

A Secondary Ghost: Gibraltar in *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni*, by Ángel Vázquez

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Abstract

This paper addresses Ángel Vázquez's novel *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (1976), a first-person account of several decades in the life of Juanita Narboni Cortés, a middle-class *tangerina* of mixed Andalusian/Gibraltarian parentage. I argue that despite Juanita's distance from her Gibraltarian father, Gibraltar represents a kind of specter, physically distant but insistently "present" through her memories and family ties, and through interpersonal, economic, and cultural connections between Tangier and the Rock. I first describe Juanita's role as a personification and mirror of late-colonial Tangier. I then explain how we can understand the novel as a ghost story of sorts. I also argue here that Juanita's Gibraltarian father and Gibraltar itself "haunt" the narrative, with a good deal of this haunting being mediated through photographs. Finally, I analyze the novel's conclusion to show how Juanita's desperate attempt to locate a photograph of her mother, and her unexpected encounter with a paperweight, an object associated with her father and with Gibraltar, suggests that she must come to terms, at least partially, with the memory of her father—and by extension, with Gibraltar. I contend that despite Juanita's centering of her narrative on her mother and Andalusia, by attending to her references to her father and to Gibraltar, we open the novel to an alternate reading that helps us recover these "secondary ghosts," and that complicates Juanita's resolute self-identification with Andalusia. Similarly, we unmask Juanita's *andalucismo* and disavowal of her ties to Gibraltar as a late-colonial fantasy of an erstwhile "Spanish" Tangier that was never entirely Spanish, but is rather a city whose numerous "ghosts," including the Rock, cannot be extirpated from its literary memory.

Keywords: Ángel Vázquez; *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni*; Tangier; Gibraltar; Andalusia; ghosts.

The third and final novel published by Ángel Vázquez, *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* (1976), has been referred to as an "obra prodigiosa, insólita, original y hasta . . . obra maestra" (Trueba in Vázquez 97), and a "novela emblemática de Tánger" (García 42)—indeed, one of the finest written by a *tangerino*, as opposed to one of the city's many literary visitors.¹ A feverish, not-strictly-chronological, first-person account, this novel spans several decades in the life of Juanita Narboni Cortés, a middle-class *tangerina* of mixed parentage. Juanita's unnamed Andalusian mother, whom she idolizes, was born in San Roque (Cádiz), while her unnamed father, from whom she is more distant, is from Gibraltar. The uncertain origin of her father's surname adds to this textual ambiguity; Narboni is said to be Genoese, thus speaking to the history of Genoese immigration to the Rock, though alternately, it may be Sephardic.²

Though deemphasized in favor of Andalusia, Gibraltar, personified by Juanita's father and his relatives, nonetheless represents a kind of specter, physically distant from Juanita, but insistently "present" through her memories and family ties and through interpersonal, economic, and cultural connections between Tangier and the Rock. Hence, my description in this paper of Juanita's father and of Gibraltar as secondary ghosts, in comparison to the novel's "primary ghosts," represented by her mother and Andalusia.

Juanita's identifications and her ties to the "ghost" of Gibraltar are unexplored themes within the relatively scant criticism and commentary that have been dedicated to Vázquez's novel, much of which focuses on the novel's status as an overlooked Spanish literary classic, or on its incorporation of Haketia (i.e., Western Judeo-Spanish) into Juanita's speech. However, references to Gibraltar and Gibraltarians are scattered throughout *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* and elsewhere in Vázquez's work, such as in his first novel, *Se enciende y se apaga una luz* (1962), in which the protagonist is a tangerina whose grandfather, a British subject, was born in Gibraltar. This paper will attempt to address this gap by suggesting that Juanita's narration is a selective reading or creative distortion of her family history—a sort of genealogical fiction, both in the traditional and Nietzschean-Foucauldian senses of genealogy.³ Juanita's centering of her first-person narrative on her mother and Andalusia as the novel's "primary ghosts," at the expense of her father and Gibraltar, seems quite comprehensible, given what she describes as his numerous personal flaws. However, by way of Juanita's references to her father and to Gibraltar, the novel lends itself to an alternate reading, one that helps us recover these "secondary ghosts" and that calls Juanita's resolute self-identification with Andalusia into question. By reading the novel—and particularly its conclusion—against the grain of Juanita's narration, we arrive at the idea that despite her efforts, Juanita cannot ultimately disentangle her mother's and father's stories from one another, nor from her own. Similarly, we unmask Juanita's *andalucismo* and disavowal of her ties to Gibraltar as expressions of a late-colonial fantasy of an erstwhile "Spanish" Tangier, a city that was in fact never entirely Spanish, and whose numerous "ghosts," including the Rock, cannot be extirpated from its literary memory. By extension, this reading prompts us to understand *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* as not only a twentieth-century Spanish novel, or as a novel of late-colonial Tangier, but also as a novel of the "Maghreb-Mediterranean contact zone" of the Western Mediterranean (Tangier, Gibraltar, and Andalusia), to cite Tamalet Talbayev's adaptation of Mary Louise Pratt's term.⁴

Juanita Narboni, *tangerina*

Juanita's mixed parentage and "mestizaje lingüístico" (Trueba qtd. in Vázquez 91)—she punctuates her Andalusian-inflected Spanish with vocabulary and expressions taken from the Haketia of Tangier's Sephardic community, in addition to Arabic, French and occasionally English—mirrors Tangier's cultural and linguistic pluralism during the period of the International Zone. This represents the majority of the time covered in the novel, which per Virginia Trueba, runs from June 6, 1914 to an undefined date in the early 1970s (qtd. in Vázquez 58). Juanita's close association with late-colonial Tangier, "une ville caractérisée par son métissage culturel" (Sagnes-Alem), a city of which she states, "Yo he nacido aquí y aquí moriré" (*Vida perra* 286), is underscored by the dual meaning in the novel of the term *perra*. Echoing the novel's title, Juanita repeatedly describes hers as a *vida perra*—that is, a difficult, onerous, or unfortunate life.⁵ However, the term also evokes a multicultural, multi-confessional Tangier. As Gabriel Maura Gamazo noted in *La cuestión de Marruecos, desde el punto de vista español* (1905), the city was known as "Tánger *la perra*, como la nombran los marroquíes viéndola por tantos cristianos profanada" (qtd. in García 15).⁶ Juanita's *vida perra*, as Vázquez implies, is also an emblematic *vida tangerina*.

Juanita's status in the novel as a personification and mirror⁷ of late-colonial Tangier, "la representación de la ciudad donde pasó toda su vida, la misma que desapareció en 1956 con la disolución del protectorado internacional" (Aliberti 160), and "paradigma del mestizaje cultural europeo del Tánger de entreguerras" (Yborra Aznar 37), is complemented, at least in her mind, by a resolute identification with Spain, and more particularly, with her mother's Andalusian homeland. Spaniards were by far Tangier's largest European community from at least the mid-nineteenth century through 1956, when Morocco regained its independence and Tangier was returned to Moroccan rule. Unlike the French Protectorate, to a significant extent, Spanish language and culture prevailed in colonial-era Tangier—at least among the city's Europeans. Alberto España, writing in *La pequeña historia de Tánger* (1954), notes that "nuestra colonia siempre fue mayor que el triple de las restantes europeas reunidas. A nadie sorprenderá, pues, que en todos los aspectos el idioma y los hábitos españoles se impusieron sin esfuerzo en el ámbito local" (33). As we shall see, this predominance seems to underwrite Juanita's nostalgic vision of a fading international Tangier, in which the city's erstwhile "Spanishness" guaranteed or at least complemented its latter-day racial, ethnic, and religious *convivencia*; her vision, it must be said, is oblivious to or uninterested in the structural inequalities that attended late-colonial Tangerine society, and particularly those that impacted its Muslim residents.⁸ García writes of the "carácter español de la ciudad" (18), and observes that a disproportionate number

of Tangier's Spanish residents had roots in the provinces of Málaga and Cádiz, and more specifically, in the Campo de Gibraltar. Significantly, the Rock of Gibraltar was the Campo's economic hub, despite its status as a British colony.⁹ Indeed, Gibraltar's cosmopolitan civilian population utilized Spanish as a lingua franca through the mid-twentieth century.¹⁰ As Nathalie Sagnes-Alem notes, Vázquez's own family history fits this profile: his maternal grandmother was born in the village of Jubrique (Ronda), and worked for a time in Gibraltar. There she met a Madame Bruzon, a wealthy Frenchwoman whom she accompanied to Tangier as a domestic servant; Vázquez would partially fictionalize this episode in his first novel *Se enciende y se apaga una luz*.

Juanita consistently identifies with her mother and with Spain—and more specifically, with Andalusia, as Vázquez explains in his introduction: “Si bien Juanita Narboni es inglesa de ‘pasaporte’, por haber nacido su padre en Gibraltar, pero con apellido italiano, y ser sus amigas más íntimas todas hebreas, ella es esencialmente española. O mejor: andaluza, como su madre” (120). Moreover, Juanita describes herself and her sister Elena as: “Unas mujeres inglesas de pasaporte, andaluzas de sangre y pasadas por Tánger” (221). Juanita's *andalucismo* is closely linked to her love for her mother, as she explains to a man she meets on the street: “¿Es usted andaluz? Se nota. Yo soy andaluza por parte de madre. ¿De Montejaque? ¡No me diga! Mi pobre mamá era de San Roque. A mí me gusta mucho Andalucía, lo llevo en la sangre, no lo puedo remediar” (282).

Juanita occasionally embraces a cosmopolitan tangerina identity rather than one specifically rooted in Spain or Andalusia. Late in the novel, she refers wistfully to the years of international Tangier: “Esto de ser inglesa siendo española, o española siendo inglesa . . . Antes no existía nada de eso, se decía: soy tangerina, y todos tan contentos” (371). Juanita's “nostalgic cosmopolitanism” suggests a discourse of latter-day Tangerine convivencia under Spanish demographic and cultural dominance that, to her mind, had prevailed between the city's Christian, Jewish, and Muslim populations, but which was presumably ended by the political ascent of the city's Muslim majority with independence, and the large-scale emigration of Europeans and Sephardic Jews, which greatly eroded the city's “Spanish” or “European” character (elhariry and Tamalet Talbayev 7). Rocío Rojas-Marcos Albert states that the novel: “refleja con palabras la agónica muerte de la ciudad internacional enmascarada en el disfraz de esa mujer tan compleja y desestructurada que es Juanita Narboni” (287-88). Juanita expounds on this mestizaje to her friend Dedé Trilby, a tangerino of Gibraltar parentage:

Mira, mi bueno, gracias a Dios hemos nacido en una ciudad donde no somos ni del todo cristianas, ni del todo judías, ni del todo moras. Somos lo que quiere el viento.

Una mezcla. Amigas judías tuvimos que de solteras le pidieron un novio a San Antonio, y amigas moras que te hablaban de Miriam—la Virgen María—y del Arcángel San Gabriel, y cristianas, mi vida, que por matar al marido invocaban a la Aixa Candisha. (378)¹¹

Inasmuch as Juanita glosses over the inequities of late-colonial Tangier and seems oblivious to her degree of privilege as a middle-class tangerina rather than a *tanjawi*,¹² and while her Tangerine cosmopolitanism may not entirely accord with her *andalucismo*, she is consistent in refusing to identify as British or Gibraltarian. This is in spite of the benefits that accrue from her British citizenship and her father's pension from the Consulate, “el dinerito de mierda que nos manda el Imperio Británico” (278), on which she depends for her subsistence, and also in spite of her enthusiasm for British consumer goods, such as the tea and biscuits Dedé acquired via a cousin in Gibraltar.¹³ In the few instances in which Juanita describes herself as *inglesa*, she does so ironically, terming her and her sister “inglesas de pasaporte” (221) or describing herself as “inglesa, soi-disant” (231), while never identifying as *llanita*—which is to say, Gibraltarian.

Just as Juanita's *andalucismo* is closely linked to her love for her mother, her non-identification with Gibraltar seems intimately tied to her misgivings toward her father. As she confesses: “No quiero a papá. Me da terror confesarlo, que Dios me perdone” (142). Further: “Francamente, yo quería más a mamá. Papá, el descansado, siempre fue un hombre muy huraño” (327-28).¹⁴ Juanita's descriptions of her father reveal distance and at times, hostility. She describes him as “el hombre más egoísta del mundo” (217), as anti-social, and as a neglectful alcoholic whom her mother married for his British passport and government job: “por más que disimules . . . si te casaste con papá fue por algo, porque él era inglés, funcionario” (219). She also refers more than once to his physical ugliness. Most seriously, she implies that in the wake of her mother's death, he may have found Juanita sexually desirable. She invokes her deceased mother's protection:

Mamá, mamaíta, tú que estás en los cielos protégeme contra el cerdo libidinoso de tu marido, que dicen que es mi padre . . . Tú no sabes como está hoy daddy, no, no creo que haya bebido, está sentimental . . . y, mira, perdona lo que te voy a decir, es un mal pensamiento y prometo confesarlo al padre Alfonso cuando pueda, yo creo que también está cachondo. (216)

While mentioned just once, this charge is alarming, and illustrates the depth of Juanita's animosity toward her father.

Painting a dark portrait of her father's family overall, Juanita mentions her paternal grandmother twice, once in the novel's first part and once in the second. Her initial, rather tender description of "Grandma Daisy," "una inglesa de pura cepa" (228-29) who lived in Morocco and spoke to the young Juanita in English, gives way to a grotesque second description, in which she describes "Granmamá" as a Gibraltarian, apparently born in Genoa, who visited Tangier just once: "Era una mujer muy grande. Con cara de hombre. Que olía a galletas. Presumía, como buena llanita, de inglesa, aunque parece ser que había nacido en Génova. Nunca se llevó bien con mamá. Algo de su sangre debo de llevar en mis venas" (*Vida perra* 384). While I cannot account for the tonal and factual disparities between these descriptions, I think they likely speak to Juanita's desire, as narrator, to shape her recollections and affirm her ties to her mother and to Andalusia at the expense of her father and Gibraltar. Finally, in chastising her father for favoring her sister Elena, despite what Juanita describes as her promiscuity and eventual abandonment of the family for Casablanca, she alludes to a romantic scandal involving her father's sister Nelly, whose tryst led to her confinement in a Spanish convent. Juanita's tone when "reminding" her deceased father of this episode seems almost gleeful:

¿Crees que no sabemos que se escapó con un tenor la noche que estrenaron en Gibraltar *La canción del olvido*? ¿Y que cuando pidió la separación ante los tribunales de Su Majestad tuvo que enseñar la espalda llena de cardenales delante de Mis Honour? ¿Qué fue la comidilla de toda la calle Real? Muchas lenguas perversas aseguraron que aquéllos no eran cardenales y que ella misma se había producido aquellas manchas aplicándose los parches de Sor Virginia . . . Todo se sabe, mi rey, todo. Pronto no quedará en esta ciudad quien no sepa quién es la gran puta de hija predilecta que tienes, porque, al fin y al cabo, tía Nelly ingresó en el convento de Nuestra Señora de Loreto [en Espartinas, Sevilla], pero ésta, ésta acabará sus días en El Gato Negro. (214-15)

Juanita voices misgivings, not just about her father and his relatives, but also about other Gibraltarians, implying that her negative feelings, while almost certainly rooted in her difficult relationship with her father, extend to *llanitos* in general and Gibraltar at large. After Dedé is murdered, Juanita meets his Gibraltarian cousin (of the tea and biscuits) at the funeral, and describes her with a combination of suspicion, disdain, and envy—as well as some irony—employing the anti-Gibraltarian term "rock scorpion:"

Ésa es la prima. Me mira como si fuera un bicho raro, como si los que han venido al entierro fueran normales. No parece sino que soy yo quien desentono. Te entre un mal. No es fea. Claro, hija, claro que desentono. Soy mujer . . . ¿No te das cuenta,

Dedé? ¿Es que no tienes ojos en la cara? Me gusta tu prima, tiene la mala leche propia de los escorpiones de la roca. (342-43)

In her grotesque description of “Granmamá,” Juanita characterizes her grandmother’s apparent pretensions toward Englishness as typically Gibraltarian: “Presumía, como buena llanita, de inglesa”(384). Notwithstanding Juanita’s consistently negative descriptions of Gibraltarians, beginning with her father, and of Gibraltar at large, the Rock “haunts” her narrative, as we shall see presently.

Ghosts of the Past, Ghosts of the Orient

La vida perra de Juanita Narboni is not a traditional ghost story, in that neither Juanita nor any other character reports seeing a ghost. Nonetheless, it is a “ghostly,” “haunted” text. Juanita’s speech is routinely marked by references to apparitions, visions, and “imaginaciones, espejismos” (170).¹⁵ Of particular interest is her use of the term “fantasma,” which she employs on at least two occasions to refer to Tangier. In the first she conjures the Tangier of the past with a phrase, “fantasmas del pasado, fantasmas del Oriente” (275), that is redolent of Orientalist nostalgia, and in the second, Juanita invokes a “ghostly,” post-1956 Tangier: “Una ciudad por donde los autobuses pasean vacíos es una ciudad fantasma. El cementerio siempre bonito” (344), that is, “a Tangier she no longer recognizes” (Linhard 125).

More substantially, while the majority of Juanita’s “interlocutors” die (her mother, father, Dedé) or vanish (her friend Elena, her *tanjawi* maid Hamruch) in the course of the narrative, she continues to “speak” to them, and these “conversations” with the dead, and particularly with her mother, which Renée Fauveau terms “interior dialogues” or “pseudo-dialogues” (qtd. in Davide Aliberti 160), include Gothic elements. Juanita often talks to her deceased mother about mundane occurrences, or asks her to intercede on her behalf, appealing to her mother and St. Anthony when she loses her house key. But at times, in line with the literary ghost’s essential function as a “figure of unruliness” (Blanco and Preen 9), Juanita’s speech becomes more agitated. In these moments the emotional stakes are raised, and the boundary between living daughter and deceased mother appears to become porous—at least in Juanita’s mind. For instance, in the ninth fragment of the novel’s first part, Juanita works up the courage to enter her mother’s bedroom for the first time since her death. The room, with its “cama con el colchón doblado” and “algunas flores esparcidas por el suelo” appears not to have been cleaned since her passing (186). Looking for a blanket to place over the bed, Juanita opens an *armario* and finds her mother’s black gloves. The gloves evoke a memory from Juanita’s adolescence, and she envisions her mother’s gloved hand holding hers, and senses that her mother’s

“manos enguantadas” are strangling her (187): “¡Ay, qué horror! ¿Qué es esto? De pronto me han parecido dos pajarracos negros. ¡Son los guantes de mamá! Se me han agarrado al cuello como unas manos heladas. Me voy a desvanecer. ¡Mamá, por lo que más quieras, no me estrangules!” (186). While Juanita repeatedly states that her mother is in Heaven, she nonetheless feels that her hands are strangling her from beyond the grave: “Y ahora que lo sabes, porque desde donde estás tú debes de saber muchas cosas, es posible que indignada intentes estrangularme” (188). This episode continues for several pages, with Juanita crying out: “¡Aparta tus manos de mí!” (190). Though Juanita does not describe this as a ghostly encounter per se, and although the novel provides substantial evidence that Juanita hallucinates or has visions related to her alcohol abuse, the episode nonetheless demonstrates how Juanita’s deceased mother “haunts” her perceived reality.

Images—reflections in the mirror and especially photographs—are central to Juanita’s “haunted” relationship with her mother. Near the end of the “gloved hands” episode, Juanita remarks that she cannot see her mother—only her hands—in the mirror: “A ti, mamá, no te veo. De ti sólo veo esas manos negras hinchadas que me atenazan la garganta como si fueran ventosas” (194). And in the novel’s climactic final fragment—which I will analyze in detail in this paper’s final section—Juanita is desperate to find a misplaced photo of her mother, explaining that the image works as a conduit for their “conversations,” and that it conjures her mother’s appearance: “Con tu foto delante hablaría yo más a gusto . . . ¡Claro que te hablaría mejor, te estaría viendo y pensaría que tú me estabas viendo! Ya sé que me estás viendo, pero no es lo mismo” (379). Juanita is terrified that without the photo, her mother’s image will bleed into the images of the other dead, and she will be definitively lost:

Me ocurre una cosa terrible, y es que conforme va pasando el tiempo te recuerdo de una forma distinta. Tu rostro no es ya el mismo que yo recordaba hace unos años. Es otro. Y tengo miedo que al final acabe convirtiéndose en el rostro de una desconocida. Tengo que encontrarte un rostro o acabaré creyendo que todas las muertas son mi madre. Con esa dichosa fotografía, con ese retrato tuyo delante, todo esto se solucionaría. (379-80)

Juanita’s use of her mother’s photo as a memory aid, and her desperation to recover it, speak to what Roland Barthes observes in *Camera Lucida* (1980) as the unique power of the photograph, which he terms a “certificate of presence” (87), that provides *seemingly* unmediated access to the referent (here, Juanita’s mother),¹⁶ and that may conjure a deceased loved one, as occurred when Barthes glanced at a particular photo of his recently deceased mother, “looking for the truth of the face I had loved”

(67). The relationship between photography, presence, and absence, as Barthes notes, has something ghostly or haunted about it.¹⁷ The photograph, for Barthes, possesses a “funereal immobility” (6), and photography as such is “a figuration of the motionless and made-up face beneath which we see the dead” (32). Further, when one is photographed, this becomes an objectified experience, “a micro-version of death,” and one “truly becom[es] a specter” (14).¹⁸ As such, a photo of the deceased, whether Barthes’s or Juanita’s mother, may effect a miraculous but also “rather terrible” “return of the dead” (9). Indeed, through photography, the dead can “reach out” and “touch” the living, in an uncanny manner that recalls Juanita’s fear that her mother’s gloved hands are strangling her. Or as Barthes puts it, rather more benignly: “From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here” (80). Closing the gap between Juanita’s mother’s (non)image in the mirror and her lost photograph, Kas Saghafi, glossing Jacques Derrida, remarks that the image’s “spectral structure”¹⁹ underscores how the Other’s “spectral trace,” as one might see reflected in a mirror, is essentially similar to a “‘synthetic,’” possibly photographic image (76-77).

Juanita’s relationships with her mother and with her deceased father are mediated through images, and specifically photographs. However, images of Juanita’s mother and father appear to serve distinct functions for her. Juanita’s photo of her mother serves to confirm the “truth” of her mother’s face, as Barthes would have it, to fix her image as “desired object . . . beloved body” in Juanita’s mind, and to maintain their connection beyond death. By contrast, photographs of Juanita’s father illustrate his physical degradation in light of age and long-term alcoholism, in opposition to what she asserts as her mother’s perennial beauty (Barthes 7). In other words, they serve to destabilize his image, and undermine any lingering emotional connection she may have to him. Glancing at a photo of her father, and recalling other images of him as a younger man, she addresses him in these terms:

Nunca me has hecho caso, ni a mamá ni a mí. Ahora que te tengo enfrente, al aire libre, y me doy cuenta de lo feísimo que eres—que Dios me perdone—, es cuando entiendo menos que mamá pudiera casarse contigo. Claro que de joven no eras así; hay una fotografía en el álbum de cuando pretendías a mi reina bendita, a la descansada de mi alma, en la que no estabas mal. (213-14)

In a later scene, she makes a similar comment to Dedé:

Mira, éste es papa. ¿No te parece un poco monstruo? Y sé que está feo que yo lo diga y menos acabando de venir de donde venimos. Pero al lado de mamá, el pobrecito no tiene ni punto de comparación. Y en esta fotografía, con bigotes, está hasta guapo.

Pero si tú vieras cómo se puso luego. Tienes razón, lo conociste. ¡Qué malvada soy!, ¿verdad? En cambio mamá fue siempre una mujer tan guapa. (323)

Despite the critical and even hostile tone of Juanita's comments, the photos of her deceased father nonetheless serve to conjure his image. Indeed, her occasional habit of addressing herself to her father speaks to his—and by extension, Gibraltar's—ghostly status in the novel. While Juanita demonstrates a desire to consign her father and Gibraltar to the margins, to the periphery of her narrative, she is unable to do so entirely. Put another way: despite her best efforts to remove them from the frame, their ghostly presence effects a sort of “return of the repressed” (Labanyi 7).²⁰ Juanita occasionally seems aware of how Gibraltar and her Gibraltarian ancestry “haunt” her, acknowledging that despite her father's many flaws—represented by a dubious Narboni claim to a castle in Malta—she would not exist were it not for her parents' unhappy union: “Mira tú lo que son las cosas, la engatusó el Narboni con la historia de su familia y por lo visto con la de un castillo que según él tenían en Malta. Nunca lo vimos. El destino de cada persona. Claro, ya lo sé. No hubiera nacido yo” (324). It is worth recalling here that Juanita's mother was born in San Roque, located a mere 11 kilometers (6.8 miles) from Gibraltar. San Roque was founded by Spanish refugees expelled by the English from the Rock in 1704. Its motto, “Muy Noble y Muy Leal ciudad de San Roque, donde reside la de Gibraltar,” and its flag, virtually identical to Gibraltar's, speak to its continued claim on the Rock. Given their proximity and the mutually dependent economic relationship between Gibraltar and the Campo, in terms of labor flows and (il)legal trade during the years when Juanita's parents would have met,²¹ there is something logical, almost inevitable, about their union. Indeed, a significant number of Gibraltarians today have parents or grandparents (especially mothers or grandmothers) from the Campo. While on her mother's side Juanita carries Andalusia “en la sangre” (282), she also concedes of her “Granmamá,” and despite her grotesque second portrait of this woman that, “[a]lgo de su sangre debo de llevar en mis venas” (384).

In a broader sense, Tangier too has something of Gibraltar in its “veins,” and this is reflected in *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni*, notwithstanding its narrator-protagonist's low opinion of the Rock and of *llanitos*. Gibraltar played a formative role in the history of colonial Tangier, despite its frequently-asserted “carácter español.” As historical census data show, British subjects, many Gibraltarians like Juanita's father, represented Tangier's second largest “foreign” community through the end of the nineteenth century, before being overtaken by the French.²² Morocco, and particularly the cities of Tangier and Tétouan, have historically maintained close economic and interpersonal ties with Gibraltar—which like Tangier is a “liminal” city (Tamalet Talbayev 158; Aliberti 159), a “lieu de

rencontre entre l’Afrique et l’Europe” (Lantelme 518). The connectedness between Gibraltar and Tangier reflects a “the long history of entanglement embracing the two spaces from the days of al-Andalus” (Tamalet Talbayev 182). These ties were formalized in eighteenth-century treaties signed by England and Morocco, which permitted Moroccan Sephardic Jewish merchants to trade with Gibraltar in order to supply the English garrison. A number of these merchants settled in the Rock, and Gibraltar’s Jewish community maintained close family and business ties to the other side of the Strait through the mid-twentieth century. These cultural and socio-economic exchanges are dramatized in Vicente Blasco Ibáñez’s novella *Luna Benamor* (1909), whose eponymous heroine is a Rabat-born Jewish woman living in Gibraltar, whose grandfather is a money lender with operations in Gibraltar and Morocco.²³

By the mid-nineteenth century, Gibraltar, whose utility to England was originally strategic, had emerged as a “free-trade haven” and a “key node in the political-financial networks that channeled considerable trade with Spain, Morocco, and Algeria” (Pack 23, 25). By the *fin de siècle*, Gibraltar and Tangier were connected by regular steamboat service and a telegraph line, and as George James Gilbard reports, “merchants of Gibraltar” had their summer homes in the same affluent Tangier neighborhood as “European officials” and “rich Moors and Jews” (100). Centuries of trans-Straits trade and population movement contributed to the development of similar cultural practices in Tangier and Gibraltar, reflecting “the symbiotic levels of interpenetration between Africa *in* Europe and Europe *in* Africa” (Thomas 147; author’s emphasis). To cite a small but symbolically important example, *kalinté*, a Tangier street bread made from chickpea flour, and referred to by Juanita as “calentei” (256), is enjoyed in Gibraltar as *calentita*, and is considered the Rock’s emblematic “national” dish. In quite another context, the first book-length literary text published in Gibraltar, *El martirio de la joven Hachuel o la heroína hebrea* (1837), written by the Spanish writer Eugenio María Romero, takes place in Morocco and is a novelization of the story of Tangier-born Jewish martyr Sol Hachuel, who was executed in 1834 for refusing to renounce her faith. Hachuel’s father was said to have worked for a time in Gibraltar, and individuals with the surname Hachuel had lived in both Tangier and Gibraltar from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The publication by subscription of Romero’s book was supported by several Gibraltar residents with identifiably Sephardic surnames. Three had the last name of Hachuel, and one of the men listed, Mr. Isajar Hachuel, may have been Sol’s brother Yssajar.²⁴ As Alberto España relates in *La pequeña historia de Tánger*, a theatrical adaptation of *La heroína hebrea* was performed in Tangier at the Liceo Rafael Calvo around the turn of the twentieth century, speaking to the circulation of the story of the Jewish martyr on both sides of the Strait.²⁵

Moving from culture back to commerce, at the *fin de siècle* it was common for Gibraltar businesses owners—Jewish and non-Jewish alike, from shipping agents, to cork manufacturers, to pipe fitters—to have branches in Tangier or Tétouan. Merchants in Gibraltar also sold “Moorish” and “Oriental curiosities,” in addition to prints and postcards of Morocco, as part of a local trade in Orientalist exotica that capitalized on the Rock’s geographic proximity to, and close trading relationships with, North African ports.²⁶ In addition to legitimate business ties, Gibraltar, Tangier and neighboring port cities (Algeciras, Tarifa, Oran), have long been connected to one another by contraband trade and increasingly, by people smuggling—a reality touched on by Moroccan authors like Mohamed Choukri and Tahar Ben Jelloun, the Gibraltarian poet Trino Cruz, and writers from farther afield.²⁷

Despite her aversion to Great Britain and Gibraltar, Juanita peppers her narrative with references to Gibraltar and Gibraltarians, with specific mention of Saccone & Speed, a beverages distributor, and the common surname, Licudi.²⁸ Further, and more central in terms of the novel’s plot, Juanita makes multiple references to trade between Tangier and the Rock. One such occasion occurs after World War II, when generators had to be brought to Tangier from Gibraltar due to electricity shortages. In the novel’s closing pages, Juanita walks around the “ciudad fantasma” of post-1956 Tangier, and refers obliquely to the redirection of consumer goods toward Gibraltar in the wake of Spain’s border closure with the Rock, inaugurated in 1969 by the Franco regime (only lifted in the early 1980s), which shifted imports and labor flows into Gibraltar from the Campo to Morocco: “estuve buscando una verdurita de buen ver, cosa nada fácil, porque ahora se la llevan toda para Gibraltar” (374). At the same time, Juanita cannot suppress her excitement when Dedé presents her with British consumer goods sent by his Gibraltarian cousin, whom she would later describe as a “rock scorpion”: “¡Qué festín! ¡Galletas ‘Crawford’! Te las manda una prima de Gibraltar, surtidas. El té es ‘Lipton’” (292). This episode, though seemingly minor, represents a rare moment in which Juanita acknowledges enthusiasm for something identified with Gibraltar and Britain. This apparent slip-up reinforces the idea that Juanita is shaping the narrative of her life—for perhaps quite understandable reasons, given her father’s numerous faults—so as to emphasize her affection for her mother and her Andalusian ties at the expense of her father and Gibraltar. However, this also reveals the incessant “haunting” of Juanita by her father and by Gibraltar, which she cannot entirely repress. Indeed, it is fair to say that Juanita’s Gibraltarian father and Gibraltar itself “haunt” the novel, albeit in a less obvious way than her mother and Andalusia. It is during Juanita’s desperate search for her mother’s

photograph, in the novel's final pages, that she is forced to contend with the legacy of her father, and by extension, with Gibraltar.

Photograph, pistol, paperweight

Well in advance of the novel's final fragment, Vázquez establishes that Juanita associates her father's *despacho* (home office), which she avoids whenever possible, with what for her are the negative traits of his reclusiveness and assumed "Britishness." Early in the novel, and referring to her sister, Juanita declares: "Yo no entro en el despacho a besar a papá, como hace ésa" (140). Shortly after her mother's death, now charged with caring for her father, Juanita expresses relief that she won't have to interact with him at night, because by the time she returns home he will have retreated to his office: "El miedo que me da sólo pensar que esta noche tengo que dormir en casa . . . Pero no tengo que ser cobarde. Papá se encerrará en su despacho después de haber comprado el *Tangier Gazette*, *La Dépêche Marocaine* y *Presenté*" (181-82). Somewhat later, she reports that he is again "encerrado con la radio todo el día, oyendo las últimas noticias del BBC" (209). And finally, Juanita reports that following his retirement from the Consulate, shortly before her mother's death, he transforms his office into an "imitación de despacho inglés" (261). He now appears to spend even more time in the office, a visual representation of his identity as a (retired) consular official and representative of Great Britain, to the point that he begins sleeping there on a cot: "Papá, bien, se jubiló en el peor momento. El despacho le ha quedado de dar gritos. Los Licudi le vendieron el tresillo Morris, parece un despacho del Consulado. Se acostumbró al lit du camp" (207).

When in the novel's final pages Juanita enters her deceased father's office, looking for her mother's misplaced photograph, her description of the space and its contents implies that it is largely untouched since his death—a detail reminiscent of her mother's bedroom. As she rifles through the office looking for the photo, she finds the detritus of her father's professional and personal life — "[c]artas del Consulado, pipas," "Un billete de diez dirhams" (380-81), as well as his medications, indicating his ailing health prior to his death. Juanita's search is disturbed by the likely presence of a pistol: "¿La guardaría [la foto] acaso en el cajón de la mesa de papá? No era el lugar más adecuado. Junto al revólver, a su revólver maldito, para lo que lo usó, y el compromiso que eso representa en una casa" (380). Further: "La pistolita, que cada vez que la veo me corren por el cuerpo sudores fríos. ¿Estará cargada? Creo que sí. Papá siempre dijo que la tenía dispuesta para cualquier eventualidad. Que en paz descanse, pero más le hubiera valido tener dispuestas otras cosas para otras

eventualidades” (380). The loaded revolver—a classic symbol of male potency and violence—seems especially jarring for Juanita, given her negative, sometimes threatening portrait of her father.

While Juanita ultimately does not find the “purloined image” of her mother’s photograph²⁹—or the revolver, she does uncover an item that symbolizes her father and his ties to Gibraltar: a paperweight, “un regalo que le trajeron al descansado de papá de Gibraltar.” (386) Her description of the object and her prior relationship to it, her stated fear that it had been lost or stolen, and her reaction when she finds it in the back of a desk drawer, together merit an extended citation and interpretation:

Bueno, creo que había un pisapapeles de cristal con unos pensamientos encerrados dentro. Era muy bonito. ¡Dios míos, el pisapapeles! Hace años que no lo veo. ¿Seguirá allí el pisapapeles? ¿No se lo habrá llevado Hamruch? ¿No lo habrán robado? Tengo que verlo. ¡No puedo, no puedo! No me concentraría pensando en la pérdida de aquel pisapapeles. Fue un regalo que le trajeron al descansado de papá de Gibraltar. Tengo que comprobarlo ahora mismo. ¿Cómo me puedo quedar aquí tranquila, relajada, como la que no quiere la cosa, cuando a lo peor se llevaron el pisapapeles? No, no puedo. Me hierve la sangre. Vengo en seguida. Sí, sí, todo está aquí. Los medicamentos, guós por mí se haga, menos mal . . . el pisapapeles . . . Al fondo. Más escondido nunca pudo estar. Ven, deja que te coja, de niña me gustaba acariciarte . . . Ven. Acércate a mis mejillas, sobre todo cuando tenía fiebre. ¡Qué fresquito estás! Gracias a Dios, gracias a Dios . . . ¡Qué susto más grande he pasado! Por un momento he creído que tú también desaparecías. Déjame que te bese. Ahora ya puedo volver a la cama tranquila. (386)

One would assume that Juanita’s reaction to the paperweight would be negative, because of its associations with her father and the Rock. Vázquez tells us little about the enigmatic object, other than that it is made of glass, may have some phrases embedded in it, and is a gift from Gibraltar. Who gifted the paperweight, when, and for what reason? What messages are written on or in it? Juanita’s reaction to the phantasmagorical presence of her father’s “revólver maldito” stands in stark contrast to her reaction upon finding her father’s paperweight. In fact, Juanita’s unexpected discovery of the long-lost item reads as the counterpart and mirror image—this in a novel built on “espejismos” of her earlier discovery of her mother’s black gloves in the *armario* of her bedroom (170), also untouched since her passing. While the visual cue of the gloves (black, virtually weightless) causes Juanita to remember an adolescent scene of her mother’s gloved hands holding hers, followed by the hallucination that her mother is reaching out from beyond the grave to strangle her, the paperweight (crystalline, presumably

transparent, weighty, and a “bolita,” physically suggestive of the Rock of Gibraltar), unearths a pleasant childhood memory, “Acércate a mis mejillas, sobre todo cuando tenia fiebre” (386).³⁰ Instead of causing distress, this memory—triggered by the paperweight—gives the highly agitated Juanita a transitory measure of peace, though this dissipates once she returns to her search for the photo: “No sé lo que me pasa, ¿quieres creer que por culpa de ese maldito pisapapeles, entusiasmada con esa estupidez de bolita de cristal, no se me ha ocurrido mirar si estaba tu foto en el cajón de la mesa-despacho de papá? Volveré a mirar” (386). The novel ends a few sentences later, with the photo yet to be found.

That the item that caused Juanita momentary relief is so closely tied to her father and Gibraltar, provoking a pleasant memory, is remarkable, given her unremittingly negative portrayal of him and consistent disavowal of her personal ties to the Rock. What then, to make of the unexpected discovery of the paperweight at this climactic moment, and in the context of Juanita’s failed search for her mother’s photograph? What does it mean that she appears to kiss the paperweight (“Déjame que te bese”), given her earlier, stated refusal to enter her father’s office to kiss him (“Yo no entro en el despacho a besar a papá”). If one interprets *La vida perra de Juanita Narboni* as I do, as a novel that is substantially concerned with the relationship between Juanita’s mixed ancestry and her narrative self-presentation, and with her attempts to shape her family history to privilege her ties to her mother and Andalusia at the expense of her father and Gibraltar, then this final episode asserts that it is ultimately impossible for Juanita to disentangle her *sanroqueña* mother’s and *gibraltareño* father’s stories from each other, and from her own story. In this sense, her earlier statement to Dedé, “Claro, ya lo sé. No hubiera nacido yo,” proves prophetic (324). By extension, the discovery of the Gibraltarian paperweight in Juanita’s Tangier home suggests that we cannot disentangle Gibraltar from the story of an erstwhile “Spanish” late-colonial Tangier that, by the novel’s conclusion, is fading into memory, if it ever existed in the first place.

Notes

1 See Sanz de Soto, who writes: “Una ciudad, Tanger, origen y motivo de no poca literatura exotica y cosmopolita de baja calidad que, por vez primera, se nos aparece como fue y como dejo de ser, sin aspavientos ni asombros, ntimamente.” See also Yborra Aznar (35-36).

2 Vazquez (120, 384) states directly, and then through Juanita, that Narboni is Genoese. However, Beit Hatfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People in Tel Aviv, states that Narboni is Sephardic, and was present in the Maghreb. See <https://dbs.bh.org.il/familyname/narboni>

3 See Foucault, glossing Nietzsche, on history as “the systematic dissociation of identity. This is necessary because this rather weak identity, which we attempt to support and to unify under a mask, is in itself only a parody: it is plural; countless spirits dispute its possession” (94).

4 See elhariry and Tamalet Talbayev (xiv). This reading in turn opens the novel to the burgeoning field of Mediterranean Studies, to which elhariry’s and Tamalet Talbayev’s volume contributes.

5 See, for example: “Algun premio tendre yo que tener en esta vida perra que llevo” (Vazquez 336).

6 Juanita regularly refers to her sister Elena as a *perra*, and Vazquez referred to Tangier as “esa puta llamada Tanger” in a July 12, 1965 letter to Emilio Sanz de Soto (quoted in Sagnes-Alem).

7 Juanita often makes mirror references, such as this Lacanian observation: “La invencion de mi misma es algo ası como si yo me viera a traves de un espejo: una tontona” (243).

8 Though Tangier was not a Spanish colony, Juanita’s view partly resembles Nerın’s notion of Franco-era “Hispanotropicalism,” a term that, echoing the better-known “Lusotropicalism,” “magnific[o] la supuesta ‘fusion racial’ entre los espanoles y los pueblos colonizados, en un intento de argumentar que su separacion era ya imposible” (2).

9 Juanita comments to Dede Trilby on the number of *campogibraltaresnos* in Tangier: “ıSus padres eran de Gibraltar? ıComo no? Ingleses, como yo. Su padre fue amigo ntimo de papa. Nunca me entere, no lo sabıa, papa nunca nos hablo de sus amistades. Claro que si no hubieran sido de Gibraltar, lo serıan de La Lınea, Algeciras, Los Barrios, San Roque o Jımera de Lıbar, lo mismo da” (285). See also Yborra Aznar, on Tangier as “verdadera tierra de promision para los habitantes de la Baja Andalucıa en la primera mitad del siglo pasado” (43).

10 In Gibraltar, English is the language of government, media, and education. Spanish, and especially Llanito, a local variant of Andalusian Spanish and related Spanish/English codeswitching practice, have traditionally been used in less formal contexts.

11 See also Yborra Aznar (40).

12 See El-Sherif (104) on European-descended *tangerinos* and Moroccan Muslim *tanjanis* in colonial Tangier.

13 Juanita does not seem to ever consider identifying with Morocco or Moroccans. “Frente a estas continuas referencias a lugares de la orilla norte del Estrecho, las de Marruecos se caracterizan por su escasez. El Tanger de la novela mira hacia la Penınsula” (Yborra Aznar 44).

14 “El unico personaje que Juanita ama e idealiza es su madre . . . Cuando la madre muere, Juanita acaba identificandose totalmente con ella” (Aliberti 161).

15 See also: Vazquez (167, 280); Aliberti (161).

16 “A specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents), or at least it is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent . . . It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility” (5-6; author’s emphasis).

17 For Barthes, “the medium of photography . . . is essentially a haunted one” (Blanco and Peeren 17).

18 “When I discover myself in the product of this operation, what I see is that I have become Total-Image, which is to say, Death in person; others—the Other—do not dispossess me of myself, they turn me, ferociously, into an object” (Barthes 14).

19 “Marking the intertwining of the nonliving, absence, and reference to the other, the *image*, the specter of the nonpresent, living-dead other, has the tangible intangibility of a body without flesh. Its mode of appearance is that of appearing in disappearing, disappearing in its appearance. Making the disappeared appear or ‘making reappear,’ [sic] all images partake of a spectral structure” (Saghafi 76; author’s emphasis).

20 Here Labanyi paraphrases Derrida’s understanding of ghosts, as developed in *Specters of Marx* (1993) and elsewhere. For Labanyi, “the whole of modern Spanish culture can be read as one big ghost story” (1).

21 See Pack (24, 196) on nineteenth-century cross-border trade and travel between Gibraltar and the Campo.

22 See Garcıa for data, and Espana, on the “hijos de Gibraltar” in Tangier (58).

23 For Sephardic Jews in Gibraltar and Tangier, see Benady and Haller.

24 For the subscribers, see: Eugenio Marıa Romero, *El martirio de la joven Hachuel, o la heroına hebrea* (Gibraltar: Imprenta Militar, 1837). For background, see Gonzalez Vazquez.

25 See Espana (25).

26 For evidence of both, see Gilbard’s *A popular history of Gibraltar* (1888).

27 For instance, Irish writer Kevin Barry's *Night Boat to Tangier* (2019) concerns two veteran Irish drug smugglers and takes place largely in the Algeciras ferry terminal.

28 During the early twentieth century Saccone & Speed had locations around the Mediterranean. Hamruch is described as having visited "Saccone Speed" (271). The surname Licudi is referenced in Vázquez (207). Gibraltarian Licudis include Héctor Licudi, author of the novel *Barbarita* (1929).

29 See Wexler, who describes a photograph of Barthes's mother as a purloined image in *Camera Lucida*.

30 This object partly recalls Winston Smith's glass paperweight in George Orwell's *Nineteenth Eighty-Four* (1949), though it is unclear if the reference is intentional.

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