

From Ideals to Action

The feminist Movement and their perspectives on the use of Violence in
Chile's Estallido Social



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Abstract

The Estallido Social of 2019 stands as a pivotal event in contemporary Chilean history, mobilizing up to 1.2 million participants in demonstrations characterized by profound social unrest. These protests, fueled by deep-seated grievances, became the epicenter of significant human rights violations, with reports documenting 3,342 serious injuries and over 1,500 instances of abuse, primarily involving confrontations between protesters and law enforcement.

Amidst this intense conflict, various groups emerged with distinct interpretations and objectives, leveraging the protests to advance their political agendas. Notably, the feminist movement, distinguished by its robust organizational structure and prominent presence, capitalized on this environment to exert significant influence. This study investigates how feminist organizations effectively utilized the unrest during the second wave of the Estallido Social to advance their political agenda and explores their stance on the use of violence. The methodology includes immersive fieldwork and in-depth interviews with five leaders from different feminist organizations, alongside five additional interviews with key social and institutional actors.

The research highlights how feminist leaders navigated the chaotic dynamics of the Estallido Social to align their goals with the broader movement's momentum. Their strategic efforts culminated in notable achievements, including securing gender parity in the articulation commission responsible for drafting the new constitution of 2019. The resulting constitutional proposal, one of the most progressive in recent history, features 388 articles dedicated to advancing equal rights across various sectors.

This study not only provides insights into the feminist movement's tactical approaches and successes but also sheds light on their complex relationship with the use of violence. By examining generational differences in solidarity with protesters, it reflects a nuanced interplay between historical legacies, immediate needs, and strategic considerations. The intricate relationship between activism and violence underscores the broader challenges faced by social movements in navigating state repression while advocating for systemic change.



About the author

To introduce my thesis, I want to share some context about myself as the author, which will help readers understand my perspective. In social research, knowing the researcher's background is crucial for grasping their conclusions.

My name is Isabel, and I am a 25-year-old master's student in Conflict Studies and Human Rights. As a feminist based in the Netherlands, I have a strong foundation in feminist theory and practice, which facilitated my interactions with feminists in Chile and enriched my understanding of their struggles and histories.

I am of dual heritage, being both Chilean and Dutch. This bicultural background has significantly influenced my approach to the Estallido Social. My existing network and perspectives were shaped by my unique cultural and familial experiences.

Additionally, my father's experience as a political refugee from the Pinochet era has deeply impacted my view of political institutions and historical context, informing my understanding of Chile's socio-political landscape and adding depth to my analysis of the Estallido Social. These facets of my identity—feminist perspective, bicultural background, and personal history—have shaped my approach to this research and the insights presented in this thesis.



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List of abbreviations

C8M - Coordinadora Feminista 8 de Marzo

Lesbofeminist – lesbian feminists

LGBT+ movement – Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans+ movement

MUS – Mesa de Unidad Social

MUMS - Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual y de Género



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Introduction

“We come from great women in our country. From great women that we really look up to here and say, well, these crazy women gave their lives for the country. We cannot stay on the sidelines. If we have to respond, well, let's go.”

– Valeria, leader of the C8M feminist movement.

In October 2019, Chile was rocked by a dramatic and widespread social upheaval known as the *Estallido Social*, or "social outburst." This unprecedented wave of protest, which saw 1.2 million Chileans take to the streets, was triggered by a seemingly minor increase in transit fares—just 30 pesos, or roughly 4 cents. Despite the modest hike, it ignited deep-seated frustrations about broader systemic issues, encapsulated in the rallying cry: "It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years." This slogan highlighted the protesters' discontent with the enduring legacy of economic and social inequalities rooted in the era of Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, which had left a lasting impact on Chilean society (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020, p. 950).

To the international community, the magnitude of the *Estallido Social* was startling. Chile, often lauded as one of South America's wealthiest and most stable democracies, seemed an unlikely candidate for such a severe social crisis. Yet, for many Chileans, the unrest was a long-anticipated reaction to a system that had increasingly failed to address entrenched economic disparities. Despite a relatively high GDP per capita of U.S.\$25,222, the average monthly income for half of Chileans was only U.S.\$561. This stark inequality, coupled with a sense of being trapped in a cycle of debt, made the eruption of discontent almost predictable (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020, p. 950).

The initial catalyst for the unrest was a student-led movement protesting the fare increase, which quickly spiralled into widespread violence. What began as peaceful demonstrations, including online calls to jump over metro turnstiles, escalated when President Sebastián Piñera responded by closing metro lines, leaving 2.5 million people without transportation. This move intensified the protests, which soon included the burning of metro stations and violent clashes with law enforcement. The government's harsh crackdown only fuelled further unrest, leading to a broader pattern of civil disobedience and property destruction (González & Le Foulon, 2020; Gerber et al., 2023).



In response to the escalating unrest, President Sebastián Piñera's government declared a state of emergency and offered minor concessions. However, these measures proved insufficient to quell the protests. Initially, Piñera's rhetoric condemned the demonstrators, framing them as a powerful enemy to be vanquished. This approach only exacerbated the situation, prompting the government to shift its strategy by promising significant social reforms and reshuffling the political cabinet. Despite these efforts, reports of human rights abuses soon emerged, with the National Institute of Human Rights (2020) documenting 3,342 serious injuries and over 1,500 cases of violations. The erosion of public trust in the government deepened societal divides and fuelled ongoing unrest, as many citizens perceived the government's actions as antagonistic to their interests.

A week after the initial protests, the social divides during the *Estallido Social* became more pronounced as the movement gained broader support. Beyond the student-led demonstrations, the feminist movement and other social groups joined the cause, amplifying its reach and impact (Castello, 2020). The feminist movement, having recently organized one of its largest International Women's Day marches, played a pivotal role in shaping the movement. With a history of organizing previous protests such as Ni Una Menos in 2016 and Ola Feminista in 2018, the feminist groups were well-positioned to advocate for collective demands, including a new constitution (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020, p. 953).

These demands began to take institutional form on November 15, marking the second wave of the *Estallido Social*. On this date, President Sebastián Piñera's administration reached a pivotal accord for peace, agreeing to a plebiscite on a new constitution and involving social organizations in the drafting process (Corvalan, 2021). Feminist groups played a crucial role in advocating for gender parity in the constitutional convention, which ultimately produced one of the world's most progressive constitutions. This new constitution featured 388 articles addressing equal rights across various sectors, including housing, education, pensions, and explicitly recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity (Rasp, 2022).

In this thesis, I argue that feminist organizations effectively capitalized on the unrest during the second wave of the *Estallido Social* to advance their political agenda. As the most influential organizers within the revolt (Cruz, 2023), feminist groups leveraged the concessions made by the Piñera government, human rights statistics, and the national



women's holiday to further their goals. While the *Estallido Social* initially emerged as a movement against neoliberal inequalities, it ultimately catalysed significant legislative advancements in women's rights. Contrary to descriptions of the movement as leaderless, inorganic, and disorganized (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020; Cox et al., 2023), my research reveals a clear and strategic organization driven primarily by feminist groups rather than traditional political entities. From the outset, feminists influenced the protests through organizing panel discussions, providing medical aid, and offering legal support to those opposing the government. However, I was puzzled with how this happened and how the feminist movement reacted to the violent conflicts happening during this period. Thus, the main research question of this thesis is:

How did feminist organizations in the greater Santiago region utilize the momentum of the 2019 Estallido Social to advance their political agenda, and what was their relationship with physical violence during this period?

To address this research question, this thesis is organized into several key sections that guide the reader through the historical, theoretical, and methodological dimensions of the study.

The thesis begins with a contextual chapter that sets the stage by outlining Chilean history, starting with the military coup of 1973. It answers the following sub-question: *How did the historical and social context from the dictatorship of Pinochet onwards influence the emergence and development of feminist movements in Chile?* This section explores the legacy of Pinochet's dictatorship, focusing on how it reshaped the relationship between the Chilean population and state institutions and laid the groundwork for a neoliberal economic system. Understanding this historical context is crucial for grasping the feminist movement's role during the *Estallido Social*. The chapter concludes with a detailed timeline of the events of the *Estallido Social*, providing a comprehensive overview of the strategic landscape navigated by feminist organizations.

Next, the thesis moves to a theoretical chapter that explains the relevance of key theoretical frameworks. It introduces the theories of Fields by Fligstein & McAdam (2012) and Vocabularies of Motive by Benford & Snow (2000), addressing the following sub-questions: *How can Fligstein & McAdam's theory of an unsettled strategic action field and Benford & Snow's theory of motivational framing be applied to understand the dynamics of the Estallido*



Social? This section utilizes Fligstein & McAdam's concept of an unsettled strategic action field to analyze the dynamics of the protests and identify feminist leaders as socially skilled actors. Additionally, it applies Benford & Snow's concepts of motivational framing and frame bridging to understand how feminist groups articulated their calls to protest and expanded their political agenda to other groups.

Following the theoretical discussion, the thesis details the research process and methodology in a dedicated chapter. It adopts an interpretivist stance and describes a five-month fieldwork period conducted in Santiago, Chile. During this time, I carried out ten interviews—five with feminist leaders from various organizations and five with different political and social actors—to gain insights into the context of the *Estallido Social*. This chapter answers the sub-question: *How did the research process, including respondent selection and fieldwork methods, contribute to understanding the feminist role in the Estallido Social?* It reflects on the research process, including how I identified respondents, selected the research topic, and the strengths and limitations of the fieldwork. This section outlines the interview setup, topic list, and the applicability of the concepts used at different analytical levels.

The analytical chapter builds on the methodologies discussed, applying theoretical concepts to the collected data. It addresses the sub-questions: *How did feminist organizations leverage the unrest and violence during the Estallido Social to advance their political agenda?* and *How did feminist groups navigate the dynamics of state violence and societal conflict while pushing for gender-based issues?* This section illustrates how feminist interviewees employed social skills to frame the movement and advance their agenda. It delves into the specific frames used by feminist groups, their organizational structure, role assignments, and their relationship with violence. Additionally, it explores their interactions with other groups, their use of frame bridging to promote their political goals through social media and organizational skills, and how they maintained strong group boundaries amidst the turmoil.

Finally, the thesis concludes by summarizing how feminist groups leveraged the *Estallido Social* to spotlight gender-based issues and push for legislative changes benefiting women's rights. It answers the sub-question: *How can the findings from this case study inform our understanding of the role of feminist movements in similar social upheavals globally?* The conclusion discusses the crucial role of feminist organizations in providing legal and medical



support to protesters, navigating the complex dynamics of state violence, and how generational divides influenced their stance on violence. It reflects on how these feminist organizations balanced historical trauma with contemporary activism and solidarity with the broader movement.

Contextual analysis: explaining the Estallido Social

The thesis opens with a contextual chapter that provides an overview of Chilean history, beginning with the 1973 military coup. It addresses the sub-question: *How did the historical and social context from the dictatorship of Pinochet onwards influence the emergence and development of the feminist movement in Chile?* This chapter delves into the enduring impact of Pinochet's dictatorship, examining how it transformed the relationship between Chilean society and state institutions, and established a neoliberal economic framework. Understanding this historical backdrop is essential to comprehending the role of the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*. The chapter then explores the social movements during the *Estallido Social*, followed by an explanation of the first and second waves of the uprising. It concludes with a detailed timeline of the events, offering a comprehensive overview of the strategic landscape navigated by feminist organizations.

History

The purpose of the historical chapter is to give the reader the necessary facts in order to understand what the *Estallido Social* is, what the feminist movement is and the relationship with the Chilean public and violence. In this chapter I will use empirical literature as well as accounts from my interviewees to explain the context necessary to understand the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*. The purpose of this historical chapter is to provide essential background information to understand the Estallido Social, the feminist movement, and their relationship with the Chilean public and violence. This chapter will utilize empirical literature and accounts from my interviewees to explain the necessary context.

First, I will describe the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Understanding the political landscape of the current system requires knowing its origins. The dictatorship left a collective



trauma due to widespread human rights infringements and is relevant because the protests' motto references this era.

Secondly, I will discuss Pinochet's constitutional legacy. The constitution he left behind prioritized private investments, leading to widespread debt among Chileans. The constitutional court's role in upholding laws that favour the wealthy created a debt system that became a focal point of the Estallido protests. Understanding this legacy is crucial to comprehending the protesters' demands and the political concessions that followed, including the push for a new constitution.

Thirdly, I will outline the social movements that were precursors to the Estallido Social, focusing on the student movements of 2006 and 2011. These movements involved the same individuals who later initiated the Estallido Social, transitioning from secondary students to university students, and finally to working adults. This history is vital for understanding how the feminist movement aligned its political agenda with the broader goals of the Estallido.

Finally, I will discuss the *Estallido Social* itself and what happened during that time, in a broad sense. I will introduce the first wave of the *Estallido Social*, where the most violence occurred, and the protests were the least organized. I will then continue towards the second wave of the Estallido. It is important to separate the waves because the feminist movement has a more prominent position in the second wave, where they use the SAF of the Estallido in order to advance their own political agenda. All in all, this chapter will provide a contextual analysis of what the main background issues were during the Estallido, before continuing to the analysis of the feminist movement.

The dictatorship

This section will succinctly describe the dictatorship of Pinochet (1973-1990) and its lasting impact on Chilean society and political landscape. The primary focus will be on how the dictatorship destabilized political trust, creating a unique relationship between the Chilean population and politics. To understand how the dictatorship, the feminist movement, and the *Estallido Social* are intertwined, it is essential to grasp the polarization of the Chilean population, their mistrust in the police due to human rights abuses, and the role the feminist movement played in discrediting the Pinochet regime.



The story of the context of the *Estallido Social* begins with the election of Salvador Allende, who was democratically elected by the Chilean population in 1970. During his election, he won with a 36.6 percent majority. The reason for his victory can be attributed to high levels of political polarization. Allende had the strongest support among the older population, those living in low-income housing, and those with less education (Navia & Osorio, 2017). He was not popular among elite groups, with only 6.4 percent of people in with a positive economic perception wanting to vote for him. This indicates that the population was highly polarized in their view of Allende.

Allende was democratically chosen, but this was not well-received by some, both nationally and internationally. In 1973, the Chilean military, with the help of American intelligence services, staged a coup that ended in the suicide of Allende (Devine, 2014). This event marked the beginning of Augusto Pinochet's military dictatorship, which lasted from 1973 to 1990.

Interestingly, despite being a dictator, Pinochet received national and international support, largely due to the economic reforms he implemented on an already polarized society. Many people were blind to Pinochet's actions: *“Many Chileans were not troubled by these actions. They deeply feared the extreme leftists and didn't believe that the military would harm innocent civilians. They were wrong. Years later, official Chilean investigations revealed that the Pinochet regime had murdered more than 2,200 people for political reasons and had imprisoned more than 38,000, many of whom were tortured”* (Devine et al., 2014, p. 34).

Pinochet did not act alone; the Chilean military played a significant role, committing serious human rights abuses. This period marked the beginning of a deep distrust of the military and police among parts of the Chilean population, a sentiment that resurfaced years later during the *Estallido Social*. One of the founders of the LGBT+ movement in Santiago explained the parallels she still sees between the police force during the dictatorship and during the *Estallido*: *“So, because you lived through the dictatorship, you take your distance, but you look from the outside. Camouflage, camouflage. I would camouflage myself and I would get to the corner and go back or go somewhere else. And here were the carabineros [Chilean police]. Because the bullets were flying and you felt one time. We felt a bullet. So, it was life*



or death.” This quote highlights the deep-seated distrust she has for the police during the *Estallido Social*, rooted in the trauma she experienced during the dictatorship

This distrust also had its foundation in the social movements of the time, particularly in the feminist movement. During my visit to the human rights museum in Santiago, I spoke with one of the historians working there about the feminist movement. She explained that the feminist movement originated from a maternal movement, where women campaigned to get their abducted sons back. Many men involved in the resistance were abducted and taken to torture centres. *“The mothers, sisters, and daughters of the detained and/or 'disappeared' were the first to protest the human rights offenses of the Pinochet regime, and they had an instrumental role in undermining its legitimacy”* (Noonan, 1995, p. 82). This maternal movement is imperative to know if we want to understand the undermining of institutional legitimacy by the feminist movement today.

In conclusion, the legacy of Pinochet's dictatorship profoundly shaped Chilean society and politics, fostering deep-seated mistrust and polarization. This historical backdrop set the stage for the *Estallido Social*, where the feminist movement's activism against human rights abuses highlighted ongoing grievances and challenged entrenched political and social injustices.

Pinochet's constitutional legacy

This section describes the introduction of a neoliberal system following Pinochet's dictatorship. Understanding the political landscape is essential to grasp the initial protests of the *Estallido Social*. The junta [board] and Pinochet undemocratically introduced a constitution that entrenched the neoliberal values of his regime, ensuring their persistence in Chile. This chapter details the relevant rules in this constitution and their connection to the Estallido protests.

The literature on the *Estallido Social* provides a comprehensive analysis of the underlying factors driving the 2019 protests in Chile, identifying the neoliberal system implemented during Pinochet's regime as a central cause of public outrage. This system prioritized market forces over collective well-being, perpetuating structural inequality in Chilean society (Canales, 2022). Pinochet's regime deliberately constructed a framework to ensure that future generations would remain bound by market-oriented rules, securing economic stability at the



expense of social equity. A key component of maintaining this system is a constitution designed to resist change, exerting more influence than the democratic process itself (Leiva, 2020). This constitutional framework, along with political fragmentation and presidential authority, upholds Chile's market-oriented system and perpetuates systemic inequality (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020).

A notable rule in the constitution that upholds the market-oriented system is the "acción de amparo económico" (action to economic protection), which limits the state's role in economic activities and incentivizes private enterprises to take on these roles (Constitución Política de la República, Article 19 No 21). In practice, this means that if the state were to invest in natural resource extraction and use the proceeds for public good, it would be blocked by the constitutional court. During the dictatorship the natural resources were also privatized, which means that the state is restricted in its resource generation of for example water (BBC News Mundo, 2019). This restriction leaves the state unable to generate its own resources, making it heavily tax-dependent. Consequently, the state must impose high costs on areas it controls, such as housing, education, and health, creating economic disparities between enterprises and citizens. These economic disparities, particularly in wages and household debt, further fuel public discontent and serve as focal points of the protests (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020).

Moreover, the constitution confers significant authority to the president, granting them veto powers and the ability to appoint members of the constitutional court. Although this concentration of power was initially designed to grant Pinochet authoritative control, it persists today. Consequently, the president wields influence over the legislative process, potentially obstructing laws that do not align with their ideological stance (Leiva, 2020). In essence, the constitution serves as a structural force upholding Chile's market-oriented system, perpetuating systemic inequality (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020).

This structural inequality manifests in wage disparities despite similar living costs for everyone (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020). With a median wage of 1.3 million Chilean pesos (approximately 1300 euros), individuals struggle to cover basic living expenses. Furthermore, discontent stems from the realization that only the top income quintile is insulated from the risk of poverty during employment or health crises (Sehnbruch & Donoso,



2020). Household debt is another pressing concern, with the average Chilean household burdened by debt amounting to 75% of its income. This indebtedness is largely attributable to expenses related to education, healthcare, and basic household needs. Additionally, protesters express frustration with the poverty trap inherent in the pension system, which sees individuals' income plummeting from 400,000 to 200,000 pesos on average (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020). This economic strain serves as the focal point of the protests, with demonstrators decrying the debt accumulation perpetuated by the neoliberal system.

Ultimately, changing the constitution became one of the major concessions by Chilean politicians. Therefore, understanding the constitutional legacy of Pinochet is imperative to comprehending the *Estallido Social*.

Social movements

In order to understand why these social movements wanted to change the constitution it is imperative to know about the history of the social movements in Chile. In this section, I will discuss how social movements in Chile have reacted to perceived class inequalities attributed to the changing policy and political decisions of the political elite, highlighting student-led protests from 2006 (the Penguin Protest) and 2011-2013 (the Chilean Winter) against the neoliberal regime. To understand the *Estallido Social*, it is imperative to grasp the protest structure established over the last 20 years. These protests are situated within a broader context of student-led movements, dating back to the 2006 high school protests, which addressed issues ranging from privatized education to feminism and pension funds (Cox, Gonzalez & Le Foulon, 2021). While social organizations played a role in sparking the *Estallido Social*, the movement transcended their influence, drawing participation from diverse sectors of society (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020).

While the initial focus of the *Estallido Social* protests was on the privatized education system, the movement quickly expanded to address a broader array of issues. As diverse segments of society joined in, the protests also encompassed critical concerns such as feminism, pension reform, and structural inequality. The catalyst for the *Estallido Social* can be traced back to the statement made by the secretary of economy regarding the 30-peso increase in public transit fare, which ignited public outrage (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020). Social organizations such



as NO+AFP (against privatized pension funds), NO+TAG (against inequality), and Niunamenos (feminist movement) issued public calls for protests in response to this statement. However, while these organizations played a role in sparking the *Estallido Social*, they did not emerge as clear leaders of the movement. Additionally, many protesters participating in the *Estallido Social* were not directly affiliated with these civil society organizations (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020). Thus, while earlier protests and social organizations set the stage for the *Estallido Social* by addressing systemic issues and inequalities, the movement itself transcended the influence of any single organization and drew participation from diverse sectors of society.

In this broader context, the student movement played a pivotal role, perceiving itself as a primary catalyst for the protests. During a roundtable discussion with members of the Young Socialist Party of Chile, I engaged with several young activists who participated in the *Estallido Social*, including some who were on the front lines. These individuals see themselves as integral to the historical social movement that ignited the *Estallido Social*, emphasizing their role in shaping this transformative period. One of them noted the following: “*The student who was a high school student in 2006, was a university student in 2011 and was an adult, young, working student in 2019. It is a generation in 2006, with the penguin revolution, the LOCE law was changed.... In 2011, they managed to reform university education with free university education. So, it is the same generation, but it is a generation used to doing politics in the street and achieving things in the street.*” Further corroborating that it was the same generation trying to change the neoliberal system.

Another interesting part is the description of the protesters that they gave me, where they perceive a difference between the youths that were born after the dictatorship: “*By 2006, I was very young, but my brothers were in the penguin revolution. In 2011, I was a high school student, I was a leader for Santiago in the Student Movement of 2011. But we are the same group of generation who are between 40 and 20. We are the generation of children who were born in the first years of democracy*”. The earlier student movements were thus characterized by their inexperience in times that were not democratic.

This section highlights the evolution of Chilean social movements in response to class inequalities and shifting political landscapes, tracing the *Estallido Social*'s origins to earlier



student-led protests like the 2006 Penguin Protest and the 2011-2013 Chilean Winter. These movements challenged neoliberal policies, addressing systemic issues such as privatized education and social inequality. While the Estallido Social was triggered by a public transit fare increase, it quickly expanded to broader grievances, including feminism and pension reform. The continuity of activism among young activists underscores how earlier movements set the stage for the Estallido Social, drawing widespread participation from diverse sectors of Chilean society.

The Estallido Social

In the chapter about the *Estallido Social*, I will provide a detailed account of the events that transpired during the first three months of the movement. This period was characterized by two significant waves: the initial unorganized wave and the subsequent wave where feminists gained more influence (M. Cruz, personal communication, March 25, 2024). Understanding these phases is crucial to comprehending the movement dynamics and the role of feminist groups.

I will highlight the key events that shaped the *Estallido Social*. These events were identified during my five-month research stay in Chile, during which I engaged with a diverse range of experts and citizens to gather their perspectives on the most pivotal moments of the protests. The formation of my ideas can be partially attributed to the help of Melany Cruz, a researcher on the feminist movement of the *Estallido Social*. This chapter aims to underscore these critical events to offer a clearer picture of the protests' evolution and the feminists' involvement. By examining these key events, we can better understand the dynamics of the protests and the role of feminist groups within this larger movement. This contextual understanding is essential for grasping how feminists navigated and influenced the broader *Estallido Social*.

The first wave of the Estallido Social

In the week leading up to the *Estallido Social*, tensions began to simmer as the Chilean council of experts introduced a controversial new transit fare rule that increased prices during peak hours while reducing them during off-peak times. This policy change, introduced with apparent insensitivity by President Piñera, who dismissed the lower socio-economic strata



by suggesting they get up earlier for work to pay less for transit, ignited widespread anger. The protests were not solely about the fare hike but about the deeper issue of class inequality in Chile. Angered by this decision and Piñera's dismissive remarks, the student movement quickly mobilized, using social media to spread the message (Gonzalez & Moran, 2020).

The turmoil began on October 7th, when the action group ContraInfo called for protests against the fare hikes, leading to widespread sabotage of metro systems, predominantly carried out by students. Initially, the protests involved peaceful acts like jumping over metro fences, but as more people joined, the protests turned violent (Waissbluth, 2020). The situation escalated dramatically on October 18th, with the burning of seven metro stations within the first hour and a total of 77 stations over the subsequent week. President Piñera declared a state of emergency, which by the constitutional law gives the state the right to restrict citizens freedom of movement and assembly (Bartlett, 2019).

The president deployed military and police forces to control the unrest. Despite offering minor concessions, the government's actions failed to quell the protests, leading to widespread defiance of imposed curfews. In an attempt to gain support, the president employed a ruffian scapegoat method, labelling the protesters as criminals and drug users, which further angered the demonstrators (Piñera, 2019; Dammert & Sazo, 2020). Under mounting pressure, President Piñera eventually promised substantial reforms to the social system, including wage increases, improvements in healthcare and education, and a reshuffling of the political cabinet (McDonald, 2019). Amidst this domestic crisis, the government also canceled an international climate summit, highlighting the extent of the upheaval.

In November and December 2019, Chile faced significant developments reflecting the deepening crisis and shifting public sentiment. In November, the Medical Council reported that 200 people had been admitted with eye injuries due to violence from military and police forces, with a total of 350 individuals suffering sight loss as a result of the unrest (United Nations, December 2019). In response to the widespread demands for structural reforms, the government initiated a process to change the constitution. Additionally, the Minister of Interior Relations faced trial for damages inflicted on protesters, highlighting a move towards holding government officials accountable for the violent suppression of protests. Amid



growing concerns over human rights abuses, the cabinet ordered the police to cease using harmful tactics against protesters (Waissbluth, 2019, p. 31).

The demands of the early movement of the *Estallido Social* lacked clear consensus but centred around discontent with perceived class inequality, a lingering issue from the dictatorship era (Jimenez-Yañez, 2020 p. 950). Key themes in the first weeks included inequality in healthcare, education, and housing possibilities for different strata in the population. The government's reaction was dismissive, with officials labelling protesters as public enemies. By framing them as enemies of the state, the government delegitimized the protesters' claims and legitimized its own use of violence. This mismanagement led to several human rights violations, as police and military forces, lacking clear orders, acted as if on a battlefield.

Second wave of the Estallido Social

After the initial wave which was unorganized, in the second wave there was more organization. In this section I will create a timeline of the important events that happened during the second wave which lasted from the 15th of November towards approximately the end of December, when the accord of piece was signed.

We begin this chapter with November 15, a pivotal date when President Piñera delivered a landmark speech on constitutional reforms. In this address, Piñera announced significant concessions, including the acceptance of a new constitution and the organization of constitutional changes in collaboration with social organizations (Corvalan, 2021). Concurrently, various feminist actions were taking place, most notably Chilean pop star Mon Laferte's protest on the international stage against the Chilean government. Laferte's demonstration drew global attention to police violence in Chile (McGowan, 2021).

On November 17, 2019, President Sebastián Piñera released a government statement addressing the ongoing unrest and protests that had gripped Chile. The statement quickly garnered significant attention on social media, with 1.8K reposts and 2K comments on Twitter (Piñera, 2019). However, the overall sentiment was predominantly negative, with many urging the president to resign and criticizing his handling of the crisis. This widespread



discontent was a reflection of the broader frustration and anger among the Chilean population, who felt that their demands for social and economic reforms were being ignored.

Just a few days later, on November 20, 2019, the performance of "A Rapist in Your Path" debuted in Valparaíso. This powerful protest song, created by the feminist collective Las Tesis, denounced sexual violence and impunity, quickly becoming an anthem for the movement. The performance resonated deeply with many Chileans, particularly women, as it highlighted the systemic abuse and discrimination they faced specifically by the police (BBC News Mundo, 5 December 2019).

On November 21, 2019, Amnesty International released a statement detailing various human rights abuses committed by the government during the *Estallido Social* (Amnistía Internacional Américas, 2019). The statement, which was shared widely on Twitter with 2.7K reposts and 133 comments, outlined instances of excessive force, arbitrary detentions, and torture by security forces. While the initial response seemed positive, with many sharing the tweet to draw attention to the issue, some respondents felt that the reported numbers were understated, believing the scale of the abuses to be even greater.

November 25, 2019, marked the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and a significant march took place in Santiago with an unexpectedly large turnout of women. This march had historical resonance, linking back to the dictatorship, as the song "A Rapist in Your Path" is based on the earlier song "A Friend on Your Path," which was sung during protests against Pinochet's regime (BBC News Mundo, 6 December 2019). It was also the day that the political parties agreed to have a referendum for a new constitution (Dattari, 2022). The march underscored the enduring struggle against gender-based violence and highlighted the continuity of feminist activism in Chile, which coincided with a significant discussion on the constitution.

The next day, on November 26, 2019, the Minister of Health published alarming statistics revealing 44 open cases of torture and 90 cases of forced nudity by the police towards the population (UN, 2019a). These revelations further intensified public outrage and highlighted



the severe human rights violations occurring during the protests. The government's acknowledgment of these abuses added fuel to the fire, as many Chileans demanded accountability and justice for the victims.

On December 4, 2019, approximately 10,000 women aged 40 and above gathered outside the National Stadium of Chile to perform "A Rapist in Your Path," a protest song by the feminist collective Las Tesis (BBC News Mundo, 5 December 2019). This location held significant historical weight as it was used as a national torture centre during Pinochet's dictatorship. The choice of this site underscored the message that women's bodies had been used as trophies of war, a point emphasized by feminist activist Betancourt. The performance was a powerful statement of resistance and solidarity, highlighting the ongoing fight against gender-based violence and impunity.

Finally, on December 13, 2019, a UN report was released accusing Chile of violating human rights (UN, 2020). The report, which came after extensive investigations, added to the mounting international condemnation of the government's actions during the *Estallido Social*. It highlighted the excessive use of force by security forces, the arbitrary detentions, and the torture of protesters, calling for urgent reforms to address these abuses. The UN's findings further validated the concerns of the protesters and underscored the need for comprehensive structural reforms to address the deep-seated inequalities and injustices in Chilean society.

By December, there was a reported increase in drug-related criminal activity in protest areas, possibly due to the disruption and exploitation of the chaotic situation by criminal elements. President Piñera addressed the nation to combat what he described as "fake news" regarding the severity of the damage caused by both the protests and the military's response, though public trust in the government had significantly eroded (Laing, 2019). This erosion of trust was reflected in Piñera's approval ratings, which plummeted from 34% at the beginning of the *Estallido Social* to just 11% by December. Furthermore, a significant portion of the population, especially in Santiago, believed that the government was actively working



against their interests, with 50% of residents holding this view, exacerbating societal divides and fueling ongoing unrest (TB en vivo, 2019).

This chapter aims to underscore these critical events to offer a clearer picture of the protests' evolution and the feminists' involvement. By examining these key events, we can better understand the dynamics of the protests and the role of feminist groups within this larger movement. This contextual understanding is essential for grasping how feminists navigated and influenced the broader *Estallido Social*.



Theoretical section

In this chapter, I will provide a thorough examination of the theoretical foundations that underpin the analysis of the *Estallido Social*. Building on the contextual chapter, this section will equip the reader with theoretical lenses through which to study the events of the Estallido. The aim is to establish a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of this significant social upheaval, with a particular focus on the role of feminist activism. This chapter will address the following sub-question: *How can Fligstein & McAdam's theory of an unsettled strategic action field and Benford & Snow's theory of motivational framing be applied to understand the dynamics of the Estallido Social?*

To answer this, the chapter will utilize Fligstein & McAdam's concept of an unsettled strategic action field to analyze the dynamics of the protests, identifying feminist leaders as socially skilled actors. Additionally, it will apply Benford & Snow's concepts of motivational framing and frame bridging to understand how feminist groups articulated their calls to protest and expanded their political agenda to other groups.

To begin, I will explore the state-of-the-art theories concerning public mobilization during the *Estallido Social*, reviewing the primary causes behind the protests and the dynamics of feminist involvement. This analysis provides a grasp of the context and factors that spurred the *Estallido Social* and the pivotal role played by feminist groups.

Following this overview, the chapter introduces the theoretical framework guiding this thesis. Central to my analysis is Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) concept of Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) and their framework for understanding skilled actors. This concept examines interactions between individual actors and broader socio-political structures, shedding light on the complexities of the *Estallido Social*.

Additionally, I will integrate Benford and Snow's (2000) theories of motivational framing and frame bridging to understand how feminist leaders articulated their issues and mobilized support. These concepts reveal how leaders effectively communicated their agendas and aligned their concerns with broader societal issues.



By combining these frameworks, the chapter elucidates how feminist leaders influenced their groups and impacted the larger SAF of the *Estallido Social*, contributing to strategic action field and framing literature. This foundation sets the stage for a detailed analysis of how these theoretical concepts manifest in practice, enhancing the discourse on social movements and political change.

State of the art

To begin, I will explore the state-of-the-art theories concerning public mobilization during the *Estallido Social*, providing a comprehensive review of existing literature and key theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. This section will outline key arguments regarding the origins and dynamics of the protests, providing a thorough overview of the existing scholarly landscape. Special attention will be given to the debates and areas of consensus among researchers, with a particular focus on the contributions of Latin American scholars and Chilean academics. By highlighting both general and feminist-specific literature, this chapter aims to contextualize the theoretical insights discussed earlier within the broader academic discourse on the *Estallido Social*, thereby setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the feminist movement's role in these transformative events.

One of the most insightful analyses of public mobilization during the *Estallido Social* is provided by Cox & González (2023), who offer a nuanced exploration of the discursive and material opportunity structures that catalysed this significant movement. Their conclusion was that the challengers, primarily composed of young and highly educated students in Santiago, strategically framed the issue of an increase in public transit fares as part of a more extensive social problem. It evolved into a broader concern encompassing the social demands of the growing middle class, discontent with political parties, feelings of abuse by public institutions, perceived increases in inequality, and concerns regarding pensions, healthcare, and education. Over the period from 2000 to 2016, there was a ten percent increase in the Chilean population perceiving significant income disparities (Sasse, 2021). This is understandable in a broader context; a opportunity structure emerged, manifesting in waves of protests against social elites in different protest movements in South-America (Sasse, 2021; Dammert & Sazo, 2020). This amalgamation of discursive and material opportunity



structures reflected widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo, skilfully utilized by challengers to underscore the importance of their cause.

The literature on the *Estallido Social* provides a comprehensive analysis of these discursive and material opportunity structures through the study of underlying factors driving the protests in Chile in 2019. Central to this discourse is the role of the neo-liberal system, implemented during Pinochet's regime, which prioritized market forces over collective well-being and perpetuated structural inequality in Chilean society (Canales, 2022; Cruz, 2023). This system was reinforced by a constitution deliberately designed to resist change, thereby exerting significant influence over the democratic process itself (Leiva, 2020). The constitutional framework, coupled with political fragmentation and presidential authority, serves to uphold Chile's market-oriented system and perpetuate systemic inequality (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020).

Economic disparities, particularly in wages and household debt, further fuel public discontent and serve as focal points for the protesters during the *Estallido Social* (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020). The protests are also situated within a broader context of student-led movements, dating back to the 2006 high school protests, which have addressed issues ranging from privatized education to feminism and pension funds (Cox, Gonzalez & Le Foulon, 2021). While social organizations played a role in sparking the *Estallido Social*, the movement transcended their influence, drawing participation from diverse sectors of society (Jiminez-Yañez, 2020).

Studying this participation, Bugeño et al., 2022 conducted a study revealing the diverse composition of *Estallido Social* protesters, challenging the conventional perception of the typical activist. Contrary to expectations, the predominant group did not fit the archetype of young and highly educated individuals. Instead, the movement attracted participants of all ages, with lower educational attainment and a political orientation leaning towards the center-right. Notably, these new protesters were often not recruited by acquaintances and frequently attended protests independently often recruited through social media.

Moving on from who the protesters were, Rice (2020) offers a distinctive perspective by asserting that comprehending the political opportunity structures enabling mobilization in the *Estallido Social* necessitates an examination of movement outcomes rather than focusing



solely on their emergence and actors. In her study of the movement's aftermath, Rice assessed variables such as political legitimacy, open communication, and the neoliberal reforms spurred by the movement's call for constitutional changes. The demands for constitutional reforms, central to the neo-liberal reforms, became a focal point in Rice's analysis. Contrary to optimistic expectations, Rice concludes that the movement's demands are unlikely to be met. She attributes this prognosis to the inadequacy of the political opportunity structure, asserting that it lacks the requisite responsiveness. According to Rice, the political entities lack either the political will or the feasibility to address all the multifaceted issues raised by the movement. This stance underscores the nuanced and complex nature of political dynamics within the context of the *Estallido Social*.

An example of these complex dynamics can be seen in the work by Cruz (2023) on the concept of a feminist revolt. This research is applicable towards my research of the feminist movements advancement of a political agenda and their relation to violence. Combining the insights from Cruz (2023) with the broader empirical works on the causes of the *Estallido Social* provides a nuanced understanding of the feminist movement within the larger context of societal upheaval in Chile. Cruz's concept of the "feminist revolt" as a revolt within a revolt highlights how feminists leveraged existing demands within the *Estallido Social* to advance their own agenda against capitalist and patriarchal relations (Cruz, 2023). This concept explains how the feminist movement elevated revolts from mere demand-building to revolutionary movements that reverted back and forth between demand- and concept-building. By engaging in bottom-up street-theorizing, feminists contributed to the development of new feminist ideas, creating a continuous feedback loop of innovation within the movement. Integrating Cruz's insights with broader empirical works highlights the multifaceted nature of the movement and its underlying causes, including the influence of the neo-liberal system, economic disparities, and historical student-led movements.

This chapter has established the theoretical and empirical foundation for analysing the *Estallido Social*, revealing how initial issues, such as transit fare hikes, evolved into a broader critique of systemic inequalities. The studies mentioned explored diverse participant profiles and the role of digital media in mobilization, as well as the limitations of political response, highlighting the complex dynamics at play. Cruz's concept of the "feminist revolt" illustrated



how feminist movements have strategically advanced their agenda within the broader context of social upheaval. Building on these insights, the next chapter will delve into my theoretical framework for this thesis, focusing on feminist contributions and their impact.

Strategic action fields

The theoretical framework of my thesis starts with the concept of Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) and their relevance to analysing the feminist movement within the *Estallido Social*. SAFs, as articulated by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), provide a robust framework for understanding how micro-level actors, such as individual challengers, interact with discursive and material opportunity structures at the macro level to mobilize collectives and enact change (Jackson & Dexter, 2014). This framework is essential for examining the dynamics of mass protests like the *Estallido Social*, where micro-level actors engage with these structures to drive social transformation.

The application of Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) SAF framework in this study is justified for two primary reasons. First, their framework offers a comprehensive analytical approach that integrates various levels of analysis: micro-foundations for individual actors, collective actors for meso-level groups, and strategic action fields for macro-level contexts. Second, their concept of SAFs is particularly pertinent to the *Estallido Social*. Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 6) define a SAF as a "well-defined" terrain of action for collective actors, contrasting it with an "unorganized social space" when the field lacks clarity. In this analysis, the *Estallido Social* is framed as the SAF within which feminist organizations operated and sought to influence.

Theoretical Framework

Fligstein and McAdam (2012) introduce the SAF concept to elucidate mechanisms operating at different analytical levels. SAFs, situated at the meso-level, encompass collective actors, whether state or non-state social groups. This theory builds on Bourdieu's notion of fields, emphasizing the importance of a shared understanding of social and power dynamics for mobilization (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012, p. 25).



Within this framework, feminist organizations are positioned as collective actors, and feminist leaders are identified as challengers. Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 13) describe challengers as those occupying "*less privileged niches within the field,*" who, despite limited influence, can articulate alternative visions and mobilize collective action. By leveraging resources, innovation, and opportunities, these challengers can reframe discontent within the SAF, potentially disrupting existing hierarchies and prompting macro-level changes. In the context of the *Estallido Social*, feminist leaders exemplify this role by challenging established norms and advocating for their political agenda.

The strategic action fields concept is particularly relevant in the Chilean context. Since the 2000s, diminishing political trust has led civil society to fill the representation gap. A robust political civil society has emerged, shaping societal rules and essentially supplanting traditional institutions (Heiss, 2018 p.127). This strong civil society acts as a crucial link between micro-actors embedded in various civil societies and the macro-level structures that collective actors can influence and alter. The dynamics of strategic action fields become influential as they navigate the intricate interplay between these different levels.

The *Estallido Social* serves as an example of an unsettled SAF, characterized by Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 13) as a scenario where "*all of the meanings in a field can break down,*" including the field's purpose, actors' positions, and rules. This disruption in societal functioning highlights the *Estallido Social* as an unsettled SAF, where the primary objective was to redefine the rules of engagement.

In such unsettled SAFs, skilled social actors can emerge as institutional entrepreneurs. Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 47) define these actors as those who "*induce cooperation by appealing to and helping to create shared meanings and collective identities.*" Applying this framework to feminist leaders, they needed to empathetically engage with others to foster cooperation, build shared meanings, and advance their political agenda amidst the turbulent *Estallido Social*. By leveraging the unsettled nature of the SAF, feminist leaders successfully mobilized collective action and promoted significant societal changes.

In summary, the Strategic Action Fields framework provides a valuable lens for understanding the feminist movement's role in the *Estallido Social*. By examining how feminist organizations navigated the unsettled SAF, we gain insights into their strategic use



of framing, negotiation, and coalition-building to advance their political agenda. The concept of SAFs underscores the dynamic interplay between individual actors, collective groups, and broader socio-political structures, highlighting the importance of strategic action in mobilizing collective change. The *Estallido Social* serves as a compelling case study of how challengers can leverage an unsettled SAF to influence societal transformation, demonstrating the relevance and utility of the SAF framework in analysing contemporary social movements.

Motivational framing and frame bridging

In the last section the unsettled SAF of the *Estallido Social* was discussed together with how social actors' utilize their skills in such a SAF. This section delves into the concepts of motivational framing and frame bridging, as defined by Benford & Snow (2000), and their relevance to the SAF framework discussed earlier. In this analysis, the SAF represents the *Estallido Social*, with the feminist movement acting as a collective actor within these protests. While the SAF framework elucidates group dynamics, this thesis extends this understanding by examining how the feminist movement interacted politically within the *Estallido Social*. Therefore, Benford & Snow's theory is essential to explain how the feminist movement was motivated towards collective action and how they leveraged their position within the SAF to bridge their frames with other ideologically similar groups.

To begin, it is crucial to define what a frame is. Goffman (1974, p. 21) describes a frame as “a manner in which a person can locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences defined in its terms”. In other words, a frame is a way of interpreting the world. This thesis posits that the feminist movement within the *Estallido Social* created a frame whereby their political issues, such as the right to abortion, the cessation of sexual violence, and gender parity, became a lens through which they viewed the world. This framing process enabled feminists within the movement to perceive their reality through the lens of feminist ideology.

The framing process provides a platform for groups to convene and contributes to their construction and definition through the framing of ideas. Benford and Snow (2000) highlight the pivotal role of framing in the interaction of groups through collective action. Framing involves constructing reality, a reality that can be altered by various agents through the politics of signification. These politics involve contestation, where one issue is asserted as



more important than another, demanding a higher position on the group's agenda. The critical significance of an issue resonating and being credible within a group is emphasized by the authors, with resonance referring to how well the group fits within the narrative being framed. This fit is achieved through fidelity, commensurability, and the centrality of the issue, which must be integral to a group's lifestyle, everyday concerns, and cultural beliefs to mobilize the group and potentially lead to violence. The amplification of cultural beliefs can incite a group towards violence (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615). To understand why the feminist movement prioritized certain issues, it is imperative to recognize the contestations that shaped their political agenda. Examining how violence was discussed and the everyday concerns that led the group to mobilize is essential for comprehending the politics of contestation within the group's agenda.

Building on the understanding of framing, it is vital to comprehend how frames can shape issues through motivational framing. Benford & Snow (2000, p. 617) define motivational framing as: *“Motivational framing provides a 'call to arms' or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate vocabularies of motive.”* This type of framing is evident in how feminist leaders articulated their concerns and galvanized others into collective action. They employed vocabularies of motive to portray issues as severe, urgent, and universally impactful, thereby shaping the collective perception of the problem. In this context, these vocabularies acted as calls to address feminist issues amidst protests, with collective action manifesting as organized gatherings. Amidst social upheaval, feminists emphasized the importance of their issues, capitalizing on the momentum of ongoing protests to amplify their voices.

The framing is a strategic process, designed to evoke emotional responses and foster a sense of shared responsibility among potential participants (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624). The feminist challengers navigate the terrain of reality construction within the SAF, dynamically shaping collective understanding and fostering a shared purpose and urgency for joint action to effect meaningful change. This strategic framing was particularly relevant for feminists pushing for changes to the Chilean constitution and advocating for their rights through the established protest framework. By motivating others to join the protests and change public perception, feminist leaders harnessed the existing protest momentum to advance their goals.



The ongoing severe social structure provided a backdrop for their message, enhancing its resonance and creating an opportunity for significant societal shifts.

The feminists adeptly leveraged the *Estallido Social* to elevate their political issues to the level of collective concerns. According to Benford and Snow (2000), this strategic framing involves challengers operating at the level of reality construction, using their active agency to transform individual issues into collective problems. Central to this process is negotiation, as challengers work to establish a shared understanding of the issues at hand. This negotiation can be understood through the concept of frame bridging, defined by Benford and Snow as: “*Frame bridging refers to the linking of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. Bridging can occur between a movement and individuals, through the linkage of a movement organization with an unmobilized sentiment pool or public opinion cluster, or across social movements*” (2000, p. 624). For the feminist organizations, this concept was crucial in framing their issues as collective problems and bridging their concerns with other social groups.

This notion of frame bridging complements the idea of cooperation described by Fligstein and McAdam (2012), who argue that: “*Actors have to convince other groups that if they join together, their collective interests will in fact be served. [...] Strategic actors use cooperative coalitions and enforced hierarchies as alternative means to organize fields*” (p. 15). In the feminist movement, initially separate entities coalesced to form a unified collective, leveraging their combined strength to advance their political agenda. This cooperative approach, combined with strategic framing, enabled the feminists to effectively mobilize support and push for meaningful change.

In conclusion, the application of Benford & Snow's concepts of motivational framing and frame bridging to the Strategic Action Fields (SAF) framework provides a nuanced understanding of how the feminist movement leveraged the *Estallido Social* to advance their political agenda. By creating a frame that highlighted their critical issues—such as the right to abortion, the cessation of sexual violence, and gender parity—the feminist movement was able to construct a reality that resonated with a broader audience. This strategic framing not only facilitated the feminist movement's mobilization but also bridged their concerns with other social groups, thus amplifying their impact within the protests. The negotiation of



frames and the politics of signification were central to this process, enabling the feminists to elevate their issues to the level of collective concerns. Ultimately, the feminist movement's adept use of framing and strategic action within the SAF underscores the importance of these theoretical concepts in understanding the dynamics of social movements and their capacity to effect meaningful change.

Theoretical conclusion and relevance

To conclude, this chapter has highlighted the importance of applying the Strategic Action Fields (SAFs) framework to analyze the feminist movement within the *Estallido Social*. By employing Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) SAF concept, the analysis shows how feminist leaders, as micro-level actors, navigated and influenced broader discursive and material structures to effect social change. The *Estallido Social*, characterized as an unsettled SAF, exemplifies how feminist organizations used this period of uncertainty to challenge traditional norms, mobilize collective action, and push for societal transformation.

The integration of Benford and Snow's (2000) concepts of motivational framing and frame bridging further enhances our understanding of feminist strategies. Feminist groups effectively framed their issues—such as gender parity and reproductive rights—as urgent and universally relevant, shaping collective perceptions and rallying support. Frame bridging allowed them to connect their concerns with those of other groups, amplifying their impact within the broader movement.

This research is academically relevant as it fills a gap in existing literature by focusing specifically on the politics of feminist framing, rather than just the general causes and participants of the *Estallido Social*. By examining the strategic framing employed by feminist leaders, the study sheds light on how these leaders elevated their issues to central concerns within the protests. It builds on Cruz's (2023) work by incorporating perspectives from a broader range of feminist groups, providing a richer understanding of feminist mobilization during the *Estallido Social*. Unlike other studies that focus on statistics of police violence (Gerber et al., 2023), this research delves into the dynamics of this violence, making it unique in examining the relationship between the feminist movement, their political agenda, and their stance on violence. This approach not only diversifies the perspectives within the



feminist movement but also enriches the understanding of how feminist framing influenced the broader social and political landscape during the *Estallido Social*.

The societal relevance of this paper lies in examining how the feminist movement within the *Estallido Social* strategically used riot dynamics to advance their political agenda. This insight is valuable not only for the feminist movement in Chile but also for similar movements globally, demonstrating how riots can be strategically employed for political gains. Additionally, the chapter explores their stance on violence. While one interviewee emphasized that feminists are a peaceful organization that does not condone violence, they did not oppose self-defense actions, raising intriguing questions about the movement's relationship with violence.

Understanding the dynamics of violence in social movements is crucial for scholars. This paper explains how the social process of not-expressing arguments about violence can create a positive image of violence. Using Benford and Snow's (2000) vocabularies of motive and Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) strategic action fields, a theoretical framework is developed to explain the feminist movement's relationship with violence during the *Estallido Social*. Despite being openly anti-violence, they still felt connected to its use.

Overall, this chapter underscores the dynamic interplay between individual actors, collective groups, and socio-political structures, highlighting the effectiveness of strategic action and framing in advancing political agendas and driving meaningful change in complex socio-political landscapes.

Research process and methodology

Following the theoretical discussion, this thesis transitions into a detailed examination of the research process and methodology. This chapter adopts an interpretivist stance, reflecting a commitment to understanding the feminist role in the *Estallido Social* through a nuanced lens. The methodological approach is grounded in a five-month fieldwork period conducted in Santiago, Chile, where I carried out ten interviews—five with feminist leaders from diverse organizations and five with various political and social actors. This exploration



addresses the sub-question: *How did the research process, including respondent selection and fieldwork methods, contribute to understanding the feminist role in the Estallido Social?*

The chapter begins by outlining the epistemological and ontological stance, highlighting an interpretivist and social constructivist approach. It then offers a reflection on the research journey, starting with contextual interviews, visits to relevant sites and museums, conversations with citizens, and literature reviews to grasp the essence of the *Estallido Social*. The chapter proceeds to detail the methodological and fieldwork challenges encountered during the research.

It then introduces the frame analysis methodology, divided into three analytical levels. At the micro-level, the focus is on operationalizing the concept of the skilled actor to analyse feminist leaders. The meso-level examines political opportunity structures, vocabularies of motive, and justification methods to understand internal dynamics within the feminist movement. At the master frame level, the study delves into frame bridging as defined by Benford & Snow (2000), analysing how feminist groups interacted with others within the strategic action field of the *Estallido Social*.

The chapter also includes a section on respondent selection and data, detailing how participants were chosen, the geographical focus of the study, and the profiles of respondents. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of key findings, highlighting the most significant aspects of the research process and its implications.

Epistemological and ontological stance

This chapter will explain the philosophical stance of this paper, covering an ontological stance of subtle idealism and an epistemological based on interpretivism and social constructivism. To know what the beliefs are in this case, it will take a subtle idealism ontological stance. In other words, that reality is knowable through socially constructed shared meaning whereby there is a collective mind (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 pp. 16). With socially constructed it is meant that meanings and interpretations of the social world are part of a group process of reality construction, there exists no neutral reality. This choice of thinking is made because to understand the movement of the feminist organization during the



Estallido Social, it is necessary to understand their collective ideas as a group, and not as individuals.

The understanding of collective ideas ties in with the epistemological stance of interpretivism and social constructivism. This paper is interpretivist in that it acknowledges that the findings are influenced by the researcher's perspective and values, and thus is a piece exploring the relationship between the researcher's interpretation and the participants reality (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003 pp. 17). The focus of meaning is central in interpretivism, and thus in this study (Maxwell, 1996 pp. 17). It will explore how the feminists gave meaning to their own political agenda, and what kind of meaning they gave to the use of physical violence. The study is also grounded in social constructivism, emphasizing the influence of social and cultural factors on knowledge formation. The feminists constructed a reality through social interaction.

Methodology

Research process

As this is an interpretivist paper, the relationship between the researcher and the research material is important to explore. In the coming section the research process will be explained. First it will start with the development of the interest in the subject, then it continues to the exploration of the research population and finally it will reflect on the difficulties experienced during the process.

The research process started with a broad question: how was violence legitimized during the *Estallido Social*, the 2019 riots in Chile? My initial interest in this subject began when I noticed that newspaper reports about the Estallido portrayed people who were violent against the police as human rights defenders (Múñoz Ramírez, December 2019). This perception differed from what I typically read about riots and protests, where violent protesters are usually framed as criminals. Additionally, I was intrigued by the demographics of the protesters; it appeared that both men and women were equally involved in the violence against the police, which further piqued my interest (Waissbluth, 2020).

Understanding the Estallido



My research on the *Estallido Social* began with an extensive literature review to understand the multifaceted causes and broader context of the protests. This foundational work was crucial in framing the historical and socio-political landscape that led to the 2019 demonstrations in Chile, as I elaborated on in the chapter *Contextual analysis of the Estallido Social*. As I was conducting my fieldwork, I tried to enrich my understanding and gather diverse perspectives, therefore I engaged in several immersive activities in my five month research process.

I attended two lectures organized by the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES). The first lecture focused on feminism in academia. This event was instrumental in allowing me to converse with feminists and activists who provided first-hand insights into the intersection of gender issues and social movements during the *Estallido Social*. The second lecture delved into the art movement associated with the protests. This lecture highlighted how art became a powerful medium for expressing dissent and unity, focussing on the violence aspect of the protests and thereby reflecting the cultural dimensions of the Estallido.

To further contextualize my research, I visited key museums in Santiago, and interviewed a feminist artist. At the Human Rights Museum, I explored exhibitions that documented the historical struggles and human rights violations in Chile, drawing direct lines to the motivations and grievances fuelling the *Estallido Social*. The Museum of Fine Arts also hosted exhibitions that captured the artistic responses to the protests, showcasing how visual art served as both a form of protest and a means of solidarity among demonstrators. The feminist artist underscored the role of art in the creation of shared meaning between the different feminist groups.

In addition to these structured activities, I engaged in spontaneous conversations with various individuals I encountered. These informal discussions provided a ground-level view of the public sentiment and personal experiences related to the *Estallido Social*. By talking to everyday citizens, I gained a deeper understanding of the widespread impact of the protests and the diverse motivations behind (non)participation.

A significant part of my contextual research involved engaging with members of the socialist party, particularly the youth wing. I visited the Socialist Party four times during my



fieldwork. I conducted both individual interviews and a roundtable discussion with their youth party to understand the perspectives of the students, who are often regarded as the primary instigators of the protests. These conversations shed light on the continuity of activism from the student movements of 2006 and 2011 to the *Estallido Social*, illustrating how these activists have matured and evolved in their approaches and demands.

Moreover, I had the opportunity to interview the vice-president of the socialist party. This conversation was pivotal in understanding the strategic decisions of political parties during the *Estallido Social*. The vice-president explained why established political parties chose to remain on the sidelines, providing insights into the complex dynamics between formal political structures and grassroots movements.

By combining these diverse research methods—literature review, attending lectures, visiting museums, and engaging in conversations—I was able to develop a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the *Estallido Social*. This multifaceted approach ensured that my research was well-rounded and deeply informed by both academic perspectives and personal experiences.

The feminist movement

During my research period, I aimed to narrow my focus to a specific group within the Estallido. Initially, I focused on women, which gradually led to a deeper interest in the feminist movement. Based on my initial readings of the literature, particularly the work of Sehnbruch and Donoso (2020), I believed that the Estallido was completely unorganized. However, I soon discovered that there was significant organization from the early stages, primarily led by feminists. These feminists played a crucial role in organizing much of the work around the Estallido, facilitating the movement, and ensuring the safety of the participants.

I chose to focus on the feminist movement for several compelling reasons. Initially, while reviewing the issues highlighted during the *Estallido Social*, it became clear that many protests centered on economic grievances rooted in the legacy of Pinochet's dictatorship (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020). Yet, I noticed that some protests specifically addressed women's rights, such as the right to abortion and the safety of women on the streets due to



sexual violence. This contrast intrigued me, as it suggested that these gender-focused protests might attract different participants compared to the predominantly economic issues. I was interested in uncovering who spearheaded these women's rights protests and how they managed to garner support from other groups.

Secondly, my literature review revealed significant insights. As discussed in my theoretical chapter, Cruz (2023) highlighted that the feminist movement orchestrated a "revolt within a revolt" during the Estallido. This concept shows how feminists leveraged the broader protest framework to promote their own agenda against capitalist and patriarchal structures, effectively shifting the focus of the protests.

Thirdly, my exploratory interviews uncovered that feminist played a pivotal role in organizing various facets of the *Estallido Social*. They were instrumental in coordinating healthcare and legal support, and they regularly held meetings to strategize daily protest themes. This extensive involvement underscored their central role in the movement.

Lastly, from my exploratory interviews, I gained the impression that men were more "lone wolves," organizing themselves individually, while women organized collectively. The men I spoke to during my stay in Chile mentioned attending the Estallido alone, primarily drawn by social media, whereas the women tended to go in groups. For a case study and framework analysis, it is thus interesting to investigate the feminist groups that were clearly organizing themselves. I decided to interview the leaders from the feminist movement, as they were the ones shaping the movement and understood its inner workings.

Concept legitimization of violence

Through the course of my research, my understanding of the concept of the legitimization of physical violence evolved through reading literature, conducting interviews, and being on the ground in Chile. Initially, I assumed that the use of violence had to be explicitly framed, with people discussing among themselves whether they were for or against the use of violence. This believe came from the mobilization literature, which will be more thoroughly discussed in the theoretical section of this paper. In short, the literature describes the mobilization of a group through a single challenger who frames an issue (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012; Jackson & Dexter, 2014). This actor then uses vocabularies of motive to



articulate their concerns and motivate others to join in collective action. These vocabularies aim to portray the issue as severe, urgent, effective on everyone, or disproportional, thereby shaping the collective perception of the problem. (Benford & Snow, 2000). Keeping this in mind about challenger(s) that would use these vocabularies of motive I began searching for these challengers in the field. I had an interview with dr. Cruz, who researched the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*, and asked if she could reflect on any challengers during that time using vocabularies of motive. She said that it would be best for me to speak with the *voceras* [spokespersons], since their role was to collect the opinions during the meetings and then distribute the knowledge during the protests. In other words, they had control over the narrative of the group.

This focus on the *voceras* of feminist organizations led me to explore how they utilized vocabularies of motive to legitimize violence. Over time, I realized that legitimization can also occur through the strategic omission of discussions about violence. I was intrigued by why the feminist movement, despite having regular weekly meetings, did not openly address their stance on the use of violence or the violence occurring on the streets.

Initially, I considered whether dissenting opinions about the legitimacy of violence were actively silenced within the movement. However, it became apparent that while the topic of violence was occasionally discussed, a consensus could not be reached, leading to its avoidance in discussions. Another possibility is that feminist organizations employed violence as a political strategy to solidify group boundaries; those who did not support the use of violence might have been excluded from the group (Demmers, 2017, p. 39).

It is also conceivable that both factors were at play: the avoidance of the violence discussion and its use as a means of group cohesion. Thus, the feminist movement might have navigated a complex relationship with violence, suppressing dissenting views to maintain unity and reinforce their position within the broader protest framework.

Research reflection

During my fieldwork, I encountered several challenges that impacted my research. One major issue was difficulty reaching respondents, particularly due to the busy schedules of coordinators from various movements. Despite extensive networking and attending events to



build connections, this limitation affected the representativeness of my findings regarding all women's movements during the *Estallido Social*. Additionally, I struggled to obtain a comprehensive list of feminist organizations in Santiago. Although RedChilena reports around 17 feminist groups focused on sexual violence (RedChilena, 2024), I could connect with representatives from only five diverse organizations, which provided valuable but limited insights.

Another challenge arose from my initial encounters with men in South America, who often dismissed my inquiries or suggested I focus on different topics. This gender-based scepticism initially drained my energy but shifted as I focused on feminist perspectives, where women engaged seriously with my research. This experience suggests that my research scope might have differed had I been a man or Chilean national.

Lastly, the lack of clear documentation from the period under study posed significant difficulties. Meetings and discussions were not recorded due to concerns about surveillance by secret services, creating a culture of secrecy that hindered comprehensive critical discourse analysis. This limitation affected my ability to conduct a thorough examination of the feminist movement's internal dynamics and strategies.

Concluding, my research process for this study started with a broad question on how violence was legitimized during the *Estallido Social*, the 2019 riots in Chile. Initially sparked by newspaper reports that framed violent protesters as human rights defenders, my interest deepened as I observed the equal involvement of both men and women in these protests. Understanding the *Estallido Social* required extensive literature review and immersive fieldwork, including attending lectures and visiting museums in Santiago, to contextualize the socio-political landscape and protest dynamics. Interviews with various activists and leaders, particularly from feminist groups, provided diverse perspectives and revealed the central role feminists played in organizing and advancing the protests. Despite challenges in accessing comprehensive documentation and respondents, these methods enabled a nuanced understanding of the feminist movement's strategies and their stance on violence within the broader context of the *Estallido Social*.



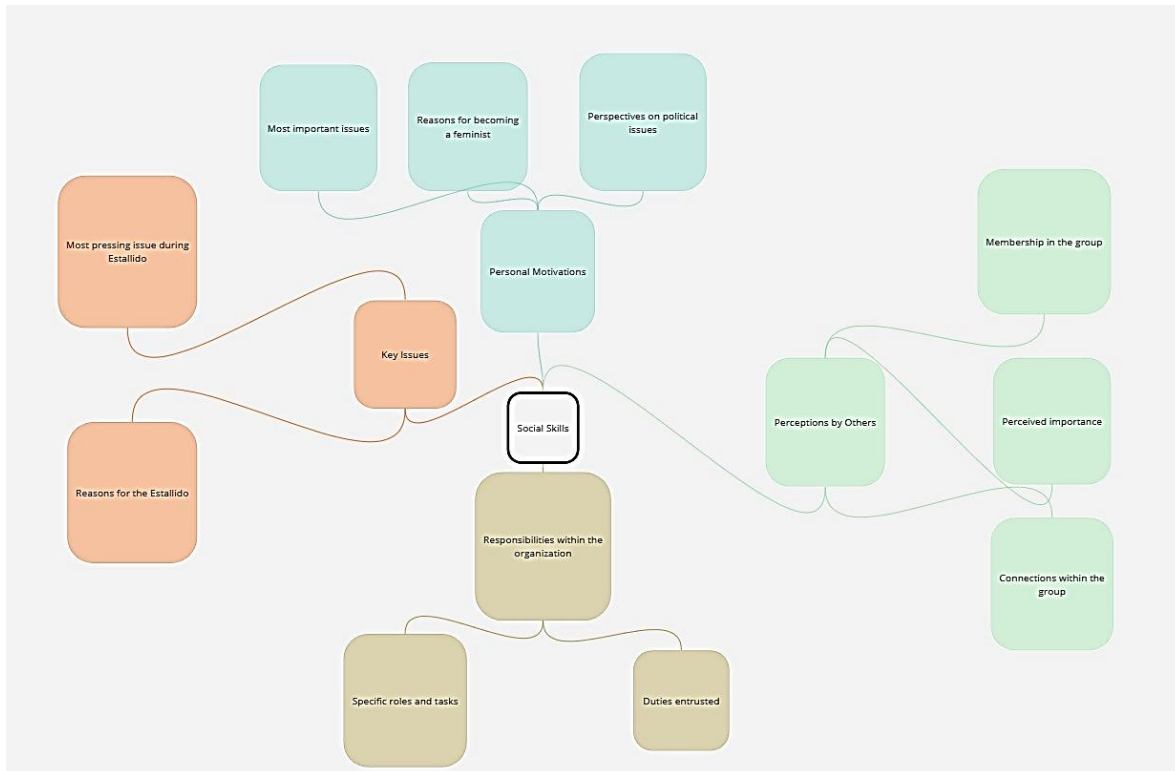
Frame analysis

To understand these feminist movement strategies and stances, the research employs frame analysis as a qualitative method, allowing for the exploration of underlying frameworks that shape individuals' perceptions, influencing how they view problems and determine appropriate actions. To gather data, the study analyzes both master frames (societal perceptions of the problem) and movement-specific frames (the feminist movement's perceptions), as well as personal motivations and examines how the interplay between these frames creates specific ideas regarding the use of violence (Noonan, 1995 p. 88). This methodology, adapted from Noonan's (1995) study on the mobilization and collective action frames of the feminist movement in Chile, extends frame analysis to include non-structural conditions, resonating well with the Chilean context of the *Estallido Social*. Noonan (1995, p.88): *“Collective action frames within a “cycle” can compete with each other, with competition being more likely under conditions of a restricted master frame. The rise and fall of master frames may shape how movement-specific frames compete, decay, and transform, as some master frames create space for certain ideas while others do not.”*

To understand the feminist movement from an interpretivist perspective, I conducted semi-structured interviews with leaders of the feminist movement, employing the theoretical frameworks previously discussed. Drawing on the mobilization literature of Benford & Snow (2000) and Fligstein & McAdam (2012), I incorporated the concepts of an unsettled Strategic Action Field (SAF), social skill, motivational framing, and frame bridging.

These concepts were analyzed through Noonan's (1995) three analytical frames: master frames (meso), movement-specific frames (meso), and personal motivations (micro). This approach allowed me to examine how these different frames interact to shape specific ideas within the feminist movement. I structured the analysis using a macro-micro-macro approach to distinguish between ideas originating from the broader Chilean context, those emerging from the feminist groups, and those from individual leaders. *Figures 1 to 3* illustrate the concepts employed and their application across three analytical levels. These visualizations correspond to *Appendix B*, which contains the topic list.

Figure one: Social skill (micro-level)



To understand the position of the interviewees within their group, I aimed to uncover their social skill, defined by Fligstein and McAdam (2012, p. 46) as *"the ability to induce cooperation by appealing to and helping to create shared meanings and collective identities. Skilled social actors empathetically relate to the situations of other people and, in doing so, are able to provide those people with reasons to cooperate."* In the context of the *Estallido Social*, understanding how individuals helped form collective identities within different groups is crucial. Therefore, researching how feminist leaders induced cooperation through their social skills is essential.

In this paper, I define the social skill of feminist leaders through three main aspects: personal motivations, how they were perceived by others, and their responsibilities within the feminist movement. I will explain how I got to these three aspects in the following section. By combining these lines of inquiry, I constructed a comprehensive picture of each interviewee's position within the feminist movement. This multifaceted approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the internal and external factors that shaped their roles and actions within



the context of the *Estallido Social*. In the following sections I will delve into the questions that were asked during the interviews to uncover the different facets of social skills.

Personal Motivations

To create a shared understanding, it is essential to explore personal motivations. To achieve this, I inquired about the interviewees' reasons for becoming feminists, their views on various political issues, and what they considered the most significant issue during the *Estallido Social*.

I started each interview by asking the participants to introduce themselves and describe their roles within their respective feminist organizations. This initial question served as an icebreaker, enabling them to share their backgrounds and their paths to joining the feminist movement. Following this, I probed deeper into their motivations by asking why they identified as feminists. This exploration aimed to uncover their personal journeys and experiences that shaped their feminist beliefs.

To further contextualize their motivations, I asked them about what they perceived as the most pressing issue during the *Estallido Social*. Their responses shed light on the collective priorities and concerns within the feminist movement. Additionally, I sought their reflections on the origins of the *Estallido Social*, aiming to capture their interpretations of the broader social and political upheavals and how these events influenced their activism.

Perceptions by Others

Understanding leaders' perceptions by others involves examining how they empathetically related to the situations of others within their movement. To explore this, I focused on several aspects of their involvement, including their membership status, connections within the group, and perceived importance. I also inquired about their education and standing within the organization to assess how they were viewed by their peers.

Drawing from Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) concept of social valued resources, which highlights how challengers in a strategic action field leverage resources like money, connections, and organizational skills to mobilize support and influence outcomes, I adapted this framework to the feminist movement. Specifically, I investigated how leaders'

memberships and connections within the movement, along with their education and status, contributed to their perceived influence and authority.

I acknowledge that a limitation of this approach is that individuals may not fully perceive how others view them. However, by focusing on tangible aspects such as education, status, and key relationships, I aimed to maintain an objective perspective. I intentionally avoided delving too deeply into how feminists personally felt they were perceived, keeping the inquiry centred on measurable factors of social capital and influence.

Responsibilities within the Group

Responsibilities within the movement focus on how the leaders helped create shared meanings and contribute to forming collective identities. To understand this aspect, I asked detailed questions about their specific roles and tasks within the group. I aimed to uncover the duties they were entrusted with and how these responsibilities reflected their standing and influence within the movement. By exploring these responsibilities, I gained insight into the internal dynamics of the group and how leadership and tasks were distributed among its members.

Figure two: Movement specific frames (meso-level)





As shown in *figure two* this study delves into the workings of different groups, the meso-level analysis is a central focus. The research examines the concepts of political opportunity structures (Tarrow, 1988), vocabularies of motive (Fligstein & McAdam, 2012), and justification methods to understand the dynamics within the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*.

Political Opportunity Structures

To explore political opportunity structures, the study investigates how the group perceives its influence compared to other groups. Specifically, it examines the group's self-perceived power and its potential to advance their political agenda. This perception is critical because it provides insights into what the feminists believed was achievable in their struggle for social change.

To study this perception, I asked the different feminist leaders how they thought about their relation towards other groups, examining how they presented themselves and interacted with other groups. Additionally, I explored their views on other groups involved in the *Estallido Social*, asking them to reflect on how they believed the media framed their actions and goals. This multifaceted approach helped to contextualize their perceived political opportunities and constraints.

Vocabularies of Motive

The study of vocabularies of motive began with an investigation into the negotiation of shared meaning. I aimed to understand how feminists decided on their political agenda and identified which topics were paramount during the time. This involved exploring how they related to various issues within the *Estallido Social* and their stance on the use of physical violence.

I sought to determine whether they participated in violence and how they reflected on their involvement. For those not involved in physical confrontations with the police, I inquired about their discussions regarding the use of violence by other groups. This aspect of the



research focused particularly on their *convocatorias*, where the group ideologically defined its collective stances.

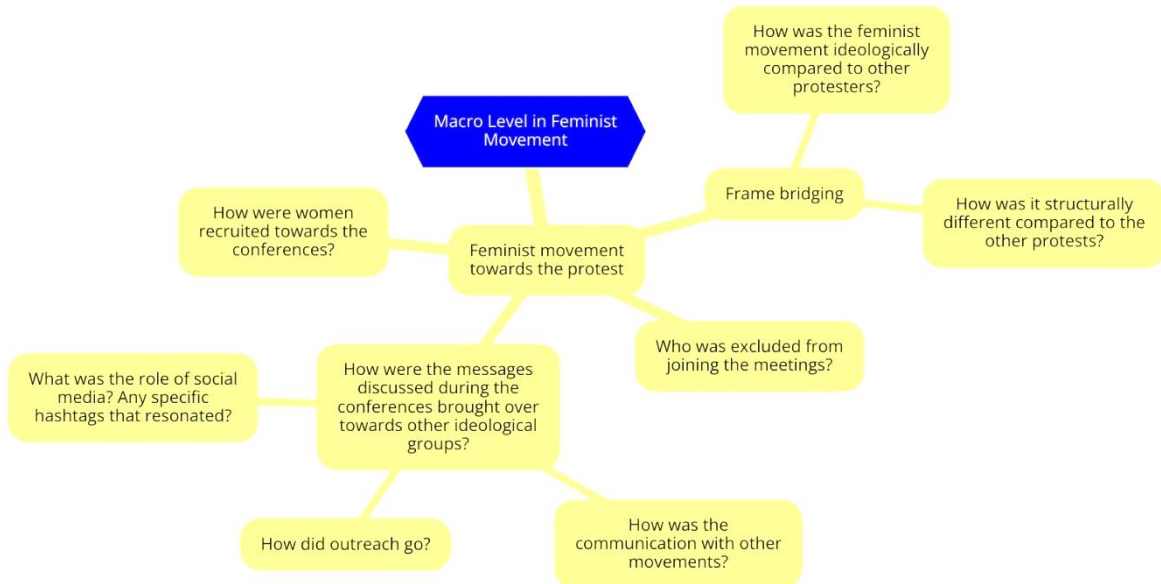
Another dimension of studying vocabularies of motive involved understanding the generation of meaning around their perceived problems. Mobilizing the group required identifying significant issues that warranted advocacy. I asked the feminists to articulate what they viewed as the most pressing issues at the time and how they intended to address them. This included defining acceptable actions and those they deemed unacceptable, especially concerning the use of violence.

Justification Methods

Finally, the study explored the methods used to justify physical violence. I asked feminists about their views on violence used by their group, the police, and other groups. Physical violence was defined explicitly as engaging in frontline confrontations and using bodily force, rocks, or Molotov cocktails against the police.

To gain a comprehensive understanding, I posed several questions: In what scenarios is it justified to use physical violence against the police? How did they perceive others' use of violence? Under what circumstances would they themselves resort to violence against the police? Additionally, I explored how the group discussed the use of violence among its members. These inquiries aimed to uncover the internal and external justifications for violence within the context of the *Estallido Social*.

Figure three: Master frames level (meso to meso level)



At the master frame level, this study focuses on the concepts of *frame bridging* as defined by Benford & Snow (2000) and the interplay between feminist groups and other groups within the strategic action field of the *Estallido Social*. Adopting a social constructivist stance, the research examines how truth was constructed among these groups. The interview questions were designed to explore the relationships and narratives formed about other groups, aiming to understand the various dynamics at play.

Group membership

The first focus was on how feminist groups recruited members from other groups, investigating the overlap and alliances formed between different feminist groups and with other social groups. This involved examining the strategies used to attract individuals and groups with similar or complementary goals, and how these recruitment efforts influenced the feminist movement's reach and impact. By understanding these recruitment processes, the study sheds light on the ways feminist groups expanded their influence and built coalitions during the *Estallido Social*.

A second aspect explored the criteria for group membership, investigating who was allowed to join the feminist movement and who was excluded. This helped define the boundaries of



the movement and provided insights into the internal dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. Understanding these criteria was essential for comprehending how the feminist movement constructed its collective identity and solidarity.

Frame bridging

Thirdly, the study delved into the communication strategies of the feminist groups towards other groups, assessing their influence in constructing shared truths about social issues. This included analyzing how feminist groups disseminated their ideologies and positioned themselves as authoritative voices within the broader social movement. The effectiveness of these communication efforts in shaping perceptions and garnering support was a critical area of inquiry.

Lastly, the study focused on frame bridging, examining how feminist groups conveyed their truths to other groups that were either ideologically similar or different. This involved investigating the methods used to align their frames with those of other groups, facilitating cooperation and understanding across diverse segments of the *Estallido Social*. The goal was to see how feminist groups navigated ideological differences to build broader coalitions and advance their political objectives.

Through this comprehensive analysis, the study aims to shed light on the complex processes of truth construction, recruitment, communication, membership, and frame alignment within the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how feminist groups positioned themselves and interacted with other actors in the dynamic and multifaceted landscape of social protest.

Selection and data analysis

Geographical Focus

This study focuses on the cities of Santiago and Valparaíso, where the protest movements were the largest and the feminist presence was most active. These locations were pivotal due to their significant role in the *Estallido Social*, starting as the epicenter of the conflict and experiencing heightened levels of violence during the protests (Rozas-Bugueno et al., 2022).



Although the *Estallido Social* spread across Chile, the greater Santiago region is particularly noteworthy for the initiation and intensity of the protests.

Organizations Contacted

I engaged with five different feminist organizations to gain a comprehensive understanding of their influence and role during the *Estallido Social*. For my contextual analysis I conducted five different actors, to grasp a comprehension on what happened during the *Estallido Social*. Details of the diverse interviews conducted can be found in *Appendix A*.

Sampling of Leaders

Through networking, I identified my respondents for this study. To understand how feminist groups influenced the discourse during the second wave of the *Estallido Social*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with key spokespersons. Dr. Cruz emphasized the importance of these spokespersons, who were instrumental in advocating for feminist interests. Although they were not formal leaders, their role in gathering opinions from daily assemblies and shaping media narratives was crucial. They effectively influenced public opinion and justified the use of violence through their words and actions.

Semi-structured interviews provided direct insights into the meeting dynamics, given the absence of written records. However, to address potential biases from participants' recollection of past events, I cross-referenced interview data with contemporaneous sources such as news reports, press releases, and social media posts. While feminist organizations were not the sole arbiters of violence justification, their prominence in the *Estallido Social* significantly influenced women's perceptions of violence, especially given the higher proportion of women in the frontline defence compared to other movements.

The target population for this study comprises spokespersons from diverse feminist organizations present at the *Estallido Social* in Santiago after November 15, 2019. Interviews were conducted based on three analytical levels, as explained in this chapter. The topic list in Appendix B summarizes the themes used during interviews, allowing room for interviewees to bring their perspectives on what was important.

Most interviews were conducted in café settings, each lasting around an hour. I identified interviewees by asking contacts if they knew feminists with organizing roles, employing a



snowballing method to find additional leaders. This approach led to interviews with Nayade and Jennifer, while other contacts helped locate the remaining interviewees.

Feminist Leaders Interviewed

1. **Valeria** was the coordinator for Coordinadora Feminista 8 de Marzo (C8M), an independent feminist organization founded in 2018. As the C8M coordinator for the Valparaíso region, Valeria organized meetings, communicated with other regional coordinators, and discussed the movement's message with politicians.
2. **Tatiana** was the president of MUMS (Movimiento por la Diversidad Sexual y de Género), an LGBT+ organization founded in 1997. MUMS focuses on class, gender, human rights, and sustainability. Tatiana coordinated meetings and oversaw daily operations, addressing class divides, promoting gender inclusivity, advocating for sexual diversity as a human right, and supporting the rights of Indigenous peoples in Chile.
3. **Anahi** was a coordinator for the feminist student movement at the University of Santiago. She organized meetings, set the agenda, and reached out to other groups outside the university to discuss shared opinions and goals.
4. **Nayade** coordinated her local feminist neighbourhood movement. Various neighbourhood organizations throughout Santiago collaborated during metropolitan meetings. Nayade promoted feminist perspectives in neighbourhood meetings, ensured their issues were included in the agenda, and organized local gatherings for feminist activists in her community.
5. **Jennifer** was a coordinator for an anarcho-lesbofeminist movement, which did not have a formal organization name. This relatively small group was part of the broader LGBT+ movement but specifically advocated for the rights of lesbians.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I detailed the methodological approach and fieldwork process used to study the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*. Employing frame analysis, I examined how feminist leaders constructed and communicated their narratives, particularly concerning violence. This approach involved dissecting master frames, movement-specific frames, and personal motivations to capture the movement's dynamics.



The research process began with an investigation into the legitimization of violence, evolving into a comprehensive analysis of feminist strategies and roles. I conducted a literature review, fieldwork, and interviews with feminist leaders to understand how they navigated internal and external challenges, including their justifications for violence and organizational tactics. The study also examined political opportunity structures, vocabularies of motive, and justification methods to understand how feminist groups negotiated their goals and interacted with other actors. Despite difficulties such as limited documentation and access to some respondents, the research offered valuable insights into the feminist movement's influence and strategies.

Overall, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of feminist activism during the *Estallido Social*, illustrating how feminist groups constructed their narratives and engaged with the broader protest movement. The findings provide a detailed perspective on the role of feminism in social movements and offer methodological insights into analyzing collective action.

Organizing for Change: Feminist Movement Tactics and Perspectives on Violence

In previous chapters, the methodologies and theories underpinning this research were thoroughly discussed. This chapter now applies these frameworks to explore the critical role of social skills and personal motivations within feminist movements during the *Estallido Social*. It aims to illuminate how feminist leaders utilized these elements to influence their movements and shape political agendas.

The chapter begins with an examination of social skills as defined by Fligstein and McAdam (2012). It highlights how feminist leaders employed these skills to create shared meanings and collective identities, fostering cooperation within their movements. By showcasing empathetic leadership, we can understand how these skilled actors drove group dynamics and set political agendas.



Key figures within the feminist movements will be examined, focusing on how they organized meetings and engaged with their groups through both formal and informal methods. This analysis will reflect the nature and scale of their respective organizations.

Additionally, the chapter will explore how feminist agendas integrated into the broader *Estallido Social* context. It will detail how these groups leveraged the protest momentum to advance their goals, especially through strategic frame bridging within the Mesa de Unidad Social (MUS), as described by Benford and Snow (2000).

Finally, the chapter addresses the complex positions of feminist organizations on violence. While open to discussing police violence, particularly sexual violence against women, they were cautious about violence from women towards the police, reflecting historical tensions and the influence of the dictatorship era (Cruz, 2023).

This chapter aims to offer a nuanced view of how feminist leaders navigated their roles and influenced their movements within the *Estallido Social*.

Individual opinions on violence & sharing within the group (micro)

In this section, I will explore the concept of social skills and personal motivations within feminist movements, drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence. The theoretical part of the paper introduced Fligstein and McAdam's (2012) concept of social skills. Skilled social actors empathetically relate to others' situations, providing reasons to cooperate. This chapter will demonstrate how the interviewees embody these social skills.

Social skills

In the theoretical part of the paper, I introduced the concept of social skills as defined by Fligstein & McAdam (2012). They describe social skills as "*the ability to induce cooperation by appealing to and helping to create shared meanings and collective identities. Skilled social actors empathetically relate to the situations of other people and, in doing so, are able to provide those people with reasons to cooperate.*" In this chapter, I will demonstrate that my interviewees fit the description of skilled social actors.

The feminists induced cooperation by creating shared meanings and collective identities, a process vividly illustrated in my interview with Valeria. She explained, "*We said, hey, we*



have substantial differences between us. But there is a sub-objective: the call to abortion, safe and free. Equal pay for men and women for the same work. Things like that and stop the violence." Here, Valeria establishes a shared meaning by emphasizing common objectives, including safe abortion, equal pay, and the cessation of violence. Jennifer corroborates this shared meaning:

"Many of the demands of the feminist movement are associated, for example, with the issue of abortion, with the issue of reproductive rights, along these lines, and other demands that have more to do with gender stereotypes, with violence, with violence in the street, or with access to health care for things that are not reproductive."

Despite their varied perspectives, three out of five women aligned with the main issues of the feminist fight, such as abortion, reproductive rights, sexual violence, and equal pay. Anahi (student feminists), Jennifer (lesbofeminists), and Valeria (C8M) emphasized these themes, reflecting a broad consensus on core feminist issues within their movements. They frame these issues as the most important. By focusing on these issues, they contribute to a collective understanding and framing of the main problem with other members of their groups.

Tatiana (MUMS), however, had a different perspective. While she sympathized with the call for abortion, she did not actively protest for it as it was not directly related to her personal experience. This highlights the diversity within the feminist movement, showing that even among leaders, there are different emphases and priorities.

Another finding was that the feminist leaders had empathy towards other groups, showcasing their social skills. The non-hierarchical nature of the organization fostered union. For example, Nayade empathized with the women on the frontlines, even though she herself was not directly involved in the confrontations. She emphasized the necessity of stopping police violence against protesters, which she saw as crucial for the feminist movement:

"I mean, since we are unarmed. We don't have anything to attack with, apart from a couple of stones or some Molotov cocktails. We don't have weapons, we don't have armaments, we don't have protective measures, we don't have helmets."

Regarding violence Valeria also empathized with a different group, the feminist that went through the dictatorship:



“We saw them as examples. That regardless of everything that was happening, they always fought. Because, for example, I was born seeing a democratically elected person as president. But they grew up seeing a dictator for 17 years. And it's not the same to go out on the streets now as it is to go out on the streets during a dictatorship.”

These two quotes exemplify the use of empathy towards other groups within their movement. This empathy then can be used as a form of solidarity to and, in doing so, the feminists are able to provide those people with reasons to cooperate.

The feminist leaders used this empathy in their day-to-day mobilisation of the movement. It can be seen with the role that Anahi had in the feminist student movement. Anahi highlighted her role in informing others: *“My role in activism has always been to inform. Because my idea is to get people to understand why there is so much anger and where it originates.”* Anahi's emphasis on informing and educating others demonstrates her ability to empathetically relate to the situation of her peers. She gathered opinions during panel discussions and set the agenda, thereby shaping what was discussed. Leading the conversations and taking minutes, she disseminated information to other groups. This role positioned her as a key figure in spreading awareness and fostering a collective understanding of the issues at hand. Anahi's ability to frame discussions and guide the conversation highlights her strategic influence within the movement.

Another example can be seen by Nayade's neighbourhood feminists' organization. Nayade was involved in organizing neighborhood meetings: *“...I was part of the articulation commission and from there we organized several meetings for the neighborhood with the people. [...] it fulfilled a more articulation role, like with other assemblies, or with other neighborhoods, or with the coordinator.”* As part of the feminist group, Nayade ensured feminist issues were included in the neighbourhood's committee's agenda. She took minutes and used the neighborhood's information letters to shape the action points of the *Gran Encuentro Metropolitano de Asembleas Territoriales* [Great Metropolitan Meeting of Territorial Assemblies], an advisor to the state. Her role in the articulation commission allowed her to influence the broader agenda, ensuring that feminist issues were prominently discussed and addressed. Nayade's strategic positioning within the movement highlights her ability to connect different groups and foster a unified approach to feminist activism.



A third example on how to connect different groups and foster unification can be seen in Tatiana's leadership of the LGBT+ movement. Unlike Valeria, Anahi and Nayade, Tatiana believed in a non-hierarchical structure within her LGBT+ movement:

"We in MUMS, when we participate, we appoint, we hold our meetings, which are relatively horizontal. We have a president, but fundamentally because legality requires it. We have a coordination, in addition to the board of directors, we have a political coordination that is horizontal. We don't have a person in charge of the assemblies. And our participation in the other assemblies is also decided in this teamwork."

Tatiana's commitment to a horizontal structure reflects a different approach to leadership. In her view, leadership is not about a single individual making decisions but rather a collective process. This approach emphasizes teamwork and collective decision-making, which can create a strong sense of shared ownership and responsibility among members. Tatiana's perspective highlights the diversity of organizational structures within the feminist movement, showing that effective leadership can take many forms.

Yet another way of unification through leadership can be found with Jennifer of the Lesbofeminists. She described a less formal, more decentralized approach to information spreading and decision-making:

"In some cases with more formal meetings and in other cases in a more informal way, of this one-to-one contact between the person you knew, right, from another organization that was convening or that you also knew was going to the activity."

Jennifer's description of her approach highlights the importance of informal networks and personal connections in feminist activism. By relying on both formal meetings and informal interactions, Jennifer and her group could remain flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the movement. This approach allowed them to build strong relationships and foster a sense of solidarity and mutual support among members. Jennifer's ability to navigate both formal and informal structures demonstrates her adaptability and strategic thinking.

In conclusion, the feminist leaders exemplify the concept of social skills as defined by Fligstein & McAdam (2012). Through creating shared meanings and collective identities, they successfully induced cooperation within their movements. Valeria, Jennifer, Nayade,



Anahi, and Tatiana demonstrated empathy, which is crucial in galvanizing support and focusing attention on critical issues such as safe abortion, equal pay, reproductive rights, and the cessation of violence. Their varied roles and personal motivations within their respective movements highlight the diversity of approaches to leadership and the effectiveness of different organizational structures. By understanding these dynamics, we gain a deeper appreciation of the complexities and strengths of leadership in feminist activism during the *Estallido Social*, showcasing the powerful impact of skilled social actors in driving social change.

Movement dynamics (meso)

In the last section, I discussed how skilled social actors can influence a group towards their goals through empathetic leadership. In this chapter, I aim to answer how the group dynamics work around the skilled actor to set their political agenda. Previously, we saw that important issues introduced by the skilled actor were adopted by the group through empathy and leadership. Here, I will explain how these ideas move from the skilled actor, mediated through agenda setting, to reach consensus at a group level. I will present this through my case study of the feminists of the *Estallido Social*.

I will first explore agenda setting, followed by the physical organization of meetings, the topics discussed, what was permissible to say, how consensus was reached, actions based on this consensus, and finally, how they organized their protests. The main point of this chapter is to demonstrate that a hegemony of thoughts and actions was created in the feminist groups. This will set the stage for the following chapter, where I will address how the feminists were able to advance their political agenda.

The first point to address is how feminist leaders organized meetings, which varied between formal and informal methods. Larger organizations, such as Valeria's C8M, one of the largest feminist groups in the country, typically scheduled meetings through formal channels like emails. Similarly, Anahi's student-feminists also preferred an institutional approach, using official means to arrange gatherings. In contrast, mid-range groups like Nayade's neighborhood feminists relied on WhatsApp groups to notify members about meetings at the neighborhood house. Tatiana, leading the LGBT+ movement, opted for a more spontaneous



method, often standing in public spaces to announce impromptu panel discussions. Smaller movements, such as Jennifer's lesbofeminist group, employed informal methods like word-of-mouth and personal WhatsApp messages. Thus, the approach to calling meetings was influenced by the size of the group and the preferred communication channels.

After the communication that there would be a meeting, the agenda was discussed, which was in most cases prepared beforehand by the leader of the group. Anahi, although emphasizing that everyone could provide points for the meeting, told me that the coordinators were in charge of making the agenda: *"So yes, the questions were designed as... by the different groups that were put together to try to coordinate."* This showcases that although they do not perceive themselves as individuals shaping the discussions, it is important to note that they are the ones setting the agenda, framing what should and should not be discussed. Therefore, they have the influence through providing a focus of the discussions.

To discuss how the protests were organized and the ideological stance the feminists would portray in the *Estallido Social*, the feminists organized themselves into convocatorios [panel discussions]. For some groups, these convocatorios served as essential meeting points for organizing protests, ensuring safety, engaging in ideological discussions, and addressing the severity of the situation. The concept vocabularies of motive (Benford & Snow, 2000) is helpful to understand the dynamics of these discussions, whereby the issues discussed in the convocatorios are framed as collective problems. This process involves an ideological negotiation of what the feminists perceived as problems, leading to a shared purpose and the necessity for joint action to foster meaningful change.

The process of ideological negotiation within the feminist groups often did not lead to immediate consensus due to the diverse range of issues at hand, including intersectionality, feminist Marxism, ecological feminism, and violence. These varied perspectives frequently resulted in differing opinions. However, despite these disagreements, the groups succeeded in producing collective statements. This was achieved through convocatorias, where discussions, even if not always unanimous, allowed for the formation of a unified stance. For instance, on the issue of violence, Valeria demonstrated a commitment to respecting differing viewpoints, expressing her reluctance to dismiss others' opinions by saying, *"And I said, well,*



who am I to invalidate the position of another colleague? I'm not going to explain to her what I'm talking about." This reflects a broader respect for diverse perspectives within the group. The following section will delve more into how these discussions on violence evolved. Once a consensus was achieved, the groups documented their deliberations, communicated the outcomes to their members, and translated these ideas into tangible actions, such as creating flyers, organizing protests, or engaging in dialogues with other groups.

In this chapter, I explored how group dynamics influence political agenda-setting around skilled social actors, using the feminist movements of the *Estallido Social* as a case study. I examined how feminist leaders, such as Valeria and Anahi, organized meetings through both formal and informal methods, reflecting the size and nature of their respective groups. From these meetings, agendas were set, often by leaders who framed discussions and shaped the focus of debates. The process of ideological negotiation within convocatorios revealed a diverse array of perspectives. Despite varying opinions, the groups managed to reach collective agreements and translate these into actions like protests and public statements. This chapter demonstrates how these processes created a hegemony of thought and action within the feminist groups, setting the stage for the subsequent exploration of how they advanced their political agenda.

Feminists' movement towards Estallido (meso to meso)

In the previous section, I analysed how feminist groups developed their political agenda. This section will show how this agenda influenced the broader *Estallido Social*. I will start by presenting an actor map to illustrate the connections between feminist organizations and other groups. Next, I will discuss frame bridging, as described by Benford and Snow (2000), highlighting how feminist groups allied with other political entities to extend their impact. I will also examine their interactions with various political actors and conclude with their role in shaping the public debate on the new constitution, demonstrating their significant influence within the *Estallido Social*.

In *Figure 4*, I present an actor map based on Waissbluth's (2020) work, illustrating the various participants involved in the *Estallido Social*. This map distinguishes between political and non-political actors. Among the non-political actors, I categorized them based on their stance

towards the use of violence against the police, which served as foundational knowledge in earlier chapters. For the political actors, I identified key groups such as the government, business owners, armed forces, centre moderates, and carabineros, all of whom played significant roles in the public debate of the *Estallido Social*.

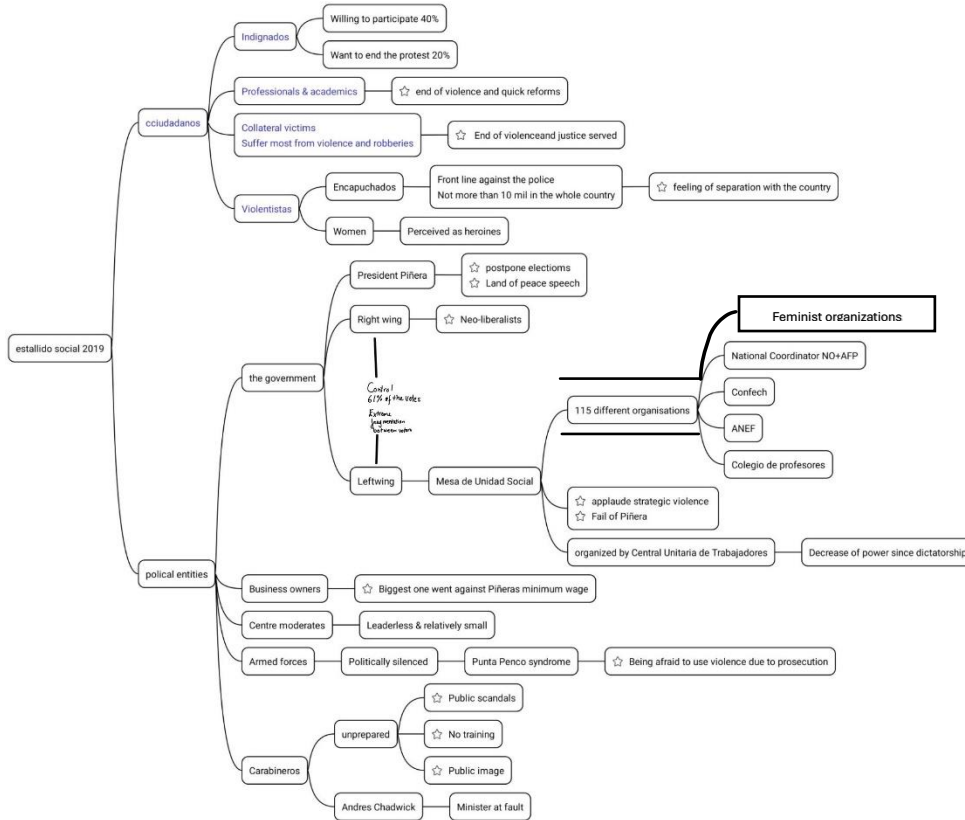


Figure 4. Actor map of the *Estallido Social*

Notably, some feminist organizations were part of the MUS, a coalition of 115 organizations that directly influenced the government by organizing public discussions and uniting various social groups (Sehnbruch & Donoso, 2020). Because of their political involvement, the *MUS* is positioned alongside government entities in the actor map. Understanding the structure and influence of the *MUS* is crucial for comprehending how feminists gained momentum and advanced their political agenda during the *Estallido Social*, because the influence of the feminist organizations partially also went through the *MUS*.



When I asked my interviewees on how they viewed themselves in regard to other groups of the *Estallido Social*, in particular the MUS, they felt that they had more influence than other groups. This had multiple reasons. One of the reasons being that they served a purpose during the Estallido because the feminists would organize the medical and legal help. Through this medical and legal help they formed an organization of the Estallido. An example is Jennifer, from the Lesbofeminists who says the following about helping other groups: “*Lesbofeminists usually also did workshops, activities, so some who had more knowledge of health, for example, organised these health brigades, which were precisely those who went to attend to people who suffered some kind of violence during the marches.*”. Valeria, of the C8M movement, also stated that the women from her organization helped during the *Estallido Social*: “*There were doctors, but also medical students. They volunteered. They were handed helmets. And they had to be in the front row. Pulling the people out who were.... We had people who were collapsing with tears.*”. These quotes show that the feminists had a part of the daily organization of the *Estallido Social*.

The visibility and presence of the organization of the feminist groups during the *Estallido Social* allowed them to gain power and forge connections through a process known as frame bridging. As described by Benford & Snow (2000), “*Frame bridging refers to the linking of two or more ideologically congruent but structurally unconnected frames regarding a particular issue or problem. Bridging can occur between a movement and individuals, through the linkage of a movement organization with an unmobilized sentiment pool or public opinion cluster, or across social movements.*” The feminist groups exemplified this by linking with other organizations, offering support, and spreading their message through various means. They distributed flyers designed to convey feminist perspectives and used music and cultural events in neighbourhoods as platforms to discuss pressing issues. Valeria underscored the significant presence of feminists in the *Estallido Social*: “*I think, I can, I dare say that 60 or 70% of the marches that took place were women. Because the feminist movement was the most articulated movement during the social upheaval. We coordinated with all the 8M coordinators at the national level.*” This multifaceted approach ensured the feminist message reached a wide audience and fostered a strong sense of community and purpose within the movement.



Through these efforts, feminist groups could link their frames to other social movements within the *Estallido Social*, particularly the MUS. Valeria, from the C8M, highlighted their significant influence: “So, we showed during the *Estallido Social* that the feminist organization was the most organized and the most organizing. The slogans of abortion, of the *Theses* movement, we did everything during the *Estallido*.” This illustrates their successful frame bridging. The C8M, among six other influential organizations, was invited by the MUS to engage with the government (Guerra, 2019).

My interviewees felt they wielded more power in the Mesa Social than other groups. Tatiana noted, “We are an organization that has more weight than numbers,” feeling their influence was disproportionate to their size. She attributed this power to their status as one of the oldest organizations, which made their opinions particularly significant. This power dynamic underscored the feminists' ability to shape discourse and policy effectively.

Through this influence, feminists effectively conveyed their political points, achieving significant milestones such as making gender equity the fourth of sixteen points discussed in the public debate for the new constitution (Rojas, 2022, p. 1010). Feminist organizations lobbied for gender quotas in positions of power, leveraging the momentum of the *Estallido Social* to advance their political agenda within the constitutional framework. This demonstrated their strategic ability to turn social upheaval into concrete political gains, ensuring that gender equity was not only part of the conversation but a priority in shaping the nation's future.

In conclusion, feminist organizations effectively leveraged the momentum of the *Estallido Social* to advance their political agenda. Positioned within the influential MUS, they connected with other social movements through strategic frame bridging, as described by Benford & Snow (2000). By organizing medical and legal aid and spreading their message via flyers and cultural events, they ensured widespread influence. Their substantial presence in marches and coordination efforts underscored their power, as highlighted by Valeria and Tatiana. Ultimately, their efforts secured gender equity as a key point in the public debate for the new constitution, demonstrating their impactful political strategy.



The role of violence

While the range of discussions among feminists is both rich and nuanced, this thesis centers on another contentious issue: the role of violence. In the following section, I will explore how feminists discussed violence in their convocatorios [panel discussions]. First, I will examine how historical foundations shaped their perceptions of police actions. Next, I will discuss how current violence influenced their views on the police. Then, I will delve into how these discussions about the police unfolded. Finally, I will outline the types of violent actions that were deemed acceptable against the police. A particularly contentious area was the divergent views on the use of violence against the police. In my interviews, a pattern emerged: while the women were willing to discuss violence perpetrated by the police against women, there was a noticeable reluctance to address violence from women towards the police. This intriguing dichotomy highlights the complexities and nuances within feminist discourses on violence.

One of the reasons of this dichotomy can stem from the historical foundations between feminists and the police. The feminist movement during the *Estallido Social* was profoundly shaped by its historical predecessors, particularly the maternal approach of the dictatorship era (Cruz, 2023). A common theme in the discussions on violence was on how the dictatorship and the Estallido are similar in terms of police actions. This is logical because feminists during the *Estallido Social* were from different generations, and feminist in Chile feel united in their suffering by the police through different generations (Cruz, 2023). The interviewees drew parallels between the use of violence during the dictatorship and the Estallido, suggesting that their experiences under the dictatorship could predict police behaviour during the Estallido. They noted that just as there were human rights violations during the dictatorship, there would likely be similar violations by the police during the Estallido. To prevent a new type of dictatorship regime, they believed the police had to be stopped. Valeria reflects on this continuity of feminists that lived through both the dictatorship and the *Estallido Social*: "*The first ones to rise up were the mothers looking for their children. They were detained, disappeared, and to this day they still can't find them. [...] During the Estallido Social, that same generation, which I saw, I saw in those organizations, cried out in fear. And the fear was the return of a military coup.*" This legacy laid a strong foundation for contemporary activism, further bolstered by recent movements,



notably the surge in significance of International Women's Day in 2018 and 2019, culminating in the largest Women's Day march in Chilean history in 2019, which fueled organizational efforts moving forward.

A distinct generational divide emerged in attitudes toward street protests involving violence. Gerber et al. (2023) support this observation by demonstrating that as interviewees' ages increased, the connection between their views of the police and their justification of violence during the *Estallido Social* weakened. Older women, shaped by their experiences during the dictatorship era, were generally more reluctant to engage in violent demonstrations, having already borne witness to significant unrest in their youth. One feminist from this era, who is not among the five leaders, expressed a palpable fear of street protests, reflecting on her reluctance with poignant clarity: *"I lived through the aftermath of the dictatorship; seeing the same confrontations as those resisting now terrifies me."* Similarly, Tatiana, though she participated in protests, did so reluctantly and primarily due to her role as a leader. She remarked on her aversion to reliving past traumas: *"I don't want to relive the confrontations with the police from the dictatorship."* Both feminists vividly illustrated how the echoes of past conflicts influenced their apprehensions about participating in current protests.

In contrast, younger generations cited a desire to advocate for systemic change and a belief in the ineffectiveness of peaceful protests as reasons for engaging in more assertive forms of protest during the *Estallido*. Valeria, Nayade and Jennifer, the younger feminists that I spoke to that had not gone through the dictatorship era, all thought that the use of violence was necessary, or at the least justified in the actions against the police. Valeria noted the following: *"It is valid to defend myself in a violent way as well. Respond with the same stone."* Another example is Jennifer who stated the following: *"There was a lot of feeling that we approved these peaceful protests and they didn't work. So now we don't have much choice but these protests that are massive and not so peaceful, effectively."* These quotes exemplify that there was a need from the younger generation to be more assertive in their protests, which contrasts the older generation that did not want to go on the streets.

This shift towards more confrontational tactics was further fuelled by the sexual violence happening during the *Estallido Social*, which profoundly influenced the way women viewed the police. According to the UN, there were 166 confirmed cases of sexual violence by the



police towards citizens during this period (UN, 2020, p.19). These incidents were not isolated but rather symptomatic of a broader issue within law enforcement, leading to widespread fear and mistrust among women. Sexual violence thus emerged as a central issue motivating women in Chile to confront the police. This pervasive threat compelled many women to join the protests, driven by the need to challenge the authority and impunity of law enforcement officers. Nayade articulated her personal fear and motivation, stating, *"For me personally, being on the street alone and seeing a Paco [police] made me afraid, it was like, these guys can do whatever they want."* Her words encapsulate the widespread anxiety among women, highlighting the constant risk they perceived in public spaces and the imperative to defend themselves against potential violence from those meant to protect them. This fear was not just about isolated incidents but a reflection of a systemic problem, where the police, instead of being seen as protectors, were viewed as potential aggressors. This shift in perception galvanized many women to take to the streets, not just in protest against individual acts of violence but against a system that allowed such abuses to occur with impunity.

However, in the taking of the streets not everyone was fan of the use of violence. I asked all my interviewees on their perception of how many of their group was for the use of violence and how many were against. Anahi and Valeria, both gave the estimation that 80 percent of their group was in favour of the use of violence and twenty percent of the groups was against the use of violence. Nayade told me that there were obvious groups that were against the use of violence, but they formed a minority. Jennifer and Tatiana, both estimated that there was a 100 percent approval in their groups for the use of violence against the police. This shows that they wanted to present unity of their groups regarding the use of violence.

When asked about the discussions surrounding the use of violence, Valeria and Anahi confirmed that it was a topic of debate, whereas others indicated that the issue was often avoided. The dynamics of these discussions frequently involved quieting down the topic. Nayade: *"It was an issue that I think people were trying to avoid trying to reach a consensus on. Like whether or not the use of violence by society is legitimate. I remember that it was an issue that we didn't bring in because we knew it wouldn't lead to anything."* Jennifer told me almost the same thing: *"There were more conversations about how to protect or take care of oneself, rather than questioning whether or not it is okay to talk about violence."* This was



also corroborated by Tatiana: *“We don't have a discussion on violence. I think there are differences of opinion. It just hasn't been necessary for now because at the time of the outbreak we were all on this side of the barricade.”* This was further corroborated by Valeria, who when I asked her about the discussion on violence she told me: *“That particular theme was never an issue. We considered it very normal, it was never an issue. The use of violence, yes, there was a debate among ourselves in which I said, I understand, but well, we said, the cops are out of control.”* The collective was that there was little room for debate on the morality or justification of using violence against the police.

I want to highlight the one open discussion that there was in the university of Anahi, which she attended as the representative of the student feminist group, because it showcases what the discussion is about if it's allowed to be held. This discussion centred around whether it was acceptable to allow the "first line", the forefront fighters of the Estallido, to seek refuge at the university to ensure their safety. Supporters of accommodating the first liners understood their fears and justified their use of violence as a response to police aggression within the broader social movement. On the other hand, opponents of hosting the first liners, as Anahi pointed out, included evangelical groups and right-wing factions. These groups struggled to empathize with the first liners and failed to grasp the underlying anger motivating their actions. Ultimately, the university students did not reach a consensus on the matter. Instead, they acknowledged the validity of diverse forms of protest against police violence, recognizing that different groups within the university community held varying perspectives on the issue.

Returning to the feminist movement, there was a notable sense of solidarity with the violent protesters. While most of my respondents were not directly involved in the first line, they felt a deep connection with these groups, which influenced their acceptance of violence. For instance, Tatiana articulated this connection by saying, *“We are all the mata-pacos.”* This reference alludes to a prominent symbol of the *Estallido Social*—a dog known for biting the police (pacos), symbolizing defiance. The first line, or the hooded protesters, were perceived as part of an in-group, deserving of protection and solidarity, while the police, as the out-group, were seen as less justified in their use of violence due to their outsider status.



In conclusion, a distinct pattern emerged in the feminist movement's approach to violence during the *Estallido Social*. While the women were willing to address police violence, particularly sexual violence, they showed notable hesitation toward discussing violence committed by women against the police. This reluctance stems from historical tensions between feminists and law enforcement, shaped by the maternal approach of the dictatorship era (Cruz, 2023). Discussions frequently highlighted parallels between the dictatorship's police brutality and the violence seen during the *Estallido Social*. Older feminists, shaped by their experiences during the dictatorship, were generally more cautious about engaging in violent protests, having witnessed significant unrest in their youth. Conversely, younger feminists, driven by a desire for systemic change and frustration with peaceful methods, were more open to violence as a means of protecting demonstrators. Despite these internal differences, the movement's ability to bridge frames and present a unified stance on violence reflects the complexity of their discourse and their strategic approach to collective action.



Conclusion

This thesis explores the dynamics of various feminist organizations during the *Estallido Social*, the 2019 riots in Chile, using a multi-level frame analysis approach. It investigates the feminist movement at micro, meso, and macro levels, during the second wave of protests between November 15 and the end of December and focuses on how they gained influence on the dynamics of the *Estallido Social* as well as the movement's perception of physical violence. Drawing on five months of fieldwork in Santiago, Chile, where I interviewed five feminist leaders and five other key actors, the research employs Fligstein & McAdam's (2012) strategic action fields framework and Benford & Snow's (2000) motivational framing to illuminate how feminists navigated and impacted the broader movement, including their nuanced relationship with violence. Underpinned by a philosophical framework of subtle idealism and social constructivism, the study sheds light on how feminists' collective ideas influenced their actions and understanding. Through comprehensive literature review, fieldwork, and interviews, this thesis offers valuable insights into the dynamics of feminist involvement in the *Estallido* and the legitimation of violence in Santiago and Valparaiso. The research addresses the question:

How did feminist organizations in the greater Santiago region utilize the momentum of the Estallido Social to advance their political agenda, and what was their relationship with physical violence during this period?

To answer this question this chapter first provides a line of argument through the thesis, then reflect on the theories used, additionally reflect on the data collected to assist on future research on the topic and concludes with some final remarks.

Line of argument

The *Estallido Social*, a mass uprising that erupted in Chile in October 2019, was a complex socio-political phenomenon that exposed deep-seated economic and social inequalities. The movement, triggered by a minor increase in metro fares, quickly escalated into widespread unrest, revealing long-standing grievances rooted in the legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship and neoliberal economic policies. Within this turbulent context, feminist organizations in the greater Santiago region played a pivotal role in shaping and advancing their political agenda.



Their approach to utilizing the movement's momentum offer significant insights into their strategic influence during this period.

Utilizing Momentum for Political Advancement

Feminist organizations effectively harnessed the momentum of the *Estallido Social* to push their agenda and achieve notable legislative and societal changes. The movement, initially sparked by economic grievances, evolved into a platform where various social groups, including feminists, could amplify their causes. Feminists capitalized on the heightened public engagement and widespread discontent to advocate for gender equity and other feminist issues. Their strategic actions can be understood through several key aspects:

1. **Strategic Mobilization and Advocacy:** Feminist groups used the *Estallido Social's* visibility to highlight issues of gender-based violence, reproductive rights, and economic inequality. The performance of "A Rapist in Your Path" by the feminist collective Las Tesis exemplified their ability to leverage the protests' energy to address and raise awareness about gender violence. This performance not only became a global symbol of feminist activism but also pressured the government to recognize and address these critical issues.
2. **Legal and Medical Support:** Feminist organizations played a crucial role in providing legal and medical assistance to protesters affected by state violence. By organizing support networks and utilizing the movement's platform, they ensured that the needs of injured and detained protesters were met. This support reinforced their position as essential actors within the movement, advocating for broader social justice issues while addressing immediate needs.
3. **Legislative Influence:** The feminist agenda gained traction as they skillfully integrated their issues into the broader discourse of the *Estallido Social*. They capitalized on the government's concessions and the national women's day events to push for legislative changes that benefitted women's rights. Their efforts contributed to the inclusion of gender equity in the discussions about a new constitution, showcasing their strategic effectiveness in translating social upheaval into political gains.



Relationship with Physical Violence

The relationship between feminist organizations and physical violence during the *Estallido Social* was complex and multifaceted. The movement's dynamics involved both state repression and protester resistance, and feminist groups navigated these circumstances with nuanced positions:

1. **State Violence and Its Impact:** The government's response to the protests was marked by excessive force, including the use of rubber bullets, chemical weapons, and instances of sexual violence. This state violence deeply affected feminist organizations, shaping their perspectives on the use of violence of protesters. Feminists' responses were influenced by their historical and generational contexts, reflecting a range of attitudes towards violence.
2. **Generational Perspectives on Violence:** The feminist movement was characterized by a generational divide regarding the acceptance of violence of protesters. Older feminists, shaped by their experiences during the Pinochet dictatorship, were generally more cautious about endorsing violence due to fears of repeating past traumas. In contrast, younger feminists, frustrated by the perceived ineffectiveness of peaceful protests and motivated by the need for systemic change, were more accepting of violence as a necessary tactic. This generational divide highlighted the ongoing struggle to reconcile historical legacies with contemporary activism.
3. **Solidarity and Tactical Choices:** Despite the divisions, feminist groups largely supported the use of violence when it was seen as a defensive measure against state aggression. They provided solidarity to protesters on the front lines and engaged in actions that were sometimes seen as confrontational. This stance was justified by the perceived necessity of defending themselves and other demonstrators from police violence. The symbolic support for figures like "mata-pacos," who represented resistance against the police, underscored their protective stance toward those involved in violent protests.
4. **Debate and Internal Dynamics:** Within feminist circles, there was limited debate on the morality of violence against police, with a focus on immediate action rather than



philosophical discussions. Some internal discussions, particularly in academic or activist spaces, revealed diverse opinions and challenges in reaching consensus. The overall approach was pragmatic, emphasizing solidarity and strategic responses to the immediate needs of the movement.

In sum, feminist organizations in the greater Santiago region effectively utilized the *Estallido Social*'s momentum to advance their political agenda by leveraging heightened public engagement, providing essential support to protesters, and influencing legislative changes. Their role in the movement was marked by strategic advocacy and integration of feminist issues into the broader social discourse.

Regarding physical violence, feminist groups exhibited a nuanced relationship. While older feminists were generally cautious due to historical traumas, younger feminists showed a greater acceptance of violence as a necessary tactic. Overall, feminist organizations maintained solidarity with protesters, reflecting a complex interplay between historical legacies, immediate needs, and strategic considerations. This intricate relationship between activism and violence underscores the broader challenges faced by social movements in navigating state repression and advocating for systemic change.

Contributions and suggestions for future research

This thesis makes several notable contributions to the understanding of feminist movements during the *Estallido Social*, the 2019 riots in Chile. It provides a unique perspective by focusing specifically on the feminist movement within this context, examining the roles and strategies of five distinct feminist groups, each led by different leaders with varied approaches. This case study is particularly significant as it explores the intersection of feminism and violence in South America, an area that has been relatively underexplored. By highlighting the organized nature of the feminist movement during the *Estallido Social*, the thesis contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that the *Estallido Social* was not only spontaneous but also strategically managed. Additionally, it introduces a generational perspective on the protests, enriching the narrative with insights into how different age groups experienced and influenced the uprising.



The findings are relevant beyond Chile, offering valuable insights for understanding the roles of women in other riot contexts. The study illuminates how feminist groups have influenced protest dynamics, a theme applicable to similar movements in South America and elsewhere. For future research, it would be beneficial to engage more leaders from the MUS to better understand the extent of feminist leaders' influence. Additionally, examining the experiences of women on the front lines of the protests could provide deeper insights into their direct interactions with violence. Finally, while this study touches on generational differences, a focused investigation into how various generations experienced the *Estallido Social* could further illuminate the diverse impacts of the protests.

Final reflection

The feminist movement during the *Estallido Social* offers a compelling case study in activism and resilience. The courageous women involved in this movement tackled systemic issues in Chile despite facing significant risks, including police repression. Even though they feared arrest and violence, they persisted in their protests day after day, driven by their commitment to causes like abortion rights, gender equality, and combating sexual violence.

During my time in Chile, I sought to understand what it meant to be a feminist in that tumultuous period. Despite differing views on specific goals, the sense of solidarity among feminists was palpable. Their shared commitment and perseverance in the face of adversity are inspirational. My message to them is to continue their fight for equality with the same determination, knowing that their efforts are paving the way for meaningful change.





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Appendices

Appendix A: List of interviewees

Interview number	Date	Gender	Role	Type	Platform
1	19-3-2024	Mixed	Youth of the Partido Socialista	Exploratory	In person



2	20-3-2024	Man	Vice-president Partido Socialista	Exploratory	In person
3	26-3-2024	Woman	Feminist researcher	Exploratory	Online
4	19-4-2024	Woman	Coordinator University feminists	Structured	In person
5	23-4-2024	Woman	Activists/artist	Structured	Online
6	3-5-2024	Woman	Coordinator 8M region Valparaiso	Structured	In person
7	6-5-2024	Woman	Founder LGBT group in Santiago	Structured	In person
8	7-5-2024	Woman	Coordinator LGBT movement	Structured	In person
9	15-5-2024	Woman	Coordinator lesbian feminists	Structured	In person
10	31-5-2024	Woman	Coordinator neighbourhood feminist group	Structured	In person

Appendix B: Topic list for the interviews

Role in the feminist movement (micro) 1

- ➔ Description of perceived role in the movement 1a
 - Personal motivations to join movement. 1aa
 - Responsibilities during this time 1ab
 - Contributions during this time 1ac



- ➔ Description of own values of what is the most important problem during the *Estallido Social* 1b
- ➔ Own values towards violence 1c
- ➔ Socially valued resources 1d
 - Status
 - Membership
 - Education
- ➔ Perception of the spokesperson 1e
- ➔ Time spent in the *Estallido* 1f

Discussion during meetings (meso) 2

- ➔ Vocabularies of motive 2a
 - Negotiation of a shared meaning 2aa
 - How was the agenda set? What were the problems discussed that needed change?
 - How did that overlap with the general problems of the *Estallido*?
 - What were movement specific demands?
 - What was the most important problem in the movement during the time? 2ab
 - How was change going to happen?
 - What actions were allowed to be taken in order to achieve the goal?
- ➔ Political opportunity structure 2b
 - How did the process go to convince people that they could change the political structure? 2ba
 - Perception of the group 2bb
 - Influence over other groups
 - Working together with other groups
 - Media?
 - Social media
 - What kind of hashtags were used? What were the more influential accounts?
- ➔ Justification methods 2c
 - Perception of the police 2ca
 - Structural emphasis
 - How did the press releases look? Who was in charge of what the press releases should say?
 - Personal experiences
 - Choice of words



- Reactive actions
 - Was the police using more violence than the protesters?
- Facts
 - What are legitimate sources to go to know what legitimately happened during the *Estallido Social*?

Feminist movement towards the protest (Meso – Macro) 3

- ➔ Frame bridging 3a
 - How was the feminist movement ideologically compared to other protesters?
3aa
 - How was it structurally different compared to the other protests? 3ab
- ➔ How were women recruited towards the conferences? 3b
- ➔ Who was excluded from joining the meetings? 3c
- ➔ How were the messages discussed during the conferences brought over towards other ideological groups? 3d
 - How was the communication with other movements?
 - How did outreach go?
 - What was the role of social media? Any specific hastags that resonated?