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## Canadian Librarianship and the Politics of Recognition

### La bibliothéconomie canadienne et les politiques de reconnaissance

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#### **Abstract / Résumé**

Recent controversies in Canadian librarianship—the Toronto Public Library room rental to a “gender-critical feminist”<sup>1</sup> group and the institution of “airport-style” security at the Winnipeg Public Library—have exposed divisions within the profession. This article attempts to untangle the relationship of Canadian libraries to state power and explores hegemonic leadership within the library profession. It also investigates the part played by a *politics of recognition*, both in the reinforcement of professional discipline and in the maintenance of the social, political, and economic status quo regarding the rights and democratic participation of marginalized communities. The paper begins with a brief account of recent controversies, looks at intellectual freedom, and then analyzes the ways in which politics of recognition play out in libraries and settler-colonial societies. Based on Taylor’s theory of recognition and its critique by Coulthard and Fraser, this article argues that, within the context of a needed refoundation of social relations, recognition must be combined with real redistribution of rights and participation.

Les polémiques récentes au sein de la bibliothéconomie canadienne telles la location d’une salle de la Bibliothèque publique de Toronto à un groupe féministe « critique du genre » ou la mise en place d’un système de sécurité similaire à celui d’un aéroport à la Bibliothèque publique de Winnipeg ont exposées des divisions profondes au sein de la profession. Cet article tente de démêler la relation des bibliothèques canadiennes avec

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<sup>1</sup> The expression “gender-critical feminists” is in quotation marks to indicate its contested nature. As Jennifer Saul points out, the term can be misleading when considering the issue of trans rights, since “by definition, feminists are critical of gender” (Saul 2020).

le pouvoir de l'État et explore le leadership hégémonique au sein de la profession. Il examine également le rôle joué par une politique de reconnaissance, tant dans le renforcement de la discipline professionnelle que dans le maintien du statu quo social, politique et économique concernant les droits et la participation démocratique des communautés marginalisées. L'article commence avec une présentation sommaire de récentes polémiques, offre un survol de la liberté intellectuelle et procède à analyser comment une politique de la reconnaissance se joue dans les bibliothèques et les sociétés coloniales. S'appuyant sur la théorie de la reconnaissance de Taylor et d'une critique de celle-ci par Coulthard et Fraser, cet article défend l'idée que, dans le cadre d'une nécessaire refonte des relations sociales, la reconnaissance doit être combinée à une réelle redistribution des droits et de la participation.

### ***Keywords / Mots-clés***

politics, recognition, trans rights, Indigenous rights, settler-colonialism, Marxism, marginalization

politique, reconnaissance, droits des personnes trans, droits ancestraux des autochtones, pionniers-colonialisme, Marxisme, marginalisation

### ***Introduction***

On October 29, 2019 at 3:10 PM, the Toronto Public Library (TPL, 2019) tweeted its congratulations to that year's winners of the Governor General's Award, Canada's highest literary honour. A little over two hours later, one of the winners, Gwen Benaway (personal communications, October 20, 2019), tweeted "Currently trapped in the library by the cops who refuse to let us leave @torontolibrary", and a minute later, "Having TERFs<sup>2</sup> scream in my face and call me a man while the cops and @torontolibrary watches". Benaway was part of a group being kettled<sup>3</sup> by Toronto Police in the Palmerston branch of TPL while over a thousand more trans people and allies protested peacefully outside. The police had been summoned by the library in preparation for the protest, the culmination of a series of events challenging the library's decision—justified by reference to intellectual freedom—to rent space to Radical Feminists Unite, a gender-critical feminist group which included Meghan Murphy, a journalist banned from Twitter for misgendering trans people (Brean, 2019).

The juxtaposition of these two tweets exposes a deep contradiction between the way the library sees itself (as promoter of culture and diversity) and its relationship with state power, specifically in terms of its role in the maintenance and reproduction of structures of oppression. TPL's core values claim to champion equity, respect, and inclusion, but its commitment to intellectual freedom—one of the "core values" of librarianship defined by the American Library Association (ALA)—often takes priority, to the exclusion of other values (TPL, n.d.-a).

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<sup>2</sup> TERF stands for "Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist". For a discussion of this term, see Saul (2020).

<sup>3</sup> The front doors were locked, preventing protesters from leaving the branch by that exit, though a rear exit was still available. It does not seem the protesters knew about this alternative exit.

In 2017, the library was criticized for renting space to a group that included white-nationalists and neo-Nazis to host a memorial service for Barbara Kulaszka, formerly defense counsel for Holocaust-denier Ernst Zundel, as well as Marc Lemire, leader of the white supremacist Heritage Front. In the aftermath of the Kulaszka memorial, TPL strengthened its room-booking policy to allow the library to deny a rental if the library “reasonably believes the purpose of the booking is likely to promote, or would have the effect of promoting, discrimination, contempt or hatred of any group” (n.d.-b). In October 2019, however, TPL refused to abide by the new policy when the library again came under fire for renting space for the Radical Feminists Unite talk. Despite protests and petitions by trans people and allies, TPL defended its decision to rent a room to Radical Feminists Unite under the auspices of intellectual freedom, free speech, and a liberal defense of minority rights. Librarianship’s commitment to intellectual freedom draws on a long and unchallenged liberal philosophy, producing a self-image which conflicts with the position of Canadian libraries as state institutions responsible for cultural and ideological reproduction.

The Governor General’s awards themselves are an example of the broader tensions and contradictions between Canada’s self-image as a liberal, multicultural, tolerant society and the realities of Canadian colonialism, intolerance of (certain) minorities, and deep implication in continuing dynamics of empire (Shiple, 2017). The award was created in 1937 by John Buchan, Canada’s 15th Governor General, himself an author (notably of the thriller *The Thirty-Nine Steps*). Buchan has been described as anti-Semitic, but also as an enlightened, if paternalistic, imperial administrator. As an apologist and propagandist for the British Empire, he “excelled... in channeling racism in service of state” (Freeman-Maloy, 2017), while as Governor General, he championed a multicultural Canada (Edwards 2018, pp. 103-104). These contradictions are not accidents or mistakes, but rather reflect the complex and contradictory reality of empire and racial capitalism.

On a visit to Winnipeg in 1936, in a speech accepting an honorary doctorate from the University of Manitoba, Buchan opined that Canada had inherited from Britain “a free and orderly government, and a great literature of thought and imagination” (as cited in Galbraith, 2013, p. 299). In 2016, Winnipeg had the largest Indigenous population of any city in Canada, but also an endemic problem of anti-Indigenous racism. One year after being called “Canada’s most racist city” (Macdonald, 2015, para. 8), Winnipeg was being hailed as “a capital of reconciliation” (Macdonald, 2016, para. 12). Despite this statement, the legacy of colonialism in Winnipeg continues to be deeply felt, not least in the extrajudicial executions of Indigenous people by police. In a recent study of colonial violence on the Canadian Prairies, Dorries et al. (2019) argue that cities like Winnipeg, longstanding sites of Indigenous organization and resistance, are also

sites of specific forms of settler colonial violence and settler colonial governmentality, including displacement through gentrification and development, institutionalized physical violence and police brutality, and systemic discrimination in housing and employment. With policing resembling neighbourhood occupation, community survival is criminalized while racist

discourse continues to rationalize acceptable rates of police violence as normal and acceptable. (p. 11)

The deep connection of libraries to this dynamic was brought to light in early 2019 when Winnipeg Public Library (WPL) implemented “airport-style” security measures to address staff safety concerns at the library’s downtown Millennium branch. The library prioritized advice from city police over community groups and other libraries (Selman, et al, 2019, p. 21; pp. 55-56). Downtown Winnipeg, the heart of the province’s governmental and financial administration, brings white, middle-class Winnipeggers into close contact with poor and often homeless marginalized communities, particularly Indigenous people. Relations between these demographics, mediated by police and “Business Improvement Zone Patrols” (i.e., capital and the state) have often been strained, and the new Millennium Library security policy was part of a broader securitization of the downtown area, especially in businesses such as the (state run) liquor stores (Gowriluk, 2019). This move towards increased security was ostensibly in response to a meth crisis in the city, but historically, collaboration between racial capitalism, the city police, and fearful white settlers has been a mechanism of oppression and marginalization (Toews, 2018). Dr. Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land, a researcher at University of Winnipeg specializing in the carceral logic of liberal states and settler-colonial violence, was one of the members of Millennium4All, a community group that arose in response to the Millennium Library security measures. Dobchuck-Land connects security measures at the library with anti-poor and anti-Indigenous policies more broadly: “Being familiar with the Millennium Library and the kind of space it is and who uses it, and being familiar with the way that politics work in Winnipeg with public discourse and security—you just know immediately who it’s intending to keep out” (as cited in Wilt, 2019, para. 4). The effect of added security at Millennium was a large drop in library usage, and the exclusion and increased marginalization of already vulnerable populations (Selman, et al., 2019).

Both the TPL and WPL examples above indicate a closer relationship to state power and to social differentiation than conventional library narratives of inclusion and universality would suggest, and it is this connection to institutions of state power that links these cases that initially appear to have little in common. TPL’s absolutist adherence to intellectual freedom resulting in the support of transphobia and WPL’s implementation of strict security measures in an iniquitous settler-colonial context both had the same outcome: the increased policing and exclusion of marginalized identities.

In WPL’s case, however, intellectual freedom was disregarded by the library administration. Amid the TPL controversy, library groups like the Canadian Federation of Library Associations (CFLA, 2019) and the Canadian Urban Libraries Council (CULC, 2019) offered letters of support, public library leadership closed ranks, and James Turk (2019) of the Ryerson Centre for Free Expression was solicited by TPL to write a blog post defending the library’s policy. On the other hand, there was no critique of WPL’s

policy offered by library leadership<sup>4</sup>, only grassroots protests on the part of library workers, library patrons, and community groups (see, for example, Schmidt, 2019).

Why was intellectual freedom indispensable in one case and unimportant in the other? In both cases, the value of equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as the rights enshrined in the Canadian constitution, were *recognized* but trumped by another logic, a logic of state power and oppression. What, then, is the connection between libraries, the concept of intellectual freedom, and the oppressive logic of the Canadian state? One way to understand this dynamic is to look at the role of what Charles Taylor has called *the politics of recognition* (1992) in Canadian debates over culture and identity. This paper will delve into the politics of recognition after a short foray into the world of intellectual freedom.

### ***The Lineage of Intellectual Freedom***

The genealogy of intellectual freedom (IF) has three distinct strands. First, there is the professional history of librarianship, especially in debates over the relative importance of intellectual freedom and social responsibility (Samek, 2001), but also in the concrete policies and interventions that are part of the rhetorical self-definition of the profession<sup>5</sup>. This self-definition may be described as “the democratic discourse of librarianship” (Popowich, 2019), and one of the major contradictions within the profession is between this discourse and the real sociopolitical effects of library work. Second, there is the legal framework, which begins chronologically with the Library Bill of Rights of 1939 (explicitly referring to the American Bill of Rights), later gaining juridical support from the 1948 United Nations (UN) Declaration of Human Rights. The intellectual freedom statements of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), the CFLA, and the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), which are not part of the American Bill of Rights regime, all refer to Article 19 of the UN Declaration, and in this way connect IF—usually uncritically—with the entire discourse of human rights. Third, there is the philosophical discourse of free speech and freedom of expression, beginning with Mill’s *On Liberty* and subsequently supplemented by a concept of communicative reason (from Habermas), a focus on minority rights and justice (from Rawls) and a weak conception of hegemony (from Gramsci) (Alfino, 2014; Buschman, 2014; Raber, 2014).

Inspired by Machiavelli, Gramsci used the image of the centaur to illustrate his concept of hegemony. The centaur—half-human, half-beast—exemplifies a dual model of power: the combination of coercion with consent. The state, in Gramsci’s view, does not rely simply on physical coercion to dominate the bodies of human beings, but also on consent derived from the manipulation and organization of values, knowledge, ideas, and culture. The class whose ideas and knowledge are dominant in a society exercises hegemony through institutions such as schools, libraries, etc, to maintain social order and control, holding physical coercion in reserve. The ideology of libraries tends to

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<sup>4</sup> For example, by the CFLA Intellectual Freedom committee, since other barriers to access, such as internet filters or reading-level indicators, have been condemned in the past as censorship.

<sup>5</sup> A good example of these are the many editions of the ALA’s *Intellectual Freedom Manual*.

place the profession on the side of individuals who, through education, resist hegemony and participate in democracy. However, this is ideological self-defence on the part of libraries, which, the author will argue below, actually stand with the state as institutions that manufacture consent. The use of police force in the cases presented above indicates that Gramsci's two forms of power are not discontinuous; rather, they are part of a single continuum of state power. The conception of hegemony sometimes employed within librarianship is weak or inadequate because it sees hegemony as something outside the profession, refusing to recognize librarianship's place within capitalist, patriarchal, and racist hegemonic structures.

Despite the debate the three strands of IF have provoked within the library profession, the same arguments around intellectual freedom, social responsibility, and censorship recur with demoralizing regularity. Since its inception, the profession has insulated itself from critique in many ways. First, the democratic discourse of librarianship protects the profession. For example, critical librarianship<sup>6</sup> typically faces and engages with issues *outside the profession*; librarianship itself remains seen as democratic, authoritative, trustworthy, and beyond the reach of power dynamics and relationships (this orientation both reproduces and relies upon what Ettarh [2018] has termed "vocational awe"). This form of critical librarianship can never challenge the hegemony of library leadership. Second, LIS—the academic discipline of librarianship<sup>7</sup>—tends to understand itself as a positivist social science, predicated on the idea of transparent scientific knowledge and the possibility of perfect understanding (Harris, 1986). This perspective maintains its hegemony within the profession through the training of librarians. As a result, library leadership view the opposite of knowledge to be *error* (correctable by more knowledge), and so ideology—knowledge in the service of power—is automatically excluded. By excluding the concept of ideology from any consideration of intellectual freedom, people can be *wrong* but they can never be collectively implicated in structures of false knowledge<sup>8</sup>. The result is that intellectual freedom remains understood solely as an individual concern, and the role of libraries at most to correct error, but never to engage in the relationships between knowledge, false ideas, and power.

At this point, it is important to note that none of these arguments are new to the profession. However, understanding the specific historical conjuncture is vital to renewing and extending various critiques of librarianship. The triumphant neoliberalism that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union—for which Fukuyama's "end of history" has become a convenient, if simplistic reference—was marked by rapid transformation of finance and technology, which served to exacerbate librarianship's perennial feeling

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<sup>6</sup> In this sentence, I mean the critical analysis of information and society, as opposed to "critical librarianship", which can be understood as the latest manifestation of internal criticism of dominant library perspectives and values. Critical librarianship is not an organized movement, unlike, for example the Progressive Librarian Guild, but it shares an orientation of internal critique of the profession.

<sup>7</sup> I use "librarianship" to refer to the whole, the combination of the academic discipline of "library and information studies" (LIS) and the practical activity of "library work".

<sup>8</sup> The narrative around "fake news" since the election of Donald Trump in 2016 is a case in point. The phenomenon tends to be treated as an individual problem to be solved via better information literacy skills, information hygiene, critical thinking, etc., rather than as a symptom of knowledge in the service of power.

of crisis. Buying into the neoliberal emphasis on entrepreneurialism, LIS scholars like Weingand (1995) criticized the profession's vocational awe in order to propose consumer-focused marketing as a way for libraries to thrive in the new environment<sup>9</sup>. The issue of "proving our value" is still present and is discussed in much the same terms, but while in the mid-1990s the critical librarianship of the time sought to reinstate social class to counter the liberal pluralism and managerialism of the profession (see Pawley, 1998), intersectional approaches have since enriched but also complicated the picture. Just as "hegemony is never complete" (Pawley, 1998, p. 123), although there is a long tradition of LIS scholars and librarians who have challenged reverential views of libraries (like Garrison and Harris; see Wiegand, 1990), the process of critique and resistance is never-ending. The incomplete nature of critique and resistance requires that we read particular arguments—vocational awe, for example—in context; out of context, an argument for resisting the oppressive demands of a calling, as in Ettarh, can be used to justify a move towards consumerism and entrepreneurialism, as in Weingand.

One such changing context is the notion of the state. Librarianship often considers itself to still be an institution of the socially-minded welfare state, ignoring the fact that welfare state protections have been progressively dismantled since the 1970s (see, for example, Harvey [2005] and Hall [2011]). As a result, the liberal-democratic commitments that seemed progressive in the post-war period have become entrenched mechanisms of neoliberal state oppression. For example, the liberal pluralism critiqued by Harris (1986), and which still underpins conceptions of intellectual and academic freedom, "has dictated long and broad structured silences relative to the ways in which social, economic, and cultural power relations shape the nature and extent of library service" (pp. 221-222). The democratic discourse of librarianship offers continuity, an unchanging transhistorical commitment to libraries as a sacred good, thus maintaining "a 'good' status quo" and seeking to "improve the profession's status within the prevailing order" (Harris, 1986, p. 219), even while the status quo and the prevailing order are in a constant state of change. Despite the longstanding challenge of various progressive and critical librarianship movements, an ahistorical narrative tends to protect the profession itself against critique and to reduce critical movements to interpretation or performance rather than real change (Ferretti, 2020).

Vocational awe and the democratic discourse of librarianship: two ways of understanding how the professional leadership wards off objective self-understanding and attempts to redirect critique outside the profession itself. An adequate conception of hegemony would be able to recognize librarianship's position within the structures of capital and the state (Harris, 1986)<sup>10</sup>, and the role libraries play in cultural formation, reproduction, and social discipline. However, any attempt at critique within the profession tends to force library leaders back onto the comfortable abstractions of professional rhetoric<sup>11</sup>. For example, in her 1998 class-based critique of LIS, Pawley

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<sup>9</sup> i.e., Weingand used vocational awe to make the opposite argument to Ettarh.

<sup>10</sup> For a critique of Harris' "culturalist" view of LIS, see Popowich (2019), 242-245.

<sup>11</sup> There are, of course, a number of internal critiques of professional practice, for example in Reidsma's work on discovery systems, but most notably in technical services, in the work of Berman (1971) Olsen (2002); Roberto (2011); Billey, Drabinski, and Roberto (2014), and others. Such critiques, however, seem

argued that the “failure of LIS education to confront societal questions is itself a sign of the power of the dominant class to exercise hegemony” (Pawley, 1998, p. 132)<sup>12</sup>. However, in her 2007 investigation of librarianship and human rights, Samek responded by arguing for a return to library values, themselves seen as unchallengeable. “A key challenge... for twenty-first century librarians,” Samek (2007) wrote, “is to foster language and a culture of critical librarianship which better support core library values” (p. 7). Failures on the part of the profession to properly engage with social or political questions then becomes an error, a failure to live up to our core values (which then require us “revisit” them [p. 15]), rather than an innate or integral connection between librarianship and sociopolitical problems as such. For Samek (2007), the fact that “the ALA has no authority over library administrations” (p. 9)<sup>13</sup>, indicates that the self-organization of library workers is key, but the weakness of the conception of hegemony in LIS means that Samek was unable to conceive of such self-organization except in the form of constituted professional organizations like IFLA. The possibility that IFLA and other professional associations—like the core values of librarianship themselves—could be part of the problem, could be institutions of hegemony and oppression, is *a priori* disallowed.

For Samek, critical librarianship is meant to be critical of external social and political processes (globalization, managerialism, etc.) from the perspective of stable, sacrosanct values and institutions. But there is another, internally focused critical librarianship which addresses problems within the profession as well as the ways the profession is complicit in larger structures of oppression and exploitation. This split within the profession suggests that the reason the core values and our professional organizations are sacrosanct (i.e., hegemonic) is due, at least in part, to tensions and polemics within the profession itself, with values and organizations themselves being used to discipline library workers, especially in racialized and gendered ways. In this sense, a stronger version of hegemony would help us understand how core values and professional associations dominate the profession and implicate librarianship in the oppressive ideological principles and strategies of broader society.

Intellectual freedom is based on much the same set of presumptions as the politics of recognition, as the author will shortly show. In the dominant conception of IF, all arguments are presumed equal, and the confrontation between arguments, the mutual recognition of better arguments, is how we arrive at the truth. Individual recognition of better arguments produces education and the informed citizenry that is at the heart of the democratic discourse of librarianship. But the presumption of equality in IF is just as spurious as it is in the politics of recognition; interlocutors are not in equally good faith; many people are not searching for the truth; many arguments are in the service of

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to have very little effect on library administrators and professional practice. Indeed, the long history of progressive or critical librarianship attests to the resilience and inertia of the hegemonic professional culture.

<sup>12</sup> Pawley sees librarianship as a “politically naïve profession” (132) but this mistakes librarianship’s active commitment to the dominant hierarchies of settler-colonial, patriarchal capitalism for a naïve neutrality.

<sup>13</sup> Samek attributes this remark to Wiegand, but in fact it was a statement made by Penway, assistant director of the ALA’s Office of Intellectual Freedom in 1994 and quoted by Wiegand (Stevens, 1994; Wiegand, 1996, p. 83).



power. The inequality of people *making* the arguments and the power dynamics between interlocutors is a problem for intellectual freedom. Based on an assumption of equality, democratic participation, and a common search for truth, IF finds it impossible to deal with different social relationships and contexts, such as capital-worker relationships, relationships of cisheteronormativity, or relationships between settlers and Indigenous people. In other words, perhaps paradoxically, IF cannot deal with contemporary situations of diversity and difference.

What the TPL room-rental and the WPL security controversies have in common is that they were challenged not only by members of the public, which would have allowed library leaders to paternalistically unite behind core values and professional organizations, but also *from within the profession itself*, placing the site of critique precisely on the failure of the core values to resist oppression of marginalized communities, as well as on the complicity of professional library associations in this oppression. The hegemony of library leadership was challenged and its legitimacy contested, forcing leadership to deflect this internal critique by deferring to sacrosanct core values and the procedural authority of the associations. Both the core values and the associations recognize the right to criticism, the rights of trans people, and the importance of community engagement, but recognition is—like pro forma Indigenous “consultation”—something *granted* by library leadership, deemed sufficient and requiring no re-evaluation of either the core values or the consequences of policy decisions. As we will see, the politics of recognition in Canadian librarianship reflects a broader reliance on recognition as a political instrument on the part of a settler-colonial state and the white, bourgeois, patriarchal society that upholds it.

### ***From the Politics of Recognition to Its Critique***

One key element that mediates between Canadian libraries’ self-image and the stark reality of power and oppression is *the politics of recognition*. In the 1970s, the individualist liberal politics dominant in Europe and North America since the Second World War began to be challenged by various collective identities, for example the Civil Rights movement, the women’s movement, and gay rights activists. In Canada, the two most obvious political examples were Indigenous rights activism and Quebec sovereignty, both of which developed rapidly at the end of the 1960s. “Recognition” was an attempt within liberal theory to take account of these collective demands (often called “group rights” or “minority rights”) without jettisoning the universalist, individualist conception of rights enshrined in the liberal legal and political order. Proper or appropriate recognition (of identity and difference) was seen as a way to achieve a just balance between group and individual rights, and Taylor (1994), one of the philosophical formulators of the politics of recognition, argued the need for recognition “is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements in politics” (p. 25). He went on to write that:

The demand for recognition... is given urgency by the supposed links between recognition and identity, where this latter term designates a something like a person’s understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being. The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped

by recognition or its absence, often by the *misrecognition* of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (Taylor, 1994, p. 25)

The politics of recognition is relevant to both the TPL and WPL cases. In the case of Radical Feminists Unite, it provides a way to understand the exercise of misrecognizing speech—for example, speech which denies trans lives and trans rights—as harmful rather than merely offensive, as well as a way TPL could have legitimately challenged the individualist conception of free expression from an intellectually rigorous perspective. For WPL, the exclusion of marginalized people not only *does not recognize* them as library users, but it actively *misrecognizes* them as already criminalized through the implementation of strict security measures. The fact that the majority of people targeted by WPL’s security programme are Indigenous supports the idea that misrecognition is based on a structured policy of increased marginalization of identifiable groups.

Like intellectual freedom, the politics of recognition are enshrined in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which claims at the outset that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all the members of the human family is the foundation of human freedom, justice and peace in the world” (UN, 1948, Preamble, para. 1). Article 6 states that “everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law” (UN, 1948). In Canada, debates around multiculturalism, religious freedom, and the status of Quebec as a distinct society have been informed by a politics of recognition, which also formed the basis of settler-Indigenous political relationships between the assimilationist 1969 “White Paper” and the advent of “reconciliation” as an alternative concept in the mid-1990s (Coulthard, 2014, p. 110).

The link between reconciliation and recognition is made explicit in the report of the “Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences”, entitled *Building the Future: A Time for Reconciliation* and co-authored by Québécois historian Bouchard and philosopher Taylor. The Commission was charged by Québec premier Jean Charest to develop a “response to public discontent concerning reasonable accommodation” of religious and cultural differences within the province and make recommendations to the government “to ensure that accommodation practices conform to Québec’s values as a pluralistic, democratic, egalitarian society” (Bouchard & Taylor, 2008, p. 17). From the outset, the egalitarian, democratic nature of Québécois society was presumed; like the core values of librarianship, this orientation provided an uncontested horizon from which to proceed. The idea that Québécois society might *not* already be democratic and egalitarian was out of bounds.

The concept of recognition informs many aspects of the Bouchard-Taylor report. For example, in their discussion of secularism, Bouchard and Taylor (2008) write that “the development in a society such as Québec of a feeling of belonging and identification

relies more on reasonable recognition of differences than on their strict relegation to the private sphere” (p. 138). Such “reasonable recognition” forms the basis of an “interculturalism model”, an “open conception of secularism” whose “first function... is the protection of the moral equality of citizens” (p. 138). Bouchard and Taylor’s intercultural model gains juridical and normative support from the Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms (1975) which, in section 10, states that “every person has a right to full and equal recognition and exercise of his [sic] human rights and freedoms, without distinction, exclusion or preference based on race, colour, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap” (p. 106). Significantly, the equivalent section in the Canadian charter differs from the Quebec charter. Section 15(1) of the Canadian charter reads: “Every individual *is equal* [emphasis added] before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (Government of Canada, 1982, section 15, para. 1). This important distinction between *being* equal and being *recognized* as equal is crucial to an understanding of both the TPL and WPL controversies. One of the main claims of this paper is that Canadian librarianship stops short at recognition, allowing libraries to view themselves as defenders of human rights while resisting any actual redistribution of social justice or egalitarian democratic participation.

*Building the Future* drew on Taylor’s existing interest in the politics of recognition. Informed by the 1990 Kaneshatà:ke resistance—also known as the Oka Crisis—Taylor published *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”* in 1992, offering a philosophical justification for a social and political concept that had begun to gain prominence in the 1970s.

Part of the traditional territories of the Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk nation), Kaneshatà:ke has been occupied by French settlers since the early 18<sup>th</sup> century and is the subject of a longstanding land claim by the Kanien'kéha:ka against the Canadian government. In 1990, the town of Oka, Québec, which surrounds Kaneshatà:ke, approved the expansion of a local golf course without consulting the Kanien'kéha:ka, who considered the particular tract of land sacred. Despite formal protest, the development pushed ahead until the Kanien'kéha:ka erected a barricade, preventing further development. After several injunctions and an attempt by the Kanien'kéha:ka to gain a moratorium on development, the Québec provincial police force, joined by members of the Canadian Army and the Montréal police, stormed the barricade, resulting in the death of a police officer, and provoking a 78-day standoff. On September 26, 1990, the Kanien'kéha:ka surrendered and the golf course expansion halted. The Canadian government purchased the land, but it has not as yet been returned to the Kanien'kéha:ka, and the

prior land claim is still unresolved (Coulthard, 2014, p. 116)<sup>14</sup>. It is in this context that Taylor's politics of recognition should be understood<sup>15</sup>.

The politics of recognition became influential in many fields over the next two decades, being applied to questions of Indigenous identity (Tully, 1995; 2008), queer theory (Heyes, 2003), feminism (Fraser, 1999; Honneth & Fraser, 2003), and trans activism (Hines, 2013). While it is not an uncontested concept, its influence has been profound, especially in policy decisions around Indigenous-state relations in Canada. Glen Sean Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene), in *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014) describes the influence the politics of recognition has had on Indigenous sovereignty movements in Canada, but also exposes the fundamental limitation of Taylor's formulation in not addressing the asymmetrical power dynamic between the colonial state and colonized First Nations. This power imbalance causes problems for Taylor's politics of recognition, especially in its Hegelian conception of identity-formation, which is predicated on the confrontation and mutual recognition of *equals*.

Taylor, part of an idealist tradition in Canadian philosophy (Meynell, 2011), has been a major figure in Canadian public life for many years. He ran for parliament three times in the 1960s, was a member of the Conseil de la langue française in Québec in 1991 and co-headed the commission identified above to investigate the reasonable accommodation of minorities in Québec in 2007. According to Hall, Taylor was responsible for introducing to the British New Left a French translation of Marx's 1844 manuscripts in the late 1950s (Hall, 2010, p. 188). Taylor's early work focused on Hegel, drawing heavily on Hegel's master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*<sup>16</sup> in his conception of identity formation. In the early 1990s, Taylor worked on various projects around the question of identity and individuality as part of a communitarian critique of what he saw as a modern culture of individual isolation and atomism. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor (1989) traced the philosophical lineage of modern individual identity and in the popular Massey Lectures of 1991, *The Malaise of Modernity*, he connected this identity to a corrosive individualism or narcissism that he saw as characteristic of modern societies (pp. 55-57). Going further, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* attempted to account for multiculturalism and a less individualized concept of identity within Taylor's framework of communitarian liberalism.

For Taylor, the need for recognition is one of the driving forces behind nationalist movements (for example, Québécois and Indigenous sovereignty), some feminisms, multiculturalism, and other political questions concerning subaltern groups. Today we might subsume all of these under the term "identity politics", and the question of identity is at the core of Taylor's politics of recognition. In his view, identity formation is dialogical—formed in dialogue with others. Taylor contrasts this dialogical view with the

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<sup>14</sup> One of the most powerful documents of the Kanien'kéha:ka resistance is the documentary *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), directed by Alanis Obomsawin (Abenaki). For an insider account of the Oka Crisis, see York & Pindera (1991).

<sup>15</sup> Though the concept was explored at the same time by the German critical theorist Axel Honneth (1992, translated 1995).

<sup>16</sup> This passage takes up only a small part of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Honneth's account of Hegel's theory of recognition draws on a more extensive corpus (Honneth, 1995).

monological conception of identity which he argues arose over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Taylor's view of this process is resolutely idealist. For example, in discussing the subjective turn in modern society, Taylor (1994) writes:

The most important philosophical writer who helped to bring about this change was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. I think Rousseau is important not because he inaugurated the change; rather, I would argue that his great popularity comes in part from his articulating something that was *in a sense* [emphasis added] already occurring in the culture. (p. 29)

It is significant that Taylor backed away from ascribing causality to Rousseau's thought. After initially claiming that Rousseau helped to bring about the transition to modern subjectivity, Taylor then makes the weaker claim that Rousseau merely articulated something that was already happening. More important, however, is Taylor's inability to see social and intellectual changes as having a source outside ideas themselves. The turn to subjectivity is happening *in some sense* that is inexplicable in the terms of Taylor's approach.

The subjective turn entailed a move towards inwardness and authenticity that Taylor ascribed to Herder, and which he saw as the source of isolated, narcissistic modern culture. Inwardness and authenticity conceive the source of our moral and social values to be purely individual, arising from our most authentic, inward self. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor (1989) describes the long process of this inwardness and individualism, marking a particular turning point in the Early Modern period with Descartes and Locke.

In contrast to the monologic conception of identity, which sees the authentic self as the *only* source of identity, Taylor (1989) argues for a dialogical conception, in which "we become fully human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression", that is, through social contact with other people (p. 32). He claims that the dialogic or social nature of identity formation "has been rendered almost invisible by the overwhelmingly monological bent of mainstream<sup>17</sup> modern philosophy" (p. 32).

For Taylor (1994), languages in a broad sense are modes of expression learned through exchange with others: "People don't acquire the languages needed for self-definition on their own. Rather, we are introduced to them through interaction with others who matter to us" (p. 32). However, Taylor does not go so far as a social construction of identity. Rather, he continues to hold to an individualistic origin of the self that brings social relationships in after the fact<sup>18</sup>. The influence of our significant others *contributes* to identity formation but does not constitute it. "My identity" is

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<sup>17</sup> The term "mainstream" here automatically precludes Marxism, which is unfortunate, as not only has the social construction of identity been a core concern of many Marxisms, but Taylor's choice of language as a metaphor for the dialogic nature of identity was used by Marx in exactly the same sense in his critique of "Robinsonades" in the *Grundrisse* notebooks of 1857 (Marx, 1973, p. 84).

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Honneth argues that Hegel's intersubjective account of identity-formation was intended *precisely* to counter this kind of atomistic social ontology (Honneth, 1995, p. 12). Because Coulthard engages with Taylor's theory of recognition, I do not address Honneth's version in this article.

ontologically separate from “my dialogical relations with others” (p. 34), as opposed to, say, the Marxist approach which argues individuals are born into an already-existing set of social relationships that are more fundamentally constitutive than Taylor’s dualistic conception allows.

As we have seen, Taylor’s dialogical approach places great importance on the ways we see and are seen by our significant others. Taylor’s politics of recognition are influential because they propose that equality is the only satisfactory solution to the problem of a dialogical formation of identity and a narcissistic modernity. However, far from being an *outcome*, liberal democracies—and the libraries that support them—have tended to assume they are *already* regimes of “reciprocal recognition among equals”, and this presumption has the effect of making it difficult to talk about or point out inequality. This is evident not only in debates around intellectual freedom in libraries, but also in questions of formal equality in elections, in Indigenous sovereignty, and in questions of equity, diversity, and inclusion. One can also connect this spurious equality with the distinction Marx makes between the “formal freedom” of workers (i.e., the “formal equality” between labour and capital) and the reality of exploitation (Marx, 1976, p. 272). Taylor’s inability to comprehend this distinction lies at the heart of Coulthard’s critique.

### ***Coulthard, Fanon, and Self-Recognition***

As the title suggests, Coulthard’s (2014) *Red Skin, White Masks* applies Fanon’s critique of colonialism to the question of Indigenous recognition by the Canadian state following the 1969 White Paper on Indigenous policy (p. 4). Coulthard argued that while a politics of recognition became the dominant lens through which to view Indigenous-settler political relationships in Canada, recognition proved to be an inadequate theory on which to base questions of Indigenous sovereignty, land, rights, etc. Following Fanon, Coulthard posited it is precisely because the relationship between the colonial state/settler society and colonized peoples is *unequal* that Taylor’s politics of recognition breaks down in multinational settler-colonial polities. The author will later show how this breakdown also applies in the case of trans rights.

Coulthard made explicit two ways in which Hegel’s master/slave dialectic applies to the colonial situation. On the one hand, it underpins a theory of identity which takes social relations seriously (i.e., which rejects the individualism of colonial and capitalist culture). On the other hand, it uses this relational conception of identity as the basis for a theory of human freedom. Coulthard (2014) elaborated that:

[T]he master/slave narrative can be read in a normative light in that it suggests that the realization of oneself as an essential, self-determining agent requires that one not only be recognized as self-determining, but that one be recognized by another self-consciousness that is also recognized as self-determining. It is through these reciprocal processes and exchanges of recognition that the condition for the possibility for freedom emerges. (p. 28)

However, while Coulthard recognized that identity formation is not monological, he conformed to Hegel’s and Taylor’s conception of the ontological priority of the individual.

It is not the *genesis* of the “essential, self-determining agent” that is in question, but the agent’s self-recognition through mutual recognition. For Coulthard, independence and self-determination are a *truth* about individuals, realized through the praxis of the slave. Coulthard did not question the individualistic conceptions of independence, self-determination, or freedom that form the basis of Hegel’s view of identity formation, but recognized that the theory hinges on the equality of the participants. It is precisely the equality of two already-existing individuals that makes recognition dialectical: an individualist ontology requires a politics of equality. Indeed, this is where Taylor stops, with the equation of the proper regime of mutually recognizing individuals and the liberal-democratic, bourgeois state.

However, while the individualistic/dialectical conception may work from the perspective of face-to-face encounters, Coulthard argued it becomes more problematic when state institutions begin to play a role in the mediation of these encounters. There is a power imbalance between the state and any identity group within it. As a result, when the liberal state focuses on formal equality (especially equality of rights), it finishes by erasing difference and destroying the very concept of multiculturalism/diversity Taylor sought to recuperate. In Coulthard’s (2014) view, Taylor’s politics of recognition become a way for states to “recognize and accommodate a range of group-specific claims without having to abandon their commitment to a core set of fundamental rights” (p. 29). However, asymmetrical relationships may deform the process of mutual recognition, by misrecognition or non-recognition (Coulthard, 2014, p. 30).

Given the unequal power relationships between the Canadian state and minority communities (either in Québec or with Indigenous peoples), Taylor’s insistence on a regime of equality falls apart. Coulthard argued that these power relationships make recognition something that is “ultimately ‘granted’ or ‘accorded’ a subaltern group or entity by a dominant group or entity” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 31), noting that this issue was previously broached by Fanon in his own anti-colonial interpretation of Hegel’s dialectic. Taylor (1994) also drew on Fanon’s work (pp. 65-66), but Coulthard argued that Taylor attempted to co-opt Fanon into support for a regime of enlightened liberalism; Coulthard (2014) contested “[Taylor’s] assumption that a more accommodating, liberal regime of mutual recognition might be capable of addressing the power relations typical of those between Indigenous peoples and settler states” (p. 31).

Coulthard insisted, again echoing Fanon, that the since the repressive function of the colonial state operates at two levels—the objective and the subjective<sup>19</sup>—it needs to be resisted at both levels. Taylor’s politics of recognition may be capable of mitigating the subjective aspects of oppression (by the mutual recognition of equals), but only at the expense of leaving the objective side (political and economic relations, for example) untouched. At best, Taylor’s political proposal may address some of the *distributive* inequality of settler-colonialism, but does not address its *foundational* inequalities<sup>20</sup>,

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<sup>19</sup> i.e., objective coercion and subjective consent in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony.

<sup>20</sup> Coulthard here draws on the work of Fraser, who distinguishes between “affirmative strategies for redressing for injustice” which “aim to correct inequitable outcomes of social frameworks without disturbing the underlying social structures that generate them” and “transformative strategies” which “aim

such as the ability of the state to expropriate land for pipeline development in the service of private capital. While, in the end, Taylor's approach "may alter the intensity of some of the effects colonial-capitalist exploitation and domination, it does little to address their generative structures" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 35).

A second, and perhaps more significant, problem Coulthard (2014) addressed with Taylor's theory is how a politics of recognition maintains existing power relations precisely by granting or according recognition:

Fanon argued that the dialectical progression to reciprocity in relations of recognition is frequently undermined in colonial situations by the fact that, unlike the subjugated slave in *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, many colonized societies no longer have to *struggle* for their freedom and independence. It is often negotiated, achieved through constitutional amendment, or simply 'declared' by the settler state and bestowed upon the Indigenous population in the form of political rights. (p. 38)

Ironically enough, an unequal politics of recognition leads to a condition in which colonized peoples are (discursively, symbolically, or legally) *recognized* while leaving the underlying power structures unchanged; this is further precisely what happens in the performative recognition of library values. *This* form of recognition *deepens* the psychological effect of colonialism on colonized subjects (or of transphobia on trans people). In this case, "the terms of recognition tend to remain in the possession of those in power to bestow on their inferiors in ways that they deem appropriate" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 39). Struggle, in particular violent struggle, becomes important for Fanon as a means of liberating colonial subjects from the inequality inherent in *this* unequal process of recognition. "Desubjectification" becomes necessary for colonized peoples not to identify with colonial forms of life and claim them as their own. Coulthard showed there is a problem with the condition of *dependency* within Hegel's master/slave dialectic that has serious repercussions for anti-colonial struggle in the real world.

In the relationship between equals in Hegel's dialectic, recognition is mutual and reciprocal. It is this reciprocity that Taylor insisted on to base his regime of multiculturalism and equal rights. But as Coulthard (2014) pointed out, following Fanon, there can be no reciprocity in settler-colonialism. In such contexts, settler-colonized relationships do not depend on mutual and reciprocal recognition: the colonial state and settler society "do not require recognition from the previously self-determining communities upon which its territorial, economic, and social infrastructure is constituted. What it needs is land, labor, and resources" (p. 40). Coulthard (2014) identified only two outcomes of this unequal situation: the domestication of "formally equal" colonized peoples and the reduction of self-determination to a specific set of cultural manifestations<sup>21</sup>, or "the dialectic breaks down with the explicit *non*recognition of the

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to correct unjust outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework" (Honneth & Fraser, 2003, p. 74).

<sup>21</sup> Indeed, it is significant that Tully (1995) restricts his analysis of recognition to *cultural* recognition (and adopts the term "politics of cultural recognition", thereby limiting its scope to the subjective/affirmative rather than the objective/transformational level of multinational political life).



equal status of the colonized population” (p. 40). In either case, “recognition inevitably leads to subjection” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 42). Libraries—through their expressed codes of values—have long supported the first outcome, the recognition of minorities and marginalized communities provided they do not challenge the hegemony of library policy or the state.

For example, on October 22, 2019, one week before the Palmerston branch protest, many trans people and allies showed up at a TPL board meeting to express their disagreement with the Radical Feminists Unite room rental and to convey their lived experiences to the board members. Many people reported the danger faced and harm done to trans people in Canadian society, but were ignored by the board and had their concerns dismissed. It has since been learned, through documents released via Freedom of Information Act requests, that the decision *not* to take trans people’s lived experiences into consideration had been taken in advance<sup>22</sup>. TPL’s support of transphobia and the *recognition theatre* of the board meeting led to public criticism of police coercion at Palmerston. This, coupled with WPL’s securitized exclusion of Indigenous and other marginalized people, suggests that when simple recognition fails to properly discipline and constrain subaltern populations’ demands for equality, then Coulthard’s second outcome comes into play: the explicit *nonrecognition* of trans and Indigenous populations as equals. The failure of consent to ensure hegemony leads to violent coercion. Nonrecognition, like the misrecognition inherent in both transphobia and racism, does untold harm to oppressed people, as Taylor argued. But where Taylor and the politics of recognition presumed a democratic, egalitarian society in which recognition achieves the desired social justice outcomes of liberal tolerance, the reality of continued inequality and lack of democracy empties recognition of all potential for political and social change.

### ***Conclusion: The Limits of Recognition***

The values statements of libraries are exercises in the performance of recognition. They indicate an awareness of social issues libraries ought to be engaged in, but are very often empty of political weight, not formally committing a given library to a particular policy or course of action. Like intellectual freedom, the politics of recognition allow libraries to maintain a neutral self-image. For example, TPL’s values include diversity, described as “valuing individual needs, experiences and differences”, yet the experiences of trans people were ignored (n.d.-a). The value of inclusion, defined as “welcoming participation in decision making and service development by residents and communities” was cast aside through an absolutist commitment to intellectual freedom. In the Winnipeg Public Library’s 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, Rick Walker (2015), manager of Winnipeg library services, writes that during strategic plan consultation, “newcomers and Indigenous peoples shared how the library could play a more important role in their lives... and when we asked you to tell us what community and

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<sup>22</sup> In an email to TPL board members dated October 18, 2019, City Librarian Vickery Bowles acknowledged that people speaking before the board was “an important part of the democratic process” but nonetheless insisted that “we will not back down when it comes to upholding intellectual freedom and defending free speech”. Additionally, Board member and City Councillor Gord Perks shared a statement supporting Bowles’ decision prior to the October 22 board meeting (Perks [2019]).

social priorities should be our focus, you told us that creating a welcoming, safe and accessible environment within our communities was a high priority” (p. 2). The views of community members were *recognized* as part of the consultation process, but on the advice of police, the library elected to create an unwelcoming, inaccessible, militarized space at the cost of at least a 25% drop in library use. As the authors of the Millennium4All report noted, “this is a significant decline in use for an institution intended for widespread public use” (Selman, et al., 2019, p. 7).

Recognition, then, has its limits and becomes emptied of all social and political content, as when land acknowledgements are recited by rote with no intention of allowing them to inform policy or decision-making, or when Indigenous consultations become “hollow and tokenistic” (Warren, 2019, para. 1) when performed by the state or by private capital. In all these cases, recognition is granted, but nothing else, making it merely a mechanism for the continued oppression of marginalized people. The impasse identified by Coulthard—performative recognition with no intention to change, or explicit *nonrecognition* and the imposition of state violence—is fully at play within Canadian librarianship. The question is whether there is any way out of this impasse.

To start, we have to admit that recognition means nothing without redistribution. Canadian librarianship, like the Canadian state, can empty recognition of all political significance because recognition and redistribution have been effectively decoupled. As Fraser (1999) has argued, “justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition. Neither alone is sufficient” (p. 26). She asserted that to achieve this, parity of participation is required, the kind of participation denied trans people at TPL or marginalized community members in Winnipeg. Fraser (1999) stated that understanding recognition as a question of justice, not just of procedure, has the advantage of

Conceiv[ing] misrecognition as status *subordination* whose locus is social relations, not individual psychology. To be misrecognized, on this view, is not simply to be thought ill of, looked down on, or devalued in others’ conscious attitudes or mental beliefs. It is rather to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction and prevented from participating as a peer in social life as a consequence of *institutionalized* patterns of cultural value that constitute one as comparatively unworthy of respect or esteem. When such patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities. (p. 34)

For Coulthard, Fanon’s later work recognized the limits of the dialectical approach to recognition and offered a way forward. In rejecting the mutuality of Hegel’s dialectic in the unequal relations of colonial domination, the question for Coulthard (2014) became “if Fanon did not see freedom as naturally emanating from the slave being granted recognition from his or her master, where, if at all, did it originate?” (p. 43).

Fanon’s answer is radical in its simplicity: a rejection of the dialectic of recognition itself in favour of “personal and collective *self-affirmation*” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 43). Colonized subjects cannot wait for recognition to be accorded to them, but rather must affirm their freedom, self-worth, and equality, just as the trans activists did at Palmerston. Coulthard

(2014) connected this radical self-affirmation with the refusal of the dialectic of recognition:

Fanon equated this process of *self-recognition* with the praxis undertaken by the slave in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which Fanon saw as illustrating the necessity on the part of the oppressed to 'turn away' from their other-oriented master-dependency, and to instead struggle for freedom on their own terms and in accordance with their own values (p. 43)

What has been witnessed at both TPL and WPL is the joining together of library workers with community members to challenge the hegemonic role played by libraries as apparatuses of the settler-colonial and cisnormative state. This kind of worker self-organization, and not the constituted power of professional associations, is the key to the lack of legislative professional framework in libraries. The lengths library leadership went to in silencing internal dissent and debate, the marshalling of support from CULC, CFLA, and the Ryerson Centre for Free Expression, all indicate that library workers siding with community members puts pressure on library leadership to maintain control and discipline. The more pressure is brought to bear and the more experience library workers gain in self-affirmation, self-direction, and direct participation alongside community members, the more the contradictions between the constituent power of library labour and the constituted power of leadership are sharpened, nourishing the growth of a librarianship capable of parity of participation as opposed to hierarchical "leadership", a necessary condition for supporting and enabling real redistributive social justice.

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