1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD
(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The idea of comparing a socialist and neoliberal doctrine in the Czech Republic from the critical feminist perspective, as suggested by the title, sounded very promising. Unfortunately, this promise does not translate to a clear research question, as in different parts of the text Ms. Crema declares different goals. In the abstract, she writes that the thesis is about bridging the gap between theory and living experience. Later in the text, she stresses that her main questions focus on “how has the implementation of neoliberal policies impacted the role and position of women within a formerly Socialist state?”, as well as the question “to what extent has neoliberal-oriented policy differed from that under socialism?”. Still, the main question: ‘how has the implementation of neoliberal policies impacted the role and position of women within a formerly Socialist state?’ is sufficiently addressed in the text.
Yet, as the paper progresses, the student seems to be more interested in answering the relational question of whether policies under neoliberalism differed from those under the Socialism. Finally, in the conclusions, the author states: “The goal of this thesis was to analyze a variety of documents including social policy, interviews, and personal reflections as a means to highlight the ways in which the state displays itself as a power-centric force, and the impact of this force upon the population.”

Reading the analytical chapters does not solve the puzzle entirely, as Ms. Crema analyses the documents from both socialist and post-socialist times with an aim of showing how both socialist and neo-liberal doctrines define women’s social role and more generally the citizenship and the role of the state. The paper does provide an effective historical and socio-political argument for the relevance and importance of the chosen topic. This is explained in the introductory chapter, which provides the historical and socio-political context of the research, narrating main historical events that resulted in the adoption of neoliberal policies and locating vignettes that evince the role of women through periods of turmoil. It advances an engaging discussion of the definitions of crucial concepts e.g. gender and the state, and their relationships, though the latter could have been distilled more clearly. The concept of intersectionality, central to the analysis, would need further discussion and critical engagement with given its significance. Chapter 3 synthesises the various contributions to international relations and theories on state formation from a feminist angle, zooming into state socialism—specific to the research problem at hand. This chapter provides a consistent review of relevant theoretical insights and critical reflection of these insights, including the tensions within the field. the thesis prioritised scope over depth, something that could not be amended for the final submission resulting in an apparent lack of focus. Yet, the richness of the literature review and engagement with the various approaches, theories, and theorists shows her academic research skills. The thesis fails to translate such richness into a sound theoretical framework, but still makes a good effort to synthetize the various theories and establish her conceptual approach.

2. ANALYSIS
(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

The thesis does not state its aims and research questions clearly, and this weakness translates to the work’s inconsistency. The thesis presents a succinct discussion of the methodological
choices made and their implications. A more focused and critical methodological reflection could have done more justice to the textured analysis presented in the findings section of the paper. Yet the thesis does have some strong and interesting parts. Firstly, the characterisation of the doctrines of (post)socialism and neoliberalism offers a good insight into the character of both systems. Yet, the student decides to label both as "theory" (i.e. socialist theory and neoliberal theory). In what sense are they theories? Even if we agreed that we could use this term, is it justified to use it in a singular form? It is unfortunate that the student refers to them as theories in her final submission, but this appears to be an issue of semantics as she deals with the normative features or foundational aspects that have guided these different regimes e.g. equality vs agency. Secondly, the thesis does refer to a rich theoretical background and uses various sources. This shows Ms. Crema’s theoretical awareness. However, this theoretical background does not translate to clear conceptualisation and operationalisation of the research questions (although this may result from the thesis’s lack of focus, as I already stated).

The methodological part of the thesis seems particularly problematic. The author does not explain the procedure which she employed when choosing these documents rather than others, nor does she explain the sampling procedure (i.e. what was the strategy of selecting ministerial documents?). Another problem relates to the comparative aspect of the analysis. Comparing the texts of constitutions from socialist and post-socialist times makes perfect sense. In fact it brings interesting insights into how the different doctrines (i.e. socialist and neo-liberal) conceptualise individuals and their rights. However, using the ministerial documents and then the reports from the World Bank or views of Vaclav Klaus to determine the shape of social policies in both periods was less clear. Surely, we could claim that the policy documents prepared by the Ministry shaped/impacted the social reality of women during the socialist times. The assumption that the World Bank reports or even Klaus’s views (as the author did not analyse the policies introduced by his government) had a similar impact seems problematic. To be clear, why did the author not use the ministerial documents from the post-socialist times to see how the neoliberal agenda translated to social policy? Such a comparison would serve as proper evidence backing up the author’s arguments about the similarities and differences between the two doctrines in their conceptualisation of citizens, women, and the state’s role towards them.
However succinct, the methodology section provides a basic description of sources used, but Ms. Crema fails to make the methodological choices explicit and this constitutes the most problematic aspect of the thesis. The rationale behind their selection is somewhat mentioned later in the analysis. The student approached the various documents as instruments of critique to conduct discursive analysis—appropriate method to explore the normative aspects that the student seemed concerned about. This is competently done in the analysis of the texts of the constitution. The inclusion of other sources is less obvious and creates confusion. As the student's main concern was with social policy, for she argues it determines the position of women vis-à-vis the state and in relation to the family, she opted for an analysis of ministerial documents, World Bank reports or Vaclav Klaus' views that could help distilling such elements. Yet, the student does not justify the use of these documents nor does she deliver a schematic comparison across these periods.

The thesis makes a good effort to advance a theoretically informed analysis of the Czech case, as discussed in section chapter 4. This chapter could have distilled the relationships between concepts more clearly and formulated a theoretical model rather than conducting a second literature review, though that could be considered an issue of structure rather than substance. In the findings chapter, the student shows a solid grasp of the subject matter. The analysis of the Czech Constitution shows a strong ability to combine theory and method in applied work, as exemplified by the critical reading of equality that emerges from the documentary analysis. The breakdown of gender in intersection with age and class is clear and pertinent. This section also shows the analytical skills of the student and her critical use of literature. The analysis of policies associated to Vaclav Klaus demonstrate a critical engagement with literature on state formation and the issue of economic rights e.g. employment; as separate from social and political rights. Nonetheless, the centrality of women fades out in this section to re-emerge partly under the marketization section and the analysis of SAPs. A stronger emphasis on individualism, as prioritized under neoliberalism, could have helped flagging the structure within women were left to operate after the dissolution of communality aspects that although essentializing, seemed to provide some form of support to women. Again, an intersectional lens, as successfully applied to previous section, could have added more texture and analytical depth to the analysis of the post-transition period.
3. CONCLUSIONS
(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Due to the lack of clearly stated aims and research questions, the thesis reads incoherent. However, the empirical part, even if problematic due to the strategy used for choosing the material for analysis, does offer some interesting outcomes. The author managed to show not only discontinuities visible in post-socialist transformations in Central and Eastern Europe after 1989, but also some similarities. In this way, she challenges views that are often taken for granted about the radical differences between socialist and neoliberal doctrines and their social and political outcomes.

The conclusions evince how policies under socialism and neoliberalism could share some common features or rather e.g. the inability to level the playing field for women, approaching them instrumentally. The argument of state-centred power is less clear and persuasive than that of the multi-layered position of women as mothers, workers and citizens, sufficiently backed by the analysis.

The thesis ends with a short reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the research, though this could have been done more critically.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE
(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis meets the formal requirements for an MA thesis. It uses the appropriate academic language, applies correct citation style and has a rather clear layout. It provides a (mostly) consistent narrative and consistent footnoting, referencing and bibliography according to a recognized academic style. The structure of the literature review and theoretical framework could have been revised to clearly differentiate the student’s contribution and theorisation from that gathered from academic sources.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT
(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis promises more than it delivers. It has too widely defined aims and too narrowly delivered results. If the latter were adjusted to the former and coupled with relevant
methodologies and slightly adjusted empirical material, this could be a very good piece of work.

The student submitted a good paper that fulfils most of the specific criteria stated above, with any relative weaknesses being well compensated for by definite relative strengths. It demonstrates competent discussion and analysis of the concepts and materials used. The gendered analysis of the state, flagging issues of equality, rights and recognition, is stimulating and adds to a critical body of literature on state formation, citizenship and state-society relations, relevant to the region and elsewhere. The paper has a fairly structured argument emerging from the analysis of documentary sources, which reflects the ability of the student to work independently and systematically. Furthermore, the student shows the ability to be self-reflective and approaches her own position and analysis critically, certainly something to be commended for. Nonetheless, the methodological section is rather weak. A clearer theoretical framework and well specified research design could have benefited the thesis which does contain a set of relevant documents which are approached critically.