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8 Domestic Brand Politics and the Modern Publicity State

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As other chapters in this collection demonstrate, the nature of political communication has changed in the era of the modern publicity state. Rather than simply providing information, the modern publicity state focuses on the promotion of its activities. Through issue definition, the modern publicity state attempts to persuade citizens of the merits of its actions in order to get society to agree on how to approach issues of the day. This has important democratic implications, as elected *governments* consisting of representatives of political parties use *state* resources obtained from the citizenry to advance narrow partisan goals. Thus, public funds can be used to advance private agendas.[1]

The emergence of the modern publicity state has coincided with the appearance of a new form of political communication: domestic brand politics. Inspired by an emerging literature on nation branding, this approach shows how governments use lessons from branding nations globally to change how citizens perceive their governments (Nimijean 2006b). In the era of domestic brand politics, politicians use issues central to the national political culture to create an emotional attachment between government policies and public opinion. Elements of national identity – such as symbols and "national values" – connect policy and citizens. While this may be seen as a normal dimension of political communication, it affects the quality of democratic practice, for the government in power is able to use state resources, notably state-sponsored public opinion research, to identify and track public opinion and then reshape public policy in ways that resonate with the electorate.

There is a strong connection between analyses of the modern publicity state and domestic brand politics. They both demonstrate that contemporary emphases on communication, branding, and image

management have reached new heights: institutional restructuring of the state allows governing parties to use communication and marketing techniques, which are increasingly integrated into the daily operations of government, to gain and cement their hold on power.[2] The communication of a national brand (or an element thereof) to a national audience can be politically motivated, reflecting the concerns of critics of the modern publicity state. Indeed, domestic political branding accentuates their concerns.

Nation Branding and Domestic Brand Politics

Nation branding is a recent state technique allowing countries to stand out in a crowded international marketplace. Its emergence in the 1990s coincided with the end of the Cold War and the rise of globalization and neoliberalism. In this environment, people and capital became more mobile, and shifting political considerations affected the potential power and influence of countries. Governments realized that national image was increasingly a key determinant in their ability to attract skilled labour and foreign direct investment and increase their influence in international relations (van Ham 2001b; 2008).

There is an important domestic and historical dimension to nation branding exercises. For example, nation-branding exercises can increase national pride, as seen in the hosting of mega-events such as the Olympic Games or World's Fairs, even though the benefits are less tangible than anticipated (Whitson 2004; 2005; Whitson and Horne 2006). The nation branding literature largely treats domestic politics and policy implications as secondary considerations, addressing domestic concerns when they affect the truthfulness of a country's external message (among others, see Anholt 2004, 216–17; a notable exception is Tatevossian 2008). Governments must avoid the temptation of propaganda, instead building their image on a foundation of domestic accomplishments: "A [country's] reputation can never be constructed through communications, slogans and logos; it needs to be *earned*" (Anholt 2009; emphasis in original).

Might the new governmental emphasis on articulating its national image abroad also be aimed at domestic audiences? van Ham (2001b, 3–4) argues that state branding represents a shift in political paradigms to a "postmodern world of images and influence" that is "gradually supplanting nationalism." This affects not only how the state projects its image internationally but also how the state conducts its relations

with citizens, who are influenced increasingly by consumerism and branding. A new state-citizen relationship has emerged, along business to customer lines, using techniques such as focus groups, resulting in the redefinition of citizens "as consumers of public policy" (van Ham 2001a). Governments use nationalist symbols for domestic purposes, though van Ham (ibid.) suggests that it is a response to citizen-consumer demands. The function of national identity therefore changes in the era of the brand state as "brand states exploit their heritage and history as logos and folk-motifs" (van Ham 2002, 263). Van Ham concludes that "location branding … plays an increasingly important internal function of identity-formation" (ibid., 254); the national brand makes "citizens feel better and more confident about themselves by giving them a sense of belonging and a clear self-concept" (van Ham 2008, 131).

Alternatively, branding national identity may have become a substitute for public policy. For example, Rose, who has written a chapter on advertising for this volume, argues that van Ham's "sanguine view of marketing" requires examination, for it allows governments to focus on changing *perceptions* of policies rather than the policies themselves. He contends that state branding is a "deeply conservative development, one that sees propaganda replace policy" (Rose 2003, 12).

Rose's critique provides a useful starting point for examining the domestic brand state and its connections to the modern publicity state. It draws our attention to the link between public policy and government communications, emphasizing the articulation of values and national image. When articulated policies and programs are framed in terms of values, stated values can point to shortcomings in policy. This was the case in Canada during the 1990s, when neoliberal policies that resulted in growing socioeconomic inequality were presented as reflecting progressive values of "caring and sharing" and a new value of "fiscal sovereignty." This allowed governments to ignore demands from the citizenry for more extensive support for social policy (Nimijean 2005b, 46).

When the state links the externally projected national image to supposed values shared by its citizens, the paradoxical nature of national identity is reinforced: governments promote the celebration of ideals rather than the accomplishments that shaped the national identity, ignoring the current state of public policy. This creates rhetoric-reality gaps that undermine branding efforts (ibid.). Thus, while van Ham (2001b, 2) defines the brand state as "the outside world's ideas about a particular country," the concept must be expanded, for it also applies

domestically, representing a citizen's idealized view of a country, complete with emotional resonance. For example, the idea of Canada as a country of peacekeeping, a core element of Canada's international image, resonates strongly with Canadians, even though in the past two decades Canada's participation in international peacekeeping has declined steadily, to the point that it now hardly performs peacekeeping and that the nature of Canadian peacekeeping has changed (Anker 2005; Simpson 2002).

The connection between international branding campaigns and the domestic political culture – the international-domestic nexus of nation branding (Nimijean 2006b) – is inherently political. There is a form of domestic governance that regulates political life (Howell 2005), and values and symbols linked to the international image can be used to shape policy choices. For example, the Harper government's promotion of Arctic sovereignty and Canadian patriotism is connected to the government's policy agenda of promoting the Canadian military. Thus, the planned $9 billion purchase of F-35 stealth fighter jets has been defended in terms of protecting Canadian sovereignty (Clark and Chase 2010). Most recently, the Harper government used a key Canadian symbol (the national flag) and a key day (National Flag Day) to honour two "Red Friday Ladies," who encouraged Canadians to wear the colours of the national flag (red and white) in order to show support for Canadian military members (Harper 2011a).

In the Canadian case, using the principles of nation branding to achieve policy goals not only transformed the state but also transformed domestic politics. The federal government promoted the celebration of Canadian ideals and identity at home, reflecting a growing sense of Canadian pride. In recent years, politicians have used the ideals and institutions promoted abroad to sell domestic policies.

Like governments of other countries, the Canadian federal government began a concerted branding campaign in the mid-1990s. The Liberal government of Jean Chrétien (1993–2003) tried to rebrand Canada's international image. Focus groups in the United States revealed that Canada was seen as a country of hockey, snow, and ice and not one of high technology and advanced capitalism, thus hurting its ability to attract foreign direct investment. The economic imperative was reinforced by the Liberal government's 1995 foreign policy statement, *Canada in the World*, which emphasized public diplomacy and the "export" of Canadian values. The federal government also emphasized diversity and official multiculturalism and the associated values of

caring, sharing, tolerance, and hospitality. The goal was to communicate a new image emphasizing Canada as a place of economic dynamism and as a country in which all people of the world would feel at home and able to prosper economically (Nimijean 2006b). The Liberals portrayed Canada as a "middle power" that used "soft power" and peacekeeping, reflecting its values as a country of redistribution and social justice to both foreign and domestic audiences. This was captured in the speech "The Canadian Way in the 21st Century" (Chrétien 2000), presented by Chrétien to the Progressive Governance for the 21st-century conference of "Left-leaning" countries in 2000 hosted by the German Social Democratic government. Chrétien claimed that Canada was at the global forefront of countries seeking to marry progressive social and foreign policies with "responsible" fiscal policies, claiming that Canada had "invented" the "Third Way" politics that dominated policy circles at the time, and indeed that this had always been "the Canadian way." By skilfully weaving a selective overview of Canadian history with Liberal accomplishments over the years, this vision of identity effectively suggested that Canada's national identity was linked to the Liberal Party (see Nimijean 2005b, 37–9).[3] More importantly, given that most Canadians have a "mixed bag" of values, this mirrors the self-image many Canadians have held of themselves over the past two decades as socially progressive and fiscally conservative (Nevitte and Cochrane 2007).

It is fair to ask if the Chrétien government's exercise in adding a partisan twist to a redefined national narrative was a one-off. The answer is no. Since assuming power, the Harper government has sought to redefine the Canadian identity with a Conservative twist, linking pride in the nation and a celebration of Canada with the military, sports, and the Canadian North, to produce a Canada that is not a soft "middle power" – an outlook associated with the Liberal Party – but a world leader and, in the words of the prime minister, a "very special place in the world" that is the envy of others (Slater and Ibbitson 2010).

The external projection of Canada is one of a military power with a glorious military past, embodying what the historian Ian Mackay has called "Warrior Nation" (McKay and Swift 2012). This can be seen in the ongoing celebration of the armed forces, including:

- Canada's participation in the 2011 Libya intervention by NATO, which was portrayed as a victory not only for democracy but also for the Canadian Forces. It culminated in an $850,000 victory

celebration on Parliament Hill – including a military fly past – that was planned months before the end of the actual conflict (Pugliese 2012). As the prime minister noted, taking a swipe at Canada's diplomatic and peacekeeping traditions that may be associated with the Liberals, "the fact that there is now 'new hope' in Libya gives some proof to the old saying, 'a handful of soldiers is better than a mouthful of arguments'" (Harper 2011b).

- This muscular rhetoric began early in Harper's tenure in power, where he attempted to get Canada to be seen as a world leader on the world stage via militarism, thus framing the Afghanistan conflict in terms of Canadian values. Speaking in New York City in 2006, the prime minister stated that Canada was taking "real casualties" (CBC News 2006a). Losses, he suggested, were "the price of leadership" (CBC News 2006b). In response to critics who said Canada should withdraw, he declared that "there will be some who want to cut and run, but cutting and running is not my way and it's not the Canadian way. We don't make a commitment and then run away at the first sign of trouble. We don't and we will not, as long as I'm leading this country" (CBC News 2006c).
- A celebration of Canada's military tradition, including a $5 million celebration of the War of 1812, about which the Heritage Minister James Moore said, "Canada would not exist had the American invasion not been repelled during the War of 1812, and for that reason, the war is a defining chapter in our country's history" (Boswell 2012).
- Looking at putting military bases in the Canadian North (Woods 2011) and linking a controversial $9 billion purchase of F-35 fighter jets to the protection of Canadian sovereignty in the North (Pugliese 2010).
- A celebration of the Canadian military and a military flyover at the 2011 Grey Cup.
- Featuring Canada's national Vimy Memorial on a new $20 bill (replacing an Aboriginal sculpture, Bill Reid's *The Spirit of Haida Gwaii*).
- The Department of National Defence restructured its annual departmental performance report, devoting more space to the military's connection to the Canadian identity and arguing that military values shape the Canadian identity, using public opinion results showing that 87 per cent of Canadians see the military as a source of pride (Meyer 2011).

This approach has been complemented by an emphasis on Canada's historic links to the monarchy, which included several 2011 initiatives (Boesveld 2011):

- Organizing a high-profile 2011 visit of Prince William and Catherine, the Duchess of Cambridge
- Restoring "Royal" to the titles of the Air Force and Navy
- Ordering Canadian embassies abroad to hang pictures of the Canadian monarch Queen Elizabeth II (This followed a controversial replacement of modern Quebec art in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade by a portrait of the Queen.)

Prime Minister Harper and his government have also wrapped themselves in country and flag, which has replicated the elevated and ceremonial stature of the presidential brand prevalent in the United States. This includes

- Travelling with a lectern called "Canada" wherever he goes
- Considering changing the colours of the prime minister's official airplane from military grey to one on which "Canada" and "True North Strong and Free" may be painted on it (Raj 2011)
- Supporting Bill C-288, the *National Flag of Canada Act*, a bill protecting the right of citizens to fly the Canadian flag wherever they wish
- Indeed, 35 per cent of photos of the prime minister issued by the Prime Minister's Office in 2010 included Canadian flags (Delacourt 2012)

Finally, the Harper government adopted what it called "principled leadership" on foreign policy – notably a strong pro-Israel stance at the United Nations, in contrast to Canada's more balanced and nuanced historic position (Clark 2011), which may be associated with the Liberal Party. Indeed, it appears that the Conservative government instructed foreign policy officers to stop using foreign policy terms and language associated with the Liberals (Davis 2009a, 2009b). The stark contrast between the two parties was made clear by the prime minister in 2011, when he stated, "We campaigned on this new Canadian reality. Not on a dream or a fantasy or a slogan, but upon the reality of this great country rising – a country founded on great principles – a courageous warrior, a compassionate neighbour, a confident partner – and under a strong, stable, national, majority, Conservative government – the best country in the world" (Harper 2011c).

That these positions and views are often complex and controversial do not detract from the political strategy being employed. The goal is to consistently create the impression in citizen's minds that Canadian values and institutions – which inform the Canadian identity – are linked to and defended by the Conservative Party.

The Chrétien and Harper cases show how promoting foreign images of Canada and recasting the national identity along partisan ideological lines domestically occurs; in turn, this image can be used to nurture domestic political support. As we will now see, this has been enabled by the rise of the domestic brand state.

The Domestic Brand State

The international-domestic nexus is the foundation of the domestic brand state. In a Westminster political system such as Canada's, the party forming the government can use national images to advance its partisan interests by taking advantage of institutional changes that accompany the shift to the postmodern world of images. These include the promotion of national symbols by the government; control over major policy development and linking the communication of policy to national identity; framing policy initiatives in terms of national values and, by extension, framing opposition perspectives as outside the national consensus; and extensive use of public opinion research, increasingly sponsored by the state.

Governments can exploit these issues in three dimensions of the domestic brand state. First, the domestic brand state is preoccupied with values politics and national identity, using it as the basis for its political strategy. Second, the domestic brand state relies heavily on public opinion research and political marketing – in essence, tracking consumer preferences – to sell and reshape its "product." Third, the domestic brand state is very centralized, allowing it to execute the strategy.

Values Politics and National Identity

The essence of branding is the creation of an emotional connection between a consumer and a service or good. Brands are not actual products or services; branding refers to how products and services are represented and perceived. The use of qualities and emotions to represent products and services creates an emotional connection between them and the consumer. This connection sees consumers willing to pay a premium in exchange for a high-quality product, for it becomes a mode of

expression of the consumer (among others, see Clifton, Simmons, and Ahmad 2004; Holt 2004; Kelly and Silverstein 2005; Klein 2000).

The emotional connection is also important in brand politics, though it operates in a slightly different manner. A country brand, as promoted by the state, embodies values and emotional qualities, and citizens connect to their sense of citizenship through national identity. The centrality of a national image is the key distinguishing feature of the domestic brand state. It is the emotional connector between government and citizen in an era of globalization and the brand state. While many believed that globalization would reduce the appeal of a national identity, globalization at its outset was an elite phenomenon, and local and national connections remained important for citizens (Guibernau 2004, 138); consequently, citizens have turned to their nations in order to feel more grounded during such a turbulent period. Indeed, in the mid-1990s, the Canadian government acknowledged that there was a role for social policy to address such feelings of insecurity in order to avoid social upheaval potentially caused by the downscaling of the welfare state (J. Brodie 2002, 389; Nimijean 2005b, 32–3).

Citizens articulate national exceptionalism through displays of national pride. Often displayed in response to mega-events such as the Olympic Games, in Canada national pride is also expressed through anti-Americanism and a belief that the "Canadian way" and, in particular, programs such as health care are much better in Canada. Political parties and governments appeal to citizens' sense of national identity and their values and stoke pride in order to form the connection necessary to develop a successful brand.[4] Parties also try to redefine the nature of national identity in order to gain a partisan advantage. Thus, the consumer brand relationship is transferred to the political sphere.

This is accomplished through the political appropriation of national values and symbols: "The bonding power of national symbols is sometimes invoked with instrumental ends in mind" (Cerulo 1995, 19). Symbols have a strong resonance with the citizenry, so invoking them involves efforts to exert control over citizens by merging their personas with the symbols. This strategy is reinforced by rhetorical articulations of national identity in efforts to rally the citizenry: these are "politically consequential" and influence a country's laws, policies, and sense of imagined community (Bruner 2002, 1). Canadian politicians regularly invoke images of Canada to link their parties to supposed Canadian values. For example, in the past decade, Canada has been both a "northern tiger" (the Liberals' John Manley seeking to promote an

entrepreneurial Canada; *The Economist* 2003b, 34) and a "wolverine" (Prime Minister Harper saying that Canada was like the small but fierce creature that defended itself against stronger adversaries; Boswell 2007, A15) to communicate images of Canada to foreign and domestic audiences.

This builds upon a long-standing tradition of prime ministers using national visions to promote their political agendas: we can think of John A. Macdonald's "National Policy," John Diefenbaker's "Northern Vision," or Pierre Trudeau's "Just Society." However, the role of a national identity changes in the era of the brand state, due to the homogenizing policy effects of globalization and the widespread adoption of neoliberalism. Symbolic differences, as opposed to ideological or policy-based differences, assume greater importance in the political competition between parties on the Left and the Right: "We are beginning to see product parity in the political arena just as in the consumer goods arena; policy is converging and the key differences between the major political parties in much of the western world are attitudinal, rather than substantial" (Anonymous 2001).[5]

In Canada, this has centred on the belief in balanced budgets, low taxes, universal health care, and a fair degree of public services (Centre for Research and Information on Canada 2004, 3–5). As Nevitte and Cochrane (2007) argue, while values have become more important in Canadian politics and while different groups of voters have different "bundles" of values, the overall direction of value change is "Leftward," a factor that parties of the Right must acknowledge. This explains the incrementalist approach of Prime Minister Harper in advancing a non-Liberal, "centre-Right" agenda. He has been reluctant to tackle controversial issues in the areas of social values (abortion, same-sex marriage), social policy (two-tier health care), and economic policy (despite a record deficit, he has stated that there will not be "radical" spending cuts). His government has been careful to link more controversial issues, such as its "law and order" campaign and increased military spending, to Canadian values and patriotism.

Consequently, political competition is increasingly based on a party's ability to frame its platform in terms of national values, as well as its ability to frame opposition policies as beyond the national consensus. Indeed, this is one of the key features of domestic brand of politics: the ongoing attempt of governing parties to present themselves "in the flag." For example, the 2004 and 2006 Canadian federal elections were highlighted by Liberal leader Paul Martin's attempts to frame

Conservative leader Stephen Harper as Americanizing and to remind Canadians that only his party truly embodied their values (see Nimijean 2006a, 88–90). Since winning the 2006 election, Harper has adopted a strategy of trying to convince Canadians that his party, and not the Liberals, reflects the Canadian consensus. This is part of his effort to achieve his main goal of challenging the hegemony of the Liberal Party (Martin 2010, 6; Wells 2006, 5). On the first anniversary of his government, Harper stated, "East and West, French and English, immigrant and native born, we are all proud champions of these founding values, all champions of the Canadian way. Conservative values and Canadian values, I think we've demonstrated in the past year that these are one and the same" (quoted in Mayeda 2007, A4). This quote is telling, for it implies that values that are not Conservative are also not Canadian. Ironically, Harper criticized the Liberals for questioning his patriotism in the 2006 federal election, asking if it was possible to be a Canadian without being a Liberal (see Nimijean 2006a, 90).

When values are consistently used to support governmental actions, critics and political opponents will challenge the government narrative. Values associated with a national identity are therefore rearticulated by governments to reconcile rhetoric-reality gaps (Nimijean 2005b) in a manner similar to Stuckey's notion of "celebratory othering." Stuckey (2004, 6) argues that the state can use the language of inclusion even if the state is maintaining stratification, for inclusion is defined by the dominant culture, seeking to recognize minority groups but first and foremost seeking to include minorities in the polity; this recognition often precedes policy initiatives or legal recognition.

In this vein, the *rhetoric* of nationalism and the promotion of national solidarity are state strategies providing security to citizens at a time of great disruption. This allows the state to implement public policy that is at odds with this rhetoric. For example, we can understand the Chrétien response to the challenges of globalization, neoliberalism, and national unity through the articulation of a redefined Canadian identity. Chrétien's economic policy response to globalization was a series of neoliberal measures reducing the size of the Canadian welfare state. As Armstrong (1996, 251) so aptly described the era in a chapter title, Canada, once "caring and sharing," became "greedy and mean." However, a simultaneous rhetorical strategy articulated the "Canadian way": a set of inclusive values that defined Canadian exceptionalism in terms of an ongoing concern for the less well-off in society. Thus, while inequality and stratification grew in the Chrétien era (Yalnizyan

2005), Chrétien politically contributed to a growing sense of pride and national solidarity. In other words, while the rhetoric of the Canadian way harkens to a socially progressive Canada, increasing its appeal, the Liberals essentially redefined citizenship to reflect the neoliberal times (J. Brodie 2002). Consequently, Canadians and their governments became more vocal and proud of their socially progressive identity just as the policy-based nature of such identity was disappearing and as a growing consensus on neoliberal economic and social policies emerged (Nimijean 2005a).

The Chrétien government also employed nationalist symbols and appeals to pan-Canadianism as part of its national unity strategy after the 1995 Quebec referendum. This followed advice the government received from prominent public opinion analysts who highlighted the need to create an emotional connection between Canada and the Québécois in order to diminish the popularity of the sovereigntist option in Quebec (see Greenspon and Wilson-Smith 1996, 356–60). The federal sponsorship program – promoting the visibility of the federal government in Quebec and the creation of a National Flag Day in 1996 – was a conscious effort to stoke patriotism and attachment to the country. Chrétien articulated a shared emotional sense of national identity while also stressing that Canadian values were threatened by fiscal doom and the prospect of separation. Canadian values – linked explicitly to the Liberal Party – could save the day (and the country). For example, in the 2000 election campaign, the Liberals prepared an ad that explicitly stated that Liberal values were Canadian values: "Canada is a Great Nation. Built on Liberal values. Freedom … justice … sharing … tolerance. Today, Canada can be a leader in the New World. What is important for me, Jean Chrétien, is that each and every Canadian can take their place in this New World … without ever losing sight of our fundamental values. We have a bright future. It is up to us to achieve it" (cited in Kinsella 2001, 72).

Harper's appeal to patriotism in order to slowly move Canada to the political Right also shows why rhetoric and the use of a national identity are central to brand politics. Harper's attempt to expand the base of the party beyond social conservatives reflects Nevitte and Cochrane's (2007, 268) argument that parties of the Right may need to move to the centre on moral and economic grounds or else possibly suffer electorally. Harper has tried to appeal to urban and suburban voters who would be attracted to policies based on market economics and patriotism (Wells 2006, 11–12) and to link these values to the Conservative

Party, as seen for example in the "Stand Up for Canada" theme of its 2006 election campaign (Martin 2010, 52).

Thus, promoting national symbols and linking them to the government in power is central to brand politics. Governments recognize that there is a symbolic dimension to nationalism that has considerable currency: "Politics – especially the emotionally laden politics of nationalism – seems to be more about wielding prominent symbols in popular culture than it does about choosing substantive policy alternatives" (Rose 2000, 1). Such promotion not only connects the nation to the state but also allows the state to define the nation (Geisler 2005, xv–xvi). For example, the Chrétien government advanced pan-Canadianism by highlighting national identity – through the articulation of Canadian values and the promotion of symbols of Canada, such as Flag Day, the federal sponsorship program, the Canada wordmark, and the Federal Identity Program, all prominently displayed in Liberal red.

This was not simply a tactic of the Liberal Party. Prime Minister Harper and his Conservative Party have employed similar tactics. Among other tactics, the Conservative government has changed the colours of government Web sites from Liberal red to Conservative blue and adopted the slogan "Canada's New Government" for official government communications rather than the traditional "Government of Canada" (Nimijean 2007), and in early 2011, controversy arose over the sudden proliferation of references to the "Harper Government" on official government communications (Cheadle 2011d). The Conservative Party has rewritten the *Canadian Citizenship Guide* to be more reflective of Conservative values of patriotism and celebration of the military (Ivison 2009). Early in his tenure, the banner of the prime minister's Web site (http://pm.gc.ca/eng) proclaimed the "True North Strong and Free," a key line from the national anthem, reminding Canadians of the need to promote sovereignty and resist "foreign" claims to the North while also connecting the Canadian brand to the Conservative Party. Lawrence Martin (2010, 51) argues that Harper was proud of Canada's war record and did not like the rise of "soft power." Thus, supporting the war effort and the armed forces "were part of an effort to shape a Tory patriotism, one predicated on symbols and traditions. This was central to his goal of taking the flag away from the Liberal Party" (L. Martin 2010, 51).

Therefore, far from the state responding to more consumerist citizens, as van Ham claims, the domestic brand state has a considerable instrumentalist interest in national identity. The key is to pitch it properly, as

Chrétien reminded Canadians shortly after the 1995 Quebec referendum: "The Parti Québécois did not win, Canada won. We have such a good product that, put it under the proper light, and the people will buy it" (Ha 1995, A4). The Canadian case shows how leaders appropriate national images and values in order to advance their agendas.

Public Opinion, Advertising, and Marketing Brand Politics

The second dimension of the domestic brand state is the increasingly important role of state-funded public opinion research in support of a more politicized governmental communications strategy. While this is not a new issue in political communications (for an overview, see Page 2006), the increase in public opinion research contributes to the "development in government communications that has politicized public employees and public policymaking as an extension of partisan interests … Government communications has become state communications by equating its work with the perspectives of the governing political party" (Kozolanka 2006, 344). This phenomenon assumes greater importance for developing and communicating the identity narratives central to domestic brand politics. Thus, while Nesbitt-Larking's chapter in this volume examines the ontology and methodologies of public opinion research and how they structure and influence research findings, this section focuses on the brand politics of public opinion research, specifically its messaging.

Scammell (2007, 188) argues that polling and market research are reflective of an older style of political marketing, namely "the permanent campaign." They are central to what Lees-Marshment (2004) calls the political marketing revolution. Voters are now political consumers: they are no longer deferential and are instead demanding changes to public policy and political institutions. Consequently, market-oriented parties seek to win elections by reflecting voter demands and responding to them. Even after winning an election, parties and governments endure the "pressure to deliver," requiring that they demonstrate to the public that they are meeting their needs. This extends to various state organizations as well, as Lees-Marshment documents in the British case: "A market-oriented party in government needs to deliver, and therefore put pressure upon health and education services to use marketing" (236).

This means that parties must continue to campaign in noncampaign periods. Scammell (2007, 188) notes, "The permanent campaign

focuses on the instruments of media politics; the brand concept uncovers the underlying strategic concerns of efforts to maintain voter loyalty through communication designed to provide reassurance, uniqueness (clear differentiation from rivals), consistency of values, and emotional connection with voters' values and visions of the good life." Thus, the identification of the opinions and demands of citizens is critical, as increased emphasis is placed on linking government programs and services to citizen values.

While some argue that polling provides government with valuable information that can improve the development and delivery of public services (Butler 2007, 118; Soroka 2010), the lens of domestic brand politics provides a different perspective of polling and the permanent campaign. "Values politics" allow governments to camouflage rhetoric-reality gaps between stated values and public policy; the brand message, rather than policy itself, becomes the effective response to the "pressure to deliver" noted by Lees-Marshment. Domestic political branding effectively builds on this foundation, with politicians emphasizing values and national identity in order to connect with voters. Thus, in looking at the operations of government and political parties in the context of the modern publicity state, it is necessary to go beyond the narrow focus of political marketing. It is important to situate political action within the broader contextual environment in which political actors operate. It is not possible to understand the changes noted in the political marketing approach without understanding the consequences of the changing understandings of national identity.

There is a fine line between public opinion research that surveys Canadian attitudes for the development and improvement of public policy and government services and the government use of such data that allows the government to craft its message in a way that resonates with citizens. Page (2006, 5) notes that governments may argue that their policies have legitimacy when they are doing what the public wants; these results help shape policies, determine what options are politically acceptable, and help determine priorities (Savoie 2003, 109–10). Polling can greatly influence agenda setting and the broad direction of government policy, as outlined in Throne Speeches (Page 2006, 58–9). In effect, governments can determine if they have public "buy-in" before they implement initiatives, especially controversial matters, thus reinforcing the "permanent campaign" (Butler 2007, 132). Indeed, in his comprehensive study of the federal government's use of public opinion research, Page (2006) notes that this research can help frame

communications strategies in order to increase acceptance of policies. He noted that 20 of his interviewees (more than one-fifth) used the word "sell" to describe this phenomenon. He concludes, "The selling of policy is the foremost purpose of government communications" (68). This makes it easier for governments to frame opposing views as outside the national consensus, thus making the balance of political competition more unfair.

Public opinion research funded by the state does not simply allow governments to develop an understanding of public attitudes. It also allows the government to shape the narrative that it uses to communicate with citizens, introducing a decidedly partisan dimension to state advertising. As Angus Reid states, politicians do not use polling simply to determine the public will; "it is equally the case that politicians want to change the public will" (cited in Page 2006, 194). This explains why governments are "addicted" to polls and focus groups, according to an anonymous public servant (cited in Savoie 2003, 109).

Domestic brand politics takes political advertising to the next level, as nationalistic political communication appears to involve the promotion of symbols rather than the debate of complex policy issues (Rose 2000, 1–2). Using national narratives to sell policy and political agendas replicates this phenomenon. Indeed, Rose (2003, 8) argues that "it's easier to change perceptions than the material conditions of citizens." Thus, we can understand how the Liberals in the 1990s emphasized Canada and Canadians as caring and sharing; polls showed that this is how they saw themselves and that they wanted policies reflecting these values. Michael Marzolini, Chrétien's pollster at the time, argued that Canadians had to be convinced of the need for drastic budget cutting in 1995. Selling patriotism could increase social cohesion. Selling neoliberal policies within a progressive rhetoric allowed the Liberals to frame the New Democratic Party and parties of the Right as outside the Canadian consensus on progressive social policy and conservative fiscal policy (see Marzolini 2002).

Marzolini noted that such an approach would minimize the political risk for the government, thus pointing to the connection between political interests and policy communication. This continued under Harper's Conservative government. Several government polls conducted in 2006–7 asked citizens for their opinion of the performance of the current (Conservative) government. A review of federal government public opinion polling practices noted that a number of opinion polls went beyond measuring satisfaction with the Government of

Canada and entered into the realm of political partisanship, an area expressly forbidden by federal regulations (see Canada 2007c, 15–18). The government polls conducted during this time included one that asked Canadians if they supported the five major Conservative priorities as outlined in the 2006 election (Woods 2006, A3). The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) also undertook public opinion research on Canadian ethnic communities – a key target of the Conservative electoral strategy – and their attitudes regarding the Conservative government's five priorities in a report called *Exploring the Views of Canada's Multicultural Communities* (Ditchburn 2007, A7). Clearly, such public opinion research allows governments to change the tone and content of their message for political purposes. Thus, while the Conservatives have been targeting new Canadians in order to increase their support, the Conservatives stress that their values reflect Conservative values: traditional, family-oriented, entrepreneurial, and tough on crime (Wells 2010). Such strategy reflects Page's (2006, 73) observation that public opinion research is often used not to provide clarity of government initiatives, but to "make a message more persuasive."

The link between domestic brand politics and the modern publicity state can be seen in how the Conservative government manages communications with respect to policies that may undermine Canadian sovereignty, seem "American," or align Canada too closely with the United States, as these are areas in which the Conservatives are weak politically. State-funded public opinion research has combined with communications strategies to attempt to both dampen the effects of unpopular policies in the sensitive area of Canadian identity and support the government's political brand. This is significant, given that the Liberal Party under Paul Martin warned that a Harper government would "Americanize" Canada (see Nimijean 2006a, 89).

For example, the Harper government used focus groups to test citizen reactions to its first budget speech in 2006: respondents stated that the speech should sound "less American" when discussing international affairs (Aubry 2006, 21). Similar results emerged from focus groups who were asked to share their views on Canada's participation in the war in Afghanistan. Citizens suggested that government communications should avoid words such as "freedom, democracy, and liberty," which sound "too American" and reminded people of the US government's message on Iraq and to drop tough language such as Canadians don't "cut and run" – used in defence of the Afghanistan mission – and instead employ a rhetoric of human rights and diplomacy involving

iconic language such as "peacekeeping" (Freeman 2007; Woods 2007a, 2007b). In effect, this was using state funding for political purposes. Given the sensitivity of Canadians to their national identity and their overwhelming desire to be seen as distinct from Americans, using public funds to reframe messages that initially are not seen as embodying the Canadian identity transcends the democratic spirit. Thus, given this record, one must question why, in one of his first major pronouncements on foreign policy as prime minister, Harper suddenly emphasized that Canada was quite distinct from the United States (Foot 2007).

This points to the ongoing use of public opinion research for partisan ends. While public opinion research can potentially increase two-way communication between citizens and government, it can also be used to reshape public opinion in favour of a government's preferred policy options. In essence, the state has developed regulations that benefit the party in power, for public opinion research is far more important for governmental communications strategies than it is for determining the content of public policy (Page 2006, 187).

The Centralization of Power

The third dimension of the domestic brand state is the growing centralization of power in central agencies, notably the PMO and the Privy Council Office (PCO), the PMO's counterpart in the public service. This has coincided with a growing power of party leaders in Canadian political parties, which allow leaders and their close advisors and strategists to focus on messaging party policies and tactics ("talking points"), with little role for parliamentarians or party (Whitaker 2001). This is where the worlds of political communications and domestic brand politics intersect. The growth of the communications apparatus, controlled by the centre, allows politicians to use state resources not only to advance partisan agendas but also to link party to state and national image.

The power of central agencies has become more pronounced in recent years, amplified by the diminishing policy capacity of the federal public service due to budget cuts. Decision making in Canadian foreign policy, and in government in general, has shifted away from line departments to centralized agencies such as the PCO and PMO and to economic ministries such as the Finance and Treasury Board (Copeland 2005, 746).

Consequently, the PMO has grown in part to control the bureaucracy through the use of communications, including the PCO's development

of a senior position to control all public service communications and the 1998 formation of a Cabinet Committee on Communications (Kozolanka 2006, 347, 353). The centralization of power allows for a very tight bond between the political (PMO) and the policy (PCO) worlds, allowing for increased political direction over government communication. Kozolanka, for example, demonstrates how strategic government communications have become standard practice in the public service. Communication, rather than substance, becomes the priority, thus explaining how the communications corps of the public service could grow by 7 per cent in the 1990s, at the peak of government cutbacks (it grew 30 per cent between 1987 and 1999) (350). The case of the federal sponsorship program, Kozolanka argues, shows how this tendency has challenged democratic practice by allowing the government in power to benefit from its control of state resources.

This practice continues under Harper, whereby the communications section is the largest division of the PMO (Hall 2009), resulting in a 30 per cent increase in the cost of running the PMO. Minister John Baird argued that these were necessary costs for communications and travel by the prime minister to promote the Economic Action Plan (Kennedy 2010, A4). In 2009, the PMO increased spending by an additional $1.7 million on video distribution of the prime minister as well as events preparation, leading journalism professor Christopher Waddell to suggest that the government is funding public relations, not communications based on the journalistic principles of access (Cheadle 2009b).

It can be argued that this seeks to promote the visibility of government members to the point of affecting the public service. For example, in 2008, a senior bureaucrat stated in a briefing note that promoting smaller projects of a federal infrastructure program provides "excellent visibility for regional ministers and local MPs" (De Souza 2010, A3). Priorities can be misplaced. In 2009, the Conservative government spent five times more tax dollars promoting its economic action plan than it did on raising awareness about the H1N1 flu virus (Cheadle 2009a); in addition, the Economic Action Plan Web site directed citizens to a Web site with Conservative Party colours that featured 40 photos of the prime minister and referred to "the Harper government," against government regulations that federal advertising should not promote a political party or entity. Photographs of the prime minister quickly disappeared, even though a spokesperson said they were not removed (despite evidence of cached images showing they were there; Cheadle 2009c). Despite these regulations, official government documents – funded by taxpayers – continue to refer to the "Harper Government."[6] Thus, the *Ottawa Citizen*

(2010, A14) editorialized that "centralizing communications in the PMO does not necessarily mean *more* communicating; it might just mean that the information that is communicated is more controlled and spun than ever." When it comes to communications, Canadians are getting less for more money. As political communications expert Jonathan Rose noted, "It's using taxpayer's money to do what the [Conservative] Party should be doing" (cited in MacLeod 2009, 1).

It appears that the PMO is driving the management of government communications and is politicizing communications using state resources (for a detailed overview of the process, see Cheadle 2011e). Most routine government communications are now cleared by the PMO through a system known as "Message Event Proposals," which seeks to anticipate media reaction to events, desired headlines, and desired sound bites. This has slowed down the communications process and reduced the amount of information shared with the public (Blanchfield and Bronskill 2010, A1; J. Davis 2010; Martin 2010).

This reflects trends elsewhere. In Britain, the Blair government showed how government marketing became more important in communicating with citizens and in the delivery of government services. Citing Scammell's analysis of the Blair government, Garbacz Rawson (2007, 215) states that "the marketing focus must be at the centre of decision making rather than something that is considered after the decision is made." This reflects van Ham's conception of state branding. However, this concern with the centralization of the marketing strategies in locations of power also underlines what is called "political marketing," "which uses marketing strategies to better execute government election campaigns on local, federal or national levels" and which focuses on "the comprehensive strategy of the party, rather than the specific promotional techniques" (ibid.).

Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that domestic brand politics are integral and necessary to the modern publicity state, which is underpinned by obsessive image management. Recent governments in Canada – and here I have focused on the emergence of brand politics under Chrétien (1993–2004) and its further development under Harper (since 2006) – have increasingly striven to define themselves and project their positive image both at home and abroad. This chapter argues that three interconnected factors mark the era of domestic brand politics in Canada.

First, politicians engage in domestic brand politics by embedding values politics, which emphasize shaping an emotional connection with citizens, and national identity, the state's distinguishing feature, into their core political strategy. This has become more significant as economic ideological differences between the major political parties diminish. Instead, reflecting the nature of branding, values are emphasized to form a bond between party and voter, highlighting the personal dimension of political outlooks (this leader or party best reflects my values) as opposed to traditional political relationships in which party platforms and policies were presented to voters. Consequently, rather than conceiving of one set of "Canadian values" that all parties seek to embody, we may be entering a period of competing sets of Canadian values linked to parties. Efforts to define and redefine national symbols and historical memories become crucial, as these influence the brand. Thus, the Harper government's message on the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, which has been framed as no less than an epic feat of survival against an American juggernaut and the foundation of the Canadian nation and identity, can be associated with a party and leader that is fiercely patriotic and militaristic. Indeed, the prime minister proclaimed in July 2012 that the War of 1812 was "the Fight for Canada" that produced "a common identity that would eventually make our Confederation possible" (cited in Wherrey 2012).

Second, in order to amplify the brand, political parties must rely on the persuasive publicity practices that have become endemic in the modern state, particularly the expensive tools of public opinion research and, more recently, political marketing. The chapter notes the increasing blurring of lines between government and state, as public opinion research can be used to help governments reframe messages that blur rhetoric-reality gaps and address partisan shortcomings. This was seen, for example, in the case of the Harper government using findings from focus groups to reshape messages, making the government sound less American, and seeking public opinion that supports government priorities.

Finally, the brand state requires the centralization of power within the government in order to effectively direct the cohesive implementation of the brand in all government "products." The growing role of central agencies in managing communications allows the domestic brand state to flourish, as the centralization of power requires and cements a close relationship between the political (PMO) and the policy (PCO) spheres of the state, thus allowing for more direct influence and

direction on the national brand. This trend began long before Harper assumed power, but it continues.

Thus, I conclude that domestic brand politics are here to stay. The Harper Conservatives, elected on a platform of accountability, "value for money," and governing differently than the Liberal Party, have continued and sometimes surpassed some of the practices they condemned when in opposition. The challenge of domestic brand politics is that it emphasizes the symbolic in its efforts to link party with state. So far, the Conservative Party has been able to keep the party base satisfied with its law and order agenda, its muscular foreign policy, its defence, and a revival of the monarchy.

However, murmurings of discontent from prominent fiscal conservatives such as journalists and commentators including Andrew Coyne and Gerry Nicholls suggest the Conservatives may continue to face challenges. It is perhaps understandable that a minority government could not implement far-reaching fiscal changes. This is reflective of the desire to constantly present the government in favourable terms according to its own narrative to increase support – as part of the permanent campaign – rather than acting according to convictions. This tendency increases the impact of high-profile cases of governments acting inappropriately, ranging from incompetence and self-interest, in opposition to their stated goals, to egregious violations of Canadian values and interests. It also has the potential to quickly undermine support, despite the best efforts to micromanage the political scene. Now that the government has obtained a secure majority (in 2011), that barrier has been removed. In 2012, in its first budget since the election, the government made huge, more Conservative-like cuts to programs and services. It remains to be seen if the carefully framed Harper brand is sufficiently established to withstand this shift.

Two scholars recently asked if democracy was good for a nation's brand (Kemming and Humborg 2010). However, it is also important to ask if nation branding is good for a country's democracy. The case of Canada suggests that the articulation and manipulation of a national image and identity for foreign audiences, when transferred to the domestic political scene, detracts from a country's democratic spirit. As Fan (2010, 101) notes, "Nation branding, in essence, is to align the nation's image to the reality." However, as we have seen, both Liberal and Conservative governments have attempted to reshape the national image to their partisan reality.

This is a troubling development in political discourse and practice, one that is antithetical to the guiding principles of democracy, which

are based on civic engagement and respect for the rule of law. Not only do many of the practices of domestic brand politics seek to shape the public will by using state resources for partisan ends, but they also flout the democratic spirit. For example, the Paillé investigation into Liberal polling practices, appointed by the Conservatives in an effort to make the Liberals look bad, cost taxpayers $610,000 (Martin 2010, 119). In the controversy over how the Conservative government promoted its Economic Action Plan, it was recently revealed that the PCO – which should serve the prime minister bureaucratically but not politically – sought exemptions from the "Common Look and Feel" regulations (designed to ensure that state communications are non-partisan) for the EAP Web site. Ultimately, Vic Toews, president of the Treasury Board, overruled bureaucrats who stated that the exemptions were not merited (Cheadle 2011f). This incident suggests that critics of the modern publicity state should be concerned about not only the use of public funds for partisan purposes but also the phenomenon of domestic brand politics, which affects the quality of democratic life.

NOTES

1 Thanks to Kirsten Kozolanka for her insights on the nature of the modern publicity state.

2 Many thanks to Jeff Ruhl for offering this insight and for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

3 The irony is that Canada was not invited to this conference. Canada's last-minute invitation was the result of American President Bill Clinton's lobbying. I have explored this incident and the politics of the Canadian Way elsewhere (see Nimijean 2005b, 37–9).

4 In this environment, corporations adopt a similar strategy. Tim Hortons, Roots, and Molson Coors have all successfully appealed to a strong sense of patriotism to connect their products to the Canadian identity (see Carstairs 2006; Cormack 2008; Millard, Riegel, and Wright 2002; Seiler 2002).

5 This comment was posted to an online discussion about the link between politics and branding on the BrandChannnel.com message board, which is sponsored by Interbrand, a major branding company.

6 Delacourt (2009) drew attention to this phenomenon in June 2009 by asking her readers to search "Harper Government" in the Canada News Centre (http://www.news.gc.ca). As of July 2012, searches reveal that some departments continued to use "Harper Government" in their press releases.