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## The Valparaíso (Chile) Anglophone Periodical Press: Voices from the Borders of Empire

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# The Valparaíso (Chile) Anglophone Periodical Press: Voices from the Borders of Empire

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When studying the anglophone periodicals produced in Valparaíso, Chile, the main port on the South American West Coast of the Pacific in the 19th century and a point of connection and transoceanic transit before the opening of the Panama Canal, we stand face to face with the reality of multilingualism in a specific geo-cultural space. This place — the Historic Quarter of the Seaport of Valparaíso, recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site for its cultural diversity, since ‘the city was populated and influenced by people from around the world’ — was co-inhabited by immigrant colonies from different European countries and linked to navigation, industry, and global trade. Alongside the group belonging to the British diaspora, there were other foreign communities established in this city: German-speaking, French-speaking, Italian-speaking (among others less numerous). Beyond their occupations, each of these groups of settlers had its own social, educational, and cultural institutions, and, of course, its own print media. Each newspaper was a key instrument in maintaining the cohesion of these foreign language communities around a common identity cultivated in reference to their homeland.

How do language and print cultures become instruments of cultural, social, and emotional cohesion? We can think of Benedict Anderson’s ‘imagined communities’, no doubt, but beyond nationalism, speaking from Latin America and the entangled history in the margins of informal imperialism, language and the press appear as elements that pragmatically perpetuate the connection with the metropolis in a community of settlers, but that also give the rootedness and sense of belonging to individuals within that community, even across generations.

In discovering, studying, and digitizing Anglophone newspapers published in Valparaíso, Chile, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we are confronted with a series of questions associated with the sociolinguistic reality of a community of settlers who arrived on the South American shores, some temporarily, others to stay. From the end of the southern cone of South America, on the borders of the informal British Empire, the British community of Valparaíso persisted in maintaining an English-language press between the 1840s and the 1960s. Among the titles were the *Valparaiso English Mercury*, the *Valparaiso and West Coast Mail*, the *Chilian Times*, the *Star of Chile*, and the *South Pacific Mail*, among many others that circulated locally and internationally on-board ships or as steamer editions. Whether they were Scottish, Welsh, Irish, or English — or even North American — the Anglophone newspapers brought together this community of Britishness. With time and the decline of the British

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Empire, as the Anglo-Chilean community hybridized in the contact zone, the contents of these newspapers became increasingly bilingual, as manifested in headlines, content, advertisements, and the diversification of readership. The papers began to also appeal to the Spanish speaking host culture, as manifested, for example, in the *South Pacific Mail*, which circulated until the mid-1960s, at the same time Chileans increasingly participated in the social activities of the colony.

The theoretical concept of ‘Foreign Language Press’, coined by researchers of the international [Transfopress](#) network such as Isabelle Richet and Diana Cooper-Richet, has been extremely useful and illuminating in the study of English-language newspapers in Valparaíso. The network’s research has helped us to understand that the existence of these newspapers, published in a language other than the dominant one, is a global cultural *phenomenon*, one seen most often in the context of colonies, migrations, or diasporas. As Benedicte Deschamps has pointed out, part of the richness of the Foreign Language Press is that it always delivers an alternate point of view, one that differs from that of the national press of the host country, and that can also become a means of cultural intervention in the local space — as we have seen in the [Anglophone Chile](#) project with Jennifer Hayward.

As newspapers that exist in-between at least two cultures, the Foreign Language Press sometimes requires special consideration, because, as the late Professor Rudolph Wagner, a scholar of the Anglophone press in China, pointed out, these newspapers have received little attention from national libraries. Written in a foreign language, they are often excluded from the ‘national heritage’ of the country in which they have been published, and far from their linguistic homeland, they are generally excluded from that nation’s heritage as well. Situated in a liminal inter-cultural space, then, the expertise of at least bilingual researchers is necessary to be able to study, understand, and value these papers in the dynamics of the interstitial space of which they speak, and of the cultural transfers that they account for, between centre and periphery.

**Michelle Prain-Brice** is a journalist and scholar at Universidad Adolfo Ibáñez, Chile. Her publications include the book *Legado Británico en Valparaíso / British Legacy in Valparaíso* and the academic articles ‘Imagining the Araucanians in the Nineteenth-Century British and Chilean Press’, ‘*The Valparaiso Review*, prensa victoriana en movimiento’, and ‘Henry Edward Swinglehurst: A Poet in Valparaíso’s Anglophone Press’, co-authored with Jennifer Hayward. They were also awarded the Eileen Curran Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Field Development Grant (2018) for ‘British Chilean News: Digitizing the 19th-Century British Press in Chile’.