Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

of

JENNIFER MATEER

MA (Queen’s University, 2010)
BSoc Sci. (University of Ottawa, 2008)

“Neoliberal Water Management in Northwestern India: Impacts and Experiences of the Shifting Hydro-Social Cycle”

Department of Geography

Tuesday, May 23, 2017
1:00PM
David Turpin Building
Room B215

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Simon Springer, Department of Geography, University of Victoria (Supervisor)
Dr. Reuben Rose-Redwood, Department of Geography, UVic (Member)
Dr. Douglas Hill, Department of Geography, Otago University (Outside Member)

External Examiner:
Dr. Farhana Sultana, Department of Geography, Syracuse University

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Stacey Fitzsimmons, Peter B. Gustavson School of Business, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Water scarcity and water contamination are persistent problems facing large numbers of people in India. In order to combat scarcity, the Indian Federal government designated 2016 to be the Year of Water Conservation. In order to prepare for the success of this initiative, different management strategies and awareness campaigns began in 2015. Critics have generally responded favourably to these shifts in water management because conservation is considered a benevolent and even environmentally-friendly, or “green” process that can successfully combat water scarcity. However, these initiatives often change the ways in which people access water based upon new governing mentalities. The governing mentality most strongly underpinning these initiatives is based on a neoliberal rationality, which is generally admonished by academics and activists due to the production of uneven socio-economic landscapes under neoliberal economics. Similarly, in an effort to combat water contamination, governing authorities have initiated programs and policies to ensure that safe water is provided for citizens. However, this too has often been influenced by neoliberal governing mentalities. In order to analyze these shifts, this dissertation takes a closer look at the narratives of water conservation, water scarcity, and water contamination using a political ecology framework in three states in North Western India: Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Haryana. The following manuscript style thesis consists of five independent papers, plus an introduction and conclusion, linked thematically through the discussion and analyses of the shifting nature of the hydro-social cycle under the pressure of various neoliberal reforms and processes initiated by federal and state governing authorities in North Western India. Having independent papers lends itself to a more nuanced discussion of the ways in which neoliberal water management strategies are lived-out in various communities. Neoliberalism is not an overarching hegemonic project or phenomenon, and as such the discourses of neoliberalism have had different consequences for different communities and populations. As such, this thesis highlights the ways in which the shifting hydro-social cycle has changed gender-related activities of water collection, the ways in which contamination is a form of slow violence, the ways in which defacto public-private partnerships operate in water scarce urban centres, and the ways in which discourses of conservation can be misleading and even manufactured.