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**‘Clean and green – that’s the way we like it’: a critical study  
of Singapore’s environmental campaigns**

by

Peter TEO

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*Editorial address:*

Centre for Language in Social Life  
Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language  
Bowland College,  
Lancaster University,  
Lancaster LA1 4YT  
United Kingdom

## 1. INTRODUCTION

We have built. We have progressed. But there is no hallmark of success more distinctive and more meaningful than achieving our position as the cleanest and greenest city in South Asia.

This is a quote from a speech by Singapore's then Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew, at the launch of Singapore's first-ever *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* on 1 October 1968. The quote captures the spirit and thrust of an emergent nation in an endeavour to assert herself as a progressive, successful nation by creating an identity as being 'the cleanest and greenest city in South Asia'.

One of the challenges that newly independent countries face is how to unify, manage and govern the newly franchised populace. Some states actively manufacture cultures as part of the wider construction of a nation-state and national identity, a view shared by Dissanayake (1990: 130) who perceives national identity to be a 'polyvalent discourse where materiality, history, ideology and symbology interact in diverse and complex ways'. Such states rely on historical symbolisms to rally the citizenry in a collective ritual of nation building and social integration. Some even go to the extent of romanticizing certain aspects of the past in an attempt to conjure a 'folk culture' or 'traditional heritage' for its people to embrace and celebrate, dressing it in a language of 'roots', 'identity', 'heritage', 'legacy' and 'tradition' and displaying it on a pedestal of marble for all to venerate. In Singapore, selected fragments of the past have indeed been revived and re-enacted, 'dressed up' and 'put on parade' (Sharp, 1987), both in a literal sense during visually splendid and spectacular events like the National Day Parade and

the *Chingay Festival*<sup>1</sup> and in a figurative sense in that the ‘rich cultural heritage’ is being displayed for the world to see and admire, ostensibly as part of the tourism industry in Singapore (see Leong, 1989), as well as for the purpose of constructing a coherent if somewhat mythologized culture of traditions for Singaporeans. But national identity is not only built on the past. In fact, sometimes it is prudent and even necessary for some newly independent states recoiling from past oppression and subjugation to actively denounce such remembrances of the past and focus the people’s vision instead on reconstruction and progress towards future achievements and successes. Thus, the pomp and pageantry and sheer visual spectacle afforded by the celebrations of a ‘National Day’ or an ‘Independence Day’, for instance, presents a potent symbolic reminder to the people of both the liberation from the oppressors of the past and a showcase of the efforts and achievements of social and economic reconstruction. Creating an identity that its people can be proud of can therefore be a powerful rallying point to cohere and unify a young nation like Singapore.

This paper explores how the leaders of post-independent Singapore have constructed an identity for Singaporeans and the world on the basis of her physical environment, how the tiny island-state of under 650 square kilometres has been exploited for building a cohesive nation out of a pluralistic assemblage of peoples from various regions and diverse cultures, who came to Singapore mainly in search of a living and whose emotional affiliations and cultural allegiances therefore lay more with their homelands than with their adopted country. Specifically, the study aims to probe into

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<sup>1</sup> This is an annual procession of floats, dancers and other performers, representing the major ethnic groups in Singapore, as well as guest artistes and performers from around the world, offering a colourful, vibrant and cosmopolitan spectacle for both tourists and locals to enjoy.

how nation-building is discursively constructed and promulgated through a series of national campaigns ostensibly dedicated to environmental protection and conservation. As a highly salient and symbolic instantiation of campaign discourse, slogans encapsulate the ideologies that underpin the particular ways in which they have been constructed by the government and construed by the people. As such, the analytic lens will be trained especially on the various slogans used in conjunction with these campaigns, using them as a platform to articulate a critique on how Singapore's leaders have endeavoured to construct national identity and solidarity on the basis of a 'clean and green' environment. But first, it is needful to provide some background on Singapore's brief history leading to her independence and the social practice of national campaigning in general, before focusing on the series of 'environmental campaigns'.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Singapore's History**

From 1819 to the Second World War, Singapore was under British colonial rule and operated relatively peacefully and prosperously as an entrepôt for Southeast Asian raw materials and Western manufactured goods. But the subsequent Japanese Occupation of Singapore from 1942 to 1945 not only brought much misery and suffering to the people, it also exposed the hollowness of the security and prosperity which Singapore enjoyed but took largely for granted. Consequently, the three years of Japanese Occupation not only marked the end of British imperial legitimacy but also fueled a nationalistic fervor that paved the way for Singapore's eventual independence. Thus, when British troops fought back to force the Japanese to surrender Singapore back

to the British in 1945, there was mass cheering in the streets not so much because the British were welcome but because their victory marked the end of a Japanese nightmare.

As Turnbull (1989: 214) observes:

The [British colonial] regime was welcomed back with genuine relief because it was benign, its weaknesses were sins of omission, its memory was not marred by cruelty or dragooning the population. But the only ultimate justification for a colonial power was its ability to protect and in this the British colonial regime had been tried and found wanting. The old unquestioning trust in the British had been shattered forever.

But it was not until over a decade later in 1959 that a group of Singaporeans, led by Lee Kuan Yew, took over the government of Singapore and formed an independent state as part of the British Commonwealth. However, faced with one of the world's highest population growth rates at that time and increasing demands for employment and rising expectations in social services, the Lee government realized Singapore's economic survival was a critical issue that demanded urgent attention. Believing that a merger with Malaysia would secure Singapore's economic survival, Singapore sought shelter under the federal structure of Malaysia and became part of the Federation of Malaysia in 1963. However, due to fundamental differences between the leaders in Singapore and Malaysia, concerning, for instance, the issue of communal rights versus social equality, the merger was short-lived. On 9 August 1965, Singapore's long struggle for self-rule finally ended, albeit somewhat ironically, when she was asked to leave the Federation of Malaysia to be on her own. As a dismembered, fledgling nation, Singapore faced a bleak prospect of rising unemployment and a ballooning population and was in serious danger of becoming another basket case in the Third World. That in less than thirty years since attaining

independence Singapore managed to rise to become a thriving metropolis enjoying one of the highest standards of living in the world is an achievement that is attributable to several factors, one of which is the way in which the ruling government has exploited national campaigns as a means to cohere and steer the people of Singapore in the direction deemed desirable by the government.

## **2.2 Singapore's National Campaigns**

National campaigns have been an integral part of Singapore's socio-political fabric for over four decades. There have been campaigns that promote productivity, a healthy lifestyle, the use of 'Good English', kindness and courtesy and even a happy family. There have also been campaigns that proscribe against particular behaviors such as smoking, jaywalking and littering which are deemed unacceptable or undesirable by the government. National campaigns in Singapore can thus be construed as a social practice – socially conditioned, conventionalized, even naturalized activity that at the same time contributes to social formation – unique in the way they have permeated into every crevice of socio-cultural life in Singapore. So what constitutes a 'national campaign'? In the context of Singapore, a national campaign is 'a government initiated and inspired movement which has an organised and formal course of action, used with the intent of arousing public awareness and influencing public behaviour' (Tham, 1986: 41). The expansive scope and variety of these 'national campaigns' and the vigor with which they have generally been promulgated over the past four decades reflect the government's commitment towards building a society in terms of the values and ideals

espoused by these campaigns, values and ideals that every Singaporean is expected to embody and uphold. At the same time, they also reflect the government's conviction in the efficacy of these national campaigns as a medium by which these ideals and values can be valorized, propagated and reinforced. Although national campaigns are by no means unique to Singapore, one can be forgiven for believing that Singapore is a nation of campaigns because of the sheer number, frequency and visibility of campaigns mounted in Singapore over the past few decades. In fact, the extent to which national campaigns have been utilized to regulate social behaviour in Singapore has led one Singaporean writer to dub Singapore as a 'campaign country' (Lazar, 2000: 374). The ubiquity, frequency and salience of campaigns become even more incongruous when seen against Singapore's small population size and short history. Since the late 50s, over two hundred national campaigns have been organized by the various government bodies and statutory boards. This averages about five campaigns per year, with some running concurrently over several months and some going on for over twenty years. This pervasiveness of campaigns is what makes Singapore a nation of campaigns.

So how did national campaigns first germinate, grow and flourish to such an extent in Singapore over the past four decades? The answer lies in a combination of factors. First, with a heterogeneous population comprising largely immigrants forming a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual social fabric, the government had to find a means of knitting together its diverse populace. At the political front, with Britain relinquishing her control over its former colony and the pangs suffered by Singapore's separation from the Malaya Federation, the government had to think of ways to galvanize

its people into a politically and socially cohesive nation. The post-war baby boom coupled with rising unemployment also meant that the government had to implement measures to check the rising birth-rate while stimulating economic growth to create more jobs. In the face of these social, political and economic exigencies, the government was determined to make the newly independent nation of Singapore succeed and prosper. Hence, all available human resources in the land-scarce, resource-poor but densely populated island-state had to be harnessed fully. To do this, social cohesion and political unity must first be put in place through an efficient and organized means of political socialization, mass education and participation, and the government saw campaigns organized on a national scale as the instrument through which these goals could be achieved with minimum time and maximum efficiency.

### **3. Singapore's Environmental Campaigns**

The first national campaign dedicated to the creation and maintenance of a healthy and sustainable environment in Singapore first took the form of the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* launched in 1968. At that time, Singapore's one million population were living in mainly unsewered, overcrowded slums without piped water or a proper waste collection and disposal system. Such conditions were exacerbated by indiscriminate littering by members of the public, improper disposal of refuse and the careless dumping of waste in the streets and drains by street hawkers and itinerant peddlers. On top of this, Singapore's hot and humid climate and a dense population provided ideal conditions for rapid bacterial growth, organic decomposition and the

propagation of disease-carrying insects. In view of these pressing environmental and health concerns, a national campaign committee was formed to run the first ever *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign*, aimed primarily at improving Singapore's physical environment and general living conditions. After the inaugural *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign*, subsequent campaigns focused on a specific theme in addition to the underlying one of keeping Singapore clean. For example, in 1969, the theme was 'Keep Singapore Clean and Mosquito-Free', and in 1970, it was 'Keep Singapore Clean and Pollution-Free'. Focusing on specific themes allowed the government to concentrate its efforts to raise public awareness on specific issues related to the environment. These campaigns were complemented by an attempt to project a green and beautiful image of Singapore, and so from 1971 onwards "Tree Planting Day" became an annual affair in Singapore's campaign calendar. Systematic and extensive tree-planting transformed the treeless streets of the 1960s to the tree-lined boulevards that are now a hallmark of the modern 'Garden City' that is Singapore.

To ensure the *Keep Singapore Clean* message was driven home to the general public, the mass media was enlisted to provide maximum publicity for the Campaign. Feature articles and programs were published in the press. Jingles, newsreels, documentaries, filmlets and slides were broadcast daily over television and radio. Hundreds of thousands of posters and banners were displayed in shops, restaurants, offices, factories, community centers, bus shelters and public notice boards. "Keep Singapore Clean" rubber stamps, seals, and postal franking of all correspondence and postal articles were used. All letters and bills from government and statutory boards and

even cinema tickets were also stamped with the slogan, "Keep Singapore Clean". Even petroleum companies distributed "Keep Singapore Clean" car stickers to consumers at petrol stations. Never before was the public subjected to a publicity blitz on such a massive scale. A unique feature of the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* was that members of parliament, together with community leaders, organized individual campaigns on the constituency level and made house-to-house visits to educate residents and hawkers. Rallies, competitions and exhibitions were organized to get as many of their constituency members involved. "Broomstick brigades" comprising young and old volunteers were formed to clean up the common areas of their constituencies. Another special feature was for the police and the public health inspectorate to go on patrol during the campaign period to advise and exhort the public against littering. Special talks were given by health officers, inspectors of schools and principals at least twice in each school during the campaign month. Competitions were held to select the ten cleanest schools, ten cleanest community centers, ten cleanest markets, ten cleanest government offices and ten cleanest restaurants. Winners were awarded prizes and certificates.

Besides applying the 'carrot' approach to urge and persuade people to observe cleanliness and reward people for their exemplary conduct, the government also used the 'stick' to very good effect. Films and photographs of places and establishments found to be dirty as well as members of the public caught in the act of littering the streets were broadcast on television and published in the press. The ten dirtiest premises were also named and publicized. In this way, social pressure was brought to bear upon the general public, both as an individual and organization, to 'Keep Singapore Clean'. The *Keep*

*Singapore Clean Campaign* also marked the first time when fines were used as a means to help regulate and enforce social behavior. People who were caught littering public areas after the campaign period were fined to a tune of \$500. The one month during which the Campaign was held thus became the grace period for the public to be acquainted with the legislative measures introduced in conjunction with the Campaign. Imposing a fine of \$500 was not only an effective way to deal with recalcitrants but also a swift way to ‘socialize’ the general public into what the government deemed to be ‘socially correct’ behavior. To this day, signs bearing the prohibitive “Do Not Litter, Fine \$500” message can still be sighted in most public places like train stations and shopping complexes in Singapore. The ‘litter-bugs’ who were caught not only had to pay fines but also had to suffer the ignominy of having their names and even photographs published in the newspapers. This strategy of using public shaming to deter people from littering continued to be used right through to the 1990s with the introduction of the ‘Corrective Work Order’ in 1992. As a punitive measure, offenders were made to clean up public areas like parks and beaches while wearing a prominent vest bearing the words ‘Corrective Work Order’. When this was first introduced, it attracted considerable media and hence public attention as photographs of these ‘litter-bugs’ were splashed for all to see on the front page of newspapers. Young offenders like school children were also not let off the hook as they were reported to their school principals who would discipline them by making them sweep their school compounds. The government also introduced a seven-day working week to ensure that streets were swept and refuse removed even on Sundays and public holidays, and street hawkers were systematically relocated to new food centers in order to help keep the streets clean.

By the end of the 1980s, under the centralized direction of a Ministry of the Environment set up in 1972, the basic infrastructure to meet Singapore's environmental needs were all in place. However, global environmental issues – such as global warming, ozone layer depletion, preservation of bio-diversity – were beginning to take center-stage, as international pressure to tackle these global issues mounted. As a small nation intent on making its mark on the global community, Singapore felt the need to do its part in protecting the world's environment from further degradation. It was against this backdrop that a fresh approach to environmental management in Singapore was conceived. This new approach was embodied in the publication, *The Singapore Green Plan – Towards a Model Green City*. The threefold vision for Singapore spelt out in this publication is of a city with high standards of public health, with clean air, land, water and a quiet living environment; a city conducive to gracious living, with people who are concerned about and take a personal interest in the care of both the local and global environment; a city that will be a regional center for environmental technology<sup>2</sup>. The *Singapore Green Plan* identified new strategic directions that had to be addressed if this vision was to become reality. Work groups were formed to develop concrete plans for improving and promoting environmental education, resource and nature conservation, environmentally-friendly technology and reducing environmental noise. Of these, environmental education was identified as a key direction of the *Green Plan* (*ibid.* p. 13). In the past, environmental management was largely concerned with providing the environmental infrastructure, which was bolstered by legislative regulations and penalties

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<sup>2</sup> Source: *The Singapore Green Plan – Action Programmes*. 1993. Ministry of the Environment, Singapore, p. 10.

to modify behavior. While there were periodic public-education campaigns, these were usually instituted either ahead of and in support of new regulations or address specific and urgent environmental problems of that time, such as mosquito breeding at a time of dengue-fever outbreaks. What is worse is that these public-education campaigns were perceived to be government initiated and directed and carried a distinct element of compulsion. This regulatory approach to modify behavior was abandoned in favor of one that was aimed at building an environmentally *pro-active* society.

The *Clean and Green Week*<sup>3</sup>, first launched in 1990, became the first environmental public-education campaign to have grown out of the new approach of *The Singapore Green Plan*. This new approach involved consciously integrating environmental education into the formal education system, educating through participation and fun rather than compulsion and fines. In his speech at the opening of the Singapore Green Plan Exhibition in November, 1993, the then Minister of the Environment, Mah Bow Tan, underlined the critical role played by the individual: ‘For the Green Plan to succeed, we will need the strong support, commitment and participation of Singaporeans from all walks of life. The man in the street can, and should, through his simple, everyday actions, help to translate the vision under the Green Plan into reality’. This exhortation to the individual to take up the responsibility of environmental conservation, to build a more environmentally proactive Singapore society represents a clear shift away from the government-led *Keep Singapore Clean* campaigns of the late 1960s. From 1983, the Ministry of the Environment has been organizing a

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.env.gov.sg/info/campaigns/cgw.htm>

Clean Public Toilets Campaign<sup>4</sup>. In 1996, following a call by the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, to use public toilets as an index of social graciousness and civic consciousness, the Campaign took on added significance and garnered much media publicity and public attention. The Campaign basically seeks to raise public awareness on the importance of keeping public toilets clean and to use them with care and consideration.

The above is an account of the history, evolution and *raison d'être* of the various government campaigns that can be subsumed under the broad domain of 'Environmental Campaigns' in Singapore. It is hoped that this broad sketch will provide a contextual framework to help readers better appreciate the analysis and discussion of the slogans used in these campaigns.

#### **4. ANALYSIS**

The term 'slogan' is a rhetorical device that stimulates mental or behavioral action, and is commonly associated with political or advertising discourse, where its power in evoking and managing collective attitudes around a concrete symbol has been widely acknowledged. One definition, which focuses on the imperative mood in which slogans are typically formulated, construes slogans as basically 'imperative statements ... single words or phrases with the imperative mood strongly implied' (Bowers and Ochs, 1971: 22). This definition, however, might have overstated the *form* of slogans at the

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.env.gov.sg/info/campaigns/TOILET.HTM>

expense of the emotive *function* of slogans. As Stewart et al (1995: 401) have noted, 'slogans are more than imperative statements – commands, decrees, edicts or fiats; they invoke impressions and elicit emotional responses'. Expressing the function and purpose of slogans in a more succinct and pointed manner, Reboul (1979: 296) has defined a slogan as a 'phrase ... whose purpose is not to inform, to enlighten or even to order, but to 'strike' people so as to goad them into action. It would appear then that the primary intent behind the use of a slogan is to 'strike' or galvanize people into some kind of mental or behavioral activity, and it is this intent of slogans to galvanize people that will be demonstrated in the following analysis of the environmental campaign slogans. The analysis will focus on three particular aspects of the slogans: presuppositions and assumptions embedded within the propositional content of the slogans, the use of pronouns and the pragmatic notion of 'politeness'.

#### **4.1 Presuppositions**

Presuppositions are an interesting phenomenon to examine, especially from the critical point-of-view, because of its capacity to smuggle ideology into an utterance. They have a tendency to conceal ideological meanings that are sometimes so deeply embedded within the discursive structure that they remain opaque to most people. With reference to the tabulation of the campaign slogans from 1968 to 2000 in Appendix 1, it can be observed that the verb 'keep' has been used in several slogans, such as *Keep Singapore Clean*, *Keep Singapore Clean and Pollution-Free* and *Let's Keep Our Toilets Clean and Dry*. In wanting to exhort Singaporeans to act in a socially responsible and civic-minded

manner, it is a little ironic that the government has chosen a word that suggests passivity rather than activity; it urges people to maintain the status quo by *not* littering, *not* dirtying public places, *not* polluting the environment, and so on, rather than encouraging the people to take a more proactive approach of protecting or caring for the environment. In presupposing a pre-existing state of cleanliness which only needs to be maintained, the word 'keep' implies that the government does not want the people to clean up Singapore (which a slogan like 'Make Singapore Clean' would imply) but merely to maintain the state of cleanliness that Singapore presumably already enjoys. Urging the people to *make* Singapore clean implies that Singapore is dirty, an admission which would project a rather negative image of Singapore to the public world even if that might better reflect the reality of the situation at that time. Perhaps, it is for this reason that ***Keep Singapore Clean***, despite its fallacious presupposition, was chosen as the official slogan for the campaign.

Among the various slogans used in conjunction with the *Clean and Green Week*, two stand out: ***When We Think Green, The Possibilities Are Endless*** and ***When You Litter, People Look at You Differently***. One reason for their distinctiveness is that, unlike most of the other slogans which urge people to do (or not to do) something, such as 'going for green' or 'acting for all our tomorrows', both these slogans emphasize what Halliday (1994) calls 'Mental processes'. 'Think' belongs with the 'cognitive Mental' process while 'Look' belongs with the 'perceptive Mental' process; one emphasises a change in mind-set, the other stresses public perception. But what is even more interesting and significant is that they represent *opposing* strategies of conveying the environmental message. In ***When We Think Green, The Possibilities Are Endless***, the emphasis is on

the *positive* rewards that can accrue from environmental consciousness; the slogan therefore *encourages*. On the other hand, ***When You Litter, People Look at You Differently*** emphasises the *negative* consequences of littering; the slogan therefore *discourages*. While the first slogan tries to appeal through empowerment – having a ‘green’ attitude empowers people to do an infinite number of things (to protect and conserve the environment), the second appeals to social pressure to disempower – being a litter-bug invites public disapproval and even social ostracism. Although both make use of Mental processes in a complex sentence structure to get people to adopt an environmentally responsible attitude, one endeavours to do so by appealing to the power of collective effort (‘when *we* think green’ [my emphasis]) while the other appeals to the power of collective pressure to deter an individual act (‘when *you* litter’ [my emphasis]).

Most significantly, however, is the ideologically motivated assumption embedded within the slogan, ***When You Litter, People Look at You Differently***. It assumes that being different or, more accurately, being *looked at* differently is undesirable. The persuasive strategy employed by the slogan is based on the assumption that people have an innate need to belong, to conform to the normative structure of society, and that being different is therefore undesirable, even unnatural. This is a highly contestable viewpoint, which implicitly champions conformism over individualism. Individualism, which advocates the free and independent action of the individual to be different as opposed to the sorts of communistic or collectivistic behaviour resulting from, say, state interference, becomes negativized and sacrificed at the altar of conformism. Thus, the implicit message inscribed within the slogan is that when you litter, people look at you not only differently

but *negatively*. In this way, the slogan brings the full weight of public perception to bear on the individual, with the implication that if the public perceives an act to be negative, then it *must* be negative. In other words, the slogan invokes the tyranny of the majority. The sort of society assumed, implied and championed by the slogan leaves little, if any, room for individualistic behaviour, thereby implicitly encouraging social unity and conformity. At another level, the slogan also belies the ideology that the norm in Singapore society is *not* to litter, and therefore littering would constitute a deviation from the norm and hence invite social reprehension. But if the norm in Singapore were indeed not to litter, then there probably would not be a need for a *national* campaign targeted at litter-bugs in the first place, now would there?

## 4.2 Pronouns

Another interesting feature of the slogans I wish to highlight pertains to the use of pronouns. There are a number of choices in the pronoun system of English that one can make depending on the kind of interpersonal meaning one wishes to express. At a broad level, a distinction can be made among first, second and third person pronouns. First and second person pronouns express a closer relationship between the writer/speaker and reader/hearer, compared to the third person or impersonal pronoun 'one'. A person who uses the third person pronoun is manifestly less involved in or more detached from the world she/he is representing (for a fuller discussion of various interpersonal meanings that pronominal choice can encode, see Goatly, 2000). The table below shows evidence of a predilection (10 out of 15) for the first person pronoun, such as 'us' in *Let's not*

*waste precious water*, ‘our’ in *Please Act Today for All Our Tomorrows* and ‘we’ in *When We Think Green, The Possibilities are Endless* and *Clean and Green: That’s the Way We Like It*. Using the first person pronoun has the effect of constructing the speaker (in this case, the government) together with the hearer (the people). Thus, the tendency to use the first person pronoun in the slogans creates an impression of the government and the people in partnership, sharing the responsibility of protecting and caring for environmental resources. The recurrent use of the first person possessive pronoun, in particular, creates a sense of collective ownership. Thus, it is *our* tomorrows for which we must act, *our* peace and quiet that we must not shatter, *our* toilets that we must keep clean and dry, *our* ‘Garden City’ we must cherish, and so on. Thus, the environment, as constructed by the slogans, is a kind of public property belonging to all Singaporeans, and thus caring for it is not only the government’s responsibility or that of a few individuals tasked with the job but a responsibility that *all* Singaporeans must collectively shoulder. The use of the collective pronoun, ‘everyone’, in *From Today, Everyone in Singapore Will Go for Green* unites pluralistic Singapore into a collective body dedicated to the ‘Green Movement’, as the global environmental movement is popularly referred to. That this is merely an assertion of idealistic optimism and not necessarily a statement of fact is obvious and hence unremarkable. What is more interesting is that, in choosing to use the indefinite collective pronoun (‘Everyone’), the slogan assumes a desire or even need for people in Singapore to conform to societal norms, and uses this assumption as the basis to impel people to ‘go green’. This underlying ideology of conformism emerges more clearly if we contrast the slogan with reformulated ones like ‘From Today, Singapore Will Go For Green’ or ‘From Today, We

Will Go For Green’. In ‘From Today, Singapore Will Go For Green’, the emphasis is on the country, which could be viewed in a detached manner by the people, depending on their level of emotional affiliation towards their country, and thus may or may not have much impact on them; in ‘From Today, We Will Go For Green’, the effect is inclusory, emphasising the togetherness of the speaker (i.e. the government) and the hearer (the people), where the achievement of the effect hinges on the extent the people wish to be allied with the government. But in choosing to use the collective pronoun ‘everyone’, the accent is on each and every individual in Singapore, and by dint of the herd instinct the slogan impels people to follow what everyone else will, apparently, be doing, that is ‘going for green’. In this way, the slogan attempts to persuade by appealing to the people’s assumed desire for conformity and concomitant fear of public ostracism.

Table 1: Use of Pronouns in the Slogans

Let’s not waste precious water
Let’s save precious water
From Today, <b>Everyone</b> in Singapore Will Go for Green
When <b>We</b> Think Green, The Possibilities are Endless
Every Little Thing <b>You</b> Do Counts
Please Act Today for All <b>Our</b> Tomorrows
Please Don’t Shatter <b>Our</b> Peace and Quiet
When <b>You</b> Litter, People Look at <b>You</b> Differently
Let’s Keep <b>Our</b> Toilets Clean and Dry
Public, It’s <b>Your</b> Toilet Too
Clean Toilet in <b>Our</b> Garden City
Clean and Green: That’s the Way <b>We</b> Like It
Clean Public Toilets are Possible. Let’s Make them Happen

While there is a distinct favouring of collective pronouns that co-construct the government and people as one unified, undifferentiated body, the use of the second person

pronoun, ‘you’ and its possessive form ‘your’, as in *Every Little Thing You Do Counts*, *When You Litter, People Look at You Differently* and *Public, It’s Your Toilet Too*, though less common is nonetheless significant. On the surface, these instances may seem to run counter to the observation made earlier concerning the deliberate attempt to co-construct the government and people as one in order to convey the ideology of collective ownership of and hence collective responsibility for the environment. However, upon closer examination, it is clear that they merely represent an *alternative* rather than a contradictory aspect of the government’s persuasive rhetoric. Both *Every Little Thing You Do Counts* as well as *When You Litter, People Look at You Differently* focus on the individual member of the public, but for opposite effects. While the first slogan celebrates the efforts made by the individual in order to encourage, the second denigrates the individual litter-bug in order to deter and discourage. In *Public, It’s Your Toilet Too*, there is an inherent ambiguity: the word ‘Public’ could either be construed as a direct address, rallying members of the public to keep public toilets clean or an adjective serving as a contrast with ‘your [that is, personal] toilet’. On the one hand, the slogan could be read simply as a call to the public to treat public toilets with the same sort of care as they would their own toilets; on the other, it could be interpreted as an attempt to re-conceptualize the notion of ‘public toilets’ (from being a public amenity that anyone can use but for which no one is responsible to a toilet that belongs to everyone and for which everyone who uses it should therefore be responsible), so as to encourage members of the public to treat ‘public toilets’ in the same way as they would treat and maintain their private toilets at home. In addressing the individual hearer through the second person pronoun, all three slogans merely highlight the pivotal role of the individual in this national

campaign and do not undermine the sense of shared responsibility and collective effort highlighted in the other slogans. The overall message of the campaigns is thus for every individual member of society to take up responsibility not just individually but also collectively with the rest of society towards a 'clean and green' Singapore.

### 4.3 Politeness

Another striking feature in the slogans is the use of the politeness marker, 'please', in two slogans: *Please Act Today for All Our Tomorrows* and *Please Don't Shatter Our Peace and Quiet*. Adding the word 'please' makes an utterance more polite and, used at the beginning of an otherwise bald-on-record imperative command, 'softens' and effectively transforms it into a plea. This is significant as a plea assumes that the one doing the pleading is less powerful in relation to the one to whom the plea is directed. Thus, the use of the politeness marker, 'please', is a clever sleight-of-hand that seemingly reverses the traditional power relations between the government and the governed and constructs the people in a more powerful position vis-à-vis the government.

Let us take this notion of 'politeness' further by delving into the pragmatic meaning and expression of politeness in an utterance. The term 'politeness', in pragmatics, is related but not reducible to its conventional, non-technical sense of proper social conduct and tactful behaviour; it is a notion referring to ways in which the relational function in linguistic action is carried out (Kasper, 1998) or how the relationship between the interactants is linguistically encoded and enacted. Leech's 'Principle of Politeness'

(1983) conceptualizes the pragmatic value of politeness in terms of maxims like the ‘Tact Maxim’: minimize cost to other, while maximizing benefit to other. The ‘cost’ is what the hearer needs to incur in relation to the ‘benefit’ that the hearer would receive if he/she were to act according to the speaker’s directive. To illustrate, if your hostess says, ‘Try some of my home-made cookies’, the directive can be construed as polite as it (normally) involves more benefit than cost to the hearer. Conversely, if a drill sergeant says to his soldier, ‘Do fifty push-ups right now’, the directive would clearly be construed as involving more cost than benefit to the hearer and hence is impolite. Thus, by focusing on the maxim of ‘Tact’, i.e. by looking at politeness in terms of the relative ‘cost’ and ‘benefit’ of the utterance to the hearer, we may be able to produce a sharper analysis of the ‘politeness quotient’ of the campaign slogans.

Slogans using bald imperatives, such as *Be green for life* and *Keep Singapore clean and mosquito-free*, direct the people to perform an act or behave in a certain way, like adopting an environmentally conscious attitude or keeping Singapore clean and mosquito-free, acts that manifestly entail effort and are therefore ‘costly’. However, not all bald imperatives are equally ‘costly’. The adverbial ‘for life’ in the slogan *Be green for life* spells out a life-long commitment that people ought to embrace; it prescribes an attitude, a philosophy even, rather than mere action. Put in sociological terms, the ‘social product’ (Kotler and Roberto, 1989) being targeted is at the higher level of social attitudes and values, transforming social ideology rather than merely changing social practice. The effort required on the part of the people and hence ‘cost’ is therefore arguably greater than that implied by slogans that merely advocate a change in a

particular social act or behaviour like keeping Singapore clean (*Keep Singapore clean or Clean Public Toilets are Possible. Let's Make Them Happen*). Similarly, the time adverbials in the slogans *Keep it clean all day – morning, afternoon and night* and *Please act today for all our tomorrows* also specify a time-frame. The (underlined) adverbial in the former highlights the need for a consistent and continuous effort, while that in the latter places the accent on the urgency of the act; in so doing, both add considerable 'cost' to the slogan. This is contrasted with slogans that are targeted at a higher level of generality like *Keep Singapore clean and pollution free*, without specifying the extent or time-frame of the action called for. The slogan *When you litter, people look at you differently* is interesting because the 'cost' being constructed here is a social one. When people commit an 'anti-social act', such as littering, they would have to bear the 'cost' of society looking at them in a contemptuous way. Thus, the 'cost' here is not manifest in terms of effort but the full weight of social pressure that is brought to bear on the individual. How 'costly' this is to the individual, though, is a function of the extent the individual fears social rejection or even ostracism. This slogan also contrasts with a similar but diametrically opposed slogan: *When we think green, the possibilities are endless*. While the slogans are similar in that they both entail some form of 'cost', it is the difference in the way they use the 'cost-benefit' relation to persuade that is interesting. While the former applies social pressure to constrain people against littering by referring to the *negative* repercussion ('cost') that would befall the person who litters, the latter attempts to appeal by referring to the *positive* result ('benefit') of adopting a 'green' attitude. The former invokes the 'stick' as a deterrent against littering, while the latter invokes the 'carrot' (albeit a vaguely worded one) to get people to be

environmentally friendly. In this sense, the persuasive strategies used in these two slogans are diametrically opposed to each other.

Turning now to 'beneficial' slogans, let's begin with an interesting slogan. *A decade past, a millennium ahead* is a rather striking slogan for the simple reason that it does not state any overt or covert benefit, but merely refers to the past and future through two contrasting nominal phrases. In the context of the 1999 *Clean and Green Week* in which the slogan was used, the significance of the reference to the 'decade past' lies in the fact that 1999 marked the tenth anniversary of the *Clean and Green Week*. The purpose behind the slogan, presumably, is to direct the people's vision to the new millennium, with a general message of hope for the future rather than a specific one on environmental protection. The slogan attempts to capture the spirit of hope that people harbour for the future, as signified by the dawn of a new millennium, in order to exhort them to care for the global environment which contributes to the assurance of a future. The message appears to be: If the world environment becomes irreparably damaged, the hope and future of humankind will die along with it. Thus, the benefit of environmental protection which this slogan seems to be suggesting, though rather obliquely, is potentially of global proportions as it relates to the hope that the entire humankind has invested in the future. It echoes an earlier (1993) slogan, *Please act for all our tomorrows*, which also constructs the benefit in terms of a vision of a (common) future for Singapore. The slogan *A gracious society cares for the environment and its neighbourhood* attempts to persuade by appealing to the people's (presumed) admiration for and desire to be regarded as a 'gracious society'. Hence, the implied 'benefit' of

caring for the environment and its neighbourhood in this case is that of becoming a gracious people. Of course, this ‘benefit’ would only be actualized if the notion of becoming a gracious society is a sufficiently attractive proposition for the people to take up. The slogans *Every little effort counts in keeping our neighbourhood clean and pleasant* and *Every little thing you do counts* attempt to persuade by minimizing the amount of effort needed to perform the act, where the operative word is ‘little’, while, at the same time, maximizing the ‘benefits’ that can be gained. The ‘benefit’ is more explicit in the first slogan (having a clean and pleasant neighbourhood) than the second, where the implication is that every small act that people perform would contribute towards the general cause of environmental conservation. The ‘benefit’ here is therefore only hinted at via the word ‘counts’ rather than directly alluded to. In the slogans *Please act for all our tomorrows* and *Clean toilet in our garden city*, the ‘benefit’ is also signalled in explicit, though less personal or tangible, terms through the collective possessive pronoun ‘our’. Here, the construction of the ‘benefit’ is premised on the idea that *we* will have a future (‘all our tomorrows’) and *we* will have clean public toilets that complement *our* garden city. In other words, the benefits to be gained are collective, shared by all members who inhabit those domains specified. This contrasts sharply with the slogan, *Public, it’s your toilet too*, which, instead of collectivizing the ‘benefit’, *personalizes* it by using the personal possessive pronoun ‘your’. The ‘benefit’ being constructed here is that, as users of public toilets, people would certainly benefit from having a clean and hygienic toilet to use, a benefit which can only be gained if people treat public toilets as their personal toilets. In a way, this slogan positions Singaporeans as people who are somewhat self-centered by nature and hence more likely to be

motivated by benefits that accrue directly to themselves than those that benefit everyone. Tangible, personal benefits (such as having a clean and hygienic personal toilet) are assumed here to be more attractive than general, collective gains (such as ‘a clean and pleasant environment’ or ‘clean toilet[s] in our garden city’), and are therefore being dangled in this slogan as a ‘carrot’ before the eyes of Singaporeans to motivate a change in behavior.

## **5. DISCUSSION**

As one of Singapore’s earliest public education campaigns, the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* was a campaign that did not merely seek to get Singaporeans to maintain the cleanliness of the country; more significantly, it also sought to evoke a sense of pride among Singaporeans in their newly independent country. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the campaign was launched just three years after Singapore had gained independence in 1965. Through this Campaign, Singaporeans were urged to treat Singapore as their home which would make them co-owners of the country, unlike in the colonial days when Singapore was merely a piece of real estate which belonged to the British and Singaporeans were merely employees working under a foreign master. As co-owners, they would therefore be expected to assume the responsibility to keep the streets, parks and other public places clean, just as they would for their own homes. Besides, a clean living environment was also seen by the government as a reflection of an orderly and well-organized society, which would in turn boost Singapore’s economic development and progress. The government believed that a clean and orderly

environment would not only help to boost the morale of individual Singaporeans, which would help the people to raise their standards of economic performance, but also help attract foreign investors to the fledgling nation. It was felt that whether a foreign company decides to invest in Singapore depended to some extent on what their executives saw when they were in Singapore to make preliminary studies. If they were impressed by the degree of organization and social discipline in Singapore, they were more likely to set up their factories and even headquarters in the country. In general, the Singapore government has constructed a clean and green environment as a national asset which Singaporeans should not only be proud of but zealously guard. In this sense, the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* was conceived not merely to spruce up the physical environment of the country, but more importantly to strengthen the spirit of the people to be disciplined, responsible, robust and, above all, proud of their own country. In this way, the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* becomes a political instrument by which the government's goal of nation-building and economic development are directly expressed.

Thus, the significance of the *Keep Singapore Clean Campaign* lies in the fact that it was essentially a public education exercise, aimed at cultivating a sense of pride among Singaporeans in their newly independent nation. Since the island of Singapore lacks natural resources, with the exception of a natural, deep harbour, the physical land itself becomes an emblem of the nation that Singaporeans possess, a reification of the sense of identity and pride in one's homeland. To this end, the Singapore government has constructed the physical territoriality of Singapore as part of the heritage that Singaporeans can be proud of and would be willing to protect and defend. This is clearly

seen in a speech made by the former Minister for the Environment in 1983, an excerpt of which is reproduced below:

A clean environment is important. It is a measure of the quality of our life, an asset which the future generations will find worth defending. It is important for a citizen returning to Singapore after a business or holiday trip to feel relieved that he has returned home to a place where the air is clean, the water is safe to drink, and where tropical diseases are relatively unknown. It is important that he should step from his plane into an airport terminal which is kept spotlessly clean and drive through a green city free of decaying refuse and litter. We are building a heritage (Ong, 1983: 28-29).

This construction of Singapore's 'heritage' in terms of its physical environment represents part of the government's broader vision of nation-building, which it hopes to achieve by getting Singaporeans to develop a sense of ownership of Singapore. Unfortunately, this desire to build Singapore up as a nation by creating a sense of ownership was expressed rather dogmatically through slogans like *Keep Singapore Clean and Pollution-Free*. This rather authoritarian approach was complemented by the use of legislative measures that criminalize 'litter-bugs' and make littering an anti-social behavior. Once littering was recognized as an anti-social act punishable by law, it became justifiable for the government, with the support of the media, to adopt the name-and-shame approach mentioned earlier to publicly disgrace and hence deter 'litter-bugs'. It was not until the 1990s with the launch of the *Clean and Green Week* and *Clean Public Toilets Campaign* that a fresh approach was adopted to urge Singaporeans to treat their country as one big home and to behave like co-owners of the country, where ownership would mean the people taking the responsibility and initiative to keep the parks, streets,

toilets and other public places clean. This idea of collective ownership of the environment and, by extension, the nation itself, is partly expressed through slogans like *When we think green, the possibilities are endless*, *Let's keep our toilets clean*, *Clean toilet in our garden city* and *Clean and Green: That's the Way We Like It*. Be it collaborative efforts in thinking green, keeping our public amenities clean or even expressing what we like in unison, these slogans simultaneously appeal to and reinforce the sense of *esprit de corps* and collective ownership and accountability. Furthermore, some of these slogans not only construct Singapore as belonging to all Singaporeans, they also construct a reality in which Singaporeans share a common future, a common destiny. Slogans like *Please act today for all our tomorrows* and *A decade past, a millennium ahead* presuppose or imply a 'tomorrow' shared by all Singaporeans, with the underlying message that they therefore have a vested interest in protecting their common destiny. Thus, it would appear that the government wants to rally the people of Singapore together to encourage them not only to care and protect Singapore as their home and property, but also their common future and destiny. Environmentalism therefore becomes the ground on which the government's nation-building goal is constructed and a rallying point around which the nationhood of Singapore would hopefully cohere.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In many ways, Singaporeans can be proud of their country's achievements in the domain of environmental protection and conservation. In a relatively short span of about

forty years, Singapore has responded to the challenges of fast-paced population growth, industrial development and urbanization by building a 'Garden City' with a clean and green image that is renowned throughout Asia and beyond, a city with a well-designed land-use plan and a comprehensive and sophisticated environmental infrastructure. The government's proactive planning and timely execution of those plans are certainly key factors that contributed to these achievements, but the role and significance of the media and, in particular, the various environmental campaigns, should not be understated either. As Singapore enters into a new millennium, it would be interesting to see how existing campaigns like the *Clean and Green Week* and *Clean Public Toilets Campaign* can be refocused and repositioned and perhaps new campaigns mounted to meet the challenges of an increasingly affluent and sophisticated society with higher expectations not only in the standard of living but also the quality of life in a clean and gracious environment.

In the final analysis, the relationship between the various environmental campaigns and the government's nation-building agenda can be conceived as a symbiotic one: the government wants its citizens to feel a sense of pride and belonging to their country because it has a clean and pleasant environment, a pride which would help cohere Singapore's pluralistic populace and, in turn, boost investor confidence in the economy; at the same time, the government wants Singaporeans to care for Singapore's physical environment by making them believe that Singapore belongs to them. One ideology simultaneously feeds on and nourishes the other, to make Singaporeans feel that a 'clean and green Singapore' is indeed the way they like it!

**Appendix 1: Environmental Campaign Slogans**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>CAMPAIGN</b>	<b>SLOGAN</b>
1968	Keep Singapore Clean	Keep Singapore Clean
1969	Keep Singapore Clean and Mosquito-Free	Keep Singapore Clean and Mosquito-Free
1970-1	Keep Singapore Pollution-Free	Keep Singapore Clean and Pollution-Free
1990	Clean and Green Week	From Today, Everyone in Singapore Will Go for Green
1991	Clean and Green Week	When We Think Green, The Possibilities Are Endless
1992	Clean and Green Week	Every Little Thing You Do Counts
1993	Clean and Green Week	Please Act Today For All Our Tomorrows
1994	Clean and Green Week	Please Don't Shatter Our Peace and Quiet
1995	Clean and Green Week	When You Litter, People Look at You Differently
1996	Clean Public Toilets	Keep It Clean all day -- Morning, Afternoon and Night
1996	Clean and Green Week	A Gracious Society Cares for the Environment and Its Neighbourhood
1997	Clean Public Toilets	Let's Keep Our Toilets Clean and Dry
1997	Clean and Green Week	Be Green For Life
1998	Clean Public Toilets	Public, It's Your Toilet Too
1998	Clean and Green Week	Every Little Effort Counts in Keeping Our Neighbourhood Clean and Pleasant
1999	Clean Public Toilets	Clean Toilet in our Garden City
1999	Clean and Green Week	A Decade Past, A Millennium Ahead
2000	Clean and Green Week	Clean and Green: That's the way we like it
2001	Clean Public Toilets	Clean Public Toilets are Possible. Let's Make them Happen

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