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Chris Brickell

Traveling Orthodoxies? Sexuality and Political Correctness in New Zealand

In the English-speaking world during the 1990s, the mass media contained much discussion of political correctness. Cultural politics in general, and questions of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality in particular, have since been bound up in debates around political correctness. However, we might understand the term political correctness *not as a description of a phenomenon but as a signifier that has traveled—from nation to nation and context to context—in search of a signified. Here, Said's discussion of traveling theory informs an investigation of the ways in which* political correctness *appeared in the New Zealand mass media during the 1990s and was applied to debates over sexuality in particular. I suggest that the particularities of this process reflected a dovetailing of (1) the differential cultural positions afforded to homosexuality and heterosexuality and (2) the discursive logics informing uses of the term* political correctness.

Keywords: *political correctness; homosexuality; New Zealand; traveling theory; rhetoric*

Ⅰn the English-speaking world, the 1990s saw much written on political correctness in both the mass media and the academic literature. Typically, the print media, film, and television have asked where *political correctness* has come from and how it has appeared throughout civil society. As a specter, *political correctness* has often haunted the cultural politics of identity: in particular, matters of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality.

However, the question "What is political correctness?" has itself posed difficulties wherever it has been asked (e.g., Dunant 1994; Harris 1991). What has usually followed is an exercise of classifying certain tendencies within cultural politics as *politically correct* or manifestations of *political correctness*. In contrast, a number of academic writers have moved beyond such classifica-

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tory exercises to interrogate the meaning and importance of the terms *political correctness* and *politically correct* themselves (D. Smith 1995; Weir 1995; Wilson 1996). Thus, we might understand the terms not as uncontestable descriptors of an observable phenomenon but as signifiers in search of a signified.

Edward Said has famously suggested that we can ask how theories or ideas travel over time from location to location and author to author and how they are modified in the process (Said 1983). A theory or an idea travels from its origin through various contexts as it moves to "another time and place where it will come into a new prominence" (p. 227). It is met by conditions of acceptance or resistance and is then transformed to varying degrees "by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place" (p. 227). If we replace *theory* or *idea* with *trope*, *sign*, or *discourse*, we might consider how *political correctness* as a trope or a signifier has traveled across several different planes. What might *political correctness* mean at different moments in time, on different parts of the globe, and when applied to different approaches to cultural politics? Precisely, what has *political correctness* come to signify, and what discursive strategies are involved? How is *political correctness* invoked in relation to normative ideas about the social order?

I work through these questions with one particular arena of social contestation in mind: the New Zealand mass media during the 1990s and discourses of political correctness circulating there with respect to sexuality.[1] Two levels of analysis suggest themselves here. The first concerns the way *political correctness* has operated as a practice of signification and the ways lesbian and gay identities in particular have often been signified by *political correctness*. One key aspect of this is the New Zealand variant created by adoption of United States's discourses of political correctness, as well as ideas about antiracism and the "loony left" from 1980s Britain. It is possible to then consider how *political correctness* has attached itself in particular ways to representations of homosexuality.

The second level of analysis concerns the relationship between this particular attachment and a broader politics of sexuality. In the second half of the article, I suggest that the precise relationship between *political correctness* and homosexuality offered in the New Zealand media has reflected the prevailing alignments within and between a number of related dualisms: heterosexual/homosexual, inside/outside, and apolitical/political. The precise logics by which these dualisms operate have ensured the application of the term *political correctness* to homosexuality in ways that have appeared to make sense to many.

Political Correctness: A Signifier and Its Travels

The United States: From the New Left to Neoconservatism

The ideas signified by the terms *politically correct* and *political correctness* have shifted over time, as others have already pointed out (Cameron 1994, 1995; Weir 1995). The term *politically correct* appears to have entered the lexicon in the United States during the 1960s within Marxist, Black Power, feminist, and gay liberation groups. This term was often used to satirize "the ever-present tendency of 'politicos' to become over-earnest, humourless and rigidly prescriptive'" (Cameron 1994, 19), and the term *politically correct* could be leveled against one's opponents within an organization if their position was regarded as dogmatic (Brennan 1991, 17). As *politically correct* came to signify ideological rigidity, *politically incorrect* became a term of positive evaluation (Frye 1992, 14).

As a signifier, *politically correct* then shifted away from its earlier Left-movement usage and was resignified through a resurgent neoconservatism (Weir 1995, 52).[2] In 1990, a number of print-media articles appeared with alarmist titles such as "Thought Police: Is This the New Enlightenment or the New McCarthyism?"; "The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct"; and "The Academy's New Ayatollahs." As these titles suggest, U.S. academia was the principal site for this resignification (Messer-Davidow 1993; Wilson 1996). It was asserted that academic infiltrators—"multiculturalists," poststructuralists, feminists, and lesbian and gay scholars—sought to overthrow the established canon, devalue the study of Western Civilization, and "politicize" academia (Diamond 1993; Shea 1995).[3] Dissenters to this emerging orthodoxy were said to live in silence, the new victims of "false charges of racism and sexism" leveled by repressive Leftist thought police (Wilson 1996, 16).

While the term *politically correct* was employed in the Leftist social movements to describe particular ideological positions, the neoconservative resignification saw a reification: the emergence of *political correctness*. Individual beliefs in Leftist organizations were one thing; *political correctness* now represented a discernible—even unitary—phenomenon or "movement" with a logic and impetus of its own (Fairclough 2003). *Political correctness* now had its practitioners, its executors, its police; to borrow from Foucault (1976/1990, 43), politically correct moments had been but a temporary aberration; "the politically correct" were now a species.[4]

While the neoconservative resignification of *political correctness* had focused initially on the university, its terms soon diffused from that specific setting into society more generally (D. Smith 1995). What is more, *political correctness* was tied to a wider set of signifiers of social order and social

contestation. It has been suggested that the term *political correctness* is often grouped with other signifiers, including orthodoxy, fascism, fundamentalism, Nazism, McCarthyism, Stalinism, totalitarianism, and tyranny. These terms are equated; each is emptied of its historical and cultural specificity and then employed for its rhetorical force. Environmentalism, feminism, antiracism, gay and lesbian activism, affirmative action, bilingualism or multilingualism, and gender-inclusive language are then taken to exemplify political correctness, orthodoxy, fascism, and so on (Cameron 1994; Weir 1995).

New Zealand: Mimesis and Signification

The semantic equations suggested by Weir in the U.S. context were also reproduced when *political correctness* was adopted in New Zealand. The New Zealand appearance of the term can be traced back to 1993: three years after the alarms were sounded in the headlines of key U.S. periodicals.

The year 1993 saw a furor erupt over "cultural safety," a component of nursing training intended to assist trainees in understanding the implications of ethnicity and culture for the delivery of health care (Pere 1997). In July, the story broke that a nursing student was suspended by her polytechnic when deemed to be "culturally unsafe" (Samson 1993, 11). The local newspaper editorialized that the suspension served to "illustrate how pervasive political correctness is" (*The Press* 1993, 22), while a journalist covering the story referred to a "'politically correct culture' in the polytechnic" (Samson 1993, 11). An analysis of the newspapers' letters to the editor columns in response to the controversy is interesting, however: none yet used the term,[5] although in the months and years that followed, *PC* (commonly used in place of *politically correct*) became a staple of correspondents' letters to newspapers. As 1993 wore on, a number of other events and the debates that accompanied them were caught up in discourses of political correctness: the hundredth anniversary of women's suffrage in New Zealand, a Labour Party leadership challenge by Helen Clark (who eventually became prime minister), the addition of sexual orientation to the Human Rights Act as a prohibited ground for discrimination, and allegations that the Ministry of Women's Affairs was favoring lesbians over heterosexual women (see Brickell 2001).

Some New Zealanders borrowed directly from the original batch of U.S. articles defining *political correctness* as a phenomenon. Adler's (1990) claim from *Newsweek* that *political correctness* originated with Derrida's poststructuralism was repeated by one magazine editor (Perigo 1995), while a correspondent to the *Dominion* newspaper lifted directly from Bernstein (1990) the idea that *political correctness* involves growing intolerance and "the risk of being accused of a constantly reiterated trio of thought crimes: sex-

ism, racism and homophobia" (Rowley 1997, 10). While the U.S. debate over the canon was not replicated in New Zealand (where there is no canon per se), some did suggest that "Political Correctness absolutely infests our education system" (Perigo 1995, 15) and that "politically correct ideologues have captured teacher training and provide anti-capitalist, one-sided views of ethnic and gender questions" (*Wairarapa Times-Age* 1997, 4).

Similarly, the equation of political correctness with fascism, Nazism, communism, and so on became clear in comments made by editors, journalists, and letter writers. One metropolitan daily claimed that *political correctness* "has become the accepted shorthand for those who would have humanity march in ideological lockstep" (*Dominion* 1997, 8); other journalists suggested the national television funding authority New Zealand on Air was a bastion of political correctness better known as "NaZis on Air," its director a "Commissar of Political Correctness" (Coddington 1995, 2; du Fresne 1994, 11). During the mid-1990s the writings of journalists and commentators were full of allusions to (among other things) "trespassers against the new dogma of Political Correctness, and burnings at the stake," "those promoting fascism in New Zealand," "the Cultural Centre for Corrective Programming," "*kommissars* of Right Thought," "indoctrination," "thought police," and "a new puritanism, an orthodoxy of thought" (*Dominion* 1996, 8; Everton 1997, 10; Haden 1995a, C3; Houlding 1995, 35; James 1996, 6; Roger 1995, 8; Stuart 1995, C1).

Some replaced allusions to fascism and communism with disease metaphors, referring to "the Political Correctness Plague," "the political correctness disease," and cases of "acute political correctness" (McShane n.d.; *New Zealand Herald* 1995, 1/6; Ward 1997, 8). A correspondent to *Metro* magazine argued that "it is hard to imagine a more insidious threat to society than this creeping virus" (Lockstone 1994, 15).

Subordinate to this gloss of orthodoxy, fascism, and disease were a number of concerns, exemplars of *political correctness*. Environmentalism was one, with its "New Age crystal-caressing caringpersons agonising about fur coats, trees, global warming [and] pesticides" (Haden 1995b, C30). Others included some feminist concerns, particularly opposition to sexual harassment; the antismoking movement; the peace movement; and the lobby for improved access to public transport for those with disabilities (Aldridge 1996, 9; *Dominion* 1994, 10; *Evening Post* 1996, 4; Haden 1996, C3; Moore 1995a, 1/8). Questions of language use provoked particular disquiet, particularly gender neutrality or the use of the indigenous Maori language in ways that challenged the hegemonic status of English (*Hutt News* 1996, 6). Politically correct euphemisms were subject to ridicule, even though many ("vertically challenged" instead of "short") were never seriously used (Allan 1993, 26; Bright 1997, 12; Moore 1995b, 1/6; Wilton 1995, 46).

Homosexuality and/as *Political Correctness*

In 1994, the front page of the *Evening Post*, then Wellington's evening daily newspaper, ran the headline "Romeo, Juliet Too Heterosexual for School Head" (*Evening Post* 1994b, 1). What followed was the story of Jane Brown, a head teacher at Kingsmead School in London, as relayed from British "local authority officials." Brown was reported as having refused to accept "cut-price" tickets to take a school class to see the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* because she "thinks it is a blatantly heterosexual love story." Brown's "'politically correct' refusal of cut-price tickets" appeared as the act of an unreasonable head teacher in pursuit of a political agenda. *Political correctness* was an imposition upon school pupils who would as a result miss out on a classic of Western culture. The *Evening Post* article ended with a London local authority education official describing Brown's decision as "ideological idiocy and cultural philistinism." While news media across the globe distorted the facts of the case somewhat,[6] the reportage served a powerful cultural function.

In New Zealand, the *Evening Post* version of the story was a timely site at which a number of emerging signs could be drawn together. The teacher was implicitly constructed as lesbian, thus homosexuality was linked with a *politically correct* tyranny and orthodoxy. Two moves in signification were visible here: the identification of homosexuality with *political correctness*, and more specifically, an identification of homosexuality with a reprobate form of politics, particularly a politics which suggested the storming of heterosexuality's citadels. The corollary was an implicit naturalization of heterosexuality, as a refusal to take a school class to a gay or lesbian ballet would most likely not have been read as an instance of *political correctness*. I have argued elsewhere that this combination of a naturalized heterosexuality and the construction of homosexuality as a tyrannous invading force constitutes a particular and recent form of heterosexism (Brickell 2000, forthcoming).

Here, we can see tied together the signification of homosexuality as *political correctness* and the ways this signification has reflected and constructed the politics of sexuality more broadly. In the sections that follow, I examine how homosexuality and *political correctness* were equated in New Zealand during the 1990s, and move on to examine why they were able to be coconstructed in such a way.

From about 1994 in New Zealand, *political correctness* was joined by the specter of "the politically correct." Members of this new species might practice *political correctness* as a form of tyranny, or they might express it purely on the grounds of claiming a particular identity. Often, the archetypal *politically correct* person was gay or, more likely, lesbian, as well as claiming other identities. The editor of the *Listener*, a liberal current events magazine, referred to

singer k.d. lang as "the first lesbian feminist, vegetarian superstar . . . a walking, talking, politically correct cliché (heard the one about the lesbian feminist vegetarian . . . ?)" (MacDonald 1994, 25). A journalist for neoconservative *North and South* magazine suggested that the "television industry's standing joke" was that the sure way to "get funding was to send [the CEO of New Zealand on Air] a script about a wheelchair-bound Maori lesbian who hugged native trees" (McLoughlin 1994, 94), while in another article, this became "a documentary about a dyslexic Seventh Day Adventist Samoan lesbian with three kids" (du Fresne 1994, 11). In an *Evening Post* editorial, the archetypal *politically correct* personage was the "rugby-playing, Chinese-speaking Maori lesbian with a limp" (*Evening Post* 1994a, 6).

This array of marginalized identities served to multiply the sense of impossibility, marginality, and ridiculousness of being lesbian and, even more so, the possibility of being a member of a minority ethnicity and/or disabled and lesbian. Such a multiplication played on the notion of the lesbian as "mysterious and surreal"—as at once freakish and unthinkable (Penelope 1980). Each of these identity categories was presented as so out of the ordinary that to inhabit any of them was suspect, while to inhabit all of them was to be placed outside the possibilities of cultural intelligibility.

While the lesbian appeared in relation to *political correctness* as at once freakish and absurd, the gay man was also constructed as *politically correct* and therefore favored by the emergent "orthodoxy." One correspondent to *North and South* constructed a hierarchy in the form of a "human PC scale":

> The higher you rate on the human PC scale, the more likely news about you will be PR [public relations]. . . . In 1990s New Zealand, the human PC scale runs roughly in this order: gays, Maoris, other Polynesians, other non-Caucasians, lesbians, hetero women, children, hetero men, Caucasians. Only PR journalism can be written about gays. That's absolute. (McRae 1993, 30)

While in other texts the archetypal *politically correct* identity was lesbian, gays rated higher on this writer's human PC scale. Her statements about only "PR" (or positive) journalism about "gays" being afforded publication reflected the more general argument that *political correctness* was (and is) both powerful and censorious. Opinion columnist Rosemary McLeod extended the notion that homosexuality is high on the PC scale with her comment that "gay is groovy": "things are never wrong if they're fashionable, and it's fashionable to be gay" (McLeod 1993, 40; 1995, 10).[7]

One of the ironies of the construction of homosexuality as an expression of *political correctness* was the tension between the idea that both are powerful as bearers of new orthodoxies and the much older idea that gay men are "soft" and insufficiently "masculine." An *Evening Post* article, which discussed the sexuality of gay Labour MP Chris Carter, stated that the "walls of his office are

covered with right-on posters about women's suffrage and AIDS, but Carter is no PC softie" (Boyd 1995, 12). Carter was apparently able to escape the label "softie" by possessing a "fiery temper" and a desire to travel to the world's "hot spots," but it seemed that a less adventurous gay male member of Parliament may not have escaped the charge so easily. Elsewhere, several years later, a television presenter stated of a meteorologist's reluctance to disagree with a colleague, "It's just too PC for me: limp-wristed as my friend would say" (*express* 1998, 8). In a number of other media texts, no less paradoxically, *political correctness* was taken as a challenge to the robustness that has long been central to definitions of New Zealand masculinity (Phillips 1996). "What sort of wimpish, politically correct, dull-as-ditchwater place is New Zealand becoming?" asked one correspondent (Mauger 1995, 8), while an editorial writer fumed that New Zealand society was being "emasculated and inhibited by political correctness" (*Evening Post* 1998, 4).

The Paradoxes of *Political Correctness*

So far, I have suggested that *political correctness*, a term denoting the reification of the earlier *politically correct*, arrived in New Zealand in 1993, and that as in the United States, it was attached to the cultural politics of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. At this time, *political correctness* as a signifier traveled toward homosexuality, which in turn became one of its key signifieds. A more detailed investigation of how and why this took place provides some interesting insights into the relationships between heterosexuality and homosexuality at this point in history. We can understand the attachment of *political correctness* to homosexuality as a process that reflected a dovetailing of two factors: the first involves the differential cultural positions afforded to homosexuality and heterosexuality; the second, the set of discursive logics informing the ways in which the term *political correctness* was and is used.

I have argued elsewhere that in recent years, New Zealand has seen a shift in the relative symbolic positioning of heterosexuality and homosexuality (Brickell 2000, 2001, forthcoming). No longer is homosexuality universally regarded as a more or less tolerable form of sexual variation from a normative (hetero)sexuality. Instead, in some recent media discourse, homosexuality appears as an increasingly powerful force that threatens to upset the normativity of heterosexuality and, in some cases, to create new forms of tyranny that unreasonably occupy "public" spaces, marginalize heterosexuality, and police the thoughts and actions of heterosexuals.

The New Zealand arguments have to some degree mirrored similar discourses elsewhere: British complaints about "dangerous" queerness and U.S. concerns with "special rights" (Brickell 2001; Currah 1995; A. M. Smith 1994). Some themes within these discourses reflect, in turn, the notions of

invasion of dominant (although held to be neutral) cultures that were central to the new "cultural racism" gaining prominence in Europe during the 1980s (Giroux 1993; Seidel 1988). In the semantic reversals upon which the logics of such reactionary movements were built, the struggle for equality was recoded as a demand for special rights; antiracism was said to epitomize racism; and the socially marginal became tyrannous oppressors. As the deputy editor of Wellington's *Evening Post* argued,

> The scorn and ridicule the gay activists once bitterly complained of themselves they now deal out to others. . . . Of course all this is consistent with the tyranny of the minority, one of the great curses of the late 20th century, whereby small groups of people play on the conscience of much larger groups of people. (du Fresne 1997, 10)

Here, du Fresne's reversal was presented as a historical fact: once upon a time, "gay activists" claimed to be "scorned" (he does not say whether he thought this a justifiable claim), while now such activists practice tyranny over the heterosexual majority. This tyranny is exemplified by a politicizing of the private realm, particularly the minds of those traditionally positioned as normative, and is therefore illiberal:

> Possibly what irritates people of my age group is this business of our being ordered and instructed what to think, not only by the gay community, but by race-mongers, PC tyrants and all the unhappy culturally, sexually, racially and otherwise fragile and destabilised mindNazis among us. (Hall 1996, 16)

Hall invoked tyranny both directly ("tyrants") and indirectly ("mindNazis"), drawing the equations noted by Weir (1995) in her semantic analysis of discourses of political correctness.

The paradoxes at the heart of these discourses are intensified when homosexuality is simultaneously constructed as both tyrannical and marginal. The *politically correct* figure of the "Chinese-speaking Maori lesbian with a limp" encountered earlier appeared in an editorial commentary on the Labour Party's parliamentary candidate selection process. The editorial writer suggested that this unreal-sounding lesbian "would be a shoo-in for Labour Party pre-selection" and that she even threatened to displace "white male MPs" through a process of "apartheid in reverse" (*Evening Post* 1994a, 6). This epitome of *political correctness* was particularly improbable and yet disconcertingly powerful.

A correspondent to *Metro* magazine replicated this chain of signification linking homosexuality, tyranny, and *political correctness*. Writing in opposition to Auckland's *Hero* festival of gay and lesbian pride,[8] Auger (1994, 17) stated that "neither should the majority feel obliged to bow, in the name of

political correctness, to any other strident minority trying to impose its will on society." Only the brave can hold out against the stridency of members of the gay and lesbian minority who demand their right to occupy otherwise heterosexualized public space. Another correspondent, writing of *Hero* three years later, welcomed the Auckland city mayor's refusal to support city council funding for the *Hero Parade*, the centerpiece of the festival:

> I congratulate the Mayor of Auckland, Les Mills, for his opposition to ratepayers having to give money to the homosexual and sex perversion parade. It is refreshing to have a political leader who won't bow down to this level of politically correct nonsense. (Daly 1997, A17)

Two observations can be made of Daly's excerpt. First, it engaged the idea of the "folk hero" (in this case the mayor) who bravely resists the moralizing of the *politically correct*. This figure was present in the discourses of British cultural racism: he or she would "dare to speak the truth" about racial difference and the evils of immigration in the face of the censorious loony left (Murray 1986, 12).[9] The folk hero idea was adapted for New Zealand during the 1990s, with some journalists and members of Parliament being hailed for their resistance to *political correctness*. For example, du Fresne was lauded as "someone [who] has the intestinal fortitude to write the truth as it really is . . . in a day when so-called political correctness is becoming a nauseating excuse for ignoring the real issues" (Street 1996, 4).

The second observation that can be made about Daly's text is the way in which he sought to collapse the perceived power of homosexual *political correctness.* At the same time as he rejected the *political correctness* of gay and lesbian occupation of public space, he forcefully reinscribed the normativity of heterosexuality through the use of phrases such as "sex perversion." The emergent discourse, in which homosexuality represented tyranny, sat side by side with the residues of much older discourses in which homosexuality appeared as a form of sexual perversion or degeneracy (Terry 1999). Another opponent of *Hero* wrote the following:

> A minority of society has won "power" that dictates to the rest of us. . . . Not all my friends, who are sick to death of this bullying, are religious. As a father, I am sick of forever being challenged by those who are arrogant and who see no damage to a nation and its children by promoting blatant abnormal sex practices in this land. (Connell 1998, 9)

Here, "bullying" by *politically correct* gay men and lesbians involves a forceful "promoting" of "blatant abnormal sex practices." Again, older discourses of sexual abnormality and the corruption of minors were interwoven with newer ideas about the tyranny of *political correctness*. In these examples, the

labeling of homosexuality as a form of *politically correct* tyranny operated hand-in-glove with older discourses—the authors' apparent aim, the restoration of heterosexuality to its rightful place as a sexual norm.

We can examine more closely this process of signifying homosexuality as a form of *political correctness* in order to obtain a clearer understanding of how this reassertion of heterosexuality works. Broadly, heterosexuality is positioned as both normative and politically neutral, while homosexuality's recent challenges to this positioning appear as politicized, if not actually illiberal and/or irrational.

Politically (In)correct? Marked and Unmarked Terms

A number of other authors have already noted that within symbolic orders both heterosexuality and maleness are "unmarked," while homosexuality and femaleness are "marked" as specific and visible terms. Thus, when they appear in culture the dominant terms are not invoked as heterosexuality or maleness. For example, Guillaumin (1985, 69) suggests that maleness is "rendered invisible as a result of its obviousness" and held to reflect the way the world is without question. The corollary of this is a symbolic economy in which both maleness and heterosexuality are identified with the political neutrality that ostensibly results from their "universal view from nowhere" (Young 1990, 127). As the dominant terms come to represent a disembodied, transcendent generality, they also stand for an absence of particular political interests: their dominance is elided under the chimera of neutrality. In contrast, the knowledges attached to femaleness and homosexuality are marked out as particular and thus specific in their politics (Wittig 1992, 25).

So, only homosexuality can be political while heterosexuality, insofar as it is recognized as such, is taken to be politically neutral. In turn, only challenges to dominance, and not that dominance itself, are regarded as being politicized. This has well suited the alignment of homosexuality with *political correctness*. Semantically, the term *political correctness* itself implies actions, beliefs, or identities that might be categorized as *political* and hence *politically correct*. It also suggests the existence of other positions that are apolitical and that therefore cannot be considered *politically correct*. Homosexuality is able to be coded as a form of *political correctness* precisely because it is constructed as political, while in general terms, heterosexuality cannot, because its political location is not recognized. According to this logic, when seeking "special treatment" and practicing political correctness, homosexuality politicizes an apolitical heterosexual order, introducing politics where previously there were none.

However, as the term *political correctness* has played out and mediated the broader changes in cultural politics, the symbolic alignments that have

allowed the term to make sense in the first place have started to bend and twist. Discourses of *political correctness*, it seems, have been deployed in complex ways when the normativity of heterosexuality is at stake.

Before exploring this further, it is worth pausing briefly to borrow Fuss's inside/out metaphor. Fuss (1991) suggests that the symbolic relation of inside to outside is played out in complex ways in respect of heterosexuality and homosexuality. She argues that the relation of inside/out works to constitute the self ("inside") in relation to an exterior ("other"), which in turn defines the very boundaries of that inside. More specifically, "heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality" (p. 2). In recent forms of heterosexism, heterosexuality is positioned as a primordial space inside of norms, prone to infiltration by the homosexuality outside.

In some of the discourses surrounding sexuality and *political correctness*, two ironic reversals take place. First, heterosexuality is positioned as outside, ostensibly relegated there by an insurgent homosexuality that has been installed inside by the machinations of a reified *political correctness*. Second, heterosexuality's status as the general and unmarked term is temporarily suspended as it is identified as being in need of reinstalling inside. Heterosexuality must be recognized as a specific category so that its claim to dominance and universality may be reasserted. However, these reversals are often only momentary, employed within rhetorical logics only for as long as it takes for the original alignments to be reinstated.

In one example of the inversion of the prevailing ordering of inside/out, it was argued that heterosexuality was literally "pushed off the stage" in favor of homosexuality. When one of the government-owned television channels decided not to screen the Miss New Zealand contest in 1998, one correspondent to the *Sunday Star-Times* was annoyed that "apparently the Miss New Zealand contest is too controversial for TV but two hours of the *Hero Parade* is OK. Political correctness gone mad?" (Lane 1998, A8). The beauty pageant, in part an enactment of the male gaze upon the female body, was upstaged by a lesbian and gay pride parade. The presence of the term *political correctness* suggests that this upstaging represented for some an intrusion of politics where previously there were apparently none. As an apparently emergent orthodoxy, *political correctness* facilitated a politicized challenge to the unrecognized heterosexualization of public space.

In another example, concerns circulated during 1993 that heterosexual women were being left out of the networking opportunities being fostered by the Ministry of Women's Affairs. A columnist in *The Press* wrote, "The ministry had six target groups, based on race, sexual leanings and physical impairments. But where did able-bodied, heterosexual, pakeha women fit into this

ministry's world?" (Wilson 1993, 17),[10] while an editorial writer for the *Hawkes Bay Herald-Tribune* (1993, 4) wondered if "the intention of the lesbians was to reinforce the stereotype that a woman putting in her utmost to maintain hearth and home is some form of misguided outcast."

Like the beauty contest's participants and would-be viewers, the "able-bodied, heterosexual, pakeha women" who supposedly did not fit the Ministry of Women's Affairs's criteria were positioned as outside of the new orthodoxy. Another correspondent argued along similar lines but, in doing so, used the notion of political (in)correctness as a pivot:

> I am a full-time homemaker (with dependants—three children, two cats and a husband). I am a practising Christian. . . . Belonging to these categories definitely places me in the minority. Unfortunately, it also makes me politically incorrect. (Langton 1993, 8)

Significantly, the diagnosis that *political correctness* has displaced heterosexual women to the outside is ultimately not as problematic for heterosexuality as it may initially seem. First, although the beleaguered heterosexual woman is supposedly denied inclusion within the affairs of the ministry, she is actually redeemed as a superior form of citizen through her *political incorrectness*: a badge of bravery obtained in the face of the new *politically correct* orthodoxy. Second, the normality of heterosexuality is reasserted against the wrong-headedness of a *political correctness* that grants improper insider status to those who should remain on the margins. This way, heterosexuality can be positioned as beleaguered and defended on this basis, while the marginality of homosexuality is reinstated. All the time that heterosexuality has appeared to be under threat, it has in fact been relentlessly naturalized.

Conclusion

While it may be tempting to ask the question "What is political correctness?", it is perhaps more useful to consider how, where, and why the term has appeared as a signifier, which is then attached to particular epistemological positions and identities. Like any other signifier, *political correctness* has traveled across time and place, settled momentarily, and then shifted and changed as its meaning has been subsequently renegotiated.

Once *political correctness* emerged from the U.S. neoconservative resignification of *politically correct* in the early 1990s, the term migrated to New Zealand where it joined some aspects of related British discourses and appeared in the context of "cultural safety" and then sexuality in particular. New ways of talking about sexuality were thus constituted, even though the politics behind these were not necessarily new. In short, the particularities of

the term's own internal logic dovetailed with the existing logics governing the relationships between heterosexuality and homosexuality. In its apoliticality, the former was seen to possess no politics, while the latter might appear as *politically correct*—and hence politically reprobate. Such a symbolic economy constructed the illusion of a new orthodoxy, ultimately allowing heterosexuality's place to be cemented, and so the deployment of the term *political correctness* often served deeply conservative purposes.

What has happened since? In New Zealand, *political correctness* has migrated again. Ten years after its arrival, the term has become both more diffused and more specific. In some cases, it is used generally, to refer to any moral or political tendency to which its writer or speaker does not wish to be subjected. Increasingly, however, it mediates debates over the politics of ethnicity: in particular, questions of citizenship, immigration, and Maori sovereignty. As in the case of sexuality, however, the internal logic of the term and the presumptions of the social order remain inextricably intertwined, and the specificities of these "travelings" require their own investigation.

Notes

1. New Zealand news media cannot be neatly sorted into categories of "tabloid" and "quality," as impulses toward sensationalistic and investigative reporting are often found in the same publication. News reports, editorials, opinion columns, and letters to the editor are all useful sources, which provide a range of discourses. *New Zealand Herald* is the morning daily newspaper of Auckland, a city with a population of approximately one million people. *The Press* is Christchurch's morning daily (pop. 300,000). *Dominion* and *Evening Post* (the latter now defunct) are the morning and evening dailies for Wellington (pop. 300,000). *Sunday Star Times* is the national Sunday newspaper with the highest circulation. The *Hutt News* and *Hawkes Bay Herald-Tribune* serve smaller urban populations (pop. 100,000), and the *Wairarapa Times Age* serves a dispersed rural area (pop. 40,000). *Metro*, *North and South*, and *Listener* are national "quality" magazines.

2. Eisenstein (1984) suggests that neoconservatism combines a liberal commitment to individualism with a conservative commitment to inequality. This body of thought rejects demands for equality of social outcomes and so particularly opposes affirmative action. Also rejected are critiques of prevailing gender relations and the nuclear family, both of which are taken to be natural social forms (Diamond 1993; Stacey 1983).

3. There is an extensive literature that documents the ways in organizations in the United States such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS), in connection with conservative foundations and think tanks, attempted to discredit Leftist intellectuals by constructing a moral panic around the supposed totalitarianism of academic *political correctness.* For accounts of NAS and its relationships with other conservative foundations, see Burris and Diamond (1991), Diamond (1993), and Messer-Davidow (1993).

4. This is not to say that the original meanings have been entirely left behind; *politically correct*, and now *political correctness*, are often used ironically or seriously among Leftists. As Williams suggests (1981, 204-5), residual forms of culture live on in tension with dominant and emerging ones.

5. For these letters to the editor, see editions of the Christchurch daily newspaper *The Press* for the following dates in July 1993: 21, 23, 26, 29, 30. Neither did an anti–cultural safety letter to Wellington's *Dominion* newspaper use the term *political correctness* (Watson 1993, 10).

6. The incident was deeply ironic. While being pilloried throughout the Western world as a tyrannous, censorious practitioner of *political correctness*, Brown was herself censured: the British tabloids vilified her and called for her sacking, she was sent hate mail and was at one point assigned police protection, and she was threatened with suspension by her employer (Field 1995; Radford 1995/1996; Sanderson 1995). Field (1995, 156) has suggested that the politics of sexuality was much less a part of Brown's decision than the fact that not all pupils in the poor part of London could afford to attend, because the cost of the tickets remained too high.

7. At the same time as homosexuality was appearing as the exemplar of *political correctness*, some gay men were invoking the term to describe gay and lesbian politics with which they disagreed. For example, in New Zealand, Coote's (1997) exposé of "queer politics" leveled the charge of *political correctness* against lesbians and gay men who rejected his libertarian politics. Meanwhile, in the United States and South Africa, respectively, Harris (1995) and Ricci (1995) have used *PC* as a sign with which to refer to those aspects of lesbian and gay movements with which they disagree (Ricci terms *PC* both *outing* and use of the word gay—for example, p. 312). In this way, *PC* has become a semantic marker of the boundary between the politics these authors find acceptable and those they do not and also allows them to disavow imputations of political correctness others might level against them.

8. The *Hero Parade* is held in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city. The parade involves a long string of decorated floats moving in procession down Ponsonby Road in the city's gay and lesbian district. Although the parade fits perfectly within the tradition of Carnival, with its sexualized bodies, lampooning of "pillars of the community," and outrageous costumes, it is taken to exemplify the excesses of a publicized homosexuality that illegitimately occupies heterosexualized spaces. For a more detailed discussion, see Brickell (2000).

9. Fairclough (2003, 24) suggests that in some ways, the 1980s British media offensive against the "loony left" might be understood as "a critique of 'PC' *avant la letter*." That is to say, the two terms have to some degree signified the same things at different times. Certainly, examples that were used in Britain to illustrate the outrageousness of the "loony left" (the banning of golliwogs and Enid Blyton's Noddy books, for example) were reproduced in the New Zealand context as exemplars of *political correctness* (Pierce 1993, 8).

10. Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand; *Pakeha* is a Maori term for subsequent settlers of European ancestry.

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Chris Brickell lectures in gender studies and sociology at the University of Otago, New Zealand, and his research interests include sexuality and consumer culture as well as sociologies and histories of representation. His writing has appeared in Gender, Place and Culture, Sexualities, Journal of Consumer Culture, *and* Journal of Design History.