

School of Communication
Simon Fraser University
Comprehensive Examination Questions for Nicole Lindsay

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1. Written Exam

Questions delivered: via email, 9:00am, November 12, 2010.

Answers due: via email, 9:00am, November 19, 2010.

- electronic copies of exam to be sent to all supervisors and Denise Vanderwolf (gradcmns@sfu.ca)
- 2 hard copies of exam to be mailed to Denise Vanderwolf as soon as possible.

Answer two questions from *each* comprehensive area (for a total of four answers). Each answer should be 2500-3000 words in length.

2. Oral Exam

To be scheduled.

Breadth: Discourse, Power, Culture: Capitalism and Ideology

1. For many of the authors in your bibliography, the concept of class is of central importance in theorizing both the political economy of capitalism and capitalist ideology. Yet class plays only a very minor role in your definitional essay. Why? Does the concept of class no longer have much to tell us about the workings of discourse, power and culture in contemporary capitalist societies?
2. Thinking through the complex relations between political economy and culture/ideology has been among the most difficult yet productive theoretical tasks of critical social theory. Which authors and texts in your bibliography have you found most helpful in this regard? How does one balance the need to trace the linkages between political economy and ideology without either reducing the one to an 'effect' of the other or exaggerating their autonomy from each other?
3. What are the principal features of contemporary global capitalism which distinguish it from earlier forms of capitalism, especially that which was dominant in the post-war period? How has capitalism changed over time? How has it remained the same? How have different theorists of the late 20th and early 21st century capitalism theorized the role of transnational corporations and neoliberal ideology in the expansion and reproduction of capitalism?
4. In your essay you note that "the dialectic of struggle that drives history ensures that power is never a given, but must be continually asserted and reasserted". How do the authors on your list help you to theorize and explain this 'dialectic of struggle'? Why is such a dialectic *always* present? Is such a dialectic an 'internal' product of capitalism, or the result of something external to capitalism which resists its colonization, appropriation or commodification? Is such an 'inside/outside' distinction useful or appropriate in understanding this dialectic? Why or why not? What is the potential for this dialectic to produce alternative forms of social, economic and political life which could lead us beyond capitalism?

Depth: The Politics of Global Governance, Development and Sustainability

1. Many have argued that globalization (and its attendant risks and crises) have led to what you describe as “a fundamental crisis in the legitimacy and political efficacy of the nation state … creating a void in the realm of representation and legitimate policy-making”. Yet others would suggest that (some) nation-states are as much the authors and enforcers of capitalist globalization as its victims. Assess how the literature in your bibliography helps us to understand and theorize the evolving role of the state in the processes of globalization, international governance and development. Which authors and/or texts do you find most helpful in this context? What are the major points of convergence and/or divergence of the authors/texts on your list on the question of the changing role of the state?
2. As you note in your essay, the institutions, practices and ideology of development have become more and more closely aligned with (neo-liberal) capitalism over the last two decades. How does one explain the process by which the concept of development has been harmonized or synchronized with capitalism? Are there other approaches or models of development discussed by the authors and/or texts on your list which represent(ed) a fundamental alternative to capitalism? Is it possible for sustainable development to ever become something other than, as you put it, “an oxy-moronic” term or, even worse, an ideological cover for ‘business-as-usual’? Why or why not?
3. In your essay you express scepticism about “the potential of networked grassroots civil society organizations to resist and/or counter the hegemony of global capital in shaping the trajectory of globalization”. Please expand on the reasoning and evidence for such scepticism, drawing on both texts which develop a more optimistic reading of that potential as well as those which are more pessimistic about such prospects. What are the realistic possibilities for social movements to resist and reshape existing practices and institutions of globalization, governance and development?
4. Why does much of the literature on development and sustainability neglect a systematic investigation into the particular activities of specific corporations and/or particular economic and industrial practices? Why is such investigation largely left to those working in the fields of business and economic history? How might we better conduct meso-level analysis which focuses upon the business and governance practices of corporations? And how would such analysis enhance our understanding of the relationship between the discourse and practice of ‘corporate social responsibility’ and broader questions of development, sustainability and governance?
5. You say you wish to draw “a red thread” linking injustice and inequity with globalization and development. If a key instrument of globalization is the corporation, isn’t it important how it is conceived and conceptualized? The definition of corporations as “persons” became an important factor in Canadian law (and American law too, though my knowledge of other jurisdictions is limited), subjecting corporations (in theory) to obligations with respect to human rights, communication, transparency (re corruption), etc. You also say there is more evidence of ‘networked rule-making’ produced in the sphere of multicentre collectivities, as an illustration of the increasing thickness of the global system. Much effort has been put recently into drawing a newer ‘green thread’ that links ecological responsibility to corporate permission to extract and exploit (licenses etc).

Linking the ‘corporation as legal person’ to this new trend, can you see evidence of ‘networked rule-avoiding’ by corporate collectivities, along with the corporations’ keenness to frame and define rules in and through these collectivities? Trying not to over-generalize, and using illustrations if possible, can you say whether and where the red thread and green thread intersect? And is this a source of the state’s “persistent crisis in legitimacy” you spoke about in the position paper, particularly those states which have weaker forms of rule-making and rule-enforcing?