Empirical Research Plan – Outline Chapters 6, 7, 8.

Chapter Outline for Context:

1. Introduction: Resurgence of the People

Part One: Constituent Power and the Politics of Recognition

1. Factories of Subjectivity: Theories of Identity and the Politics of Recognition
2. Free, Informed Choice: Constitutional Theory and Cultural Recognition
3. The Dialectic of Virtue and Freedom: A Negrean Critique of the Politics of Recognition

Part Two: The Right Kind of Citizen

1. Introduction: Canadian Politics, Recognition, and Intellectual Freedom
2. The Right Gender: Minority Rights, Free Speech, and Transphobia at Toronto Public Library
3. The Right Race: Indigenous Dispossession and Security at Winnipeg Public Library
4. The Right Class: Workplace Speech, Precarity, and Crisis
5. Conclusion: Una cultura ancora offensive

Chapter 6: The Right Gender.

The Toronto Public Library controversy produced a large number of documents, both internal to TPL publicly released in response to two Freedom-of-Information requests, as well as a very public discursive struggle interpreting and contextualizing the controversy and its issues. I don’t know if it matters, but I was deeply embedded in this discursive struggle through my blog. The core of this chapter will be to reconstitute the timeline of the controversy and focus on the way different parties (especially the TPL chief librarian and the Ryerson University Centre for Free Expression) interpreted what was going on, from a political theory perspective. My hypothesis here is that, while they never openly acknowledge it, the TPL and CFE positions are derived from hegemonic liberal theory (specifically the politics of recognition) in terms of its focus on individual identity, individual rights, and the role of the state. There is also an important rhetorical shift here from intellectual freedom (the term used in librarianship) not to freedom of expression (the term used in the Canadian Charter of Rights) but to free speech (the term used in the American legal context). A second hypothesis is that trans rights are excluded from the politics of recognition in this case because they are not considered “cultural”. This was made clear at the TPL board meeting in which trans lived experience was only rhetorically recognized but in reality were *not recognized*. (Documents related to the board meeting indicate that the board’s decision to go ahead with the event was made in advance, and so testimony on the part of trans people was simply “recognition theatre”)

Document sources:

1. FOIA request documents (2 corpuses, mostly including the same material).
2. Public communications from the Toronto City Librarian, Vickery Bowles (Radio interviews, TPL communiqués, speeches and addresses).
3. Blog posts from the Ryerson CFE, the American Library Association’s Office of Intellectual Freedom, and librarians; news stories from national newpapers (Globe and Mail; National Post).
4. Twitter eyewitness accounts of the TPL board meeting, the Palmerston branch protest, and the police intervention in the protest. This includes Councillor Gord Perks’ public statement on the board’s decision, which was automatically released before the board had made its decision.

* This chapter will use research by trans activist and prison abolitionist Dean Spade.

Chapter 7: The Right Race

This chapter will explore the implementation of “airport style” security at the main downtown branch of the Winnipeg Public Library in the context of settler-Indigenous relations in the city, and the rhetorical use of a “meth crisis” to expand policing and private security throughout downtown. The security instituted at WPL triggered a grass-roots community response that challenged the library at city council hearings. The main focus in this chapter is to connect what the library positioned as a narrow, tightly-scoped response to staff safety concerns to larger historical questions of land, dispossession, racism, and security/safety in Winnipeg. This chapter will explore how the library – fully in line with its role in cultural and ideological reproduction – exists as a kind of white, bourgeois outpost in the middle of a “dangerous” zone of poor, Indigenous people. One hypothesis is that by excluding Indigenous people from the library (people mostly affected by the security policy), it excludes them from the library’s “civilizing” mission (the same way that it excluded trans people in the TPL case). This exclusion is necessary for “non cultural” elements in a politics of recognition (genderfluidity or nonconformity, land and non-capitalist modes of production in the Winnipeg case).

Document sources:

1. Internal and publicly released documents from the city and Winnipeg Public Library.
2. Documents produced by the Millennium4All citizen group, especially its alternative report presented to city council.
3. Press releases and reports about the wider crisis of safety and security in Winnipeg.

* This chapter will employ research by Bronwyn Dobchuk-Land on the meth crisis and policing in Winnipeg, as well as recent work on settler-colonialism in Winnipeg (Owen Toews’ *Stolen City*, Dorries et al’s *Settler City Limits*) and more broadly (Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks* and Nichols’ *Theft is Property!*).

Chapter 8: The Right Class

This chapter isn’t based on documentary research. Given the restrictions on travel and on face-to-face meetings during the COVID crisis, I think a good way to manage this would be to set up a blog which will allow participants to answer survey questions and give their own account of the question of workplace speech, precarity, and work situations in Canadian libraries. This chapter will also draw on recent research on precarious library work done by the Precarity in LIS group. I’ll have to design a survey instrument, but what I’m most interested is subjective or phenomenological accounts of workplace speech, precarity, etc.

Participants will be drawn from Canadian public library workers. One way to do this would be to construct an initial survey that can be sent out via national and regional communication channels (e.g. listservs), with an option at the end to be contacted for further information. This contact could take the form of a login to a blog system which would have a few more long-form, open-ended questions where people could write about their own experiences.

Besides statistical questions (e.g. urban or rural library, size in branches of library system, etc), the survey could ask questions about whether workers feel their workplace speech is covered by their library’s commitment to intellectual freedom, whether they have ever had presentations or other communications vetted or changed by library management, etc. Regarding precarity and the crisis, there could be questions about permanence (is there a probation period? Is the library unionized, etc) and layoffs/furloughs as a result of COVID.

On the blog, which would be anonymous and allow for further reflection, workers can be asked about their feelings towards intellectual freedom in libraries, precarity and the state of the profession, the effects of the COVID crisis on their work and lives, etc.

This chapter seems less focused/solid than the previous two. Is it worth trying to do this? It has the potential, I think, to grow into a research project that is perhaps unmanageable within the context of the thesis. It also seems less directly connected to the focus of thesis than chapters 6 and 7.