

# The Line and the Limit of Britishness: The Construction of Gibraltarian Identity in M. G. Sanchez's Writing\*

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**Abstract:** From Anthony Burgess's musings during the Second World War to recent scholarly assessments, Gibraltar has been considered a no man's literary land. However, the Rock has produced a steady body of literature written in English throughout the second half of the twentieth century and into the present. Apparently situated in the midst of two identitary deficits, Gibraltarian literature occupies a narrative space that is neither British nor Spanish but something else. M. G. Sanchez's novels and memoir situate themselves in this liminal space of multiple cultural traditions and linguistic contami-nation. The writer anatomizes this space crossed and partitioned by multiple and fluid borders and boundaries. What appears as deficient or lacking from the British and the Spanish points of view, the curse of the periphery, the curse of inhabiting a no man's land, is repossessed in Sanchez's writing in order to flesh out a border culture with very specific linguistic and cultural traits.

**Keywords:** Gibraltar; Gibraltarian literature; Gibraltarian identity; contamination; border.

**Summary:** Not Simple Mimics and Contami-Nation. A Sense of Belonging and Imagined Communities. *La Línea / The Line*. Conclusions: Fluid Borders, *odio patriótico*, and Walling.

**Resumen:** Desde las descripciones de Anthony Burgess durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial hasta las historias de la literatura más recientes, Gibraltar siempre ha aparecido como tierra de nadie desde el punto de vista literario. Sin embargo, la Roca tiene en su haber un corpus literario escrito en inglés desde mediados del siglo XX hasta la actualidad. Aparentemente situada entre dos deficiencias identitarias, la literatura gibraltareña ocupa un espacio literario distintivo que no es británico ni español. Las novelas y el relato autobiográfico de M. G. Sanchez se sitúan en este espacio liminar de múltiples tradiciones y contaminaciones lingüísticas. El escritor disecciona este espacio atravesado por múltiples fronteras y barreras. Lo que en principio

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parece una deficiencia desde el punto de vista británico o español, el ocupar la periferia y una tierra de nadie, se convierte en la escritura de Sanchez en el punto de partida que permite recrear una cultura fronteriza que posee rasgos lingüísticos y culturales propios.

**Palabras clave:** Gibraltar; literatura de Gibraltar; identidad gibraltareña; contaminación; frontera.

**Sumario:** No meros imitadores y contami-nación. Sensación de pertenencia y comunidades imaginarias. La línea/*The Line*. Conclusiones: Fronteras fluidas, odio patriótico y murallas.

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## INTRODUCTION

The trouble is that this is about the limit of their Britishness. They speak English, but only on that denotatory [*sic*] level which is wholly adequate for commerce and local legislation. They know nothing of English literature and have not themselves produced either a poet or a novelist. Their primary language is Andalusian Spanish, but not even in this have they asserted a cultural identity. Their songs, dances and cuisine are Spanish (tea and chips are for visitors only); they watch Spanish television and used, when they were able, to go to bullfights. They cry their identity, but this is merely a reflection of British military history. (Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores 1968: 275)

In 1968 the Spanish Foreign Ministry quoted novelist Anthony Burgess, who served in Gibraltar during the Second World War, giving a full account of the inhabitants of Gibraltar. Burgess portrays Gibraltarians as mimics of a relocated British Empire that are, however, inescapably Spanish in nature and culture. As such, they may appear to know English, but their ability is primarily one associated with the use of English in commercial situations. They are ignorant of the cultural tradition of the language they use for such special purposes, since their primary language is a variety of Spanish, like the rest of cultural practices they engage in.<sup>1</sup> For the writer, part of this cultural void has to do with the fact that Gibraltarians have not produced any literature. Significantly, seven decades later, the editors of *Introducing Comparative Literature: New Trends and Applications*, César Domínguez, Haun Saussy and Darío Villanueva, describe Gibraltar as “a clear case of a no man’s land, or, better said, the place of no man’s *national literature*” (2015: 105). There is, the editors state, no reference to Gibraltarian literature in any history of Spanish or British literature except, in the case of the latter, as an instance of postcolonial literature. In fact, for the poet Trino Cruz Seruya,

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<sup>1</sup> Far from an isolated impression, Burgess’s hostility or open racism towards the population of Gibraltar is equally noticeable in his novel *A Vision of Battlements*.

Gibraltarian literature is a literature *nonata*, which is paradoxical, given the history of the colony and its official bilingualism (qtd. Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva 2015: 105). The editors admit the assessment changes when one approaches Gibraltar comparatively, for, they claim, there is a plurilingual literature written in English, Spanish, Creole, Ladino, Maltese and Moroccan-Arabic. Although there have been few attempts to systematize it, its institutional recognition starts in the 1990s (105). Philip Dennis and Anne Taylor, for their part, frame Gibraltarian literature in the context of Postcolonialism. In this key, they place the birth of Gibraltarian literature in 1704 with the British takeover, and state that English has become the language most often used by Gibraltarian writers (qtd. Domínguez, Saussy and Villanueva 2015: 105).

The Rock, however, has asserted its cultural identity in a body of literature throughout the twentieth century, especially in terms of historical literature. If Spanish was the language of literature in the first decades of the twentieth century, with Hector Licudi's *Barbarita* (1929) as a case in point, English has become the literary language in the second half of the century, with the publication of volumes of poetry such as Leopold Sanguinetti's *The Calpean Sonnets* (1957), Peta Pryor's *From Gibraltar with Love* (1985), and Mario Arroyo's *Destiny Is the Name of a Woman* (1989). A quick look at the works published in the 2000s shows a growing number of fiction titles published by Gibraltarian writers, such as M. G. Sanchez, Sam Benady, Mary Chiappe, and Francisco Javier Oliva While (Stotesbury 2016: 102; 2015: 123–124). They have all responded to the challenge of “giving Gibraltarians a linguistic and cultural space for themselves,” as writer M. G. Sanchez comments in an interview with Esterino Adami (2014: n. p.). Sanchez’s substantial volume of writing —two collections of stories, *Rock Black* (2008) and *Diary of a Victorian Colonial and Other Tales* (2012), three novels, *The Escape Artist* (2013), *Solitude House* (2015), *Jonathan Gallardo* (2015), and an autobiographical account, *Past: A Memoir* (2016)— testifies to the creation of this literary and cultural space. Like his characters, Sanchez has crossed many boundaries, and has lived in Great Britain, where he took his BA, MA and PhD, with stints in New Zealand, India and Japan. Significantly, at the University of Leeds Sanchez wrote a thesis exploring perceptions of ‘Hispanicity’ in Elizabethan and Jacobean

Literature.<sup>2</sup> This crucible between Hispanicity and Gibraltariness is an integral part of his writing. So is his attention to place and what makes Gibraltar a palimpsest of histories and occupations. Hence his interest in neglected aspects of Gibraltarian history and the presence of Gibraltar in English Literature in his editions of *Writing the Rock of Gibraltar: An Anthology of Literary Texts, 1720–1890* (2007) and *Georgian and Victorian Gibraltar: Incredible Eyewitness Accounts* (2012). It is the purpose of this article to explore the space of Gibraltarian identity in M. G. Sanchez's writings. How British or non-British is it? Against the traditional effacement of human geographies and histories and the reduction of Gibraltar to 'the Rock' as a place through which British troops pass and perform heroic deeds, Sanchez presents a narrative pivoted on people and places with very distinct features that seeks to be recognized as such. Deemed as lacking or insufficient from the two central points of view of the British and the Spanish, Sanchez fleshes out this liminal space of contami-nation that can be described as a border culture.

## 1. NOT SIMPLE MIMICS AND CONTAMI-NATION

[T]he visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered inter dicta: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed; a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them. (Bhabha 1994: 89)

This liminal discourse "uttered between the lines" and as such "both against the rules and within them" that Homi Bhabha describes in *The Location of Culture* fits the quality of Sanchez's multilingual and multicultural writing. Sanchez's stories situate themselves in between the lines of colonial discourse to articulate a voice which is neither British nor Spanish. What on the surface may appear as another manifestation of British writing may be considered as a subversive act, "that of writing the self using the tools of the Master and, in the process, transforming those signifiers with the cultural meanings, values, and ideologies of the

<sup>2</sup> See M. G. Sanchez's personal web page: <http://www.mgsanchez.net/biography>. M. G. Sanchez has revised this manuscript and provided very valuable suggestions. I am very grateful for his generosity.

subordinate sector. Subversive also in a literal sense (*sub-verso*, under the verse, under the word)" (Aparicio 1994: 797). That transformation is intricately linked to the myriad of references to Andalusian Spanish and Spanish popular culture. This contact or mixture implicit in the process of contamination does create the deficit that Burgess would call a limit to Britishness. Indeed, Sanchez's prose is peppered with references to Spanish popular culture, such as TV shows (*Curro Jiménez*, Karlos Arguiñano, football matches); religious references (La Virgen del Pilar); sayings, swear words, and code switching. There is frequently no translation of the Spanish words or expressions and no glossary at the end of the volume, so the writing can pose a challenge for the monolingual reader.<sup>3</sup> The alternation, as in other multilingual contexts, implies a negotiation of languages and cultures that brings tension to the text. Context can help to translate the Spanish in Sanchez's prose, but the fact that the writer has chosen not to translate or paraphrase is revealing. The transit from one language to another is only indicated by the use of italics. Spanish is thus allowed to remain untranslated in a predominantly English text. Sanchez, to follow Ch'ien's assessment in another context, "engages in the art of assertive nontranslation" (2004: 209). There is a need for translation when the language is foreign or alien. Accordingly, the translator carries words from one language to another. Through nontranslation, however, Sanchez adds a level of unintelligibility to his writing, which will be understood by a bilingual audience in the context of the Gibraltarian experience. By shirking the task of the interpreter or translator for the monolingual British reader, the writer narratively performs the limits of Britishness in his writing. In so doing he creates a narrative space based on linguistic and cultural contamination that creates its own sense of belonging. The limit to a particular national allegiance emerges not as a lack but as an asset.

## 2. A SENSE OF BELONGING AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

G. Stanton remarks that the psychology of colonialism involves mimicry, but the Gibraltarians take this to a peculiar extreme as they stage and bask in all the symbolisms of Britishness, such as dressing up

<sup>3</sup> See the analysis of Junot Díaz's acts of nontranslation in Manzanas (2016).

in navy-style blazers, and propagating an arcane folklore concerning the symbols of the regiments (Stanton 1996: 285-6). Although situated on the periphery of British identity, Gibraltar has repeatedly voted to remain under British rule in 1967 and 2002. That unflinching sense of belonging to the British Empire and its unwillingness to let go of the colonial status is one of the reasons why David Lambert claims that Gibraltar does not seem an obvious candidate for consideration within a postcolonial frame (2005: 209). However, this alleged Anglophilic and the political desire to stay British contrast with the ways Gibraltarians are perceived from the British mainland. The gaze from the center is pervaded by an identitary deficit, by not being British enough. That very gaze, however, is revealing of a clear position that establishes a hierarchy between center and periphery. The British culture emanating from that center as “strategic location” (Said 1979: 38) is perceived as unequivocally superior to that of the fringes. It is that centrality that allows Burgess to assess Gibraltarian identity as deficient and lacking, as a no-man’s land.

But how British is Gibraltar? The question remains. In Sanchez’s *Solitude House* Seracino, a young doctor from Malta, finds Gibraltarians “charmingly idiosyncratic” as he registers the different modulations of physical appearance and varieties of English and Spanish:

Some, for example, looked English, but spoke only in Spanish. Others looked Spanish, but spoke only English. Others —the majority of them, I would say— looked neither English nor Spanish and spoke something that, well, to be honest, was neither *ingles* nor *castellano* (2015: 29).

All in all, the young doctor claims, it is hard to differentiate Gibraltarians from Linenses: “Facial expressions, colour of eyes, cuisine, eating habits, sense of humour, their way of strolling around and holding themselves: they were all pretty much the same. Gibraltarians even looked uncannily similar to the *linenses*” (33). At the same time, Gibraltarians embrace all the symbols that confirm their belonging to Britain. The waning of the British Empire in his native Malta is precisely what draws the young doctor to the colony:

Gibraltar, you see, was still British. And it had everything I needed to feel comfortable. Old-style pubs. Fish and chips shops. Bobbies in black helmets. Red pillarboxes. Good old-fashioned sterling. (...) And, of course

(unlike my native Malta), a population fervidly committed to retaining their links with the motherland” (21).

Pubs, shops, fish and chips, bobbies, among others, construct the image of an imagined community Gibraltarians belong to, a mother country from which an unequivocal British identity emanates. For the young doctor, attachment to these markers of Britishness makes him feel part of an “imagined community” of peers, to use Benedict Anderson’s term. For Anderson, the nation is *imagined* because the members “will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them” (2006: 6). Even so, identity traits such as the ones Seracino mentions construct a sense of belonging that supports the individual and locates him/her within a larger entity of finite if elastic boundaries (7). The nation is understood as a *community* because “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Yet, repeatedly, this fraternity or horizontality changes when British citizens encounter or interact with Gibraltarians. Invariably, horizontality becomes a form of hierarchical verticality. Although Gibraltar has occupied an iconic military status in the British imaginary, the civilian population has been traditionally effaced and dismissed as “Levantines,” and “not of the most scrupulous stock or standards” (Bradford 1971: 102). For Lambert, this characterization reflects British imperialist attitudes towards a population that was mainly Catholic and of mixed Mediterranean origin (2005: 213). The attitude survives to the present-day, with many metropolitan British migrants and military personnel viewing Gibraltarians as no more than English-speaking “Spicks” (Stanton 1996: 280). These preconceptions transpire in “Dago Dropings,” the story that opens *Rock Black*. Sanchez creates a triangle of attitudes that dissect the meaning of Gibraltarianess and the apparent oxymoronic compound “British Gibraltarian.” Sanchez introduces Peter Rodriguez, the character that weaves in and out of the collection, and two patrons at the pub: Rodriguez refers to the first as “the surveyor,” an example of the Anglo-Saxon superiority Rodriguez is used to; the other patron, “Tommy-Boy,” will voice the most widely held stereotypes of the Gibraltarians. For him, Gibbos are “*quite Spanish* in a lot of ways” (2008: 5). They all like “olives and octopus, dancing seviyanas or whatever you call that horrible fucked-up flamenco shit” (5); they all like “going to Il Cortay Inglay store in Marbella” (5); they all speak Spanish

like they do in La Línea across the border (6); they are also marked linguistically, for British Gibraltarians cannot even speak proper English (6). Rodriguez dismantles these generalizations by claiming that both Spanishes are not the same to the attuned ear, and concedes that British Gibraltarians have an accent, just like every other speaker in Britain has. He himself, Rodriguez adds, has a strong West Country accent. The issue is that some accents are accepted as domestic whereas some others are viewed as foreign. Even if there are some people who have trouble speaking English in Gibraltar, Rodriguez concedes, it is common for those people to write better than the average English man. The clarification becomes self-evident, as Sanchez repeatedly characterizes Tommy-Boy's English as ungrammatical: "The Kid here don't have no job" (9); "while you was talking before" (10). In spite of his disrespect for grammar rules, however, the English man patronizes Rodriguez and compliments him on his "real good English (...) for a local boy" (10). This English, though, he immediately attributes to his studying in the United Kingdom.

Rodriguez's stay in Britain, where he supposedly learnt "good" English, opens another point of contention in the conversation that Rodriguez is eager to clarify. Britain, Rodriguez explains, is the imaginary mother country and will remain so even if you never set foot on the Island: "Before I travelled there, I was your typical pro-British, anti-Spanish Gibraltarian. (...) That was the way I had been brought up, you see" (Sanchez 2008: 10). Love and hatred were divided equitably between the Liverpool football team and the Real Madrid and the Spanish national football team. When as a child he spent six months in England with his parents he already experienced England's hostility towards its others: For the other kids he was just a "Dago, spic, wop, greaser" (11), the habitual terms of abuse to describe a southern European. All those feelings of humiliation, however, had subsided when Rodriguez got a scholarship to study in Britain. The thought of his inability to settle down in England, given his prior experience, did not even cross his mind because he felt British: "Maybe not British English like you are, Tommy-Boy, but certainly *British Gibraltarian*" (11), Rodriguez adds. He watched *Match of the Day* every day, his father bought the *Daily Mail* most mornings, his mother did her shopping at Marks and Sparks. The gestures do link Rodriguez to an imagined community in Britain, but that imagined community of alleged flexible boundaries has trouble in recognizing Gibraltar as part of it. The

periphery is not automatically regarded as part of the center, as becomes evident in what Rodriguez calls “little incidents” (12), such as the time when a drunken Royal Navy soldier came up to him and told him he was “a Spanish shit” and assured him he would remain so for the rest of his life. Still, for Rodriguez that was not systematic or systemic, for such abuse came from English squaddies and sailors who were totally drunk. More revealing for Rodriguez was the fact that when he finally went back to Britain as a young man and told his fellow students he was from Gibraltar he started to get blank stares. “Gibraltar?” They would ask. They would not know where to locate it, and a typical response was: “Oh, yeah, Gibraltar. That’s somewhere near Benidorm, innit? Great part of Spain, that. One of my mates went down there last year and had a real laugh” (12). Interesting, Rodriguez ponders, that you spend your schooldays being told to be proud of your *British Gibraltarian* identity and when you go to the United Kingdom, you find that everyone takes you for a “flamenco-dancing bullfighting aficionado who’s also a dab hand at playing the castanets” (12). Rodriguez’s fellow students decolonize Gibraltar by assimilating it to the set of stereotypes associated with a performing Spanishness. What was more troubling for Rodriguez, however, was the fact that when he tried to explain where and what Gibraltar was, they were simply not interested. In their eyes Rodriguez was a Spaniard and that was that. He was hence labelled, snubbed, ignored and ostracized in the stereotype of the Spaniard (12).

Similarly, in “Timeshare,” Rodriguez further explores his complex relation to the mother country as he goes over his commitment to the standards of Britishness:

We tell the Spaniards that we are proud to be British, we stick George Cross stickers on our windscreens and we support football teams like Manchester United and Liverpool, we even send our kids to British universities—but the moment we actually come face to face with a Brit all this seems to disintegrate (...). It is no longer a matter of being British then—but a case of ‘Gibbos’ and ‘Giris,’ ‘*llanito y ingleseh*,’ ‘us’ and ‘them,’ as if our Britishness were no more than a disposable mask we put on from time to time to convince ourselves that we are not just a cluster of newly emancipated colonials (2008: 51).

The binaries in the passage, British/Gibbos, *ingleseh/llanito*, us/them break down the smooth quality of the imaginary community and

something snaps in Rodriguez. As a result, the term “British Gibraltarian” turns into an untenable joke for the young man.

But the term ‘Gibraltarian’ itself is questioned on the other side of the border. As a group of Gibraltarians cross into Spain in *Rock Black*, they encounter a welcoming sign that turns out to be openly hostile: “Bienvenidos a [la ciudad de] San Roque, donde reside la de Gibraltar” (2008: 29). Translated for one of the characters, it means “Welcome to San Roque (...) where the real Gibraltar resides.” The sign points at another dichotomy, not between British and Gibraltarian, as seen above, but between real and fake Gibraltarians. Ever since Franco’s dictatorship, the writer claims that Spaniards have argued there is no such thing as a Gibraltarian because the real ones left the Rock in 1704, with the British takeover. This division between former and alleged legitimate inhabitants and contemporary and illegitimate ones promotes the vision that the current Gibraltarians are merely a removable population, just like they were for the British when they were evacuated during the Second World War. Manolo, one of the characters in “Harry Pozo and the Brazilian Prostitute,” says:

We, the *Llanitos* (...) who live on the Rock and have been there since God knows when, we’re just foreigners to them, innit, scumbags, piece of trash without any real identity, *nada más que rateros y chorizos* like they’re always saying, just a bunch of Maltese and Genoese immigrants (...). *We are the real Gibraltarians*, they’re telling the world, *not those bastards across the border*. (29)

From the Spanish point of view, *Llanitos* appear as an identitary aberration (Sanchez 2016: 150), the impossible inhabitants that bear a resemblance to the category of the prohibited or the forbidden that Gloria Anzaldúa situates on the border: “the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the confines of the ‘normal’” (1987: 3). The heterogeneity of the Gibraltarian population, a mixture of English, Spanish, Portuguese, Maltese, Jewish, Moroccan, Genoese and Indian ancestry, is decried as *colonos*, as a surplus population that occupies but does not belong to the place.

Brian Manrique, the protagonist of *The Escape Artist*, finds a similar conceptualization of Gibraltarians when he meets Spanish students in

Cambridge. They consider him an impossible anomaly, a “renegade Spaniard,” an “Andalusian apostate, an odious and subversive desecrator of the Spanish national honour” (2013: 231). Echoing the hostile sign in San Roque, they would

shake their heads and tell you that you couldn’t possibly be a Gibraltarian because Gibraltarians didn’t really exist — there being nobody on that pestiferous scrap of rock, as everybody well knows, apart from a few hundred blue-eyed *soldados guiris*, a handful of renegade Andalusian smugglers and one or two *malditos monos*” (231).

A similar kind of encounter reverberates in “Shrink,” included in *Rock Black*, where Peter Rodriguez is at a student party in Manchester and is approached by a couple of Spaniards. When he tells them “*Soy de Gibraltar*” and extends his hand, one of the students laughs at him and says “*Habéis escuchado? (...) ‘A British gentleman con acento andaluz?’*” (2008: 176). Their laugh, “a cruel heartless laugh that pierced right through Peter’s adolescent soul” (176), makes Rodriguez reconsider what it means to be British Gibraltarian:

To be pissed on by the English and spat upon by the Spanish? Or was there something else? Something that Gibraltarians could claim as their own, some unique sense of *Gibraltarianess* that came with being born on the most famous rock in the world? (176).

From this perspective, Gibraltarianess may appear as non-existent, as a void or as a manifestation of nothingness. And when Rodriguez tries to come up with something specific that defines Gibraltar, he finds that apparently there is nothing there, “other than tobacco smuggling, cars with tinted windows, and big, fuck-off medallions on tanned and hairy chests” (2008: 177). The place itself, with the monuments and the fortresses, all belonged to the Moors, to the Spaniards, to the British (177). Very revealingly, the space of Gibraltarianess seems like a void. It is not the space of Britishness, nor the space of Spanishness, but something else, an uncharted territory away from nationalistic absolutisms and overintegrated perceptions of culture. This is the liminal space Sanchez repossesses in his writing.

### 3. LA LÍNEA / THE LINE

The fact that Rodriguez's fellow students immediately reconceptualize him as a Spaniard and that Spanish students think of him as a renegade Spaniard symmetrically splits Gibraltarian identity into two opposite deficits. While for the former, echoing Burgess's comments, Gibraltarians are not British enough, for the latter they are just an impossibility and an aberration. Neither point of view is ready to acknowledge the heterogeneity of its population nor the complexity of the intercultural perspectives that converge in Gibraltar, a contested place that goes beyond predetermined and authoritative moulds. Like any other border region, the Spanish-Gibraltarian borderlands offer instances of drug or tobacco smuggling, as portrayed in Sanchez's "Death of a Tobacco Smuggler" and in recent films such as Daniel Monzón's *El niño*. There is *clandestinidad*, as Guillermo Gómez Peña clarifies in his "Border Manifesto: The Border Is" (1993), but there are also multiple manifestations of intercultural communication, as mentioned before. The border also seems to split two black legends that usually pertain to border areas. There is the Black Legend Seracino learns from his fellow workers at the hospital: the historical evidence against Spain that starts with the Inquisition, goes through the Conquest of America and Franco's dictatorship but continues till today, with Spanish bullfights (2015: 66).<sup>4</sup> There is, on the Spanish side, the perception that Gibraltar is all about illegal trafficking.<sup>5</sup> What Sanchez fleshes out in his writing is what remains in the midst of these two gravitational pulls and how to qualify this apparent void and no-man's land. Carved out around this nothingness, Gibraltarian identity seems to disrupt dichotomous formulations. Echoing Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic*, it is possible to claim that "What was initially felt to be a curse" (1993: 111), the curse of being deficient, the curse of not being able to name anything strictly Gibraltarian, the curse of the periphery, and the curse of being crossed by the border get repossessed in Sanchez's writing. It becomes affirmed and

<sup>4</sup> If hostility towards Spaniards seems to unite the majority of Gibraltarians, that was not always the case. In Hector Licudi's *Barbarita*, the Gibraltarian narrator has a very strong dislike of the British while strongly empathizing with the Spanish. The shift in attitude, in M. G. Sanchez's opinion, can be attributed to the damage caused by Franco's intentionally anti-Gibraltarian policy.

<sup>5</sup> The cover of *Rock Black* portrays a deserted beach and a package of Winston cigarettes, an image suggestive of tobacco smuggling.

is reconstructed as the basis of a privileged standpoint from which to look at Britain and Spain. The limit to their Britishness, to echo Burgess, becomes the site or interstice, the void or nothingness of a particular identity production that creates unpredictable contact zones and intersections, and becomes revealing for those on either side of the boundary.

Like any other geopolitical boundary, the line that separates Spain and Gibraltar is porous and hermetic at the same time. The *verja* or gate partakes of the double nature of the border, a line with gaps and apertures whose rhythm is unpredictable. As Janet Turner Hospital remarks, "At borders, as at death and in dreams, no amount of prior planning will necessarily avail. The law of boundaries applies. In the nature of things, control is not in the hands of a traveller" (1990: 11). The *verja* is as variable as a political weather vane, and was closed from 1969 to 1982. For Gibraltarians those years have been regarded as yet another siege, the fifteenth since 1309, and have brought to the fore the siege imaginary that has permeated the history of the Rock (Stotesbury 2014: 36). That period of total lockdown reverberates in Sanchez's works. In *Past: A Memoir*, the writer includes a remarkable photo of the Mor's family standing by the closed border. One of the Mor children had taken his First Communion and had been brought to the gate so he could be seen by the grandparents on the Spanish side. A photographer captured the moment in which two different families shared a family landmark with the family on the Spanish side. In a personal e-mail to M. G. Sanchez, Cath Mor recalls the rituals of the encounter:

[Y]ou would commence by waving enthusiastically. (...) This was followed by yelling, mainly small talk as you couldn't engage in much conversation. They would reply and you'd be lucky if you heard it clearly! Being the eldest, I was often chosen for the yelling and was told what to say. At that young age, I found this exciting and challenging! I recall that ordinary folks would just hang out at the frontier in their cars just to overhear conversations. This was deemed as a form of entertainment by many —such was life!

While for Cath Mor the exchanges were not meaningful in terms of the information exchanged, the moments were extremely important for her mother, separated from her parents when she decided to stay in Gibraltar and marry a Gibraltarian. Like the Mors, there were people

shouting on at the border, trying to communicate with their families on the other side. Sanchez's grandmother Bertha would call them *los pobrecitos, esos desgraciados*, "those who had been separated from their relatives by the sword of Francoist politics" (2016: 47). Reminiscent of contemporary scenes at the United States/Mexican border, Sanchez presents how the border cuts across the land and family relations. In border parlance, those families can be called *los atravesados*, those who were cut and divided by the border, to echo Gloria Anzaldúa in *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In order to cross onto the other side, Cath Mor recalls, they had to cross from Gibraltar to Tangiers by ferry and then catch another ferry from Tangiers to Algeciras. The situation is captured in Sanchez's *The Escape Artist*, where the protagonist laments that he has to take two ferries and travel to a different continent just to reach a place one could walk to in a matter of minutes (2013: 229). That was the state of Spanish-Gibraltar relations in 1982.

The border was reopened in 1982, but the uncertainties attending its unpredictable rhythm of opening and closing persist until today. In "Harry Pozo and the Brazilian Prostitute" Sanchez presents a typical border crossing, with the Spanish *Guardia Civil* inspecting the cars and reinstating obscure Spanish laws, and the bottled-up resentment of the crossers. As Seracino comments in *House of Solitude*, the distance between his apartment in Marina Bay in Gibraltar and the center of La Línea was about a mile, or a mile and a half at most, but harassed by the *guardia civiles*, "it seemed like you were trudging your way from one continent to another!" (Sanchez 2015: 49). This distance between countries, however, dispels on February 5<sup>th</sup> 1985, when Spain unlocked the iron frontier gates. The official opening, echoed in local newspapers, was accompanied with a marked change of attitude in customs officials, Seracino notices. Border policemen were actually smiling as crossers were ushered through the barest checking of documentation. For the doctor, it seemed as if the former incivility was just a throwback to the old Francoist days. But the doctor was wrong. The change of attitude had to do with the European Community's admonition to open the half-shut border if Spain wanted to be a full member (52). A fellow doctor at the medical center, Magilton-Garcia, curbs the Maltese doctor's enthusiasm and informs him of the intermittent nature of the *verja*. The older generation, he informs him, tends to be more cautious when it comes to the opening or closing of the border, for the current opening did not have to last:

The Spanish, you see, have a historical hatred for Gibraltar and all things Gibraltarian, what many Spaniards themselves describe as *un odio patriótico*, and while it may sometimes appear, as in the present day and age, that his hatred, this *odio patriótico*, has completely and totally melted away, it won't be long before the pendulum swings the other way and they start venting their wrath and hatred on us again. (63)

Present normality does not mean future stability, he concludes. Seracino does find some evidence of this historical hatred when one night he is in Spain and he finds his car painted across the bonnet with the message “Gibraltar español! Llanitos cabrones!” (Sanchez 2015: 76). The graffiti stands as an illustration that one may cross the border between the two countries but there are other borders that are quietly productive. The message automatically reterritorializes the car and marks the young doctor as foreign, as belonging to the other side of the border. Consequently, the young doctor decides to forget his dream of relocating to Spain. Magilton-Garcia’s words turn out to be prophetic. Once Spain got into the European Community, the border became a political weapon to express Spanish distress:

If Gibraltar applied to become a member of UEFA, *there was a queue*. If the British Foreign Secretary said that handling Gibraltar back to Spain against the wishes of the Gibraltarians was not an option, *there was a queue*. If the Gibraltarian Chief Minister spoke in front of the UN Assembly, *there was a queue*. If a Gibraltarian sports team was invited to compete in some prestigious tournament in Spain, *there was a queue*. (192)

As a result, mayhem would sweep through Gibraltar. With its roads clogged, ambulances and police cars could not attend emergencies and “everybody on the Rock would feel stressed out of their heads” (192–193), Seracino laments.

## **CONCLUSIONS: FLUID BORDERS, *ODIO PATRIÓTICO*, AND WALLING**

Sanchez’s writings illustrate that borders “no longer function solely laterally, to cordon off states from one another. (...) Borders can be discontinuous, fragmented, refracted across space and scale” (Price 2004: 118). If we do not see them, Patricia Price explains, it may be because we are not looking in the right places, or because we are failing to recognize them when we encounter them (118). The location of new demarcations

requires thinking about lines of separation as more fluid sorts of places, since they do not stay put in visible geographical manifestations according to traditional geometrics (118). Sanchez's works offer examples of these fluid borders away from the geopolitical border. There is a wall of stereotypes that Gibraltarians impose on the Spaniards, the dagos, the excrescence, as Sanchez explores in "Dago Droppings." In spite of internal differences, Gibraltarians seem to stand together in their disdain for the Spanish, described to Seracino in *Solitude House* as fickle and deceitful in nature. Significantly, the young doctor includes the description of Spaniards in Spanish: "Esos Españoles. Son lo que no hay [sic], Dr Seracino. Best to stay in Gib and have as little as possible to do with them" (2015: 32). There is, on the other hand, the widespread vision among Spaniards that contemporary Gibraltarians are not legitimate, and that the 'settlers' occupying the Rock are either temporary or engaged in drug or tobacco smuggling, as expressed above. If these conceptualizations reinforce invisible borders between the Spanish and the Gibraltarians, periodic lockdowns of the *verja* stop all communication between the two communities, thus reinstating the spectacle of absolute power. These random lockdowns, however, can be understood as expressions of misled patriotism and as desperate attempts at exercising an impossible sovereignty.

Indeed, as Eduardo Galeano suggests, the border is a paradigmatic site to anatomize the workings of political systems: "to the extent that the system finds itself threatened by the relentless growth of unemployment, poverty and the resultant social and political tensions, room for pretense and good manners shrinks: in the outskirts of the world the system reveals its true face" (1988: 114). If we assume that the border is the outskirts of the world, we will find that geopolitical boundaries and peripheries are the sites where political systems fortify the notions of nationality and national identity. Examples abound: in the barbed wire separating the United States from Mexico, American democracy reveals a policed side; likewise, in the border separating the Spanish colonies in North Africa from the rest of the continent, and in the barbed wires that exclude contemporary migrants, the dream of a solid and prosperous Europe reveals its true face. However, these revelations on the contours of countries and continents bifurcate in at least two ways: they tell those on the other side that the crossing is going to be difficult or impossible as they are conceptualized as illegals or redundant, but they also speak volumes about the country's or the continent's values. British attitudes

towards Gibraltarians are revealing of the limits of Britishness as an imaginary community. By the same token, it is possible to argue that in closing the gate and strangling Gibraltar, Spain strangles itself. Any political boundary cuts both ways, and one cannot block one side without considering the consequences of the blocking on the other. The issue is who stands on the other side of a gate or fence, those who are fenced-in or those who are fenced-out? The question repositions the inside versus outside dynamics as well as the effects of walling or fencing. Wendy Brown has expressed the subtle mechanisms implicit in reinforcing borders in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, where she claims that

a structure taken to mark and enforce an inside/outside distinction —a boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and between friend and enemy— appears as precisely the opposite when grasped as part of a complex of eroding lines between the police and the military, subject and *patria*, vigilante and state, law and lawlessness. (2010: 25)

The more hyperbolic the fence, the more closely watched, and the more solid the stereotype, one may add, the more vulnerable the state that reinforces it. From this perspective, as Sanchez writings illustrate, the fence does not only create meaning for those it codifies as foreigners or illegitimate settlers, but also resignifies those on the other side of the boundary.

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