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LIMINALLY ANGLOPHONE WOR(L)DS: M.G. SANCHEZ'S GIBRALTARIAN STORIES

Abstract
This paper deals with the 2006 collection of stories by acclaimed Gibraltarian author M.G. Sanchez, titled *Rock Black: Ten Gibraltarian Stories*. These stories focus on the lives of young Gibraltarians in the 1980s and 1990s, which are largely determined by the place they inhabit. The paper approaches the stories as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's minor literature, with the premise that the imagery and style which make these stories a minor literature are rooted in the anthropological concept of liminality. As the analysis reveals, characters who occupy Sanchez's Gibraltarian world live in a state of permanent liminality, which contributes to the elusiveness of their identity and makes it unalignable with any fixed category in the Anglophone literary sphere.

Key words: Gibraltarian literature, M. G. Sanchez, deterritorialization, politicalness, collective value, liminality

1. Introducing Gibraltarian Literature

Anglophone world literature contains numerous marginal zones which are easily overlooked due to the overshadowing presence of British or American literary achievements in the Anglosphere. Such marginal spaces are in most cases a product of complex historical and political processes and relations between Great Britain or the United States and other – often

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smaller – territories and communities across the globe. As English remains the official or dominant language in these communities, their literature is often produced in this language, but both the language and the literature are affected by the specific experiences conditioned by the spatial as much as historical factors. To this effect, this paper approaches such zones from the theoretical perspective of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's concept of 'minor literatures', which develop in small communities when the dominant language is deterritorialized. One such case is Gibraltarian literature, occupying the liminal borderland between Spain and England, countries with which Gibraltar shares historical, geographical, political, cultural, and social links. Since the fifteenth century, English and Spanish governments and armies have fought over or laid claim to this territory. Due to its favourable strategic position at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea, Gibraltar was exposed to "fourteen definable sieges" (Stotesbury 2014: 36). The greatest of them lasted from 1779 to 1783, when Spain unsuccessfully tried to capture Gibraltar from Great Britain, which had controlled it since the Peace of Utrecht. The most poignant, however, was probably the unofficial fifteenth siege of the 1970s, when General Francisco Franco closed the border between Spain and Gibraltar, which not only left a series of economic consequences but also imposed iron-fence strict restrictions on people's movements.

If not in terms of history or geography, in terms of literature Gibraltar is still largely unexplored. Quoting one of the few scholars who have ventured into this particular zone, "there is no identifiable canon of Gibraltarian writing in either English or Spanish […] and, with very few exceptions, there appears to be no formally published anglophone Gibraltarian writing from before the start of the present century" (Stotesbury 2014: 37). Additionally, there seem to be few active writers, the most prominent and prolific among whom is M. G. Sanchez. Sanchez is the author of more than a dozen books published since 2001 in English, including mostly novels and collections of stories, but also anthologies, autobiographies, and non-fiction. While Sanchez is based in the UK, his fiction bears the unmistakable mark of being Gibraltarian in its themes and narrative discourse and style.[1] The focus of the present paper is

[1] Sanchez's work has been analysed to a certain extent. Among other authors, Manzanas Calvo has explored the repossession of "the curse of the periphery" (2017: 27) in Sanchez's work with a view to constructing a specific border culture; the quoted John A. Stotesbury has explored Sanchez's work in the context of the (post)colonial gothic

M. G. Sanchez's 2006 collection of short stories titled *Rock Black: Ten Gibraltarian Stories*. Close reading the ten stories, the presented analysis identifies and describes images of liminality, aiming to examine the extent to which these images contribute to the main defining characteristics of M. G. Sanchez's stories as a minor literature.

2. Minoritarian Zones of Liminality

According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, a minor literature is what a minority constructs within a major language (1986: 16). Minority here does not refer to an easily definable group singled out from the majority by virtue of its ethnic membership, sexual orientation, or any other criteria that perhaps automatically come to mind. Instead, it refers to a set of practices which are minoritarian because they effectively and continuously challenge established norms and standards. As a minoritarian practice, a minor literature emerges through deterritorializing the established norms of the major language. In other words, the literature of Gibraltar written in its official language is not minor simply because it originates in a small community – it is minor because of its creative power to bring innovation into the broad field of Anglophone literature(s). Deterritorialization is the first characteristic of a minor literature, and while it can be effected through various strategies, which can either enrich or impoverish the language, it refers broadly to changing or dismantling a territory, whereby territory is understood as a set of social relations. The second characteristic of a minor literature is its politicalness. Everything in minor literatures is political since "its cramped space forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 17). The third quality of a minor literature is that everything in it takes on a collective value. As Deleuze and Guattari put it in their book *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, "if the writer is on the margins […] this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 17). To this effect, a minor literature "finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation" (Deleuze

(2016), while Habermann has similarly analysed Sanchez's 2015 novels *Jonathan Gallardo* and *Solitude House* from the perspective of Derridean hauntology.

& Guattari 1986: 17). These three defining features of a minor literature – deterritorialization, politicalness, and collectivity – form the framework for approaching M. G. Sanchez's *Rock Black* stories through the prism of liminal imagery.

Deleuze and Guattari's claim about the creative (minoritarian) potential of a writer on the margins might easily be applied to M. G. Sanchez. In Gibraltar, his writerly position is marginal because he virtually does not have a canon with which he could form a relation. In the UK, his writing about various aspects of life in Gibraltar is probably unique.[2] This puts the author in the position of liminality, as described initially by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep and anthropologist Victor Turner, and subsequently developed by Mary Douglas and Gloria Anzaldúa. Victor Turner defines liminal state or space as "ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (1974: 232). It is a place of transition from one fixed and classified state (preliminal) into another (post-liminal). Referring to Sanchez's *Rock Black* stories within this framework, the "neither here nor there" space they occupy is a territory between British literature and Gibraltarian literature. On a similar note, the stories in the collection feature various manifestations of the inability to cross the threshold, which leaves the protagonists in a limbo state.[3] Describing different stages of rites of passage, Van Gennep stresses the importance of the liminal or threshold stage, during which the individual is in between two different states, in a specific situation which can only be observed on its own terms, independently from either the preliminal or post-liminal state. According to Mary Douglas, it is precisely in the liminal or threshold stage (or space) that power lies. Douglas describes it as "the inarticulate area, margins, confused lines […] beyond

[2] M. G. Sanchez writes from the UK; however, the fictional world he creates belongs entirely to Gibraltar. Sanchez explains his position with great precision: "When I first started writing about Gibraltar I told myself that I would stop writing about it if I had nothing left to say – but I don't think I am anywhere near that point yet!" (private e-mail correspondence, 3rd January 2024). A comparison to James Joyce's writings about Dublin comes to mind. Both can be described as writers of a minor literature (as for Joyce, cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 19), and both write liminally, living at the same time physically in the place from which they write and fictionally in the place about which they write.

[3] The concept of liminality is likewise pertinent to the territory of Gibraltar. While officially remaining a British Overseas Territory with English as its official language, its close proximity and cultural connections to Spain have probably influenced its ambiguous position, which can better be described as "both here and there". It is from this not easily classifiable position that the specific language and culture of Gibraltar have originated.

the external boundaries" (1984: 99), claiming that such spaces contain the kind of power whose quality can challenge the power of established social structures. Gloria Anzaldúa writes more specifically about the liminal as borderland. According to Anzaldúa, "[a] border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants" (1987: 3). It is tempting to think (geographically) of Gibraltar as a kind of "unnatural boundary" between England and Spain, and the "constant state of transition" typical of such a boundary is the essence of liminality, as well as of the continuous process of becoming minoritarian. Developing Anzaldúa's concept of the borderland, Nyk Robertson argues for a different reading of Anzaldúa, in which the prohibited and forbidden, the excluded subjects who are nothing/zero/no one, can construct a radical multiple subjectivity in the borderland. According to Robertson, "it is not nothingness, but a multiplicity, that is created […] This 'multiple subjectivity' is what gives the inhabitants the power to look beyond conventional norms" (2018: 50). There are echoes of both Anzaldúa and Robertson in Deleuze and Guattari, or perhaps echoes of the latter in the former. At a certain point in *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari describe minoritarian groups as "groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions" (1987: 247). The zones populated by these groups can therefore be observed as borderlands, which deterritorialize spaces on either or both sides of the dividing border line, and "the power to look beyond conventional norms" which Robertson stresses is "a perfectly positive power" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 5) inherent in deterritorialization and aimed at challenging the existing (majoritarian) order. The fictional Gibraltar of Sanchez's *Rock Black* stories stands as one such liminal zone, a borderland, in which the minoritarian practices of its inhabitants contribute to the creation of a specific literary subjectivity which readers might tentatively think of as Gibraltarian.

3. Deterritorializing Minds and Subjectivities

The world of M. G. Sanchez's *Rock Black* stories is populated with subjects who are for different reasons "the prohibited and forbidden," i.e., excluded from various established and acceptable social structures. The book

contains ten stories which are all set in Gibraltar in the late 1980s and early 1990s. At first glance these stories are not connected, and while most are similar in terms of narrative style, there is a striking exception in the eighth story, called "Dream Sequence." The story represents a dialogue at the lunatic asylum between Mister Lunatick and someone who remains unidentified until the end of the story. Characterised quite overtly (perhaps even generically) by his name, as well as by the place to which he is confined, the asylum, Mister Lunatick is a person who stands outside the domain of the socially sanctioned norms and mores. The very fact that the story is narratively different, i.e., written in the form of a dialogue, makes it significant, perhaps explanatory, and we may observe it as a prism which reflects some major themes of the entire collection. The dialogue seems to be a conversation between the nominal lunatic and someone speaking with the voice of reason. The former's words are written in regular script, the latter's in italics. There is a clear delineation, a border between these two entities – a symbolic or mental border, as well as a textual border. However, the italicised voice of reason finally enunciates: "*But do you know what you are? You're just a lunatic conversing with the sound of your own voice – that is all you are*" (Sanchez 2008: 188), whereby it transpires that these two seemingly clearly separated identities are in fact one. The story is contained within the space in which these two voices meet and interact, whereby it becomes itself a border, a liminal space between reason and madness, in which both reason and madness coexist and defining each becomes a difficult task. Another story from the collection offers a possible answer to the question of who this seemingly schizophrenic person is. The reader is made aware from a previous story called "Shrink," the seventh in the collection, that the character named Peter Rodriguez has seen a psychiatrist and reluctantly accepted treatment.[4]

Peter Rodriguez appears in several of the stories, and the combination of information they offer allows the reader to construct an image of this character. As a child, Peter Rodriguez spent some six months in England with his family. He was fascinated with England, especially its football, and this fascination did not end even when he was bullied at school and called

[4] The necessity of psychiatric treatment appears as a motif in other works by M. G. Sanchez, perhaps most notably in his novel *Jonathan Gallardo*, in which the eponymous protagonist, a Gibraltarian orphan, is haunted by the Gibraltarian past and its history of violence to the extent that psychiatric treatment, however frightening, becomes the only solution.

a "dirty foreigner." After high school in Gibraltar, he went back to England to continue his education. He did not mind being bullied as a child, but as an adolescent he did mind that no one in England knew where Gibraltar even was. He returned to Gibraltar without finishing college, leaving his beloved girlfriend Marsha behind. Marsha soon ended their relationship via a long-distance phone call, but this did not end his love for her. This is the account Peter gives in the first story, whose title "Dago Droppings" quite explicitly indicates the precarious position of Gibraltarians, which provides framework for the whole collection. In "Dago Droppings," Peter Rodriguez is in Gibraltar, looking for a job, calling his ex-girlfriend back in England every now and then, even though she is now in a relationship with a guy from Ireland.[5] Following an accidental reunion with his childhood friend Manuel, Peter starts dabbling in the smuggling affairs (which Sanchez depicts as typical of Gibraltarians), which lasts for a while, until Manuel disappears one night at sea during a smuggling operation and is subsequently presumed dead, which is described in the fifth story, titled "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler." This is the point at which Peter decides to see a psychiatrist.

"Dream Sequence" provides an example of a mind in the space of liminality, existing, in Victor Turner's words, neither here nor there, in between reason and madness. At the same time, this mind (presumably Peter Rodriguez's) is deterritorialized to the effect that it is unclassifiable and unattributable to either category (reason or madness). Thus, it dismantles the set of social relations that prescribe what reason and madness should be, and by allowing Peter Rodriguez to exist in a state which is at the same time sane and insane, it defies the very idea or possibility of such a set of relations in the society in which Peter Rodriguez lives. According to Deleuze and Guattari, one of the strategies in which a minor literature deterritorializes the major language in which it is written

[5] This is a point that might deserve further theoretical elaboration. Namely, while England is in many postcolonial texts seen as Mother country, in this example of a minor Anglophone literature it is not a motherly figure and its symbol is instead a girlfriend, a wife who abandons her partner. Peter's inability to let go of his former lover corresponds to the desiring subject that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as 'schizo' (1987), the body, either personal or social, that records the flow of desire, the subject that is emancipated and that overcodes the desires of the father, described by classical psychoanalysis, with its own desires. This 'schizo' is whom we see in the story "Dream Sequence". Much of the story in fact deals with the reasons why the lunatic's, i.e., Peter's girlfriend left him (Sanchez 2008: 187, 188).

is by impoverishing it through killing "all metaphor, all symbolism, all signification, no less than all designation" (1986: 22). Deterritorialization can in this case be indicated by certain linguistic elements of varied types, which "express the 'internal tensions of a language'" and are referred to as *intensives* or *tensors* (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 22). They might include "the incorrect use of prepositions; the abuse of the pronominal; the employment of malleable verbs […]; the multiplication and succession of adverbs; the use of pain-filled connotations; the importance of the accent as a tension internal to the word; and the distribution of consonants and vowels as part of an internal discordance" (Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 23).

Mister Lunatick's conversation with himself is entirely a play with pronouns me/I and you, which points to his liminal state and the split in his personality, while it also abounds with pain-filled connotations – the story opens with his statement: "Many years ago I loved a woman, but she did not love me in return" (Sanchez 2008: 185). As Mister Lunatick further claims, the reason his girlfriend gave for leaving him is that he "was too intense" (Sanchez 2008: 187) – in addition to the fact that her family would never approve of his background, which his voice describes as "*your rather prominent gonial angles, your barely noticeable zygomatic arches and the distinctly mesocephalic measurements of your Western Mediterranean cranium. Miscegenation, although in theory quite a productive exercise, is not everyone's cup of tea*" (Sanchez 2008: 187). Thus, Mister Lunatick's state of liminality is related specifically to his Gibraltarian origin, and his nature is described as too intense, just like the deterritorializing language used to relate his circumstances. In the third story, titled "Timeshire" – which, like "Dago Droppings," features Peter Rodriguez as the first-person narrator[6] – Peter Rodriguez starts stuttering noticeably following a confrontation with some Irish soldiers in a kebab store: "I'm s-sorry. I r-r-really am. He's just p-pissed. Rat-arsed. Doesn't even know what he's s-say-saying"[7] (Sanchez 2008: 65). His stutter reflects his internal discordance which the entire

[6] All the stories featuring Peter Rodriguez – in addition to "Dago Droppings" and "Timeshare," also "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler" and "In the Territory of the Last Things," which is written in the form of Peter's diary – except "Shrink" are narrated in the first person. Peter Rodriguez also shows his theoretical knowledge of bilingualism (in "Dago Droppings") and characterisation (in "Timeshare"), which positions him as the author's alter ego or a sort of metanarrator, whereby the entire collection might be observed as a record of his psychiatric treatment.

[7] Peter Rodriguez's stutter evokes Gilles Deleuze's essay on creative stuttering as "what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome

story deals with: his considerations of media stereotyping good guys as fair-skinned and bad guys as dark-skinned, his discussions with his friend Taffy of Gibraltarian pro-Spanish or pro-British sentiments, and his subtle vindication of liminality in the form of claiming that any fanaticism is evil. It is additionally inviting to add vulgarisms to the given list of intensives/tensors, which permeate all the *Rock Black* stories. The title of the very first one, "Dago Droppings," intensifies the already offensive word for a Spanish-speaking person (Dago), indicating the view of Gibraltarians as not even a proper entity but merely Spanish excrement. Similarly, Mister Lunatick's voice in "Dream Sequence" refers to him as a "colonial little shit" who never learns: "*Always trying to subvert the order of things, always moaning and complaining about the lot that life has handed out to them*" (Sanchez 2008: 188). This refers primarily to the lunatic's moaning about his ex-girlfriend, which permeates the story. Sticking to their failed relationship while finding many faults in the way she treated him is perceived by Mister Lunatick's voice as an attempt at shattering the established order – the order which presents the couple with many obstacles due to their different backgrounds. The lunatic's obsession with his English girlfriend is driven by his desire to cross the threshold into which he was born – and into which he eventually returned after the sojourn in England – and become an accepted and equal member of English society. However, this desire leads only towards insanity, and the only way for the lunatic to keep undermining the existing order is not by assimilating into English society but by remaining a "dago dropping." In other words, he needs to form or find his subjectivity precisely within the threshold that Gibraltar offers – a subjectivity which is, following Nyk Robertson, multiple, as the split personality in "Dream Sequence" indicates. The lunatic's/Peter's return to and, as the ending of the collection suggests, further permanent stay in Gibraltar is required for the deterritorialization of the linguistic and social norms.

4. Politicalness and Collectivity in Borderland

Both "Dream Sequence" and "Dago Droppings" – as well as nearly all the other stories – make explicit the connection between the political and liminal in the Gibraltarian context by presenting what is political through

instead of a tree, what puts language in perpetual disequilibrium" (Deleuze 1997: 111), thus providing a deterritorializing effect.

images of liminality. The stories contain references to numerous historical facts, events and political struggles, which are woven into the narrative in such a way that they merely provide a background to or context for the ordinary everyday lives of the characters populating these stories. For instance, in the second story, titled "Harry Pozo and the Brazilian Prostitute," a group of friends crosses the border to the Spanish city of La Línea to visit a brothel, which is a consequence of the gradual historical and political process which in 1922 ended prostitution in Gibraltar (incidentally, once they cross the border, the Gibraltarians almost exclusively use Llanito to describe the prostitutes in the brothel). Due to the political and historical circumstances, the Gibraltarian world presented by M. G. Sanchez is one "where border crossing has become a normality" (Stotesbury 2014: 38). The long conversations between Peter Rodriguez and Taffy in "Timeshare" make references to various historical events related to Gibraltar while the story features police officers wearing typically British Bobby uniforms and speaking Spanish. In the fourth story, titled "The Passion of Gilbert Spiteri," the eponymous protagonist is made redundant by the 1984 Royal Naval Dockyard closure, which initiates a series of circumstances that ultimately ruin his life. As has been stated, according to Deleuze and Guattari "everything in [minor literatures] is political" (1986: 17), and in the case of the *Rock Black* stories, it is firmly linked with the aspect of liminality of their protagonists. This link is immediately apparent from Peter Rodriguez's name, his first name referring to Gibraltar's political connections with the United Kingdom, and his last name to those with Spain. The same pattern appears in other names as well: Harry Pozo or Steven Hernandez, but there are also names which indicate the mixture of different origins and backgrounds, referring, among other things, to the waves of Maltese and Genoese immigration to Gibraltar, such as Manuel Sciandri, the tobacco smuggler. Characterisation through naming offers liminality as multiple subjectivity and as a possible identity beyond any strict classifications. Additionally, many stories stress the disharmony between the looks and affiliations of the characters who populate them, which also indicates a liminal identity based on the political history of the place. Peter and Taffy discuss this in "Timeshare": "A man with a surname like Calderon – dark eyes, raven hair, olive skin, unshaven *nearly all the time* – slagging off Spaniards in such a racially motivated way" (Sanchez 2008: 58), while Peter in "Dago Droppings" describes children with similarly "Spanish" looks wearing Manchester United and Aston Villa t-shirts.

The lives and experiences of the characters vary, but they remain the same in one feature, which is their liminality. In "Harry Pozo and the Brazilian Prostitute," Harry Pozo, who is 19 and has just been diagnosed with leukaemia, travels to La Línea to lose his virginity with a prostitute. He attempts to cross a temporal border, from adolescence into adulthood, alongside the spatial border from Gibraltar to Spain. But he fails: he cannot sleep with the Brazilian girl and so remains in his liminal state, which is made all the more pronounced by his looming death. Gilbert Spiteri in "The Passion of Gilbert Spiteri" is made redundant at 36 years of age and subsequently becomes an alcoholic, losing all the money he received as severance pay. In such circumstances and on the threshold of his middle age, Gilbert Spiteri perches on the balcony railings in his mother's apartment, threatening to jump unless she gives him money. He utters the following threat: "*O me dah el dinero* or I throw myself" (Sanchez 2008: 81), in the mixture of languages which reflects his liminal state (which he additionally embodies quite literally by balancing his weight on the balcony railings, in between the safety of his family home and the deadly fall) while also deterritorializing the English language with the insertion of Llanito. Gilbert Spiteri does not kill himself and instead just keeps being drunk all the time, thus remaining in his state of liminality. In the sixth story, titled "Strait Crossing," the protagonist Steven Hernandez attempts to resolve the agony of his permanent liminality by travelling to Morocco. Coming from a broken home and being known in Gibraltar solely for his alcoholic father, Steven Hernandez attempts to break the pattern that shapes the lives of all the *Rock Black* characters. He is motivated by a visit from his British cousin Michaela, who plans to continue her exploratory journey from Gibraltar to Africa, which Steven considers dangerous, unnerving and unsettling. Michaela scolds Steven: "Just because you've been stranded all your life on this little Rock of yours doesn't mean that everyone else is as paranoid and scared of travelling as you lot are!" (Sanchez 2008: 137) and Steven admits to himself: "For many years, after all, Gibraltarians had been told that their lot in life was to be found in Gibraltar and Gibraltar alone" (Sanchez 2008: 132). Steven therefore decides to venture for Africa and boards a ferry, but at the end of the story his crossing remains incomplete. He does not get off the ferry, and the narrator merely comments that "[i]t was time to disembark…" (Sanchez 2008: 167).

The most striking examples of characters stranded in a state of permanent liminality appear in the fifth ("Death of a Tobacco Smuggler")

and tenth story ("In the Territory of the Last Things"), which are significantly placed in the middle and at the end of the collection. In "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler," Peter's friend Manuel disappears at sea in no man's land, somewhere between the territories of Spain and Gibraltar, during a smuggling operation. Manuel's body is never found, which leaves him at the same time likely buried somewhere in the depths of the sea and unburied; neither living nor unambiguously dead. An empty coffin is buried in the ground during Manuel's funeral: "What was being interred was *the hope we all kept in our hearts of Manuel still being alive*" (Sanchez 2008: 125). In "In the Territory of the Last Things" Peter Rodriguez, who is now deeply depressed, recalls the story his grandfather's friend Cacciato once told him, about the night Peter's grandfather and Cacciato went out fishing and saw a mermaid. The mermaid is the ultimate liminal creature, existing hypothetically as neither a fish nor a human being but effectively only in the marginal zones of human imagination. The story is carried over to the present moment, in which Peter finds Cacciato several days before the old man dies. Even in his old age, Cacciato firmly believes they did in fact see a mermaid, and he leaves Peter a blurry picture, which does not reveal much. If Peter Rodriguez can visualise the mermaid in the photograph, presumably he can also visualise life in Gibraltar in which permanent liminality is a viable option for a decent life. The mermaid as the epitome of liminality is impressed deeply into collective imagination, and as "In the Territory of the Last Things" shows, it haunts several characters throughout decades, which implies that the strength of the mermaid image has a collective value.

Additionally, the order of the *Rock Black* stories and their type and mode of narration do not seem to be accidental for it is through narrative techniques that the aspect of collective value is primarily built. The *Rock Black* stories make subtle references to one another. For instance, "The Passion of Gilbert Spiteri" makes mention of "a memorial service for some twenty-year-old kid who had died of leukaemia or something" (Sanchez 2008: 86), which is a reference to Harry Pozo from the second story in the collection. Gilbert Spiteri does not know Harry Pozo and his story does not deal with him in any way, but this cross reference creates for the reader a narrative space in which all characters and events become interconnected through the fact that they all occupy the same territory. This in turn reinforces the idea of collectivity, namely, it confirms that the experience of any single

character (such as the experience of Gilbert Spiteri's life in a limbo-like state) can be connected to the experiences of other characters (in this case, the limbo-like state in which Harry Pozo awaits death). While no relationships are established between these characters, their coexistence in the overall *Rock Black* story universe emphasises the sense of community which arises from writing on the margins of the English language and Anglocentric experience (cf. Deleuze & Guattari 1986: 17). Thus, the *Rock Black* stories become more than a possible intimate confession of Peter Rodriguez as a metanarrator (see footnote 6); they become a collective confession of his generation of Gibraltarians. There are more examples of cross references in the stories. Peter in "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler" speaks of the night he spent in prison; this is described in more detail in one of the previous stories, "Timeshare." In both "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler" and "In the Territory of the Last Things" he searches the beaches for any valuables with a metal detector. Furthermore, Manuel Sciandri also speaks of his imprisonment in "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler" (Sanchez 2008: 111). There are more examples of shared experiences: Harry Pozo, Gilbert Spiteri, and Steven Hernandez all seek some kind of liberation in the mere idea of crossing the border,[8] and so does Manuel. Manuel the tobacco smuggler appears as the figure which unifies all these experiences. When as a young boy he meets Peter, he tells him: "Just promise me that you'll join my gang and that I'll always be your leader, that you'll stand by me and follow my orders no matter what" (Sanchez 2008: 102). Manuel has a way of gathering people around him: "Although these [verbal tags given to them on account of personal idiosyncrasies] were primarily used to disguise our identity when we talked over the radio, they also reflected the great camaraderie between us, the close fraternal bonds that held the group together" (Sanchez 2008: 119), and such descriptions of close bonds among the young people in the central story of the collection stress collectivity not only as a value but also as a motif of the stories. Significantly, the sense of camaraderie or mateship is described precisely in terms of Manuel's gang, people whose prospects are based on the smuggling activities they carry out on the margins, veiled by the night and under constant threat of either imprisonment

[8] Gilbert Spiteri receives an offer from a German he meets in a bar: "come and meet me tomorrow morning at the Gibraltar-Spain border […] It's time you let go of this life and became everything you were meant to be" (Sanchez 2008: 98).

or death. Collectivity is thus firmly connected with the liminal state of these people, in which any movement forward, towards a different state of being, seems difficult to achieve.

5. In Conclusion, towards New Literatures

While the characters in the *Rock Black* stories may seem stranded, they all in fact embody a different possibility of being, however precarious, one of a permanent state of liminality. Sanchez's stories abound with characters who permanently occupy and try to build their lives in a place that remains liminal – Spanish-like but certainly not Spanish, officially British but far removed from Britain. The expected stage of their transition process, that of post-liminality, in which they are supposed to experience reintegration into the desired community, eludes them, and they are left only with the potentiality to create a world and express their identities outside the established binary structures that the Gibraltar borderland imposes upon them. This potentiality to create is what makes Gibraltarian literature, at least as presented by M. G. Sanchez's writing, minor. Its deterritorializing effect is seen in the liminal imagery of the characters such as Peter Rodriguez, whose split mind destabilises social structures and classifications. The English language which, among other things, uses expressions in Llanito, vulgarisms, and phrases that reflect internal discordance, is also deterritorialized through being in a liminal state between Llanito and English (whereby Llanito is itself a mixture of English and Spanish)/standard and non-standard/articulate and inarticulate. The political aspect of a minor literature is presented in the constant need and at the same time inability of various characters, such as Harry Pozo or Gilbert Spiteri, to cross the border and thus gain freedom, the loss of which is either implicitly or explicitly caused by historical decisions and political implications in the cramped space of Gibraltar. Finally, the textual cross references as well as the descriptions of similar experiences shared by many characters, particularly those gathered around the ultimately liminal figure of Manuel Sciandri, indicate a strong collective value which these stories contain. The liminality of Manuel's existence, as well as that of the elusive mermaid, emphasises the power of imagination, which – in Deleuze and Guattari's terms – might from being or writing on the margins give rise to a whole new community and consciousness. In the universe

of Anglophone literatures, Gibraltarian liminal literary world is one such community and consciousness, whose process of becoming is documented by M. G. Sanchez's *Rock Black* stories.

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