups comes from the belief that this will surely transpire if all Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity, were to work hand in hand. Tun Dr. Mahathir is explicit in his discourses. Being a leader of a multiethnic population is not an easy task as TDM can be perceived to be biased in favour of his own ethnic group. Consequently, he explains and provides reasons why the Malay community has to be helped. At the same time, the Chinese are portrayed as economically stable. Thus, they need to cooperate with the government's plan of providing the Malays with an equal chance and

opportunity to enjoy the economic benefits that the Chinese enjoy. Tun Dr. Mahathir infers that this will result in a win-win situation for both communities and for the country. However, the smaller communities such as the Indians and other minority ethnic groups in the country do not feature in any of the speeches examined.

In summary, the findings of this study demonstrate TDM's concern for equality and unity among Malaysians. In fact, his concern for uniting all the ethnic groups was emphasized in many of his speeches.

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## Appendix 1

The speeches were analysed and classified according to the years they were delivered. The selected speeches were:

1. In 1982, a speech was delivered by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, 1982.
2. There were two speeches in 1995: the speech delivered at the South African Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa, on 25th August; and the speech delivered during the *National Seminar on Public Service*, at Istana Hotel, Kuala Lumpur, on 1st September.
3. Three speeches were delivered in 1996: at the *Inauguration Ceremony of the Chair of Malay Studies*, at Victoria University, New Zealand on 27th March; *Market Economy and Moral Cultural Values – A Malaysian Perspective*, at St. Catherine, on 16th April; *The 30<sup>th</sup> Singapore – Malaysia Congress of Medicine*, in Singapore, on 10th August 1996.
4. In 1997, the three speeches were the *Silicon Valley Conference for Investors on the MSC*, at Stanford University, Santa Clara, California, on 15th January; the *Majlis Ulangtahun ke-50 Majlis Gereja-Gereja Malaysia*, at PWTC, Kuala Lumpur, on 25th April; the *1997 Langkawi International Dialogue*, at the Berjaya Langkawi Beach and Resort, Langkawi, Kedah, on 28th July.
5. There were three speeches in 1998: the *4<sup>th</sup> Pacific Dialogue*, at the Palace of Golden Horses, Sg. Besi, Kuala Lumpur, on 12th January; the *Official Dinner in Honour of His Excellency Rafiq Hariri, prime minister of the Republic of Lebanon*, at Sri Perdana, Kuala Lumpur, on 9th February; the *Official Opening of the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) General Assembly*, at the Palace of the Golden Horses, Kuala Lumpur, on 8th September.
6. Three speeches were chosen in 1999: the *Luncheon Talk*, at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, on 28th September; the *World 15<sup>th</sup> Hakka Convention*, at Sunway Lagoon Resort Hotel, Subang Jaya, Selangor, on 5th November; the *International Conference of Religious Studies: Meeting the Millenium*, at the Palace of the Golden Horses Hotel in Kuala Lumpur, on 30th December.
7. In 2003, the speech delivered was at the *54<sup>th</sup> Umno General Assembly*, at Putra World Trade Center (PWTC), Kuala Lumpur, on 19th June.

All the speeches chosen had something in common - ethnic relationships among the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The focus has been on these three ethnic groups because they constitute a big percentage of the Malaysian population.

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