Towards a Historiography of the 1973 Nationalization of Chilean Copper

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Introduction

Salvador Allende’s term as president of Chile during 1970-1973 has fostered an extensive corpus of historical works. The Nationalization of copper in 1971 was an important event during the Allende administration representative of the political, economic, and social environment of Chile during this period. With the wealth of written sources dedicated to this event; books, opinion pieces, articles, historical works, polemics, and memoirs, there is however very little historiographical analysis on it. The objective of this article is to present two lines of inquiry that will help to understand the different existing positions in historical writings about the Nationalization from 1971 to the present day. Thus, a further understanding of the main historiographical debates about the topic will be reached.

Historically, copper served as a vital resource for of Chile. Due to the large quantity of reserves the country possesses, their accessibility, and the existence of high-grade deposits, the copper industry formed the most important sector in the country’s economy. In the early 20th century, the issue of the administration of the copper industry began to acquire increasing importance in the Chilean public opinion. Key aspects that stimulated this discussion were the collapse of the national saltpeter industry, economic underdevelopment, the economic potential of the copper industry, and most importantly, the preponderance of foreign capital in the copper industry. The largest owners of copper reserves in Chile were United States companies, primarily the Braden Copper Company, the Anaconda Copper Company,

1. In this study, Nationalization in capitals refers to the 1971 nationalization of Chilean copper whereas nationalization, in lower case, refers to the general act of nationalizing an industry or company.
and the Kennecott Corporation. The question of the administration of the copper industry continued to gain importance in the Chilean public and political discussion until in 1955, the government of President Jorge Ibáñez del Campo enacted the “Ley del Nuevo Trato”\(^2\). This was the first in a series of directives enacted during the next 20 years by successive administrations aimed at regulating taxation and defining the level of state participation in the industry. The overall trend during the years 1955-1971 shifted towards greater state control of the industry through a series of acquisitions of US company shares. The culmination of these efforts arrived with the election of President Salvador Allende in 1970, who included the total nationalization of the “Gran Minería”\(^3\) copper companies in his government program.

Nationalization stood out from the strategies of past governments, especially that of Allende’s predecessor Eduardo Frei Montalva, in that it sought the immediate and total transfer of the main US copper companies to the state. All the member parties of the Popular Unity coalition\(^4\) approved the Nationalization and the project counted with widespread public support.

Shortly after his election as president, Salvador Allende began forming a team in charge of drafting a congressional bill in order to carry out the Nationalization through a constitutional reform. Noted jurist and lawyer, Eduardo Novoa Monreal, was in charge of the legal aspects of the bill. A heated parliamentary debate, characteristic of the intense political polarization of the UP era, followed its proposal to Congress. The bill eventually underwent a few modifications that, however, did not alter either its fundamental objectives or mechanism. Despite the bitter discussion in

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2. Translates to “New Contract Law.”

3. Translates to “Greater Copper Mining Industries”, a Chilean legal statute that designates copper companies that produce over 75,000 tons per year. At the time of the Nationalization, the only companies that held this distinction were US-owned.

4. The Popular Unity (Unidad Popular) was a left-wing political coalition composed of the Communist and Socialist Parties, the smaller Social Democrat and Radical Parties, and the Popular Unitary Action Movement (MAPU for its Spanish acronym), and formed specifically for the 1970 presidential election. The UP’s platform was based on carrying out significant political, economic, and social reforms that would lead Chile to a socialist transformation via electoral politics. “The fundamental task that the People’s Government has before it is to end with imperialist, monopolistic, and landowner oligarchic domination and begin the construction of socialism in Chile” (Basic Program of the Popular Unity Government)
parliament, the constitutional reform bill regarding the nationalization of the copper *Gran Minería* passed with a unanimous vote on July 11th 1971. On July 16th 1971, the official diary published Law No 17,450 relating to the new constitutional amendment. During the rest of the Allende presidency, and even after the 1973 coup, the administration of the *Gran Minería* remained entirely in Chilean hands, from extraction to commercialization.

The Nationalization caused a great commotion from its gestation to after its proclamation. Masses of people attended rallies in the street to support it while politicians were busy arguing the logic and effects of it. Many newspapers, magazines, and speeches proclaimed it as a "Second Independence", alluding to the breaking of ties of international dependence that the Nationalization, they argued, would bring about. The Nationalization eventually unleashed a significant conflict with the U.S. companies in response to the lack of monetary compensation offered by the Chilean government. For the government, the Nationalization represented an essential part of the great transformations that the country had to undergo in its transition to socialism, while for the opposition to the government⁵, it was an act that stirred up the most diverse reactions: from support to total repudiation. The way the Nationalization has figured in historical studies from 1971 to our day, has been marked by the language and polarization of this period.

**To Talk of Nationalization**

Political polarization in Chile from 1970 to 1973 featured intense friction and widespread antagonism. Political conflict, the 1973 coup, and the subsequent military dictatorship, have all made it nearly impossible to look at the events of the UP period without projecting the subsequent political events onto it. Steve J. Stern mentions that “The crisis of 1973 and the violence of the new order generated a contentious memory question in Chilean life. [...] As a result, the study of memory cannot be disentangled from an account of wider political, economic, and cultural contexts.”⁶

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⁵. The opposition, in 1971, is understood to be as the parties that did not make up the Popular Unity. These are the Christian Democrat Party, the National Party, and the minuscule Radical Democracy party.

⁶. Stern, Steve J. *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile*, xix.
Similarly, when writing about the Nationalization, the logic, discourse, and rhetoric of the political polarization of the period becomes evident in writers from across the political spectrum. This way, many studies about the Nationalization have sacrificed quality and thoroughness in defending or attacking this event.

I will argue that three general historiographical trends become evident in writings about the Nationalization from 1971 to the present day. A careful reading of the language that each author uses in relation to lines of study about the Nationalization will allow these general historiographical categorizations. To write favorably or negatively about the Nationalization during the UP period was part of a larger debate at a national level about the direction the country was to take in the near future. After the 1973 coup, the Pinochet dictatorship, the subsequent return to democracy in Chile, and the end-of-century global crisis of Marxism, writing about the Nationalization has changed in meaning and direction. Despite these historical developments, some elements of language and lines of study are present in historical works about the Nationalization across different periods that will allow us to outline three general stages in the writings about the history of the Nationalization in the past four and a half decades.

The first historiographical tendency groups authors generally associated with the center-left and left of the political spectrum who associated with the UP, whether as collaborators or supporters, in direct or indirect ways, starting from 1970 to the present. Regardless of their analysis of the Allende regime, most authors along this line evaluate the Nationalization in net neutral, at worst, or otherwise positive ways. Often highlighted is the popular support it received, the domestic and foreign obstruction towards it, and the symbolic importance it held for the UP. This line can be characterized as “sympathetic”. A second, conservative vision generally critical of the Nationalization is held by many authors of the center and right in Chile and often aligns to a broader political or economic critique of the UP government. Authors subscribing to this line highlight the meager economic benefits of the Nationalization, the lack of compensation for the nationalization of private property, the opposition that existed to it, and its ideological justifications. The years of intense polarization between 1970 and 1973 formed this view and it is still prevalent today. The third line of
study emerges during the dictatorship, especially towards the late 1970s, and takes a revisionist approach. Rather than justifying or condemning the Nationalization, these authors present the Nationalization in a more nuanced way. It contests the sympathetic view by pointing out that government justifications for the Nationalization ran up against shortages of spare parts, lack of national human capital to operate the mines at pre-1971 levels and overall political disorganization and opposition at all levels in the industry. It also contests the conservative approach by highlighting how external situations such as low world copper prices and politically motivated strikes and lockouts hampered production. The revisionist approach has been a refreshing new development for the field in the sense that it looks beyond a mere defense or attack of the Nationalization and seeks to reevaluate its importance and effects. The appearance of this approach has been crucial in dismounting long-held assumptions and common places about this event, and has invigorated the study of this event and the UP period.

In order to discover and understand these three lines of study, a common set of questions that position each author within the historiography of the Nationalization must be asked. The first question refers to whether the author addresses this event as a nationalization or as an expropriation, confiscation, or other synonyms. This refers to the fact that the Nationalization project was carefully designed by the UP to be a legitimate act that followed international conventions on the subject, such as the UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 about “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”, and was deserving of the name “nationalization”, rather than being a common expropriation.7 Those who sympathized with and supported the Nationalization generally highlighted this fact while its detractors and critics referred to it as an expropriation and found ways to discredit it through this. Subsequent writings on the Nationalization have echoed many of the same concepts and language drawn out in the debates between 1970 and 1973. The second question asks how each author describes the Nationalization as an act that received almost total national support across the political spectrum, as an event that contributed to the political and social polarization of the time and hardly stirred up consensus, or something in between. Those who were

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7. General Assembly Resolution 1803 (XVII) of December 14, 1962, “Permanent sovereignty over natural resources”
in favor of the Nationalization invoked images of national unity in a time of polarization to defend it, and those who opposed it were quick to dismiss this. A close reading of each author’s account of the dichotomy between the political polarization of the period and the apparent national consensus regarding the Nationalization can inform the reader of a historiographical tendency.

The advantage of focusing on the discourse and rhetoric of the historic writings on the Nationalization is manifold. Following the assertion by part of Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci that “in ‘language’, there is contained a specific conception of the world”, we can read the different historical works on this event or clues about each author’s stance regarding it. Even if works that are more recent do not seek to explicitly defend or attack the Nationalization, it was born as a political act, and even in contemporary writing, the language different authors use to explain it entails a political choice at some level. Each author configures their discourse and rhetoric along a specific language that stems from the experience of the UP period. Similarly, each author chooses to highlight certain topics and silence others. It is through this that we can understand what the purpose of each author’s writing is.

The stakes of this exercise make it a necessary and important one. In first place, this paper will show how most works about the Nationalization before the mid-80s were focused on merely attacking or defending the Nationalization, rather than analyze it without a partisan bias. Secondly, it will expose assumptions and common places about the Nationalization that are political in their inception and have hampered a critical study of this event. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it will look into newer ways of writing about the 1970-1973 period in Chile without a precursorist bias. Too often is the history of the UP period seen as an inevitable build up to the 1973 coup. An essential point that this paper will make is that the revisionist approach is necessary in order to be able to study the 1970-1973 period as a discrete unit, and not as a precursor to later historical events.

**Expropriation and Nationalization**

How did authors describe the Nationalization in the immediate

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months after its passing? One of the first mentions of the Nationalization as an expropriation appears a few months after the passing of the constitutional reform. Christian Democrat economist and politician Sergio Molina Silva wrote about this in an article published in *Mensaje* (Message) magazine on October 1971. *Mensaje*, a Jesuit publication, represented a progressive editorial line and generally sympathized with the government. In his article, Molina warned readers about how thinking that an expropriation of the foreign mining companies would mean the end of national problems was nothing but a mere illusion. 9 This is one many similar messages repeated throughout those years that called for caution and stressed how the Nationalization did not necessarily mean an immediate end to relationships of international dependence. What becomes relevant is that from the very beginning, authors with a progressive political outlook were equating the Nationalization to an expropriation. While he can be seen as sympathetic to the Nationalization, his analysis is skeptical about the outcome of this project.

The 1972 book written by Eduardo Novoa Monreal, *La nacionalización chilena del cobre* (The Chilean Nationalization of Copper), serves as an invaluable document in order to understand the government position insofar as the development, grounds, political discussion, and the legal mechanism, of the Nationalization. This book portrays the Nationalization as a long feat with origins in the mid-20th century and that, even though was necessary, had always encountered obstacles of a political character.

Firstly, Novoa describes how parliament members from the center-right and right parties attempted to use the word “expropriation” to deny any sort of novelty in the mechanism of the Nationalization, and eventually equate it to a common expropriation. 10 Novoa states that, in the words of Pedro Ibañez, a National Party senator, the term ‘nationalization’ was a malicious “semantic misunderstanding [designed] to dazzle people of limited political culture”. 11 It is evident in Novoa’s words that equating

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11. Ibid.
the Nationalization to an expropriation was not a caprice of some senators and representatives, but rather a conscious move by the opposition. This characterization appeared to come up in the most diverse discussions in Parliament. When the topic of compensations was discussed, Novoa illustrates how National Party senator Francisco Bulnes, in contrast to the majority in Parliament, argued that nationalization should be governed by the same rules as an expropriation.\(^{12}\) This criticism denied the government argument that nationalization was a qualitatively distinct mechanism than expropriation, and furthermore, it maintained that Chile should have fully compensated US companies on Chilean soil, contrary to the argument by which the UP defended the Nationalization. Novoa even tells how Jorge Ovalle, a guest speaker at a Parliament session, attacked the project calling it “more of ‘a war confiscation than an expropriation’”\(^{13}\). Under Novoa’s conception, the use of the word expropriation is a value judgement that the opposition used to undermine the credibility of the Nationalization.

In response to the planned attack that, according to Novoa, the reform project suffered in Parliament, he lays out an unequivocal difference between the concepts of “nationalization” and “expropriation”. In his writings, a nationalization is so (as opposed to an expropriation) because of the general and collective nature that the nationalized assets have for a nation. One of the most important differences between the two is the amount of compensation that either action would require. Novoa highlights that a nationalization would not necessarily require economic compensation due to the essential nature of the nationalized industries.\(^{14}\) He admits that if there were to be such a compensation, it must merely be “adequate”, without further explaining what this means in terms of quantities.\(^{15}\) The government coalition carefully constructed concept of nationalization according to the previously mentioned semantic considerations and other precedents such as UN declarations about natural resources and national sovereignty. This was in order to carry out a form of nationalization favorable to the UP program.

\(^{12}\) Novoa. *La nacionalización chilena del cobre*, 192.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 132.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 184.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 197-8.
Said understanding about what the Nationalization was not only influenced its mechanism of action and presentation to the country and the world, but also gave a language and structure to the debates about the Nationalization.

The official interpretation of what a Nationalization was acquired importance with the so-called “excess profits” statute. The “excess profits” (Rentabilidades excesivas in Spanish) statute was a consideration included in the legal text of the Nationalization. According to this formula, the Chilean state would have the right to deduct from the total amount of compensation, any amount of profits that the North American companies operating in Chile received that was over the global average of profits for copper companies. The president would be the one to decide said amount. In practice, this statute meant that Chile avoided any sort of payment related to compensations. Furthermore, President Allende decided that United States copper companies actually owed the Chilean state money. The US companies predictably did not pay any compensation towards the Chilean state. Naturally, this disposition generated a large commotion and became one of the most conflictive points of the Nationalization, both in the parliamentary discussion and in the relations with the United States.

Novoa was not the only one who defended the separation between a nationalization and expropriation. Philosopher José Echeverría was cited by Novoa as an influence in resolving the issue of compensations. In his 1972 article, Enriquecimiento injusto y nacionalización (Unjust Enrichment and Nationalization), Echeverría poses a similar argument to that of Novoa. For him, a nationalization is different from an expropriation because of its public and national interest. As a result of this, the different amounts of compensation that each require are justified. It is interesting to note that Echeverría does not completely separate the concept of expropriation from that of nationalization. In a passage in his article, he refers to the Nationalization as a “bigger expropriation”.16 Under his conception, a nationalization is not equal to the concept of an expropriation, but both are closely related. Although Echeverría’s closeness to the UP administration puts him in the sympathetic camp, it is interesting to note how even for an author aligning with the official position, there is the possibility of judging the Nationalization as an expropriation.

16. Echeverría. Enriquecimiento injusto y nacionalización, 44.
Not only Chilean authors participated in this debate. George Ingram, a US economic and political analyst, served as part of a group of academics from the United States who researched the copper industry in Chile during the 1970s. At the time of his research, he was a senior staff member for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. In 1974, he analyzed how “expropriation”, in his words, was a tactic used by Latin-American governments in order to gain popular support. In his study, Ingram uses nationalization and expropriation interchangeably. Given his credentials, open support for the Nationalization was out of the question. His writings on the Nationalization exhibit little engagement with the political language of the period in Chile and can be seen as an early example of the revisionist approach.

As the temporal distance with the Popular Government increased, writings about the Nationalization, for the most part, employed a markedly less partisan language and radical tone. Within the restricted academic context of the military regime, the 1985 book *Chile y el Mundo 1970-1973* (Chile and the World: 1970-1973) by historian Joaquín Fernandois, contains a quality analysis about the Nationalization. For the author, the “expropriation of copper”, as he calls it, represented the core of the government program of the Popular Unity. This study generally refers to the Nationalization as an expropriation. The study is also notable for being the first work that mentions the rhetoric differences put forward by Novoa and Echeverría regarding to the difference between a nationalization and an expropriation. As part of his conclusion, Fernandois invites the reader to see the Nationalization and the subsequent legal battle as a show of forces between “a small state that carries out a confiscatory expropriation (as was the case of copper), and a powerful multinational corporation”. This is an early example of the revisionist approach in the Chilean academic context. However, Fernandois was still using a language that echoed conservative critiques to the Nationalization.

Are current analyses exclusively revisionist or do earlier positions

on the topic persist? The 1997 study by US academic Joanna Swanger, “Defending the Nation’s Interest: Chilean Miners and the Copper Nationalization”, included in the book *Workers’ Control in Latin America 1930-1979* represents an example of the sympathetic position in the post-Allende period. Like George Ingram, physical and cultural distance from Chile conditions Swanger’s narrative. In addition to this, her study also adds a longer temporal distance. Even so, it is interesting how Swanger does not mention the word expropriation in any part of her text. This study is part of a book that analyzes the history of labor movements in Latin America, especially the topic of workers control. Self-defined as a historical study from the bottom up, there is a comment in the introduction on how the authors of the book (Swanger included) do not consider themselves Marxist historians but they nonetheless acknowledge the important influence that this school of historical thought has had in their work.20 This way, and with an example removed from the Chilean academic and political environment, it is all the more obvious that this semantic choice necessarily entails a political position. United States authors, just like Chilean authors, seem to use the word nationalization in direct relation to their support of the UP government and the Nationalization itself. Swanger’s essay represents a recent sympathetic perspective written outside of Chile.

A recent conservative study that refers to the Nationalization is the book *Salvador Allende, el fracaso de una ilusión* (Salvador Allende, the Failure of an Illusion). In its pages are accurate descriptions of the Nationalization interspersed with polemical statements. He states in a passage, “No one, or almost no one, was opposed to an act of robbery”.21 Although the book uses the terms “nationalization” and “expropriation” equally, other polemical statements by the author place him as an opponent of the Nationalization. “It is correct to characterize the Nationalization as scandalous”, he states, echoing the language of political disunity.22

Two works by Fermandois, the 2009 *Historia política del cobre* (Political History of Copper, in collaboration with Jimena Bustos and María

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José Schneuer), and the 2013 *La revolución inconclusa* (The Unfinished Revolution), contain the most current studies about the Nationalization. The former mentions the concept of expropriation mainly in reference to the debate that this concept provoked during the period. In one passage, the author asks himself if the unanimity for the reform was due to the “[... ] triumph of the semantics of the nationalization, the conviction that the expropriation practically with no compensation [...] was a politically and economically sound path?”

Fermandois’s study is important because it identifies that the Nationalization and its justification necessarily implies a choice in terms of rhetoric and semantics. In *La revolución inconclusa*, the use of the word expropriation is much more selective. Fermandois only mentions an “expropriation” in the context of the constitutional reform project already having been passed and the controversy of the compensations to be paid to the US companies already underway. In this specific work, the Nationalization is not an expropriation in its conception; it becomes so only after the controversy about the compensations, “grotesque” in the words of the author, is unleashed. Fermandois’s recent work represents a maturing of the revisionist position in that it uses the terms nationalization and expropriation not in respect to the judgement that the author has of the event but in relation to how different authors and political ideologies used these terms in the past.

The eloquence of the words written defending the Nationalization from the moniker of “expropriation”, and those who do not see any major distinction between both, speak for themselves. This debate is useful in characterizing the historiographical line of each author. It is important to note a temporal progression related to the use of these words. In a first period, most authors exclusively use either nationalization or expropriation. As time passed, those authors who were politically committed to the Nationalization became far less in number, so that it is ever easier to use these terms interchangeably. This is not to suggest a sort of direct correlation between the use of a certain word and the position of each author in a historiographical tendency. It is evident though that just as the Nationalization was carefully constructed and justified rhetorically against the accusation of a confiscatory or illegal move by the team that wrote the

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constitutional reform project, the authors that have talked about it also make a conscious choice in the words they use to describe this event. It is only with the appearance of the revisionist position that these terms become an object of analysis rather than a value judgement. This is one of the reasons that makes the revisionist approach valuable for the study of this topic.

**Consensus and Conflict**

On July 11th 1971, the constitutional reform project regarding the nationalization of the *Gran Minería del Cobre* was unanimously passed by a joint session of both chambers of Congress. Taking into account the polarized political environment that the country was living and the radical nature of the project, this fact becomes particularly interesting. Because of this, sympathetic authors and historians have tried to present the Nationalization as an exceptional moment of political unity during that period that stood outside of the polarized political environment of the time. The conservative line proposes that the so-called consensus on the project never existed or was nothing more than a strategic political position. The revisionist view sees the conflictive and contested nature of politics in this period vividly portrayed in the Nationalization. Works on the Nationalization reveal an underlying tension between the large support it received throughout the nation in contrast to the partisan struggle occurring at all levels of political life at the time. The way each author elaborates on this will serve us to understand their respective line of study.

The right-wing *Sepa* magazine published an article the week after the Nationalization was passed that foreshadowed dark predictions and inserted it within a bleak reality. “The first months of Marxist-imperialist administration have been disastrous [...] If the current rhythm of disorganization, anarchy, and politicization is kept up in the mineral industry, now Chilean owned, copper will be Chile’s death shroud”, stated the magazine, hardly concealing its hostility to the Nationalization. In August of that year, the Christian Democrat politician Genaro Arriagada, in an article for *Mensaje* magazine, stated that in a Parliament where agreements of any magnitude between the government and the opposition were rarely reached, the Nationalization

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“counted with a practically absolute national consensus.” In November, Eduardo Novoa Monreal wrote in an article for Mensaje magazine that the Nationalization was a historic rectification of erroneous policies by earlier governments. For Novoa Monreal, the Nationalization signified that “the legislative approval to the constitutional reform was unanimous, which in Chile, where the opposition, still the most rabidly anti-Marxist, counts with important strength, means an unprecedented concordance between the most dissimilar political groups and parties.” By the end of 1971, the Nationalization was a main element of the Chilean political discussion and to talk about the national consensus around it was a political act.

Authors of the conservative position generally presented negative judgments about the Nationalization that downplayed the existence of any sort of political consensus and highlighted the level of disunity in the political arena. In change, those of the sympathetic vision tended to emphasize national unity and consensus in order to explain the passing of the Nationalization, and highlighted the opposition’s obstructionism and opportunism. In 1972, conservative politician and journalist Arturo Fontaine pointed out how the Nationalization was received by the public in a rather cold and indifferent manner due to the natural and political tragedies Chile had suffered in an essay titled Revolución en papel sellado (The Stamped Paper Revolution). His point about natural tragedies is correct because on July 8th, 1971, just three days before the official passing of the Nationalization, a violent earthquake struck the central coast of the country. To mention a political tragedy is a partisan statement, however. In the same study, Fontaine argues that the Nationalization did not respond solely to a desire for national independence, but that it was at the same time an undercover Marxist plan designed to “cut the ties of Chilean politics with alleged inspirations or aid by part of foreign capital invested in the country”.

27. Ibid., 513.
29. Ibid., 78.
conservative newspaper *El Mercurio*, Chile’s most widely read and a strong bastion of government opposition during the UP period. His conservative tendency is clear from the language he uses in his study.

Eduardo Novoa Monreal dedicated several lines to the issue of the parliamentary debate about the reform project and the level consensus that existed around it. For him, the unanimity in the voting session in Congress did not correspond to an unanimity in the minds of the members of Parliament. He describes the congressional discussion as wrought by political conflict. Firstly, he narrates how the Christian Democrat Party (DC in its Spanish abbreviation) was uncompromising in its commitment to keep certain clauses from the copper agreements passed during the Frei administration, even if this meant stalling the nationalization project and incurring in higher economic costs. UP legislators yielded to the DC since they had a majority in both houses, Novoa argues. He is eloquent in describing this, saying that the DC would take advantage of all circumstances that could present them with a favorable political opportunity.30 “The gravity that the Christian Democrat pretension to maintain the contracts and agreements struck between the Frei administration and the North American companies”, he says, “produced a veritable undeclared war” in Parliament.31 When referring to the actions of what he calls the Right in Parliament32, Novoa spares no words, speaking of a zigzagging attitude were they came up with the most vicious attacks on the project, in his words, only to end up supporting it.33 How does Novoa interpret the vote of the Right in support of the Nationalization? He states, “This could be understood, perhaps, as the National Party finally convincing itself that their detraction to the project was unfounded”.34 This explanation has two interesting elements. First, it has a hint of condescension: he believes the Right finally realized that they were wrong all along. Second, it assumes a widespread national support to Nationalization. In his view, the Right’s opposition was but a marginal

32. Novoa understands the “Right” as a synonym of the National Party.
34. *Ibid.*, 139.
position that eventually corrected itself, something that places him squarely in the sympathetic camp.

In 1974, George Ingram maintained that in Chile there existed an almost total unanimity in favor of the Nationalization, but that at the same time, said action was not able to unite the country under the banner of the UP. In contrast, US academic Theodore Moran, in his 1977 book, *Multinational Corporations and the Politics of Dependence*, he states that the Chilean Right and sectors of the DC, due to their hostility towards the Alliance for Progress and its insistence on the Agrarian Reform, fostered a growing discontent with the actions of United States multinational companies in Chile. US support for some of President Frei’s progressive policies between 1966 and 1970 was certainly a point of contention acknowledged by other authors. Both are revisionist studies in that they try to reconcile the political disunity of the time with its relatively easy passing in Congress without entering into partisan polemics about the desirability of the Nationalization.

Joaquín Fermandois’ book, *Chile y el Mundo: 1970-1973*, published in 1985, is an indispensable tool to understand the dichotomy between consensus and conflict that was present in the Nationalization. Within its pages, it provides a plausible explanation for the issue of an opposition that supported such a radical project by analyzing the individual motivations of each party. Fermandois comments how the DC possessed a “progressive self-consciousness” at the time that prevented them from opposing a project that enjoyed a high level of popular support. The National Party, in contrast, supported the project “essentially moved to avoid placing themselves in the public stake of ‘submission to imperialism’, in a stronger manner than the Christian Democrats.” It is interesting to compare the motivations that Fermandois assigns to each party with those that Novoa

38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
Monreal suggested in 1972. Novoa Monreal’s account describes both parties as being extremely obstructionist in the parliament discussion, and support for Nationalization is qualified only as opportunist. In Fermandois’s account, however, pragmatism, rather than opportunism, guides the opposition’s support to the Nationalization. His revisionist tendency is clear in that he tries to analyze the level of consensus regarding this issue without entering into discussions about hidden motives and opportunism.

This work is also important because it is the first one where Fermandois outlines a particular theory about the supposed consensus in relation to the Nationalization. The first iteration of this conjecture states that the opposition generally accepted the Nationalization as something inevitable and instead of adopting a position that would result to be dangerous to its public image, it accepted the government proposals, as inflammatory as they could result to be. Fermandois states that by supporting the Nationalization, the opposition intended to leave the inevitable conflict that was to arise with the United States mining corporations in hands of the government. This explanation is extremely important since it is the first one that is capable of reconciling the existing conflict between the both parts with the apparent consensus that the Nationalization reached in Parliament. Fermandois states, “It was neither as calculated [the attitude of the opposition] so as to lead the Government into a trap, nor as ‘patriotic’ as the apparent unanimity and subsequent support in the legal battle against the companies would lead to believe”.

An article written by Fermandois that same year delves into this thesis arguing that the opposition responded to the pragmatic attitude of the UP during the Parliamentary discussion with a likewise pragmatic and slightly opportunist attitude. Contrary to many of the heated ideological struggles in Parliament throughout the UP years, Fermandois’ revision argues that realpolitik guided the issue of Nationalization and was responsible for the surprising unanimity in the voting session.

The passing of time did not necessarily entail the complete disappearance of a partisan language like the one of the 1970-1973 period.

40. Fermandois. *Chile y el Mundo*, 413-4.
41. Ibid.
42. Fermandois. *Ideología y pragmatismo en la política exterior chilena durante la crisis del sistema político*, 173.
The book *La transformación del estado: la experiencia de la Unidad Popular* (The Transformation of the State: The Popular Unity Experience), written by Alejandro Rojas in 1987 is configured under a discourse reminiscent of the Popular Unity period. This publication states that the UP was certain of the support of their own members in Parliament and those of the DC in support of the Nationalization. He writes that the National Party had no intention of appearing antipatriotic in a parliamentary debate that, according to Rojas, was resolved before it had even begun.\(^{43}\) This allowed the Nationalization to be carried out with such a degree of legitimacy that the “conspirators against Allende”, which Rojas says were already in action since the beginning of his period, found themselves with their hands tied for a long while.\(^{44}\) The memoirs of communist politician Orlando Millas, MP and minister during the UP period, published in 1997, also echo the partisan language of the UP era. In an astute observation respecting the consensus/conflict dichotomy, he states, “It is repeated, and is the accepted version, that the Nationalization had counted with the unanimous vote of the Parliament. The truth, however, differs completely from this idyllic image. There was a tough and long political and parliamentary battle”.\(^{45}\) His analysis sees the parliamentary discussion as a power struggle between the UP and the DC, a struggle where the National Party played a marginal role by constantly opposing and obstructing the initiative.\(^{46}\) In his view, the National Party, whose votes ended up being worthless, took a turn and supported the DC in their vote in favor of the project. This was with the intention of appearing closer to the DC and thus avoiding future political agreements between them and the UP.\(^{47}\) The words Millas uses in his analysis depict the survival of the language of that time period. He observes how the National Party had already been “taken overboard by fascist elements”, branding it as opportunistic and calling their representatives unscrupulous.\(^{48}\) Both Rojas and Millas can be seen as part of


44. Ibid.


46. Ibid.

47. Ibid., 80-1.

48. Ibid.
the sympathetic approach in a recent time period.

The two latest works by Fermandois that are relevant to the study of the Nationalization of copper add to his original 1985 considerations. In his *Historia política del cobre* he continues to emphasize that the opposition chose not to confront the UP in a field where it wouldn’t be able to triumph.\(^{49}\) He adds that the critiques of the opposition to the project were always indirect and relevant only to marginal aspects of it. Perhaps the most relevant aspect of this work is Fermandois’ observation that “The nationalization of June 1971 was the conclusion of a race towards the hegemony of a language that interpreted the place of countries such as Chile in the international economy in a ‘structuralist’ or ‘dependent’ manner”.\(^{50}\) Indeed, the political language of the 1970s in Chile was the basis to describe, defend, analyze, and criticize the Nationalization. The persistence of many elements of the language of that period in recent writings about the Nationalization suggests continuities in historiographical lines when talking about it.

In *La revolución inconclusa*, Fermandois adds to his already mentioned thesis that “save for a few economists or business owners, few or none in Chile were in disagreement with the idea of the nationalization”.\(^{51}\) Those who had objections to the project, however, could not find reasons to condemn Nationalization as a whole, only addressing marginal issues related to it. When Fermandois writes about the UP discourse relating to economic liberation and popular participation that the Nationalization implied, he states that that it “was inseparable from the language of Marxism.”\(^{52}\) While he highlights the importance of the rhetoric and language of the Nationalization in the period, he also states that there is no evidence that the Nationalization affected in the electorate’s support or opposition to the UP.\(^{53}\) This represents a maturing of Fermandois’ revision. His study focuses on re-evaluating the actual influence that the Nationalization and its rhetoric had on the political support that the UP received, while at the same time presenting a nuanced

\(^{50}\) Ibid., 120.  
\(^{51}\) Fermandois. *La revolución inconclusa*, 471.  
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 436-7.  
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 438-9.
vision of the consensus that this event had in the country.

The Nationalization of copper is an exceptional event for a variety of reasons. It was one of the few occasions during the UP government where the governing coalition and the opposition came together for a project. At the time that it was passed, there existed a widespread conviction at a national level that something had to be done in respects to the question of copper administration. These particularities have led diverse authors to try to explain the Nationalization in regards to the amount of consensus that the Nationalization generated. Earlier writings on the Nationalization generally present partisan debates with noticeable ideological biases. Recent revisionist writings present a more nuanced view about the consensus that the Nationalization stirred up and focus instead on the rhetoric that characterized this event.

**Conclusion**

The different rhetoric strategies used to analyze, defend, attack, and judge the Nationalization often times closely align with political positions. Starting with the first partisan analyses, the present study concludes with the historical studies of Fermandois that are significant revisions to earlier lines of thought. It becomes clear that, *grosso modo*, there exist two stages in the writings about the Nationalization. The first one, between 1970 and 1973 corresponds to the struggle between two political options that appeared as possible for Chile during that period: radicalism or reaction, Marxism or liberalism. The language used to describe the Nationalization during this period is generally totalizing and partisan. Authors describe Nationalization either as a unanimous and liberating action, or as an economically disastrous and quasi-illegal move. The abrupt end of the UP project ended with the possibilities for the language of Marxism to reach a hegemonic position, but it did not signify the end of the discussion. The second period of historiography about the Nationalization leaves behind the heated polemical language that was characteristic of the 1970-1973 period, but is nonetheless highly influenced by the language and rhetoric of the UP era as a whole. During the first era, the sympathetic and conservative approaches were by far the most common. After the UP era, a revisionist critique of these approaches appeared, influenced however by the memory and politics of the
UP period and the military dictatorship.

The UP period is inseparable from the language it created. Writings about the different political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of the era echo the language and political debates of the period. However, it becomes clear that a revision of earlier forms of writing about this period is necessary in order to produce high quality analyses. In this sense, there will always be fertile ground for historical revisionism of the UP years. The pervasiveness of political conflict in all spheres of Chilean society during the time make it possible to understand the historiography of the Nationalization of copper as inserted within the general struggles of the period. Historians have found it useful to read the conflict and polarization of the period into the historiography of the different lines of study relating to the UP period. However, the most useful analyses about this topic are the ones that stay away from a partisan debate on the issue. The revisionist approach has turned out to be a refreshing and invigorating development in the field. With a clearer understanding on what has been written about the Nationalization, and how this has been written about, future authors will be able to study this topic through new and innovative lenses.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


