The subject of interest in this book is the discourse produced by the former Malaysian Premier and UMNO President, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in the years 1982-1996 at the UMNO General Assembly. The analysis adopts the concept of ‘discourse as social practice’ as advocated by critical discourse analysts.

The overall aim of the book is to examine how ideology and relations of power come into play in the formation of discourse. The objective is also to investigate the ways in which the texts are homogeneous or normative and how they are heterogeneous or creative from year to year. It is also aims to examine the social effects of the discourse on the multi-layered community, i.e. the immediate audience and the potentially larger one via the media; and in turn, how the effects may influence the texts produced in the following years.
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This book is an adaptation of a doctoral endeavor which culminated in 1999. The subject of interest is the discourse produced by the Malaysian Premier and UMNO President in the years 1982-1996 at the UMNO General Assembly. Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad is quoted in Asiaweek (May 9, 1997:39) as saying that he considers the keynote address he gives every year as the most important speech because it sets the tone for the party for the rest of the year.

The analysis adopts the concept of 'discourse as social practice' as advocated by critical discourse analysts (Fairclough, Van Dijk). One of the fundamental ideas behind the theory of critical discourse analysis is that discourse is socially shaped and in turn re-shapes societal formations.

The overall aim of the study is to examine how ideology and relations of power come into play in the formation of discourse. The objective is also to investigate the ways in which the texts are homogeneous or normative and how they are heterogeneous or creative from year to year. It also aims to examine the social effects of the discourse on the multi-layered community, i.e. the immediate audience and the potentially larger one via the media; and in turn, how the effects may influence the texts produced in the following years.

I had focused on three major sections of the speeches - UMNO, Economy, and Islam. These sections are selected on the basis of consistency of appearance in the speeches every year. The main target audience of the speeches is the
party members who are predominantly the Muslim-Malay community. However, there is a large population of 'secondary audience' who watches the live coverage of the Assembly on national television and read the full text of the speech on the following day in major newspapers.

I would like to record my gratitude to my mentor Professor Dato' Dr. Asmah Hj. Omar. She had shown me guidance and encouragement for which I am truly thankful. I must not forget my good friend, Dr. Nesamalar Chitravelu, who had provided much insight into this study. I would also like to thank Dr. Mohd Zaki Abdul Rahman for spending time to answer my queries on some of the Islamic matters that are in the study. Also, I would like to thank Nasir, Nor Ima, Choo Keng Koh, and Zaulin for the times they had provided their assistance.

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Last but definitely top of the list, I would like to express my love and affection for my family. This book is dedicated to my husband, Shukri, my daughter Nauwar, and my son Haikal for their unending patience, love, support and encouragement.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Man

Mahathir bin Mohamad was born on 20 December 1925 in Alor Setar, Kedah - a northern state in Malaysia. He is the youngest of nine siblings. He went to a Malay-medium school for two years then went on to an English Medium school. In 1947, he went to University of Malaya in Singapore to obtain a Medical degree in 1953. Even while still a student in secondary school, Mahathir had anti-colonialist sentiments and had been in the center of the people's struggle against British colonialism from the beginning. He had been an active opposer of the Malayan Union.

While his fellow students at the English school were isolating themselves from the people's struggle, Mahathir was already fraternising with fellow students and teachers from religious schools, teachers from Malay schools, religious scholars and movement leaders in Kedah, the kind of people regarded as dangerous by the British (Zainuddin, 1994: 12).

As a university student, he was very active and often participated in debates. Apart from that, he was editor of the medical students' magazine and the President of the Muslim Students' Association in his medical college. Between the late 1940s and early 1950s, he was an active