1. Student: Barbora Capinska

2. Thesis title: *Challenging Hegemony: Coercion, Repression, and Protest in Liberal Democracies*

3. Opponent: Prof. Dr. Jean-Paul Gagnon, PhD

4. Content and objective of the thesis

This thesis is concerned with explaining how "liberal states" employ coercion. It is done through a sophisticated treatment of difficult, and often divergent, theoretical matter and shown through two case studies. Capinska's ultimate aim is to reveal "taboo concealment" (or perhaps "concealed coercion") as it is, the author claims, the most sophisticated form of coercion that a liberal state (or perhaps any state for that matter) can conduct. The author is also concerned with bringing focus on the mass media and its role in the coercion of protest/rebellion.

5. Formal, linguistic and factual processing of the work

The thesis is understandable although there are times when the English given is not perfect as the occasional article is missing or an unnecessary article is given. But these are not blemishes to the argument and can easily be ironed out with professional editing by a native English speaker. There are, on occasion, sections of paragraphs which I think can be given in plainer English but there is a plan to the author's delivery which is to convey the full force of the concepts she has been wrestling with and to, over the course of the thesis, bring clarity through that. Whilst not stated by the author, anyone steeped in the traditions of post-modern orthography will recognize the importance of just such an approach: sometimes a difficult start, even open confusion (although that's not present here), is needed to prime the argumentative engine for its full-forced delivery at the end. Haraway, the early anyway, comes to mind in particular but so too the earlier Butler. That said, if the author intends to bring this thesis into a book form, then I think it will be necessary to give the argument in much plainer English.

6. Evaluator's Critical Essay

Most compelling in this thesis is the author's focus on specifying coercion in liberal democratic states, like the Czech Republic/Czechia, Mexico, and the USA. Any state is coercive else it has no means to defend itself from insurgency or international attackers and no means to enforce laws and therefore continuously reassert (force upon others) its legitimacy. Indeed, how can a state exist without coercion? This is, to my opinion, the most promising inquiry brought up by Capinska's masterful treatment of the social movement and state violence canons of literature. It brings to mind classical problems in political theory, not touched on in the thesis as they are out of its remit, such as the social contract, the boundary problem, the need for impartial procedurally just institutions, and overall the avoidance of violent chaos in the pursuit of maximalist conceptions of freedom.

There is much to admire and praise in this thesis. The amount of detail provided on how states can, and have, suppressed dissidence is astounding: proactive, reactive, legal, silencing,

through proxies, indirect/direct benefit through media, hard or soft repressions and so forth. The thesis should be nominated for a relevant award or prize just for this tour de force in *detail* about how *illiberal* any given "liberal state" can be. I wanted, in particular, to commend a smaller point made in the thesis which is the difficulty that subalterns – and this includes "leftist" (or just anti-capitalist) thinkers, but especially Indigenous Peoples – have in being heard, in pursuing their aims against suppressive, extractive, megastructures like the global capitalist economy. As a result of their complicity in this global capitalist economy, state laws are often colonial, archaic, and ill-suited to "keep up with the times" which often leads to strange fights at the local level where progressives on the "right side of history" are, somehow, made to be dissident, are branded as lunatics or irresponsible children. To be silenced, not given voice, by lack of media coverage and lack of attention from traditional agents of the state has long proved to be insult to many groups that are pursuing deeply ethical projects.

There are two aspects to the thesis which I think could be accentuated. The first has to do with the "state" as a concept. Early in the thesis, Capinska states that it is important to know the "who" of an event – such as the actors in a protest or in a meeting for reasons of accuracy and accountability. I would like to see this attention extended throughout the thesis to the "who" of the state. We know that the mass media (surely not all media, though?) is part of the state in Capinska's thesis. And we know that individuals, governments, businesses, and so forth, can be proxy agents for the state. So what exactly *is* the state beyond a nebulously defined territory or some de facto "state" of affairs that (always changing) vested interests try to maintain for their own benefits? There is some energy at play by actors here – the state as the enemy, the state as the suppressor, the state as the anti-dissident – which would benefit from a clearer articulation earlier in the thesis. The second aspect of this thesis which I think should be deepened is its position on what is at stake for liberal regimes: how, in short, can they be less coercive/repressive? There is no scope in the thesis to do this so I would find a place for this consideration at the end, in terms of further research.

From here I would like to encourage Capinska to look around the bend as we would benefit, immensely, from the author's continued attentions on this topic. Ramin Jahanbegloo is an Iranian-Canadian political philosopher and practicing non-violence advocate. He has been vocal, for decades, about how coercive *any* state is. The puzzle he puts before us, which I think Capinska's thesis and her further research can help us to unravel, is whether a *non*-violent state is possible (he would say it is desirable). My sense in reading the detail of coercions and repressions in this thesis is that there is a whole other work about how to foil them: a field guide for activists, if you like. Perhaps this could be a topic for a post-doc – it seems to me a very good one – and perhaps it may lead to making states less violent.

Overall, Capinska has done very well to bring together numerous and often disparate sets of literature to explain, in detail, the ways in which a "liberal state" – nebulous as this term is – coerces and represses dissidents. That, in the way it is given and to the extent it is given, is an original contribution to knowledge. The thesis certainly demonstrates the author's capacity to undertake independent research and to communicate their findings to a world-class standard. Most importantly, it makes (at least this reader!) beg for more: Can a state ever be non-violent? Are liberalism and non-violence even compatible? Is a non-violent state desirable? How can a dissident, or dissidents, foil the hidden coercions of liberal democracies? Perhaps one or more of these questions will be of interest to the author and that we will come to benefit from her work in answering them.

7. Questions and Comments Recommended for a Further Explanation During the Defense

1. Please tell us more about the *practical* significance of your work. When I read it, I think particularly of Ramin Jahanbegloo's efforts at instituting "non-violence" in even the "leading liberal states" of this world. Can, in other words, your impressive insights lead to the development of *less* coercion in liberal states?
2. Please clarify the distinction between "state" and "regime". It seems the two are used interchangeably. If that's the case, how does it work? What does a "state" mean?
3. Is a "liberal regime" better than a "weak regime"?

8. Recommendations

Approve the thesis. It will require careful copy-editing by a native English speaker prior to publication though.