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Feminist Theories of Development in Farida Benlyazid's Double-*Bildung* story, *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (2005)

Abstract

Farida Benlyazid's film, *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (2005), offers viewers a novel iteration of the classic coming-of-age genre. As a film, it lies outside the preferred medium of expression for the genre and it features not one, but two distinct protagonists: Juanita (for whom the story is named) and her city, Tangier. Each half of this double narrative provides a feminist critique of the masculine projects traditionally associated with the *Bildung* genre. When read as a narrative of development, both the form and content of the film open up the possibility of gendering theories of development. The film's feminist interventions destabilize the aims of Enlightenment thinking, which produced the *Bildung* genre, along a three-pronged axis: the film questions the processes that lead to the solidification of national boundaries; it challenges progress-oriented ideals as they relate to time and development; and it dissolves the construct of linguistic purity.

Keywords

Farida Benlyazid, Juanita Narboni, Tangier, double-*Bildung*, development, feminist intervention, national boundary, progress-oriented, linguistic purity

Scholars of the *Bildungsroman*, *roman d'apprentissage*, or coming-of-age novel have often debated the exact contours of the genre. In a widely-accepted description, Franco Moretti states that the *Bildungsroman* is a story in which the protagonist discovers the solution to “the conflict between the ideal of *self-determination* and the equally imperious demands of *socialization*” (15; italics in original). In this canonical version, the *Bildungsroman* pairs the coming-of-age of its protagonist with loyalty to the projects of the protagonist's nation; the social necessity of conforming to the aims of society; and a general consolidation of progress-oriented ideals (Boes 51). Other established literary scholars have questioned the utility of delimiting the genre's boundaries by pointing out that many authors of *Bildung* stories, and especially those in a postcolonial context, are unlikely to have been writing in reference to the genre (Austen 215). (I use “*Bildung* story” to refer to “narrative of *Bildung*” because, unlike *Bildungsroman*, it captures the notion that coming-of-age narratives are not specifically tied to any particular genre.) However, categorizing a particular cultural product within the category of *Bildung* story may

open up new possibilities for the literary analysis of said text or film. This article makes use of one such cultural product, Farida Benlyazid's *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (2005), to highlight the feminist interventions that are made possible when certain narratives are read as *Bildung* stories.

Farida Benlyazid was born in Tangier, where she currently resides. She recalls being enthralled with films from a very young age. Her multilingual background lent itself to a multicultural cinematic experience and she remembers going to the movies with her mother regularly to watch a variety of international films on the big screen. She left Morocco to complete her university studies in France, where she wrote and produced her first feature-length film; it would go on to become the first chapter in her "city trilogy."¹ In an interview, Benlyazid described her mission to give viewers an additional variation in culture, because in variation "lies the wealth of humanity. It is the unfolding of all the possible human futures. And that is perhaps why I want to display my own culture and its subtleties" (Zuhur 15).

The film in question, *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (2005), is an adaptation of Spanish-Moroccan author Ángel Vázquez's novel of the same title.² Part one of the film begins in 1938, at which point Tangier was a Spanish colonial city jointly administered as an international zone by France, Great Britain, and Spain. The second part takes place during Franco's occupation of Tangier and, finally, the third part takes place in the 1960s. Through these historical moments, the viewer follows Juanita as she sits about her house, walks through the city's streets, attends social events and, most notably, criticizes everything around her. Each of these parts is signaled by both visual changes on screen and references to political events occurring contemporaneously with the story.

I read *La vida perra* as a double-*Bildung* story. I refer to it as such because it features two

strong protagonists, Juanita and the city of Tangier. The structure of the narrative is innovative in and of itself. The first half of this double-*Bildung* belongs to Juanita, but her trajectory is that of an anti-*Bildung* protagonist. The second coming-of-age narrative belongs to a less obvious character: the city of Tangier. Benlyazid protagonizes the city to the extent that we are able to trace a *Bildung* story belonging to Tangier. It is precisely Benlyazid's foregrounding of the city in comparison to Vázquez's novel that allows us to read a distinctly feminist intervention regarding the *Bildung* genre. In other words, Benlyazid's two-part *Bildungsfilme*, in which the two protagonists undergo radically different stories of transformation, complicates the boundaries of the genre and presents the viewer with new visions of the coming-of-age process. Additionally, read side by side, Juanita's anti-*Bildung* and the feminist *Bildung* that belongs to Tangier undermine the notion that one peaks in understanding and matures at the pivotal transition between youth and adulthood.

As authors Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland show throughout their study, *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, the *Bildungsroman* has traditionally presented readers with a story of development rooted in male perspectives. Additionally, this genre often combines the coming-of-age of the male protagonist with other literary motifs grounded in Enlightenment-era, masculine projects (i.e. notions of progress, linguistic purity, and nation-formation). By nuancing the borders around the concept of *Bildung*, the film offers several feminist interventions that undo these masculine projects initially associated with the genre. Benlyazid is widely regarded as a distinctly feminist producer³ and filmmaker; in their analysis of Benlyazid, scholars Ella Shohat and Robert Stam have referred to her work as "alternative feminist cinema" and claimed that it "envisions an esthetic that affirms Islamic culture, while inscribing it with a feminist consciousness" (165). Similarly, Florence

Martin has described the manner in which Benlyazid has become known for her “formidable ‘Benlyazidian’ female protagonist[s]” (126). We will ask how Juanita does and does not conform to the Benlyazidian model while interrogating what is at stake in breaking *La vida perra* up into two halves: one which belongs to Juanita and one which belongs to the city of Tangier. Each half of the story offers feminist alternatives to the *Bildung* projects of progress-oriented ideals, the consolidation of the myth of linguistic purity, and nation-formation, albeit in distinct ways. We will begin with Juanita, the film’s titular protagonist, and then contrast her anti-*Bildung* story against the alternative, feminist narrative of *Bildung* that belongs to the city around her.

Juanita Narboni’s Anti-*Bildung*

In what follows I examine the first half of *La vida perra*, which belongs to Juanita and her anti-*Bildung* story. Through this section, we will see how Benlyazid’s portrayal of Juanita offers a feminist alternative to the masculine *Bildung* protagonist and how Juanita’s story arc undermines each of the three aforementioned projects often coupled with the *Bildung* genre. If narratives of *Bildung* take their cues “from the discourse of development [and progress] by narrating a convergence of economic development and personal fulfillment,” or by “linking the status of an individual consciousness to the material security of the emerging nation” (Kalliney 171), then Benlyazid finds innovative ways of offering the opposite in *La vida perra*’s Juanita.

Benlyazid’s film adaptation of *La vida perra* destabilizes the *Bildung* genre by scripting Juanita as an anti-*Bildung* protagonist according to two distinct criteria: first, unlike traditional *Bildung* stories – such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795), or Richler’s *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959) – in which the titular protagonist evolves, Juanita does not develop (in fact, she alienates the viewer due to her lack of evolution); and, second, Juanita remains “enchanted” throughout the entire film, as I will explore further below.

Juanita's Lack of Development and Relationship to Time

In *Commonwealth of Letters*, Peter J. Kalliney contends that the anti-*Bildung* is one in which “the narrator and the other human characters never seem to learn any valuable lessons about themselves and the world into which they have stumbled; there is no growth of consciousness, no moment of recognition or disillusionment or self-affirmation” (170). From the film’s opening scene through the final credits, Juanita remains surprisingly constant and, thus, she fits Kalliney’s description. Juanita accomplishes the surprising feat of witnessing a period of monumental geopolitical shifts without evolving much herself. Those transitions include the end of Tangier’s status as an international and cultural hub; the Spanish Civil War and World War II; and Morocco’s so-called Arabization at the end of the colonial era,⁴ wherein the population around her began the process of reclaiming (or perhaps just claiming) an Arab identity.

In the third portion of the film, Juanita, whose identity is distinctly European in nature, is unmoved by the increasingly present Arab influences around her. For instance, she is shown walking about the city or through an Arab open-air market, surrounded by more overtly visible Arab dress and language, but still ruminating on the trivial gossip of her past. She does not notice or remark on any of the changes Benlyazid highlights and her presence in the story becomes more and more out of place. Juanita, as a sort of anachronism, offers an alternative to the male *Bildung* protagonist who experiences linear development alongside his nation and presents us with a singular notion of temporality. Further, Juanita’s meditations on and simultaneous movement through her city can be read as a feminist break from the progress-oriented ideals of the *Bildung* genre, more generally.

Juanita’s lack of development is also consistently visible on screen on a level more personal to her. In one striking example, we see how Juanita’s fixation on her rivalry with her

sister, Elena, prevents her from confronting pivotal life events. When her mother dies, Juanita is too distracted by her sister to mourn their mother's death. At the funeral, Juanita's thoughts drift away from the ceremony and eulogy. Instead, she mentally accuses Elena of putting on some sort of act and of being obsessed with sex. She criticizes Elena's actions with "Se cree moderna."⁵ Juanita's critique of her sister reflects her acceptance of her social role as a conservative, anti-modern woman.

Juanita's fixed identity and lack of change are also visible as she refuses to develop an awareness of current events. At lunch following her mother's funeral, Juanita tells her family of her friend's precarious situation due to the Spanish Civil War. Her friend, Sagrario, has been raped by Spanish soldiers and Juanita is trying to find a way to smuggle Sagrario some cigarettes. Juanita's concern for Sagrario is cut short when she notices Elena flirting with her most recent boyfriend. Elena's actions cause Juanita to abruptly lose interest in Sagrario's situation and she mentally digresses. Juanita's internal accusations resurface, but this time Elena is guilty of speaking with a fake accent in an effort to seem less Spanish or to "pass" for something else. Juanita's inner monologue claims, "Se cree muy fina."

In each of these examples, Juanita demonstrates that she is immutable to the life-changing events around her. She is fixated on comparing herself to her sister, even in the face of geopolitical shifts and her mother's death, or when she is grappling with the distressing news about a friend's rape. Later, in the section of this paper dedicated to the storyline pertaining to the city of Tangier, we will see how the city complicates the relationship between permanence and change and offers a more nuanced understanding of personal development.

In another study on the *Bildungsroman*, Derek Lee describes the genre as a narrative of disenchantment in which the protagonist is forced, through the coming-of-age process, to

reconcile a variety of competing forces. As previous scholars have observed, “[the] premodern world gave way to forces of scientific and instrumental rationality, secularism, individualism, and the bureaucratic state – all of which, combined, disenchant the world” (Bennett 7).

Definitions such as this one allow us to read the anti-*Bildung* as a story of enchantment (Lee 552). Juanita’s anti-*Bildung* is a narrative in which she is enchanted with the banal. We have seen how she fixates on her sister’s behavior and is completely out of touch with the reality around her. She can also be said to continually obsesses over matters of little consequence.

Juanita’s fascination with the banal keeps her in a state “enchantment.” The spectator hears her inner chatter, thanks to a voice-over, as she tries to get inside Elena’s head, perform an analysis of how Elena sees herself, and diagnose her. In fact, she chatters out loud so consistently that there is rarely a moment of silence from the film’s start to finish. This chatter is present when Juanita is dealing with life-changing events, such as her mother’s death and the sexual assault of a friend; it is a constant reminder that she is distracted and enchanted with her own inconsequential inner monologue. The end result is that we hear Juanita’s chatter refer to atrocious war crimes disaffectedly – the topic of a friend’s rape is somehow turned into casual conversation. Similarly, she continues to visit her mother’s grave regularly throughout the film, but only to fill her in on the neighborhood gossip. When the news she reports to her mother’s headstone turns towards something serious, like the arrival of fascists to the city, she gets easily sidetracked.

Juanita’s anti-*Bildung* story is not that of a failed *Bildung*; in a narrative of failed *Bildung*, the protagonist embarks on a formative journey and seeks change but remains stuck in a state of “arrested development” or frozen in his or her youth.⁶ Juanita’s trajectory differs from that of a failed *Bildung* because at the outset of her story, her character, though young, is not

particularly youthful. Even at a young age, Juanita imagines that she is fully formed and could not embark on a formative journey even if she wanted to, making it impossible for her to become frozen in a youthful state.

Benlyazid contrasts Juanita against her sister to establish that, despite Juanita's youth, she is not youthful. Elena's activities underscore the extent to which Juanita represents the traditional values of an older generation. While Elena leaves the Narboni home to go shopping with friends or to go on dates with young men, Juanita observes Elena's life and vacillates between disapproval of her sister's choices and jealousy. In one scene, she attributes their differences in behavior to Elena's lack of reception to the "educación" their mother attempted to instill in them. Juanita chuckles at the notion that her sister thinks of herself as modern due to her choices and implies that she comports herself more "correctly" than her sister. Juanita's unquestioning obedience to the social norms of her mother's teachings and, thus, to the ideas that belonged to someone of another time, transform her into a sort of old soul in her context. As the film unfolds, Juanita's non-belonging only becomes clearer.

Juanita admits that she is a bit of an anachronism in her time. She demonstrates many of the conservative values one would associate with older generations. For instance, in the opening scene to the film she refuses to go on a walk with a single man. These traditional views regarding "appropriate" interactions with men are atemporal and continue throughout the duration of the film. Because Juanita is outside of her time, her anti-*Bildung* story allows us to ask how Benlyazid's film complicates the progress-focused nature of the *Bildung* genre.

Juanita consciously recognizes that her choices, while more "correct" according to the standards set by the previous generation, are outliers when compared to those of women of her generation. Her views of herself become clear when she goes to lunch with her father. She

watches an older woman, Mme. Maubert, flirt with a much younger man. She makes it evident to her father that she does not approve and he replies, “Es una mujer del mundo, viuda y rica. ¿Se va a quedar encerrada en casa?” His views of Mme. Maubert’s decisions are antithetical to Juanita’s; if she thinks Mme. Maubert is violating a social code, his opinion is anti-traditional. Juanita replies bitterly, “Sí claro. Y como Juanita ni es viuda ni es rica se tiene que quedar en casa sola.” The irony of her statement lies in the fact that she is the only one preventing herself from going out. She goes on to admit that she has inherited her mother’s conservative values, making her father and Mme. Maubert seem youthful when compared to her.

La vida perra offers an interpretation of time that upends the temporal ideals posited by the classical *Bildungsroman*. When Juanita meditates on Tangier through time, she offers a vision of temporality wherein permanence is present yet fleeting. In particular, Juanita says of Tangier, “Esta ciudad es como un sueño, todo puede pasar, pero nada dura.” She relegates Tangier to an undying, dreamlike, eternal space. However, immediately following that observation, she calls into question the eternity of the city, thereby introducing the possibility that the only thing that is permanent in Tangier is impermanence.

Juanita is, as Emily Apter has described, *démodée* in her place and time. Apter explains the *démodé* “as a mechanism that makes possible the radical dispossession of time. There is a temporal violence to outdated; when it erupts, it loosens periodicity’s possessive perimeters around spots of time and releases arrested imagines into the future” (15-16). Juanita and her understanding of Tangier are both unpossessed by neat temporal boundaries or by the notions of time that we associate with the advent of modernity and the *Bildung* genre. Juanita’s anti-*Bildung* introduces the possibility of Apter’s “radical dispossession” of masculine temporalities.

In perhaps the most striking examples, Juanita is meandering through the city and

Benlyazid actively gestures at the city's layered history with shots of the Casbah, a painting by Matisse, and unmistakable references to Paul Bowles (Martin, 130-31). Each of these scenes points to the historical residue that remains imbedded in the city, regardless of its mutability through time. Juanita's fixed state, which is then juxtaposed against her internalization of the city's change over time, works to undo the consolidation of time typically associated with the *Bildung* genre.

Each of these points – related to Juanita's lack of development, enchantment, anachronistic view of herself, and *démodé* status – contributes to the undoing of progress-oriented ideals traditionally associated with the *Bildungsroman*. Instead, Juanita's anti-*Bildung* story leaves viewers with a more complex proposition, wherein the passage of time does not necessarily imply the development of a person or character.

Juanita's Non-National, Regional and Local Identities and Relationship to Place

A reading of Juanita's story as that of an anti-*Bildung* allows us to see how her narrative also destabilizes the fixity of the notion of national identity that is central to the traditional *Bildung* genre. Juanita's identification with her city presents Tangier as an exception to national categories. Her understanding of her identity as municipal and regional genders nationalism by presenting us with these feminist alternatives. She feels enmeshed enough in her city to claim an identity rooted in Tangier and to foreground the city over and above alternate geographic roots. Similarly, her sense of place of origin lies not only in geography, but in a predilection for certain ideals or a disposition towards a certain temperament. In other words, rather than imagining herself as part of a nation, she is nostalgic for her mother's worldview, which she associates with a specific regional identity – Andalusian. The overall effect of Juanita's identity, as it relates to her place of origins, is to gender the masculine *Bildung* project of nation-formation. As we will

see in what follows, the importance of national identity (traditionally associated with the *Bildungsroman*) gives way to her more local, historically rooted identities of origin. Juanita's anti-*Bildung* serves to reveal the arbitrariness of national identities and, thus, national boundaries.

Throughout the course of Juanita's lifetime, Morocco gains full independence from each of the European powers that previously had a foothold there. Alongside independence, Moroccan officials worked to consolidate the country's status as a nation-state with policies that sought to inject nationalism into the identities of its citizens. However, Juanita's identity lies outside the bounds of her national origins. The viewer first gets a glimpse of Juanita's lack of identification with the concept of nation in the film's opening scene. She explains her family dynamics to her French dance partner, who seems to be a stranger, at a lively garden party. He starts by asking, "Tu es de Tanger?" to which she replies, "Oui, ça se voit vous n'êtes pas d'ici... à Tanger nous nous connaissons tous."⁷ He discloses the reason he admires Tangier: "Des jeunes filles espagnoles, italiennes, anglaises, françaises et une plage merveilleuse." He then switches without hesitation into Spanish, "Y tú, eres española, no?," and she responds, "Llanita,⁸ de Gibraltar... inglesa de segunda... mitad inglesa, mitad española. ¡Juanita de Tánger es lo que soy!" The notion of a national identity does not seem to resonate with her; she belongs to multiple nations and simultaneously to no particular nation in a way that destabilizes the fixity of national limits altogether. Her identity is informed by each of the influences she lists, but is also external to each of them. Instead, she sees herself as Tangeroise, or Tangier-ian.

For Juanita, Tangier is an exception to national categories.⁹ Her opinions on this exceptionalism have been echoed by Michel Peraldi, who has claimed that the Tangier of Juanita's lifetime was "très peu national" or that the internationality of the city was "l'excès de la

nation” (8). In the film, Tangier’s exceptionalism is accessible to the viewer both visually and in Juanita’s dance partner’s comments. Visually, we see the party’s other guests, who are both diverse and fairly homogeneous. With the exception of one man in traditional Moroccan garb, most of them seem to represent the same social and economic elite of European descent. However, Juanita’s French dance partner emphasizes the various nationalities of individuals who make up the city. While his view of Tangier underscores the diversity of the city, he also notably only lists European nationalities, which betrays his Eurocentric gaze.

In a completely different scenario, Juanita claims a regional identity: Andalusian. In the early 700s AD, much of the Iberian Peninsula (what is Spain and Portugal today) was under Islamic rule. The Moorish rule of the Peninsula shrunk for the next 700 years due to the Spanish Reconquista, but for a very long time Northern Morocco and Southern Spain were united and part of the same empire. In claiming an Andalusian identity, Juanita alludes to the long-shared histories of the places that inform how she sees herself. To be Andalusian is, in many ways, to imagine one’s place of origin outside of the schema of national origin.

Juanita invokes her Andalusian roots when she compares herself to her sister. She brings it up in the same conversation she has with her father over lunch about Mme. Maubert: “Sí Daddy, tú eres más inglés, más abierto que Mamá. Yo soy un poco como Mamá... más andaluza... muy clásica.” She equates this Andalusian, regional identity with her mother’s legacy, associating regional identities, more broadly, to femininity. She also creates an association between Andalusian identity and a particular moral code or value system: for Juanita, to be something other than Andalusian is to be more “open.” She imagines her father as “English” and, thus, as belonging more neatly to a national category, suggesting that she unconsciously connects his nationality to masculinity.

Juanita's Multilingual Environment and Relationship to Language

Benlyazid deploys language and, specifically, linguistic multiplicity to highlight Juanita's anti-*Bildung* journey and to undermine the language consolidation process that typically accompanies masculine narratives of formation. The story's linguistic multiplicity is most clearly visible when examined in relation to the structure of Juanita's family; the family's linguistic patterns throw into question the idea that someone can belong to a singular language and that one's language should correspond to one's national identity. The linguistic mosaic that Juanita inhabits and Benlyazid underscores are a feminist alternative, characterized by plurality, to the *Bildungsroman*'s project of social and linguistic consolidation (Moretti, 49).

In one scene, the Narboni family is at home getting ready for dinner. Juanita's father calls her into the living room in Spanish. She replies, "Just a minute, Daddy!" in English. He yells back, "Nada de un minuto, ven inmediatamente, come at once!" and he orders her to stop what she is doing while translating his own thought process mid-sentence. After Juanita sits down across from him and her sister Elena, he says, "Tengo que hablar con vosotras de un tema muy serio," and Juanita cries out, "What's happened? ¡Por Dios!" bilingually. He explains that Europe is at war (referring to both the Spanish Civil War and the beginnings of what would later be referred to as the Second World War) and that Franco's government has begun to occupy the city of Tangier. The two daughters, Juanita and Elena, listen respectfully as their father tells them to be cautious, but they do not seem at all moved by what he has to say. When the conversation ends, their father invites them to sit down for dinner and everyone goes on as if the conversation had been more or less inconsequential.

Juanita's father's tone throughout the scene is didactic and instructional. As he informs his daughters of the shifts in geopolitics, he also lectures them on what to do with the

information. The exchange, and his disinterest in cultivating a dialogue, reminds us that Juanita and her sister have been relegated to the metaphorical sidelines. However, Juanita and Elena also fail to push back against the position that is assigned to them. Juanita's lack of reaction or response to her father's news prompts us to recall her anti-*Bildung* as it is related to both her lack of development and her state of enchantment: first, we discern the degree to which she is consistently unshaped by world events; second, the ease with which she allows the subject to be changed reminds us of her preoccupation with the banal. Juanita's anticipation of the news ("What's happened? ¡Por Dios!") was a far stronger than her reaction to the content of her father's report.

What is of note in this scene (and in the scene described previously where Juanita is dancing with a Frenchman) is the lack of linguistic boundaries between languages traditionally associated with specific nation-states. Throughout the film, we learn that Juanita's family's linguistic dynamics are even more complicated than what she let on to her dance partner or than what we see in this scene. Her sister, Elena, was educated in the French *lycée* system and she prefers speaking French. Although Juanita judges her sister for this preference, she and her other family members understand Elena perfectly. The family's maid, Hamruch, evolves into a part of Juanita's family throughout the film and she turns into Juanita's most reliable companion. Based on Hamruch's speech, accent, and inflection patterns, we guess that she likely grew up speaking the local dialect of Arabic. Hamruch also speaks an Arabicized version of Spanish but only receives replies in Spanish or French.¹⁰

Importantly, in certain scenes, the film includes Haketia, which is now considered an endangered language of Judeo and Romance origins. In her review of Benlyazid's film, in which she evaluates it alongside Vázquez's original, Nora Glickman writes:

Farida Benlyazid logra una adaptación fiel a los coloridos modismos tangerinos, y en particular fiel a la *yaquetía*, que caracteriza a su protagonista a través de expresiones de cariño (“mejorado te veas, mi bueno”), o de maldiciones como “se te caiga el *massaj*” (de “mazal” o suerte, en hebreo). [...] El lenguaje tangerino de Juanita, como el de su creador, refleja la coexistencia de formas alternativas de expresión. Es un mestizaje lingüístico que caracteriza vivamente a la protagonista en sus constantes repeticiones, muletillas, aumentativos y diminutivos. (170; italics in original)

As Glickman shows, the presence of Haketia in the film, in addition to the language’s coexistence alongside so many other languages, dialects, and modes of expression, provides the viewer with a linguistic environment that is uniquely Tangerian. The Tangerian modes of expression throughout the film reinforce the idea that Juanita’s identity is municipal. The linguistic hybridization disentangles the frequent false conflation of language with nation and highlights the extent to which notions of linguistic purity are myths or constructs.

The family’s comfort across languages, ease switching between them, and use of either a variety or a hybridization of languages at multiple registers highlight the oversimplifications we make when we assume that linguistic categories are fixed entities. We see that members of this family do not have what some would refer to as a “mother tongue” and cannot really be classified as “native speakers” of one, single language.¹¹ Thus, throughout Juanita’s anti-*Bildung* story, we are exposed to a variety of languages and to slippages between language categories. This linguistic variation invites us to question the language consolidation that had previously been associated with the *Bildung* genre. The film’s intentional multilingualism is not only distinct from linguistic environments presented in other *Bildung* stories, its plurality and hybrid nature are feminist substitutes to the prior masculine model.

As we have seen, Juanita’s anti-*Bildung* story undermines the traditional boundaries of the *Bildungsroman* genre along several axes: first, through Juanita’s lack of development, enchantment and relationship to time; second, thanks to Juanita’s privileging of municipal and

regional identity over national identity; and, third, due to the linguistic multiplicity that characterizes Juanita's environment, familial or otherwise. Each of these interventions contributes to the manner in which Benlyazid genders the *Bildung* genre through Juanita's anti-Bildung story. As we will see next, the other half of the story, which exists in parallel to Juanita's and belongs to Tangier, makes equally important additions to this feminist project.

The City of Tangier and a *Bildung* Story

In addition to Juanita's *Bildung* story, a second narrative of *Bildung* evolves throughout *La vida perra*. In the introduction to *The Voyage In*, the authors have shown how "fictions of female development may revise the concept of protagonist," as "women characters [...] sometimes share their voyage with friends, sisters, or mothers, who assume equal status as protagonists" (12). Throughout Benlyazid's film, the city of Tangier is protagonized alongside Juanita and, arguably, claims a more traditional *Bildung* journey than she does. The film uncovers the possibility of adding to the notion of shared *Bildung* experience, typically found in fictions of female development, by incorporating a non-anthropocentric *Bildung* story. As we will see in what follows, Benlyazid protagonizes Tangier as a character who shifts and adjusts, which contributes to our understanding of the shape of the *Bildung* genre. Additionally, the story in which Tangier is the protagonist adds to the questions raised in our analysis of Juanita's anti-*Bildung* story. Like Juanita before her, Tangier offers us alternatives related to the temporal, national, and linguistic/cultural consolidation we typically find in the *Bildungsroman*.

Personifying Tangier

The role of the city in *La vida perra* has been examined in previous scholarship, especially regarding the additional importance Benlyazid ascribes to it compared to Vázquez's novel (Martin, "Farida" 130). As Véronique Bonnet states: "The film rewriting of Ángel

Vázquez's literary work by the Moroccan film direction, Farida Benlyazid, makes of Tangier one of the driving elements of the film" (81). The city's importance in the narrative can be taken one step further. When she is viewed as a second protagonist, the city's *Bildung* story provides a feminist lens for the genre.

In Benlyazid's film, Tangier is a protagonist with a distinct personality and the other characters see her as a living being. In both a linguistic and feminist move, the city is personified in a feminine manner, perhaps unsurprisingly considering that *la ciudad*, *la ville* and المدينة (al-medina) are all gendered feminine in Spanish, French, and Arabic, respectively. However, the Tangier that Juanita and Benlyazid know and love comes alive to a point where the city requires more than the assigning of a gender or the use of a pronoun. Instead, Tangier can be said to have her own coming-of-age process thanks to the changes she undergoes. Her story, like Juanita's, moves away from the traditional, male-centered model to destabilize the world of which she is a part.

Most notably, the protagonist Benlyazid creates is hospitable, multiple, and flexible. In an interview with Hamid Aïdouni, Benlyazid is quoted describing her childhood in Tangier. She mentions the amicable coexistence of the three major monotheistic religions and describes the identity of Tangier as "multiple" (Benlyazid et al. 28). This view of Tangier spills over into her work and is clearly visible through *La vida perra*. In one scene, before Juanita's mother passes away, she gets irritated and makes an unintelligible comment about the Jewish population of the city, to which Juanita replies, "¡Anda mamá! ¡Tu siempre has dicho que lo que más te gusta de Tánger es que todas las religiones son iguales!" They go on to discuss the manner in which all religions, including their own Christian faith, have their "cuentos." Because this scene puts "all religions" on equal footing and claims that each has its own elements of truth, Tangier comes

into view as a city that accommodates all people, regardless of their spiritual inclination.

Benlyazid uses both visual and audio elements of the film to accomplish her personification of the city. When Juanita leaves the house and walks through the streets, the viewer sees people of all ages, dress styles, origins, and socio-economic categories. Shortly after the film begins, it cuts to Juanita's white, European-style heels, as she struggles to move quickly along cobblestone streets. Next to her feet, we see the feet of men walking in their *babouches*, or regional footwear. As she runs to catch a movie, she passes a Moroccan tile fountain; a pair of individuals wearing straw hats that are generally associated with the Amazight population in the Rif region; another pair of individuals who look like they could be a Catholic priest and nun; veiled women; a man wearing a black fedora (who may or may not be a conservative Jew); an older man with his mule; and an older couple in European clothing, carrying a small dog. These individuals, who represent a stunning variety of people, are all present in the same part of town and go about their affairs without drawing attention to themselves. The city does not distinguish or discriminate between people; instead, people walk freely through her streets.

Tangier's Development and Relationship to Time

The city's personification allows us to see her as a body that has been marked by social and political changes. For example, Tangier and her body are more affected by the war than Juanita or any other member of the Narboni family. While Juanita, Elena, and their father witness the wars and remain distanced from them, Tangier takes on the shape of a woman's body, raped by outsiders. This metaphor for invasion and colonization is not unique. Frantz Fanon described the arrival of the European colonizers (specifically the French) to Algeria in the same fashion when he penned "Algeria Unveiled," originally published in French in 1959:

Chaque voile qui tombe, chaque corps qui se libère de l'étreinte traditionnelle du *haïk*, chaque visage qui s'offre au regard hardi et impatient de l'occupant expriment en négatif

que l'Algérie commence à se renier et accepte le viol du colonisateur. (25)

In the film, Juanita's father does not lament the city's rape in the same fashion; he would not have argued that she belonged to non-colonial powers, but rather that she was being violated by Spanish militants. His view of Tangier and the violence that is being inflicted upon her is most visible when he tells his daughters of the fate that befell their family friend:

¡Ahora ellos son los dueños de esta ciudad, y tienen sus métodos! Son unos fanáticos...unos bárbaros. No sabéis cuánto siento tener que deciros...han fusilado Encarna. Se la llevaron a Tetuán, con otros...dicen que son rojos. Los mataron a todos. Rojos. Consiguieron Tánger, y ahora nuestras vidas como regalo.

Tangier, her landscape, and her mood are shaped by the arrival of the Spanish forces, even if the Narboni family does not feel the repercussions of the war directly.

The personification of Tangier not only allows us to see the city as a second protagonist alongside Juanita, but also provides the viewer with a theory of time that contradicts the one outlined in *Bildung* stories of the late 1800s and early 1900s. Tangier develops in such a way that we cannot graft a linear concept of progress onto her evolution. Instead, the city's *Bildung* and its disruptive chronotope evoke a different notion of development and time. In this way, *La vida perra* introduces a feminist critique of previous *Bildung* stories by showing how time can and should produce something other than a linear trajectory. For Tangier, time meanders, folds back in on itself, produces repetition, moves laterally instead of always forward, and invites a questioning of the geopolitics of periodization.

La vida perra gestures at feminist understandings of time while also resisting allegiance with any one particular theory of "women's time." The film undertakes the feminist goal of critiquing the masculine projects associated with traditional iterations of the *Bildung* genre because it "se situe hors du temps linéaire des identités qui communiquent par projection et revendication" (Kristeva 9). Unlike the traditional sub-genre of novels, in which the

protagonist's coming-of-age is paired with the consolidation of a progress-oriented ideal, Tangier's story reminds us of Kristeva's 1979 essay, "Women's Time," where she argues that "female subjectivity is divided between cyclical, natural time (repetition, gestation, the biological clock) and monumental time (eternity, myths of resurrection, the cult of maternity)" (Qtd. in Apter 3). These ideas stand in sharp contrast to the project of *Bildung*, wherein we can discern a linear evolution of both the protagonist and his or her nation toward the author's understanding of a fully-realized, mature self.

In an interview with Michel Amarger, Benlyazid addressed the philosophy of cyclical time in Tangier explicitly: "Tanger renaît toujours de ses cendres comme le Phénix." This vision of rebirth and cycles is visible throughout the film as the political situation in the city changes. Tangier, the protagonist, seems to be experimenting with possible identities (international hub, colonial stronghold, war zone, nationalist/Arab city) and then discarding them when they no longer suit her. Although breaking her story up into these "periods" may represent a non-feminist periodization of the city's phases, it allows us to see the rebirth (to use Benlyazid's term) of the city as she cycles into and then back out of each historical moment.

Through all of these cycles, the notion of monumental time remains present and complementary to the rhythm of rebirth. A portion of the city's personification lies in Benlyazid's allusions to the city's mosaiced past and resilience in the face of change. The city's history stretches back much further than that of any of its inhabitants and, by the time the film starts, she has been occupied by Carthaginian, Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Portuguese, and other European colonizers and subjected to new codes of conduct and structural edifices with each wave of settlers. Despite the constant death and rebirth due to perpetual colonization, Tangier has absorbed the shrapnel left behind by these varying groups and persisted as an eternal presence.

The same can be said of the Tangier we see throughout *La vida perra*: while Tangier's mood is altered by the global crisis that arrives on her shores, she is resilient and eternal.

Tangier's Extranational Identity

A similar argument can be made regarding the story's implications for the notion of national identity; that is to say, Tangier's story destabilizes notions of fixed national identity. The other characters throughout the story echo Juanita's sentiment when she exclaimed "Juanita de Tánger es lo que soy!" The effect is that we see a Tangier who imagines herself outside of national boundaries. When the Spanish Civil War and WWII reach Tangier, Juanita's father informs his daughters of the potential changes to the city's political milieu. He tells them he does not know if Tangier will reserve its status as an international city. He lists the countries involved in the wars, as if to blame them for the city's current predicament, and says, "Y ahora regalan Tánger, la perla del Norte de África, a Franco." At the time he made this remark, Tangier was a Spanish colonial city but it had spent 16 years as an international, jointly administered zone.

In his exclamation, Juanita's father fears Tangier will lose its international status. However, as Florence Martin has pointed out, Benlyazid calls on the city's history with visual representations of culturally important moments ("Farida" 130-31). By including references to figures as varied as Henri Matisse, Emily Keene, Paul Bowles, and Mohamed Mrabet, Benlyazid alludes to the city's ability to accommodate change; she reminds the viewer how Tangier has been consistently shaped by extranational forces (even though some of these ambitions contributed to the consolidation of national projects).

Benlyazid's Tangier bears the residue and scars of centuries of international influence. These intentional references, chronicled through a rich cinematographic experience, seem to upend the notion that she could ever be anything but extranational. Paired with new theories of

time, they allow Benlyazid to leave the viewer with a version of Tangier that will remain external to nation regardless of other changes that may affect her. Instead, Tangier will allow the sets of boundaries imposed by outside forces to remain in tension with one another and unreconciled.

Tangier's Multilingual Environment and Relationship to Language

Benlyazid's use of visual elements on screen are not the only tactics she uses to personify the city throughout the film. She also makes innovative use of sound to mirror much of the personification described above. Part of that mirroring takes place linguistically at the level of the conversation between characters. In the section on Juanita's anti-*Bildung*, we saw how the family communicates in a triglossic collage that consists of a mix of Spanish, English, and French. However, other languages and dialects are present (albeit to a lesser extent) throughout the film's duration. Most notably, Hamruch speaks the local dialect of Arabic, *darija*, and she communicates in her own Arabic-Spanish hybridization.¹² Arabic is also sprinkled throughout the film in the lines of other characters. The linguistic variants add to Tangier's personification as a hospitable character.

The multiplicity of the city is also registered at the level of the city's other soundscapes. For example, the film opens with lively music that reflects the city's status as an international hub. Before Tangier is affected by the wars in Europe, Juanita, Esther, and Hamruch (three women of three different faiths) sing one another's songs together in the Narboni courtyard. When soldiers arrive to the city, Tangier's mood is reflected in somber music and other sounds that inspire malaise: a cat screeching, Winston Churchill on the radio, or a woman crying. The end of the war is marked with a change on both the visual and audio levels. The screen cuts to a view of the city from the water and the viewer hears the sound of the ocean coupled with a fog

horn. This person-less scene indicates a shift in time and, in the next scene, the family is out at a social gathering in the presence of upbeat music. It appears that the war is over and the city has re-found her lively gait. Finally, in the last portion of the film, Morocco has gained independence from European powers. Tangier, along with the rest of the country, is considering assuming an identity that is more heavily informed by Arab influences. Again, the sounds of the city highlight a shift in her identity: Juanita goes to the *souk* and we hear the sounds of the traditional open-air market and she attends a wedding where all of the music is rooted in North African culture.

These shifts undo the myths of monolingualism or monoculturalism that often accompany *Bildung* stories. The sounds that accompany Tangier's *Bildung* do not begin scattered and multiple in order to slowly make their way towards homogeneity; instead, Tangier experiments with multiculturalism and multilingualism. Although the end of the story points toward the city's desire to claim a more Arab identity, Benlyazid opens up the possibility, or even likelihood, that Tangier will never find a fixed identity or express herself in a single language. Instead, the city is content with her multilingual identity.

Conclusion

When the film closes, Juanita may have finally gained access to a higher plane of knowledge, but it is too late. In the last few scenes of the film, Juanita's most reliable friend and sidekick, Hamruch, does not come to work. In a fit of worry, Juanita realizes that she has no way of finding her. Up to this point, Hamruch has been steadily present in Juanita's life and is the only character who remains close to Juanita. (Juanita had even previously offered to have Hamruch move in to the Narboni home because they spent all of their time together.)

On the day that Hamruch disappears, Juanita wanders around the Casbah inquiring after her. She finds herself in a part of town she had never visited before. When asked by Casbah-

dwellers, she cannot answer any questions about Hamruch's personal life: the two women have been companions for over 30 years, but Juanita does not know Hamruch's last name, her address, who else might have information on her whereabouts, or the names of her children. Juanita is left utterly alone, with only one remaining companion: her city.

Juanita's *moment d'apprentissage* is presented as entirely futile. In this last chapter of Juanita's life, Hamruch's disappearance startles her into the realization that she has been out of touch. This is, arguably, her only learning moment, but she is now alone and has no relationships left to which she could apply this newly-found knowledge. Benlyazid helps us to see that it is too late by ending the film and leaving the question about Juanita's awakening unanswered. The viewer is left with a feminist call-to-arms. As Juanita wanders aimlessly, the city of Tangier around her remains as vibrant as ever. Benlyazid implies that the cycles, permanence, and impermanence of the city will continue even after Juanita's days are over. The only thing that feels certain for the city is the uncertainty of the future.

Each half of Benlyazid's double-*Bildung* narrative provides us with a distinct combination of alternatives to the projects of progress, nation, and linguistic purity. When viewed together, the result is Benlyazid's feminist critique of the masculine agenda traditionally associated with the *Bildung* genre. As we have seen, the form and content of the film open up the possibility of gendering theories of development. Benlyazid's work not only provides a feminist alternative to traditional coming-of-age stories, but also adds to previous studies on female fictions of development.¹³

¹ Referred to as such because each piece of the trilogy features a different Moroccan city. The trilogy consists of "(1) *Bab Al-Sama Maftuh* (1988) on the holy Moroccan city of Fez; (2) *Casa ya Casa !* (2002) on the corrupt financial capital of Morocco; (3) *La vida perra de Juanita de Tanger* (2005) on the cosmopolitan Moroccan city of Tangier" (Martin, *Screens and Veils* 64).

² For more information on Vázquez's novel and the intertextual relationship between the novel and its film adaptation, see articles by Bonnet and Linhard.

³ All of her work, starting with her first production, *Identité de femme* (1979), and including her more commonly-known films, *Bab al-sama' maftooh* (1989) and *Keïd Ensa* (1999), engages feminist themes.

⁴ Arabization is most commonly discussed with regards to changes in language education policy. See Sirles.

⁵ The transcriptions of dialogue from the film are mine.

⁶ Previous scholarship has, at times, conflated narratives of anti-*Bildung* with those of failed *Bildung* (Scarpino). I distinguish between the two descriptors based on the protagonist's potential for change. In a narrative of failed *Bildung*, the protagonist demonstrates potential for change but fails to develop.

⁷ Juanita rarely speaks French during the film; typically, her lines are in Spanish.

⁸ Spanish word that refers to the inhabitants of Gibraltar, located at the tip of the Iberian Peninsula.

⁹ This view of Tangier is notable in light of recent narratives, such as Tahar Ben Jelloun's *Partir* (2006). Here, the protagonist migrates to Spain and mourns the extent to which Tangier has become Moroccan; for this protagonist, Tangier is too Moroccan and not an exception to nation at all.

¹⁰ For more on linguistic imbalances between Hamruch and the family and the relationship between these imbalances and the colonial environment, see Bonnet.

¹¹ See Chow.

¹² See Bonnet on the role of Hamruch's speech, especially as it concerns her position as a colonial subject (88-89).

¹³ See Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland's *The Voyage in: Fictions of Female Development* (1983).

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