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## Shopping for Vibrators with my Abuela... #Space #Representation and #Latinidad in @JanetheVirgin

Maria Guarino  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

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SHOPPING FOR VIBRATORS WITH MY ABUELA...  
#SPACE #REPRESENTATION and #LATINIDAD in @JANETHEVIRGIN

A Thesis Presented

by

MARIA S. GUARINO

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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Approved as to style and content by:

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Barbara Zecchi, Chair

---

Albert Lloret, Member

---

Meghan Armstrong-Abrami,  
Graduate Program Director of Spanish and Portuguese

---

Robert Sullivan, Chair of Language, Literature, and Cultures

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## ABSTRACT

SHOPPING FOR VIBRATORS WITH MY ABUELA...  
#SPACE #REPRESENTATION and #LATINIDAD in @JANETHEVIRGIN

FEBRUARY 2020

MARIA GUARINO, B.A., ROANOKE COLLEGE

M.A. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

Directed by: Barbara Zecchi

*Jane the Virgin* debuted on the CW in 2014 at a time when anti-immigrant, particularly anti-Mexican and anti-Latinx, sentiment in the U.S. felt very prevalent. This TV show was the latest to offer representations of Latin@s at the forefront and advanced a distinct political stance on immigration by calling for #immigrationreform. The series has not only been a ratings hit amongst the Latinx community, but has garnered wide acclaim from other races, ethnicities, and gender identities across the United States. This thesis explores the representation of the character of Alba (Ivonne Coll), through an investigation of the various physical and linguistic spaces which she occupies within the narrative of *Jane the Virgin*, and investigates how these spaces facilitate character growth, transformation, and a challenge to pre-established notions of Latinidad in U.S. mainstream television. It also questions the genre of *Jane the Virgin* itself, showing how the show's unique hybridization of the *televenovela* genre and the sitcom contribute to its diverse spectatorship, both welcoming the dominant American viewer without alienating the Latinx viewer. Lastly, it brings attention to the usage of social media within the show's narrative as well as outside of it. Building off of Mark Prenski's generation of "Digital Natives" (2001), I call for a pedagogical shift and literacy in social media from scholars today to effectively engage and dialogue with what I coin "Social Media Natives."

In exploring these various facets of representation in *Jane the Virgin*, I show how the occupation of "safe spaces" and "non-safe spaces" affects development— whether that be of Alba's character, the dominant American spectator, or the "Social Media Immigrant" scholar. This work is informed by Michel de Certeau's concept of "space" in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), and utilizes Moira Kenney's identification of "safe space" in *Mapping Gay L.A.*, (2015). Intended to contribute to intersectional feminist race studies, this work also uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to negotiate identity (1990), Kimberlé Crenshaw's notion of intersectionality (1989), and engages with somatic racialization and shaming proposed by Stephanie Fetta in her recent publication *Shaming into Brown* (2018).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. ORGANIZATION AND METHODS.....	4
Space.....	5
Safe Space.....	6
Identity.....	8
Standpoint.....	11
Organization.....	12
3. SHOPPING FOR VIBRATORS WITH MY ABUELA... COMMUNICATION AND RESISTANCE THROUGH SPACE IN <i>JANE THE VIRGIN</i> .....	15
Physical Spaces.....	15
Linguistic Spaces.....	21
4. SPACE AND THE MANIPULATION OF GENRE IN <i>JANE THE VIRGIN</i> .....	27
<i>Telenovela</i> vs. Soap Opera.....	28
Defining Viewership.....	30
Spaces and Melodrama.....	31
Hybridization vs. “Americanization”.....	36
5. “SOCIAL MEDIA NATIVES” AND THEIR #SPACES.....	40
Social Media Spaces.....	40
Social Media Natives and their Spaces.....	43

6. WHERE IS ALBA NOW?.....	47
7. CONCLUSION.....	54
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	59

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

“We were strangers once, too.”  
-Barack Obama, 2014

Sitting in a noisy bar, downing a shot of tequila, and dressed in her daughter’s sexy clothing, Alba, an older, Catholic, Latina woman reveals to her daughter Xiomara and her granddaughter Jane that her boyfriend Jorge had proposed marriage to her, and she does not know what to do. She feels worried because she does not feel the same love for him that she had felt for her husband, who is deceased.

“I mean, at this point in your life, that’s pretty good, right...?” her daughter drunkenly responds to her.

“Que ya soy una vieja a dos pasos de la tumba?” Alba angrily responds. “Que soy una vieja que se tiene que olvidar de la pasión del amor, de la emoción...”<sup>1</sup>

With a little bit of convincing, and a lot more alcohol, Alba ends up on top of the bar, dancing with Jane and Xiomara.

“That’s my Grandma!” Jane yells proudly.

\*\*\*

This scene, taken from *Jane the Virgin* (2014), an American adaptation of a Venezuelan *telenovela*, is one of many small but significant transgressions practiced by the character of Alba (Ivonne Coll) within the narrative. Created by Jennie Snyder Urman and loosely based on the Venezuelan *telenovela*, *Juana la Virgen* (2002), *Jane the Virgin*

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<sup>1</sup> Translation: “So I’m just an old woman two steps away from my grave? I’m an old woman that has to forget about the passion of love, the excitement...”



is about a young Latina woman, Jane (Gina Rodriguez), who has decided to wait until marriage to have sex, but is accidentally inseminated with a man's sperm by her gynecologist.

*Jane the Virgin* debuted on the CW Network at a time when anti-immigrant, particularly anti-Mexican and anti-Latinx<sup>2</sup> sentiment in the U.S. felt particularly prevalent. Public protesters in Murietta, California forced Department of Homeland Security buses, full of undocumented immigrants from Central America, to turn around, shouting insults such as “Go home!” and “We don’t want you!” and “What part of illegal don’t you understand” (Huffpost)? Anti-immigration activists protested in Arizona with American flags, signs, and “patriotic music,” because “[w]ord had come that the federal government was planning to bring some of the [illegal] detainees to a local academy for troubled youth” (NPR). Commenting on the protest, one of the activists, Marla Bernis stated, “You know it’s a shame that they’re kids, if they’re kids, but I guess their parents didn’t care that much to send them on that journey to here” (quoted in NPR). In one weekend, hundreds of protests took place simultaneously to oppose immigrant reform, specifically the influx of recent illegal entry from Central America. William Gheen, the president of Americans for Legal Immigration PAC said of the protests, “We know that 12,000 people expected to attend roughly 300 events shows illegal immigration is the most important problem facing America” (quoted in Fox News). President Obama

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term “Latinx” in accordance with the *Oxford English Dictionary*: A person of Latin American origin or descent. I utilize “Latinx” as a gender-inclusive, gender-neutral alternative to “Latino/a” or “Latin@” and I use “Latin@” when acknowledging the existence of gender binaries. I use “Latino” or “Latina” to acknowledge a male or female identifying person.

announced his executive action on immigration policy, offering temporary legal status to millions of illegal immigrants in the United States (Washington Post).

Amidst this turbulent time, *Jane the Virgin* contributed positive representations of Latin@s at the forefront and advanced a distinct political stance on immigration by directly calling for immigration reform. The series has not only been a ratings hit amongst the Latinx community, but has garnered wide acclaim from other races, ethnicities, and gender identities across the United States (Nielsen).

In this series, Alba is Jane's grandmother, living in Miami with Jane and Jane's mother (Andrea Navedo). She does not possess legal resident status, and during the first three seasons of the TV series, she communicates almost entirely in Spanish. She is widowed and expresses and practices devout Catholicism. Through tequila consumption, risqué clothing, boy talk, and sexy bar dancing, Alba uses the foreign, non-safe space of the dirty dive bar to challenge the established, stereotyped, boundaries of her character's Latinidad.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I use Juana Rodriguez's definition of Latinidad: "a particular geopolitical experience but it also contains within it the complexities and contradictions of immigration, (post)(neo)colonialism, race, color, legal status, class, nation, language and the politics of location."

## CHAPTER 2

### ORGANIZATION AND METHODS

This work is a study of safe spaces in relation to Latina representation within the narrative of *Jane the Virgin*, spectatorship reception of this distinct representation in U.S. television, and ultimately, it is an application of utilizing current social spaces to demonstrate the potential for accessibility and education. *Jane the Virgin's* representations through the intentional use of various spaces are significant in educating audiences about the assimilation of Latinxs, now the nation's largest ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau), into the United States' hegemonic culture, and debunking unidimensional character stereotypes of Latinxs in U.S. television.

I begin with a character study of Alba's identity expansion and transformation through a close reading of her specific spatial transgressions within the narrative, and then explore the hybridization of the *telenovela* genre through the manipulation of specific spaces. My investigation concludes outside of the show's narrative, applying the usage of digital and social media spaces I have found to be effective to question and to call for a variation in the production and distribution of academic work. This work is a narrative and pedagogical study, informed mainly by spatial theory. As I am questioning representation of a minority group, and specifically analyzing an older immigrant woman, I consider this a contribution to intersectional<sup>4</sup> feminist studies.

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to Kimberlé Crenshaw's usage of "intersectional" in her paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

## Space

To dialogue about the constructions of the various spaces in *Jane the Virgin*, I define the concept of “space” through Michel de Certeau’s distinction between “place” and “space” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984):

A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*)... It implies an indication of stability. A *space* exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables... composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities... In short, *space is a practiced place*. (117)

Basing my proposal in De Certeau’s distinction between place and space, the physical and linguistic spaces which I refer to in this investigation are “practiced places” that have been created.

I also explore the borders which are established and broken within the narrative, because this action of crossing them is what creates new spaces. To do this, I also utilize the theory of “border” which De Certeau develops; and, as he proposes, the borders “shed light on the formation of myths, since they also have the function of founding and articulating spaces” (122-123). These spaces are established within the narrative through the understanding of the existence of borders, and in observing how they are broken. Therefore, it is not possible to understand the distinct spaces without knowing where they are located, and which are the borders that limit them.

## Safe Space

Each part of this study analyzes “safe” and “non-safe” spaces in different capacities. In the first section, I utilize Malcom Harris’s definition of “safe space,” for which he uses Moira Kenney’s identification of this concept in her book *Mapping Gay L.A.*, first being implemented in the 1960’s within gay bars (2015). It was a physical and socially constructed space where queer-identifying people could “be out and in good company,” amidst the oppression of anti-sodomy laws and discrimination against these practices and identities (Harris). Kenney asserts that “safe space” is then consistently utilized in the women’s movement during the 1960s and 1970s, writing that the safe space signifies “a freedom to speak and act freely, to form collective strength, and generate strategies for resistance” (24). This act of practicing by the women “generat[ing] strategies for resistance” and the queer-identifying people coming together in the bars to practice “resistance to political and social repression,” as Harris writes, aligns with De Certeau’s definition of space being “a practiced place.” Therefore, through these practices, safe spaces are created. They are not safe in the sense that no conflict or disruption can happen within them, but safe in the sense that the subjects within them are creating practiced places where they are free to express themselves, and no harm can come to them.

In the second section, as I investigate spectatorship, my application of “safe space” changes from a space of practiced resistance for the non-hegemonic, or the othered subject, to a space of familiarity for the dominant or hegemonic subject. Using this definition, I identify the dominant American viewer’s “safe” viewing genre spaces, and examine how the hybridization of *Jane the Virgin* introduces the practice of a “non-

safe” place (the *telenovela*). This identification of safe spaces for the hegemonic would seem uncommon or unnecessary, since they are established spaces for the majority- not places being practiced for resistance, change, or literal safety. However, I believe that the identification of these spaces demonstrates a comfort zone that is important to identify. In recognizing it, we can observe the perceived “unsafe” spaces, and the necessary practices to break the borders which limit them.

A practiced example of this type of “safe space” is the recently established app called “63red Safe” which is an app designed “keep conservatives safe as they eat and shop.” The description in Google Play reads: “Reviews of local restaurant and businesses from a conservative perspective, helping [ensure] you’re safe when you shop and eat” (The Washington Post)! One user reviewed, “Finally, I am able to avoid places which don’t respect America and [the] US Constitution. Eat your heart out, snowflakes.” (quoted in The Washington Post). This emphasis on the practice, through this application, of “respect[ing] America and the US” is promoting a safe space for the American hegemonic patron and consumer. Another example is the Boston Straight Pride Parade, held on August 31, 2019. The website statement reads: “Super Happy Fun America invites you to celebrate the diverse history, culture, and contributions of the straight community” (Super Happy Fun America)! This act of practicing a physical space by marching in alliance to celebrate the dominant sexual orientation of the United States is the exact opposite of Kenney’s identification of “safe space” and the practicing of it by queer-identifying subjects. Though both of these examples are intentional practices, my second definition of “safe space” does not need to be intentional practice, as the first one does, because the hegemonic subject, by default, already practices a safe space. The place

is not being converted into something safe, but simply reemphasized. Because of this, the intentional practice of it, in fact, might seem redundant and unnecessary. However, the identification of the space is important, for the understanding of the borders and comprehension of how to effectively cross or expand them.

Lastly, I utilize “safe space” not in relation to the hegemonic subject, but to dialogue about personal and academic comfort zones within academia. Returning again to De Certeau’s notion of “practiced places,” I question how social media places can be practiced effectively as pedagogical tools. The notion of “safe” enters because social media is a relatively new space, and a place recently being practiced by the majority of Americans (Pew Research Center). This newness makes it “unsafe” to established and unestablished scholars alike, because the methods of practicing it effectively are still evolving and being tested.

### **Identity**

In analyzing Alba’s socially constructed identities as “old,” “Latina,” “woman,” and an “illegal immigrant,” I draw from Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, acknowledging that though her theory is specific to the body, gender, and sex, the relationship she draws between performativity itself and its relationship to power structures is useful in informing my investigation of Alba’s ability and agency to perform and change her identities within socially constructed spaces.

This relationship between performativity and power structures is explained well through a wardrobe analogy in Sarah Salih’s book *Judith Butler*:

...one’s gender is performatively constituted in the same way that one’s choice of clothes is curtailed, perhaps even predetermined, by the society, context, economy, etc. within which one is situated. Readers familiar with Daphne du Marier’s novel *Rebecca* (1938) will remember that the

nameless narrator shocks her husband by turning up at a party in an identical dress to that worn by his dead wife on a similar occasion. In preparation for the party, the narrator, assisted by the malign Mrs. Danvers, believes that she is choosing her costume and thereby creating herself, whereas it turns out that Mrs. Danvers is in fact recreating the narrator as Rebecca. If Mrs. Danvers is taken to exemplify authority of power here, *Rebecca* may provide an example of the way in which identities, far from being chosen by an individual agent, precede and constitute those “agents” or subjects (just as Rebecca literally precedes the narrator). (56-57)

The first thing I highlight in Butler’s work as I explore Alba’s identities within *Jane the Virgin* is this notion that they are performed, not natural. This is key, because for Butler (and for Alba), the idea of identity transformation then becomes subversive and disruptive to established patriarchal identity expectations and standards (Robinson 290). Again, I believe it important to note that though the overarching concept of performativity is being informed by Butler, the identities which she investigates (gender and sex) are not interchangeable with Alba’s other identities of “Latina,” “old,” and “illegal immigrant.” However, though not interchangeable, these identities are never not affected by her gender identity, due to this notion of intersectionality. So, yes, they are distinct categories that should be, and are examined, yet paradoxically, intersectional ones that cannot be separated.

With each spatial transgression and convergence, Alba pushes, expands, and transforms her Latinidad, and redefines what it means for her to be an older, Latina, immigrant. With Alba’s linguistic transgressions, I want to make special note of the importance of an intersectional analysis of the representation of Alba’s character. While one might be inclined to think Alba’s language proficiency has nothing to do with her age, it is impossible to analyze one without taking the other into account. Each performed



identity affects the others, which is what makes her growth as a character, and the positive representation of it within the hegemonic U.S. television show so impressive.

Just as Crenshaw argues that one cannot understand the experience of a Black woman independently through a stand-alone analysis of her race or her gender, Alba's linguistic journey is also tethered to her age, and vice-versa. Older women in dominant U.S. television are typically underrepresented, and are not principal characters with progress narratives (Magoffin 11). Alba's linguistic performance of Spanish through her safe space of Spanish also promotes the Latino Threat Narrative, proposed by Leo Chaves, furthering the stagnant, one-dimensional, character trope. This seemingly unrelated mixing of Alba's language performance and racial identity is what necessitates the intersectional analysis. The Latino Threat Narrative, per Chaves, is one that crafts an "alarmist discourse about immigrants and their perceived negative impacts on society" (4). Furthermore, Alba's immigrant status need not be officially known, but her foreignness is presumed through her linguistic one. Alba's race, language, as well as her gender and age all contribute to the representation of her character. So, as she transgresses this safe space, she is breaking with these established stereotypes of "immigrant," "Latina," as well as "old"- identities that though separate, continuously affect each other, and must be examined intersectionally to fully appreciate the depth of Alba's growth.

Secondly, this relationship between performing identities and the agency to perform them allotted by the power structures which dominate the performing agent is important. Returning to Salih's wardrobe analogy, the narrator of *Rebecca* possessed complete agency to select her outfit and perform her identity. However, this agency was

limited and “*even predetermined*” by the clothing available to her and by Mrs. Danvers, the power figure. Similarly, Alba possesses complete agency to perform her own identities, and she does. However, it is important to observe not only how the spaces she occupies empower her to do this, but how they ultimately determine the capacity in which she is able to.

### **Standpoint**

Based on my appearance, cultural practices, language, age, and class, I am considered a young, white American, and I benefit from the privileges that come with that. This “outsider” status is important as I investigate the representation of an older Latina immigrant. The “insider” and “outsider” statuses are also messy. This can be easily seen with a cursory dip into popular culture today. Pop singer Ariana Grande has garnered criticism for purposely exoticizing herself to gain popularity and insider status with Latinx audiences (Diamondback), though when asked directly, she immediately responded that she is not Latina but Italian-American (Twitter). Beyoncé, on the other hand, has been criticized for furthering and capitalizing on pro-Whiteness through her choice in hair color and lighter skin, thus not truly representing a Black woman in mainstream media (The Conversation). Cultural appropriation or not, the fact that these issues of representation and questioning of race even exist support the proposal that race is a social construct, and that racialization is cultural, not biological, that racial identification is social, not scientific.

Having my race, and simultaneously, insider/outsider status, unconsentingly projected onto me by White-identifying people as well as Latinx-identifying people furthers my ascription to the theorization of race as a social construct. Stephanie Fetta, in

her book *Shaming into Brown*, resists using the term “race,” asserting that it “cloaks ideology as empirical fact” (3). She employs the term “racialization” to “indicate an entrenched U.S. cultural practice or using phenotype and performative markers to designate a subcategory of people as separate and inferior” (3). This practice becomes “racism” when it becomes political, “seek[ing] subordination of sectors of the population as out-groups based on the *perception* of human variation” (3).

This work is a narrative study of an older, Latina immigrant character’s identity transformation. I reached my conclusions through applications of spatial theory, feminist methodologies, educational pedagogy, film theory and production. I feel that I am offering a small, but significant contribution to intersectional feminist race studies. Though achieved through theory and perspective, not standpoint, I offer it as valid nonetheless.

### **Organization**

First, in “Shopping for Vibrators with my Abuela... Communication and Resistance through Space in *Jane the Virgin*,” I explore Alba’s occupation of targeted physical and linguistic spaces within the narrative of *Jane the Virgin*, and demonstrate how these spaces facilitate her growth and transformation into a multi-dimensional character. I propose that the “non-safe” physical and linguistic spaces which Alba’s character occupies are practiced as intentional manipulations and attempts to challenge established stereotypes of the old, Latina, immigrant woman in U.S. mainstream television and are practiced as places of transgression for Alba to break the borders confining her character to these one-dimensional tropes. While these public, non-safe

spaces act as spaces of transgression for Alba, her character ultimately experiences growth and identity expansion through the convergence of her safe and non-safe spaces.

In “Space and the Manipulation of Genre in *Jane the Virgin*,” I investigate the manipulation of the *telenovela* genre itself through the use of spaces within the narrative and its effect on the reception of Alba’s character transformation and Latinidad within U.S. television. I assert that, through the creation and utilization of specific spaces within the narrative, *Jane the Virgin* is a successful adaptation of the *telenovela* genre, mixing the genre with comedy in an effective way, making the show accessible to mainstream U.S. audiences, while maintaining the integrity of the *telenovela*. This successful hybridization of Latinx and American media allows for Alba’s stereotyped Latinidad to be questioned and reconfigured by the dominant American viewer. Here, the idea of safe space is applied to the dominant American viewer and their genred safe space: how the narrative spatial manipulations in *Jane the Virgin* allow for the viewer’s genre preferences to expand and include tropes of the *telenovela*, mainly the element of melodrama.

Next, in “Social Media Natives and their #Spaces,” I focus on the digital and social media spaces in *Jane the Virgin* and propose that these places are quickly transforming into the new spaces for social activism and scholarly learning. Because of this, I call for a change in the production and exchange of research and academic work, showing how the success of *Jane the Virgin*, its diverse spectatorship, and political implications are facilitated through social media forums. The implications for safe space here are largely generational, as I label current students and emerging scholars “Social Media Natives,” and argue that these digital spaces which they are occupying are foreign,

thus not credible, to current academics. As a Social Media Native myself, I also created a digital component for this thesis, in an attempt to demonstrate the academic credibility and accessibility for this research to current generations and non-academic audiences, to bridge the gap between theory and praxis. Here is the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4JNisWWCFk>

Lastly, in “Where is Alba Now?” I return to Alba’s current spatial occupations as *Jane the Virgin* concludes, and her character’s narrative through this medium comes to an end, focusing on how her safe spaces have changed or expanded, and how her non-safe spaces have become safe, or at the very least, more accessible. I also examine the convergence of spaces and identities, noting that Alba does not simply shed harmful Latina stereotypes, but instead complicates them, creating a complex, multi-dimensional character and identity, who, despite not complying with or reinforcing U.S. models, has successfully entertained both dominant American and Latinx viewers in the United States.

### CHAPTER 3

#### SHOPPING FOR VIBRATORS WITH MY ABUELA...COMMUNICATION AND RESISTANCE THROUGH SPACE IN *JANE THE VIRGIN*

##### Physical Spaces

“[Alba] has sensuality, she’s still assured sexually, and when she takes her to that sex shop, Alba ends up with a vibrator in her house! And experiencing the vibrator, too! You have never seen a Latina grandmother doing that! Somehow we’re not seen as sexual beings after a certain age. When we’re young, Latina characters are very hot, very sexy. And in the middle, you’re still sexy and hot, but you’re the policewoman or firefighter or nurse. You see this older woman exploring and breaking boundaries, because we are always portrayed as traditional, with the fear of God. Here the fear of God is very instilled in my character, but Jennie [Urman] has made her go beyond her Catholicism.”

-Ivonne Coll, on her character, Alba (2018)

Returning to the introductory scene of Alba’s drunken bar dancing from *Chapter 71*, this chapter performs close readings of physical and linguistic spatial transgression performed by Alba, resulting in challenges to established stereotypes of older, Latina women in U.S. television. The actual appearance of Latinx characters in U.S. television is scarce to begin with. According to Professor Isabel Molina-Guzman, author of recent book *Latinas and Latinos on TV*, “U.S. Latinos make up about 18 percent of the population, but [they] are represented on programs only about 6 percent of the time” (Illinois News Bureau). With only about one-third of a representation-to-population ratio, the issue of how Latinxs are represented in this 6 percent of screen time becomes even more pressing. Mary Beltrán, author of *Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom*, asserts that this representation has a significant political impact, and that the image of the Latinx on screen directly impacts the lives of U.S. Latinxs:

...the equation of whiteness with citizenship and all of its attendant rights in the United States, whether Latina and Latino stars have been constructed as white, nonwhite, or indeterminate, citizens or foreigners at various junctures arguably has had a profound impact not only on film, television, and star images but also on public attitudes, and thus on social institutions and legislation that made a difference in the lives of U.S. Latina/os. (8)

Beltrán writes that this image tends to portray “the inaccurate conflation of disparate Latina/o cultures and the stereotypical representation of Latina/os as highly sexual, comic, subservient, and/or criminal” (12), and also draws on Ramírez Berg’s description of the Latin@ role in Hollywood: not the star. She writes that “[h]ero and heroine roles have historically been the exclusive domain of the white actors and actresses, while Latina/os and other actors deemed nonwhite have typically been cast as villains, sidekicks, and temporary love interests” (11). Alba’s transgressions challenge these notions of Latina representation in U.S. television.

The house is the physical space which Alba occupies most frequently. Often, she can be seen on the sofa, in the kitchen, seated at the dining room table, and on the porch. Through the various ways in which she occupies this place (speaking exclusively in Spanish, cooking, cleaning, and caring for her family in different ways), she establishes this place as a constructed social space. The house is the space where she adopts the role of a caretaker, fulfills stereotypical roles of femininity, and through her language and strict practice of Catholicism, reinforces some stereotypes of the Latina woman. The house is Alba’s safe physical space because she is most physically safe from the threat of deportation, and because within this space, she feels free to comfortably engage in the aforementioned physical, linguistic, and social actions.

In this space of her house, Alba is identified as a “caregiver” by the narrator of the series, and also as a “wise old owl” by Jane’s former boyfriend (*Jane the Virgin* 79,68). A study about the representation of older people in television series showed that old women are “heavily under-represented,” and that “the representation of older people’s social participation and financial resources was overly positive” (Kessler, Rakoczy, Staudinger 531). Even though the qualities of being wise and caring are not inherently negative, Alba’s identity seems one-dimensional within the space of her house. She is solely the person who her family goes to for advice or consolation.

This same study also showed that older women were represented within typical gendered female roles. The majority of Alba’s actions comply with the feminine stereotype, because she is habitually cooking, cleaning, and caring for others. She is almost never seen doing something for herself within the space of her house. In this same space, she speaks Spanish exclusively, complying with a part of the Latinx immigrant stereotype, who, according to the “Latino Threat Narrative” proposed by Leo Chaves is “unwilling or incapable of integrating, or becoming part of the national community” (3). When Alba leaves this established safe space, which is both physical and linguistic, her character generally confronts challenges. Within the five seasons of the series, these repeated spatial transgressions force her character to grow and develop, and within these foreign, “non-safe” spaces, she triumphs in breaking certain cultural frameworks which operate within her.

This non-safe space of the bar in Chapter 71 demonstrates a significant resistance against Alba’s stereotyped character. First, she is dressed in the clothing of her daughter, which is nothing like the conservative clothing that she normally dresses in. This action,



in accordance with the concept of “border” that De Certeau offers, creates a “theatre of actions,” which establishes the place of the bar, a public space, as a space of rebellion for her (123-125). Even though she is an older, Catholic woman, she chooses to wear provocative clothing. Second, she rejects the notion which her daughter proposes that “this point in [her] life” implies she should settle for something less than what she desires romantically. Alba also dances, again breaking a border. A study analyzing the representation of older people in mainstream U.S. media showed that older women, especially in television, are not represented in sexual, spontaneous, or fun ways. On the contrary, they are typically not significant, strong, or principal characters (Magoffin 11). Furthermore, occupying this foreign space allowed Alba to get drunk, something which she would not normally do within the space of her house. In assuming this conduct, she could relax and honestly express her true romantic desires, allowing her pre-established character to develop, resisting the label of the unidimensional, purely matriarchal, caring role. Jane affirms this broken border with the exclamation of “That’s my grandma!” showing her surprise at Alba’s actions.

In Chapter 74, Jane brings Alba to a sex shop to buy a vibrator. “Siento que he entrado a las puertas del infierno,”<sup>5</sup> Alba exclaims, uncomfortable, refusing to even look at any of the objects. “It looks like as you age, your vagina gets drier,” Jane says to Alba, examining a bottle of vaginal lubricant. Offended, Alba leaves the store, while Jane buys her a vibrator and the lubricant, secretly placing them in Alba’s purse, to be discovered later.

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<sup>5</sup> Translation: “I feel like I’ve entered the gates of Hell.”

“No lo vi y no lo quería... usar, eso estaría mal. Es pecado,”<sup>6</sup> Alba says to Jane.

“Well, a part of you did because you came with me to the store... Is that just what you grew up hearing in the Church?” Jane asks her. “That sex wasn’t about pleasure? Because it should be, and you deserve to be happy, abuela, and in love, but you’re never gonna find that if you can’t overcome this. You can’t just deny a whole part of who you are.” Ultimately, Alba enjoys the vibrator in her bed, her Bible on the nightstand next to her.

In the foreign, non-safe space of the erotic store, Alba is battling significant constructions of religion and sexuality that her character holds. A study about Hispanic families and the connection between Catholicism and medical assistance by Geri-Ann Galanti showed a strong correlation between religion and the importance of modesty for older Hispanic women. It also emphasized the value placed on marriage and the adherence to typical gender roles. Alba uses the oppressive language of her religion (“el infierno” and “pecado”)<sup>7</sup> to describe how she feels about being in the store. However, this resistance ultimately happens when the erotic store transforms into a physical space of sexual and religious transgression for Alba. On her part, in talking about the vaginal lubricant to her grandmother, Jane is practicing something significant because this space, through the object of the bottle of vaginal lubricant, helps her recognize that older people also have sexual needs and desires; and even though these needs may change, they do not stop existing. This is a good example of DeCerteau’s bridge (126), because Alba feels so uncomfortable that she cannot answer Jane’s comment about her sexuality, but ultimately, she utilizes the information provided by Jane to cross into a new space.

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<sup>6</sup> Translation: “I didn’t see it and I didn’t want it... using this would be bad. It’s a sin.”

<sup>7</sup> Translation: “Hell” and “Sin”

Also, Jane helps Alba identify a part of her identity that she is not prepared to recognize yet. In reminding her that the act of going to this physical space demonstrates a wish or a curiosity for a vibrator, she creates a space of transgression for Alba, that even though Alba does not access comfortably, she does choose to enter. Ultimately, Alba using the vibrator in her bed, next to the Bible laying on her nightstand, demonstrates a firm acceptance. She is performing this sexuality in her safe and private space. With this action, she expands the safe space into one that newly includes an identity of sexual exploration and self-care. So, initially, Alba (nor Jane) can acknowledge Alba's sexuality within the safe space of the home, where Alba performs as a chaste, Catholic, caretaker. The non-safe, foreign physical space of the erotic store creates a space of transgression for them, because Jane, acting as a bridge, feels empowered outside of the household, which is run by the matriarchal and Catholic Alba, to push Alba's boundaries and educate her about her sexuality. Alba, confronted with sex toys and Jane's admonishments, feels that she is committing a sin, but is reminded by her granddaughter that she came to this space voluntarily, signifying that some part of her must have wanted to explore her sexuality, and was using this foreign, public space to do so. However, she was not comfortable enough to fully expand her sexual identity until she utilized the objects and experiences accessed from the non-safe space of the erotic store within her safe space: her bedroom. Ultimately, her house is where she feels comfortable expanding and performing her identity, and in her white nightgown, next to her Bible, in her own bed, she safely tried the vibrator and successfully expanded her sexual and religious identities.

Within these foreign, non-safe physical spaces of the bar and the erotic store, one can observe fragments of the challenges to Alba's character, and the rejection of some

stereotypes of her Latinidad. Labelled as a “caregiver” and a “wise, old owl,” she begins to free herself from these restrictions with the intentional search for romantic love, independence, and sexuality. She begins to leave behind the notion that being religious equals complete chastity or feeling ashamed of her sexual desires. While these non-safe spaces provide challenges to Alba’s established identity, the convergence of the safe and the non-safe ultimately foster growth to her character identity and the representation of her as an older Latina woman on screen.

### **Linguistic Spaces**

“I was worried, because Americans don’t like to read subtitles. Everywhere else in the world, we read the subtitles, but here not so much. I was worried that people wouldn’t know what I was about, what Alba represented. And oh my god, what a journey.”

-Ivonne Coll, 2018

Apart from the physical spaces which aid in the transformations of Alba’s character, the linguistic spaces are equally relevant, and perhaps even more overtly political. I propose that Alba’s linguistic safe space is a form of resistance, reminding spectators that she is a first-generation immigrant, and it permits Alba to relate with other generations, genders, and nationalities on her own terms, welcoming them or prohibiting them from the linguistic space which she has created for herself.

Throughout the series, Alba communicates in Spanish, though it seems she understands English very well. She only speaks English on specific occasions, and these instances are significant to the relationship that she has with the people she is interacting with. Similarly, only certain people speak with her in Spanish, which indicates a significant relationship or connection that they share with her. So, the utilization of Spanish and English establish Alba’s linguistic spaces, a foundation of her linguistic

ability; but the ways in which she chooses to use them convert them into “practiced places,” or spaces.

There are various characters in the series who speak Spanish and choose to speak in English when they are with Alba, even if everyone in the physical space speaks Spanish. For example, Jane and Xiomara are fluent in Spanish, but inside of their house, they choose to speak in English with Alba for the majority of their interactions in the series. For this reason, I believe that the choice Alba makes to speak in Spanish, is a linguistic spatial practice to establish security within the narrative, similar to her practicing of the physical house as a space to safely perform her identity. Additionally, it is an intentional reminder for the viewer of her first-generation immigrant status. This is important, because this linguistic safe space is establishing the cultural racialization of Latinxs in the United States through Alba’s character representation.<sup>8</sup> Stephanie Fetta not only supports the notion of race as a social construct, but proposes that we assume race somatically, through what we see, smell, and hear (39). Each time Alba speaks, and the English subtitles appear on the screen, she leaves the linguistic space of the people with whom she is speaking, and is distancing herself from the established linguistic space of the United States, not only through the linguistic barrier of Spanish, but through the visual space of the on-screen subtitles, reminding the viewer that Alba’s linguistic safe space is culturally foreign.

Each time Alba chooses to speak in English, she is leaving her linguistic safe space. Similar to the effect of the public physical spaces, her integration into the

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<sup>8</sup> I employ the term “racialization” as Stephanie Fetta does in her book, *Shaming into Brown*: “to indicate an entrenched U.S. cultural practice of using phenotype and performative markers to designate a subcategory of people as separate and inferior” (3).

linguistic space of English also challenges her character identity, and ultimately the convergence of the two spaces helps her to leave the cultural limits, labels, and stereotypes of being an immigrant which are imposed on her. As the seasons advance, her use of English changes and progresses, and her transition into this linguistic space results in her successful legalization as an American citizen. I identify two specific occasions within the narrative in which Alba speaks English to show how they contribute to the development and growth of her character.

In *Chapter 78*, Alba goes to a medical supply store with Rogelio (Jaime Camil), her son-in-law, to buy some things for Xiomara, who is going to have surgery for her breast cancer. When an employee comes to help, he speaks to Alba in English and says, “The patient has a long road ahead of her.” Alba responds in English and says, “She is not a patient, she is my daughter. I am aware that she will be in pain, that’s obvious. I don’t need to hear it from you.” Rogelio attempts to interrupt in Spanish and remove Alba from the conversation, but she ignores him and continues to speak in English with the employee.

Something important to observe in Alba’s response is that she does not only answer outside of her linguistic safe space, but she also answers clearly and aggressively. She uses English to enter into the linguistic space of the employee and correct what she feels he has said wrong, to redefine the identity he has given her daughter. This is significant because, typically, when Alba communicates in English, she does so out of necessity, shyly, and does not say more than is essential. English is her non-safe space, where she does not feel comfortable performing this linguistic identity. But here, she enters into this foreign space to share her anger, something that is not essential. When

Rogelio attempts to bring her back into her linguistic safe space and remove her from the confrontation which she has started, she rejects him, and insists on finishing what she is saying, instead of returning to her safe space and using Rogelio to translate for her. Though it could be noted that she is using English to fulfill her stereotyped role as a “caretaker,” I propose that she is leaving her established role as immigrant to communicate her emotions without help, as she usually depends on a translator outside of her linguistic safe space.

This interaction is also quite different from an experience Alba has in Chapter 2 in a doctor’s office, when Jane has her first ultrasound. Though Alba leaves the safe, physical space of her house to accompany Jane to the appointment, she does not traverse her safe linguistic space. We can observe how she fulfills the stereotyped “caretaker” role, because when Jane enters the exam room with six other people (her boyfriend, her mother, her grandmother, the baby’s father, and the baby’s father’s wife), and grows overwhelmed, she pulls Alba in first saying, “This is my Grandma.” However, when the doctor asks everyone to identify themselves, Alba responds, “¡No entiendo! ¡No entiendo!”<sup>9</sup> and is asked to leave the room with everyone else except for Rafael, the biological father of Jane’s baby. Unlike her reaction in the medical supply store, Alba does not protest, but leaves quickly. Dominated by her linguistic safe space, Alba’s role of immigrant restricts the caretaking role that she wanted to fulfill, and that she was expected to fulfill by her granddaughter. Alba’s foreignness is also highlighted by the subtitles that appear on the screen. When the doctor asks who in the room is Jane’s family, everybody starts to answer and elaborate at once, but Alba’s answer of “¡No

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<sup>9</sup> Translation: “I don’t understand! I don’t understand!”

entiendo! ¡No entiendo!” is emphasized with the English translation on screen, reminding the viewer that even in the midst of chaos and confusion, Alba is further isolated than everybody else.

In Chapter 80, Alba takes the Naturalization Test to become a legal citizen of the United States. The exam is oral and in English, and she earns a 100 percent. When she leaves the exam, she exclaims in Spanish, “¡Voy a ser ciudadana americana!”<sup>10</sup> In this moment, Alba looks at a painting of the Statue of Liberty and imagines the statue saying to her in Spanish, “Felicidades, Alba. Esta tierra es tu tierra.”<sup>11</sup>

When in the oral exam, located in the non-safe, linguistic space of English, Alba’s achievement of earning a 100 percent signifies that this space is no longer so foreign. She has conquered it, and upon doing it, rids herself of the established identity of “illegal immigrant.” She has officially proven that she is competent in the linguistic space of English, the hegemonic linguistic space of the United States- a social space that had not completely accepted her, legally or socially. Additionally, when she declares her happiness in her linguistic safe space of Spanish, the Statue of Liberty, a markedly American figure, responding to her within her established linguistic safe space, telling her that the land of the United States is *her* land, represents an acceptance of Alba’s Spanish linguistic safe space, which had been largely rejected throughout the series by many. Here, we can observe this convergence of Alba’s safe linguistic space (Spanish) and non-safe linguistic space (English) converging, resulting in identity expansion.

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<sup>10</sup> Translation: “I am going to be an American citizen!”

<sup>11</sup> Translation: “Congratulations, Alba. This land is your land.”



Through these many transgressions of her physical and linguistic safe spaces, Alba's character develops outside of established one-dimensional stereotypes of an older, Latina immigrant. As this series progresses, her character develops, her identities expand, and she gains dimensions in her personality and in her own personal narrative. These are only a few, targeted examples of Alba's transgressions, but they demonstrate instances of Alba pushing back against her initially established identities as the selfless matriarch of the Latin@ household, an older widow whose religious identity prohibits her from dating or attending to her sexual desires, and an illegal immigrant who communicates in Spanish as a linguistic safe space in the country that has not legally or socially accepted her as a citizen. With each spatial transgression and convergence, Alba pushes, expands, and transforms her Latinidad, and redefines what it means for her to be an elderly, Latina, immigrant.

## CHAPTER 4

### SPACE AND THE MANIPULATION OF GENRE IN *JANE THE VIRGIN*

“Late night?” my Uber driver asked me, as I slide into the car, eyes puffy, hair unwashed.

“End of the semester,” I answer. “I’m not sleeping very much. How’s your day going?”

“I didn’t sleep either,” she said. “But, you probably wouldn’t understand.”

“Try me.”

“Well, I am VERY Hispanic, and last night my husband I and were finishing this soap opera.”

“Oh, nice! A soap opera or a *telenovela*?”

“Oh my God! A *telenovela*! Are you Latina?”

“No, I’m just researching the differences for a paper.”

“Mujer<sup>12</sup>, they are SO different. Nobody understands. I would NEVER watch a soap opera. But novelas are DEEP. I wish Americans understood that.”

-Early Morning Uber Ride, 2018

*Jane the Virgin* is an American sitcom loosely adapted from the Venezuelan *telenovela Juana la Virgen*, but it is not quite a *telenovela* or a sitcom. Obviously changed for American TV, the show still maintains specific, obvious elements and tropes of the *telenovela* genre. However, it is not a parody of the *telenovela* nor a failed American attempt at the *telenovela*. I propose that *Jane the Virgin* is a successful adaptation of the *telenovela* genre, effectively mixing the genre with comedy, making the show accessible and enjoyable to dominant American viewers, while maintaining the integrity of the *telenovela*, thus not alienating the Latinx viewer. Though various strategies are implemented to achieve this adaptation, the creation and utilization of specific spaces within the narrative to manipulate the genres sets the stage for the

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<sup>12</sup> Translation: “Woman”

successful usage of space to facilitate Alba's identity transgressions, and the dominant American viewer's understanding of them.

The Nielsen Company released a report in 2018 showing that 24 percent of *Jane the Virgin*'s viewership identified as "Hispanic," 53 percent identified as "Non-Hispanic White," and 17 percent identified as "Non-Hispanic Black." This report compared *Jane the Virgin* to viewership of other top-rated U.S. programs which featured multicultural casts, and the other shows, though highly rated, were not attracting diverse audiences. For example, the show *Pequeños Gigantes*, produced by Univision, reported a 98 percent Hispanic viewership and a 1 percent Non-Hispanic White viewership. In Nielsen's report, *Jane the Virgin* was the only show out of the thirteen listed whose audience racial demographics almost directly matched the those of the most recent generations in the United States: Millennials and Generation Z<sup>13</sup>, suggesting that the show is appealing to anyone.

### **Telenovela vs. Soap Opera**

Before exploring the adaptation strategies of the *telenovela* genre, it is first important to establish the difference between the *telenovela* and the soap opera. This is a significant distinction and a common misconception among English-speaking audiences. In fact, the Spanish word "*telenovela*" is often directly translated in English to "soap opera," even though they do not carry the same meaning (OED). This confusion is one of the key reasons that I find the successful adaptation and maintenance of the *telenovela*

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<sup>13</sup> I use Pew Research Center's definition of "Millennial" and "Generation Z." A Millennial is anyone born between 1981 and 1996, and a person belongs to Generation Z if born in 1997 or afterwards.

genre within *Jane the Virgin* so impressive, as the show attracts and maintains both Latinx and White audiences.

There are at least four key differences between the *telenovela* and the soap opera: the targeted audiences, the presence of narrative closure, the status of the actors and actresses, and the attachment of the spectator to the genre. U.S. soap operas began to premiere in the 1950's, sponsored by soap companies. They generally aired during the day, targeting females who were at home, whereas *telenovelas* started at the same time, but with a different vision. *Telenovelas* aired during various times, and were targeting all audiences in Latin America, not specifically women. Another important difference is the lack of narrative closure often found in soap operas. A chapter titled, "Our Welcomed Guests," which discusses the economic impact of the *telenovela* in Latin America, specifies that "telenovelas have always had clear-cut stories with definite endings that permit narrative closure" (Lopez 258). The caliber of the actors and actresses in each genre is also regarded very differently. In the U.S., with Hollywood being the ultimate goal for stardom, acting in a soap opera is typically considered second-rate acting work, whereas "[working] in a telenovela today is often to have reached the apex of one's professional career" (Lopez 258). So, because *telenovela* stars are generally recognized, admired, and lauded by their viewers (who are not only stay-at-home women), there exists this presence of closure to provide said viewer with a satisfying narrative, which not only typically results in more attachment from the viewer, but also often results in reappearances of characters, such as dead characters who are not really dead, or characters who have left the narrative but return in unexpected (unrealistic) ways.

*Telenovelas* are recognized and valued for their melodramatic qualities and tropes, such as characters returning from the past, reversals of fortune, dramatic and painful conflicts (Acosta-Alzuru). On the contrary, the use and reception of melodrama in the U.S. was “devalued in favor of realism in the twentieth century through a gendering process... the genre became a ‘women’s form’” (Lopez 260) because of the strong emotions and the focus on supposedly feminine preoccupations- qualities that made the genre more attractive to women. So, while soap operas were, and still are, associated with an exclusively female viewership, *telenovelas* aim to be an “elite genre,” and for this they include “novela” in their name (Lopez 260).

### **Defining Viewership**

To negotiate viewership, I have changed terms many times, feeling dissatisfied and nervous about generalizations. I started identifying spectators on the basis of race and citizenship, toying with labels such as “American viewer,” “Non-Latinx viewer,” and “White viewer,” and have been tempted to remove race from the dialogue entirely, anecdotally knowing that there exist Non-Latinx people who enjoy *telenovelas*, and also recognizing that terming someone “American” implies an exclusion of Latinxs that perhaps even further racializes. In Alba’s momentous moment of obtaining American citizenship, she does not cease to perform as Latina, or to be perceived as Latina. These hesitations led me to the label of “Non-*telenovela* viewer,” in order to remove all identity assumptions and performances, but while this term might be technically correct, and even proper in a theoretical bubble, it is not realistic or helpful in furthering the claims about representation that I am trying to make. Historically, *telenovelas* were created for Latin American audiences and soap operas were created for White-identifying women in the

United States. Recognizing this distinction and working with the current mixing of genres I observe in *Jane the Virgin*, I acknowledge that race is critical, albeit performative and socially constructed. To pretend that race is not a factor, or to refuse to recognize it would be to not acknowledge the significant contribution I believe *Jane the Virgin* to be making as a U.S.-produced T.V. series, in regard to attracting and educating White, American spectators, without trivializing the Latina culture, or at the expense of it.

So, I employ the term “dominant American viewer,” understanding that any Latinx spectator is an American spectator, but with the intent of raising consciousness, through this choice in language, that “American” is often associated with Whiteness, and that the soap opera, with its key element of melodrama, was designed for the White, female spectator within the United States, gendering and racializing the reception of melodrama in the United States. “I also use “Latinx viewer,” again, with the understanding that “Latinx” and “American” are not mutually exclusive, but as an intentional rhetorical reminder that “Latinx” comes with a foreignness.

To identify, or be identified as a Latinx person, is to be marginalized, to be othered, and often to be shamed within the United States. I utilize “dominant American viewer” to emphasize the importance placed on the construction and hierarchy of Whiteness in the United States, distinguishing this viewer as a White, American viewer, to whom the *telenovela* genre is foreign.

### **Space and Melodrama**

*Jane the Virgin* contains many of these melodramatic elements that the *telenovela* genre is known and valued for, such as the artificial insemination of a virgin, evil twins, a long-lost father, prohibited love with a priest, to provide just a few of many examples.

How then, since the reception of such melodrama is typically dismissed as too “feminine” and “emotion[al],” are a significant population of dominant American audiences also enjoying the show? Speaking about her vision for the creation of the series, the creator of the show, Jennie Urman, said, “Telenovelas are the most popular genre in the world, and there’s a reason for that: They have so much drama and such huge stakes all of the time. I wanted to capture that. I wanted to capture it in the way that also let our characters stay grounded amidst all the crazy (Sava).” She also expressed, “I wanted to treat it a little bit like a fairy tale and give it moments of magical realism with daydreaming sequences that play up telenovela qualities...It’s such a fine line to go from deep comedy to deep drama” (Villarreal).

Thinking of this goal of “grounding” which Urman expresses, a creation of distinct spaces can be observed within the narrative, each space coinciding with a different distance from the protagonist’s perceived reality, and from the dominant American viewer’s comfort and understanding of melodrama. Urman identifies three of these spaces as worlds which she creates specifically to achieve this process of grounding, and identifies two other spaces as elements which she believed were essential to the tone of the series (Sava). The spaces are: The Villanueva House, The Hotel Marbella, The *Telenovela: The Passions of Santos*, The Narration of *Jane the Virgin*, and the on-screen texts.

The first space is the Villanueva House. This is the home of Jane, her mother, and her grandmother. This is the world with which the viewer follows and empathizes the most, because Jane is the pregnant protagonist, and the series focuses on her family. This is also, as established in the previous chapter, Alba’s physical and linguistic safe space.

As this is the most “grounded” space, this also becomes the dominant American viewer’s safe space. This is the space with the least melodramatic elements or events, and because of this, the identities which the characters perform are more easily believed, understood, and accepted by the dominant American viewer.

The second space is the Hotel Marbella, the home of Rafael, the father of Jane’s baby, and Petra, his wife. Urman explains that the colors and the esthetic are intentionally bright and “Florida-like” to insinuate and create more fantasy for the viewer (Sava). This space also clashes with the calmer and more muted space of the Villanueva house, insinuating more possibility for drama and a distance from reality. Just as this space is foreign to Jane and Alba, it is also slightly foreign to the dominant American viewer, introducing possibility for melodramatic tropes that they are not typically exposed to.

The third space is a *telenovela* within the show, called *The Passions of Santos*, and this is the space which is most removed from reality. This distance is most effectively demonstrated when the women in the Villanueva house watch the *telenovela* on their television in their home, physically and emotionally distancing the two spaces, especially as the star of the *telenovela* on the television screen, unknown to Jane, is her father.

When various melodramatic tropes begin to occur within the show, they typically happen within spaces that are further away from the perceived reality of Jane, the protagonist, thus further away from the dominant American viewer’s safe space. Just as Alba pushes against the boundaries of her established one-dimensional character in foreign spaces within the narrative, melodramatic elements that push against the American spectator’s viewing boundaries also happen within narrative spaces established as more foreign, creating genre transgressions outside of the dominant American viewer’s



genre safe space. For example, when Petra's mother pushes Alba down a flight of stairs, they are located in the Hotel Marbella, a foreign space to both Alba and to the dominant American viewer. Or, when Jane's mother tells Rogelio, Jane's father, about Jane's pregnancy, they are on the set of his *telenovela*, with various backgrounds changing, and a live leopard walking around.

So, I propose that the processing of the melodrama and this grounding of the characters then occurs within the space that has been fostered as more realistic: the Villanueva household. Additionally, as this space has been established as a real and safe space, the risks and changes that various characters take can begin to be introduced here, helping the viewer accept the melodramatic aspects of such transgressions which have happened in foreign spaces. For example, Jane's mother explains the very melodramatic occurrence of the impregnation of her virgin daughter to Jane's father, while also revealing to him that he does, in fact, have a daughter (another typical melodramatic trope). These extreme transgressions occur in the most foreign space- the set of another *telenovela*. The processing of them, however, happen back in the safe, grounded space of the Villanueva Household. Here we can observe a parallel to the role that space plays in Alba's identity transgressions and expansions. Her identity is challenged in spaces that are foreign to her character, and ultimately expands once her safe and foreign spaces converge. The dominant American spectator goes through this same processing, finding a safe genre space in the non-melodramatic place of the Villanueva household, experiencing challenges to the understanding and acceptance of the *telenovela* in foreign spaces, like the Hotel Marbella and *The Passions of Santos*, and is given the opportunity

to ultimately process and enjoy the *telenovela* genre through the processing of the melodramatic events in the safe, “grounded” space of the Villanueva house.

Speaking about the narrator of the series, Urman said, “It was in that third and final draft that I decided to put the frame on with the narrator and have a bit of a meta-*telenovela* happening at the same time. Once I did that, I felt like it unlocked for me, tone-wise (Sava).” The utilization of a narrator is, for me, what parodies the *telenovela* genre in this series, reminding the viewer that yes, melodramatic things are occurring, like evil boyfriends trying to kill people, or “dead” people not really being dead, but still insisting that the series is worth watching. The narrator speaks directly to the viewer, thus creating an alliance, and assuring us that we are remaining grounded amidst all of the craziness of the melodrama. I believe that this act of parodying is another way to help the dominant American viewer process and accept the melodrama without dismissing it. I also propose that this is the “fine line” which Urman refers to, and that this is one of the ways she attempts to maneuver it. Similarly, the use of on-screen texts and modern symbols such as hashtags and tweets are a way of relating to a more contemporary audience. Like the narrator, they help connect comedy with the melodrama, and with this feeling of being grounded. In the next chapter, I elaborate more on the use of these more contemporary spaces and their potential for connecting with more varied audiences.

So, the intentional use of spaces, each being distinct in their representations of reality, is a key technique which contributes to the successful adaptation of the *telenovela* genre in *Jane the Virgin*. Though the series maintains the key element of melodrama, it is not, as the creator explains, a complete *telenovela*, nor a parody, but instead an attempt to mix and connect the *telenovela* genre with comedy, which I find successful. These spaces

formed inside of the narrative allow specific spaces for the melodramatic tropes while establishing credible character reactions, and also creating empathy, interest, and intrigue for both the dominant American and Latinx viewer alike. Ultimately, they create a series which, though not a *telenovela*, is a successful hybrid which does pay homage to the original genre, and invites the dominant American viewer to enjoy the melodramatic aspect that is generally dismissed within hegemonic American film and television viewing culture.

### **Hybridization vs. “Americanization”**

This intentional hybridization of *Jane the Virgin* creates an understanding for the dominant American viewer of the *telenovela*, as opposed to simply “Americanizing” the series into a sitcom and alienating the Latinx viewer. Griffin, in “The Americanization of *The Office*,” explains the successful transnational adaptation of the British sitcom through an episodic comparison of the original, British *Office*’s first season to the American adaptation, identifying the various strategies of “Americanization” (157). Griffin addresses the setting (spaces), the protagonist, the characters, the dialogue, and the plots, and asserts that “NBC’s *The Office* arguably has been more successful than any remake of a British series since the 1970’s. The producers and writers have managed to craft a version steeped in American sensibilities, rather than a paint-by-numbers remake” (162). I do not disagree with Griffin’s assertions, nor do I believe that the “Americanizing” of the sitcom should never be done. However, if this had simply been done to *Jane the Virgin*, with this core element of melodrama being removed in an attempt to Americanize the series, I am not sure that the original *telenovela* could have been adapted into a comedy in a way that would feel accessible or enjoyable for dominant American or

Latinx viewers. Furthermore, this hybridization of genres which occurs in *Jane the Virgin* is political. In providing access to the dominant American viewer, as opposed to simply removing the *telenovela* element, the viewer is then able to gain an access point and a cultural understanding of Latinx character journeys. A counterexample of this can be seen in sitcoms such as *Modern Family* (2009), a series situated for the dominant American viewer, which establishes the Latina figure as a comedic, stereotyped trope as opposed to a character with a progress narrative or journey.

Molina-Guzmán points to this type of representation in her book, *Latinas & Latinos on TV: Colorblind Comedy in the Post-racial Network Era*, writing that U.S. television is pressured to “produce a character who is ideologically safe for audiences to consume, particularly during a moment of heightened racial and ethnic anxiety in the United States” (74). She engages in close readings of characters like Gloria (Sofia Vergara), the Latina housewife in *Modern Family* (2009), and Oscar, a gay Mexican (Oscar Nunez) in *The Office* (2005). I am intrigued by Molina-Guzmán’s assessments of these representations, because though she acknowledges the problematics of their stereotypes, she does not dismiss them. In an interview for the *Chicago Tribune* Guzmán said of Sofia Vergara and her character on *Modern Family*:

Personally, I love her. I think she’s a brilliant comedian and a very smart comedian. And until very recently she was the only Latina character on television in such a prominent role on a successful show. She’s playing a stereotypical character, but Gloria has also been allowed to be more nuanced in ways that are unexpected and really interesting. Her sexual politics on the show are much more progressive than the more conservative stereotype. For example, Latina women and mothers in particular are often portrayed as more Catholic and more socially rigid, whereas Gloria seems more socially conscious than a lot of the characters. But we can’t forget her only way to access that visibility is through this decades-old stereotype that is super-familiar to most U.S. audiences. And that’s a problem. The scope of representation is so narrow that for Sofia

Vergara and this character, her path has to be through this spitfire Latina trope, which means: usually has an accent; usually very temperamental; tends to look a particular way and have a particular body type.

(emphasis mine)

In speaking with me, Guzmán reinforced the positives of Gloria's representation in U.S. media, saying, "Vergara is the highest paid actress in the United States. Ask most people, and she will be the first, if not only Latina actress they can name." The solution for Guzmán, as far as Latinx representation in U.S. media, lies in production. She writes:

[A]ttention should be placed on the cultural and social risk of gender and racial homogeneity among television executives, creators, and writers. Greater diversity behind the camera is necessary for generating creativity in front of the camera that breaks away from established and traditional genres, stereotypes, and archetypes and moves audiences beyond what we are already comfortable with. (116)

Perhaps diversifying production is part of, or even the key to, *Jane the Virgin's* success in its representation of Alba. The writer's room reported that having a "female-centric room had created a safe space." Valentina Garza, the co-executive producer, described the room as a "room where people can really express their vulnerabilities," saying that "[t]he fact that we have a very diverse, very female writing staff, means we can have very candid conversations about things like sex, which is a big part of our show, and how it affects female identity." One of the writers, Rafael Agustin, expressed his connection to Alba and her immigration journey, as he used to be an undocumented student, saying that his history made him "so proud" of her, and expressing that he viewed *Jane the Virgin* as a narrative about "three powerful Latina women" as "uniquely American," which is "in itself an act of resistance against this administration (Deadline)."

Through these spatial manipulations, the dominant American viewer is familiarized and comfortable with features of the *telenovela* that are not cultural elements

of U.S. television, and because the viewer now understands, accepts, and enjoys the style, tropes, and narrative that have been established, they can follow and accept the spatial transgressions and development of Alba's identity and Latinidad within the narrative. Additionally, because many aspects of *Jane the Virgin* maintain true to the *telenovela* genre, and it is not simply a parody, the show does not alienate Latinx viewers, who are familiarized and respond positively to these melodramatic tropes. If *Jane the Virgin* were merely an American sitcom or only a Latina *telenovela*, then Alba's transgressions, though still possible, would not be accessible to both audiences. Challenging identity performance of Latinidad within an American sitcom, for example, would be difficult, if not impossible, because the viewer would be understanding the character through purely hegemonic American spaces and a U.S. cultural standpoint, and the transformation of the actual character herself would be more difficult, with the danger of "transforming" solely through an American understanding, or not transforming at all, but becoming the Latina trope of the American sitcom.

Returning to this notion of "safe space," and understanding how safe spaces are intentionally being practiced for the dominant American viewer in *Jane the Virgin*, the foreign space of the *telenovela* is made accessible through bridges such as the narrator parodying the elements of melodrama, and the contemporary on-screen texts. Because of these elements, as well as the familiar elements of the American sitcom, and the processing of melodrama in an established safe space, the borders are broken and the hegemonic viewer's safe space is expanded to include, understand, and enjoy the *telenovela* and melodrama.

## CHAPTER 5

### “SOCIAL MEDIA NATIVES” AND THEIR #SPACES

...the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language.

-Mark Prenski

I began this investigation with a narrative close reading of specific physical and linguistic spatial transgressions of Alba's character identity within the narrative of *Jane the Virgin*. I then expanded this idea of spatial manipulation into the wider scope of the hybridization of media genres, and its effect on dominant American and Latinx spectatorship. I now conclude with a consideration of the technological spaces that I observed within *Jane the Virgin*, as well as a questioning of the role which technology and social media have on spectatorship and its pedagogical potential.<sup>14</sup>

#### **Social Media Spaces**

In the previous chapter, I introduce the use of on-screen texts and modern symbols such as hash tags and tweets, which I propose are a way of relating to younger, contemporary audiences, and implying cultural relevancy for the show. Hashtags were first introduced to Twitter in 2007, and became linkable in 2009, meaning that if someone clicked on a hashtag, it would bring them to other posts which contained the same hashtag. They became linkable on Facebook in 2013, and are currently commonly

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<sup>14</sup> In order to fully engage with the praxis I want to emphasize, I include an experimental applied component of this technological space as well, via production of a thirty minute video essay titled: "Shopping for Vibrators with my Abuela... Communication and Resistance through Space in *Jane the Virgin*." I aimed to reproduce part of my research via social media in an accessible, yet still academically credible way. The video is available publicly via Youtube and Vimeo, and can be shared through social media forums such as Facebook or Twitter.

utilized on various social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Digital Trends). Hashtags have been used to create social movements in popular culture, such as the #metoo movement, a campaign to help survivors of sexual violence. Though started in 2006, their website explains that:

In less than six months, because of the viral #metoo hashtag, a vital conversation about sexual violence has been thrust into the national dialogue. What started as local grassroots work has expanded to reach a global community of survivors from all walks of life and helped to destigmatize the act of surviving by highlighting the breadth and impact of sexual violence worldwide. (metoo.)

Issues of representation have also been brought to light through hashtags, exemplified in the #Oscarssowhite hashtag. Starting with one tweet in 2015 by April Reign, managing editor of BroadwayBlack.com, the tweet went viral and initiated “broader social media movement” (Ashagre). This online activism enacted change outside of the digital space, resulting in a vote by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences which approved “changes aimed at doubling the number of women and people of color in its membership by 2020” (Wagner). Because of their cultural relevance, and their place in the technological and social media spaces which the younger generations occupy, tools like hashtags can further dialogues and conversations that were not previously visible outside of these spaces. The #metoo hashtag has made stories of sexual violence visible and has enabled survivors to share their stories and find empowerment, a sense of community, and resources to aid in their recovery journey. The #Oscarssowhite hashtag, starting with one tweet in 2015, has led to increased awareness and visibility at the lack of diversity and representation in entertainment, and a response and commitment to change. So, through the use of hashtags, we can observe the online



places of social media being practiced as spaces of community for victims of violence and social activism calling for change in mainstream media and entertainment.

*Jane the Virgin* has its own official social media accounts, including an Instagram account which has 719,000 followers and a Twitter account which has 275,000 followers. Both Instagram and Twitter have #JanetheVirgin hashtags as well, enabling fan connection via these online social platforms. Through these, we can, for example, observe debates about which love interest Jane should end up with, and what the implications are for choosing one man or the other.

After Alba's character earned American citizenship in Chapter 80, a screenshot was posted from the episode of Alba, Xiomara, and Jane from the episode on the official Instagram account of *Jane the Virgin*, captioned: "Stronger together." Many Instagram users commented on the post, offering opinions on the episode, and on its political implications. Users responded positively with comments such as, "I LOVED this scene! And trump turning into Obama was the best thing EVER 😊" and "yesterday I experienced this moment with my mom and boy was it a great day! This episode holds a special place in my heart! ❤️❤️❤️❤️" Other responses were more critical, with one user writing, "Stick to entertainment, stay out of politics... This really was a very tacky way to favor the former president over a current..." (cwjanethevirgin)

Through these social media spaces such as Twitter and Instagram, the narrative of *Jane the Virgin* continues to be examined, not only among fans who watch together or who know each other, but within significant, populous communities. These snapshots show how fan reactions to the narrative and interactions with each other are quickly tied to real-life opinions, such as the dangers of a toxic relationship, or Trump's immigration policy. This is important, because we can observe how Alba's representation within the

TV show has direct implications to the understandings and dialogues of current racialization within the United States. The space of social media is important, because I focus this last chapter on the Millennial and Generation Z spectators, and the pedagogical potential for social media spaces.

### **Social Media Natives and their Spaces**

In 2001, educator Marc Prenski proposed a concept of the “Digital Native,” asserting that all students who were currently in school at that time fell under this label, as they had never lived their lives without computers, video games, or internet. They were “native speakers.” For this reason, he proposed that these “students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors” and that our teaching methods needed to consider that. Well, 2001, especially in technological terms is ancient. Not only has technology advanced, but now, in 2019, I label current students “Social Media Natives,” as all students who are currently in Kindergarten through seniors in High School have never lived in a world without social media, adding yet another layer to our pedagogical mindsets and considerations (Dimock). Prenski argued that educators needed to learn the language of computers and the internet in order to effectively teach students, and building on this same theory, I now argue that it is essential to speak in the language of social media to efficiently communicate and distribute information with this generation of scholars. Twitter feeds are the new “Letters to the Editor” in the newspaper.<sup>15</sup> Instagram posts are the current community forums. Hashtags are an effective form of social protest and activism. To become fluent, or at least proficient, in

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<sup>15</sup> Link to Twitter Hashtag: “#Lettertotheeditor”  
[https://twitter.com/search?q=%23lettertotheeditor&src=typed\\_query](https://twitter.com/search?q=%23lettertotheeditor&src=typed_query)

this language of social media, as *Jane the Virgin* has done through the use of hashtags and tweets on and off of the screen, is to reach current students in targeted, yet still scholarly and informed ways.

So, in acknowledging this necessity to communicate with Social Media Natives via their spaces, I question academia's current modes of educating and publishing, and propose a pedagogical shift into these social media spaces. A 2019 poll reported that seventy-two percent of people in the United States utilize social media daily to socialize, check the news, share and view personal and political information, and for entertainment. This is a significant increase from 2005, when social media use in the U.S. was only five percent, and then fifty percent in 2011 (Pew Research Center). Of this seventy-two percent, we can observe a generational correlation. 90.4 percent of Millennials, 77.5 percent of Generation X, and 48.2 percent of Baby Boomers report themselves active social media users (Emarketer, 2019). Today's emerging scholars occupy these spaces of social media.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of age though, this space of social media is foreign to all academics, as social media usage has only been prominent in the U.S. for the past nine years.

Henry Jenkins, professor, author, and scholar labels himself an "Aca-fan" on his personal blog, defining this as "a hybrid creature which is part fan and part academic." He writes on the blog: "The goal of my work has been to bridge the gap between these two worlds... to find a way to break cultural theory out of the academic bookstore ghetto and open up a larger space to talk about the media that matters to us from a consumer's

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<sup>16</sup> Examples of academic social media twitter accounts:  
**bell hooks, Feminist Author and Scholar:** <https://twitter.com/bellhooks>  
**Sara Goldrick Rab, Professor of Higher Education and Policy:** <https://twitter.com/saragoldrickrab>  
**Jesse Stommel, Educator in Critical Digital Pedagogy** <https://twitter.com/Jessifer>

point of view.” As someone who is, bluntly, obsessed with *Jane the Virgin*, yet also researching it for academic purposes, my language and ways of thinking about it, depending on whether I’m rehashing the previous night’s episode with other fans, or analyzing the narrative through literary, feminist, or film theory, though they might shift, certainly overlap. Jenkins effectively uses the internet and the space of a personal blog to present his academic research to fuel his fandom and communicate with other nonacademic fans in an informed way.

Jenkin’s use of the personal blog space and the mixing of the academic and the nonacademic audiences is supported by Christian Keathley in his piece, “La camera-stylo: notes on video criticism and cinephilia.” In it, he demonstrates how the internet specifically has created a space where not only non-academic and academic cinephiles are communicating, but he emphasizes that much of what the non-academics are talking about actually affects what the academics end up research and producing:

Because much on-line film criticism takes for granted that its readership includes the non-academic film specialist as well as the academic, it is less jargon-ridden than in years past, while still maintaining a high degree of critical sophistication. Inevitably, the writing style and concerns of non-academics seem to be informing the discourse of scholars every bit as much as the reverse. (178)

So, the practicing of these social media spaces is not only about making scholarly research accessible to the current generation and to non-academic audiences, but it is also about creating a two-way, symbiotic relationship that informs the research scholars are conducting.

Bringing this back to the social media spaces of *Jane the Virgin*, I observe the use of the hashtags and tweets within the show as invitations to viewers to continue to engage with the show within the social media spaces like Twitter and Instagram online. This not

only boosts fandom and community, but political discussion, and, from the Instagram example demonstrated earlier, connects the representation of Alba to the current social construct and racialization in the United States today. These dialogues are facilitated through these social media spaces, and can inform our social activism, political discourses, and scholarly work. With this in mind, acknowledging social media spaces as valid, and perhaps the most relevant form of engagement to current students and upcoming scholars, I return to the notion of safe space, and invite scholars to move out of their academic safe space, and into the foreign spaces of social media. This will make work more accessible to other audiences, and possibly through this practice, they will even find their work being informed by these audiences who, through these connections in the foreign spaces of social media, would not otherwise have been reached or dialogued with.

## CHAPTER 6

### WHERE IS ALBA NOW?

Sitting on the couch with her daughter, Alba asks Xiomara what's frustrating her. Xiomara sighs and tells her, "Well, I'm 46 and my sex life is over."

"¡Claro que no!"<sup>17</sup> Alba responds. "Solo tienes que ser paciente. El cuerpo cambia. Tú necesitas tiempo para explorar que es lo que te gusta ahora... He descubierto que hay un vibrador para cada mujer."<sup>18</sup>

Alba continues on, to Xiomara's shock and discomfort, lecturing about different types of vibrators, the importance of lubricant, and having enough batteries on hand.

"Well, well, well," says the Narrator. "Look who's suddenly a 'sexpert!'"

Despite her discomfort, Xiomara is grateful, saying to Alba, "Thanks, that's really good advice," to which Alba responds with a smile, "Ah, es mi placer."<sup>19</sup>

*(Jane the Virgin, 87)*

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Thirteen chapters after Alba storms out of an erotic store and tentatively uses her first vibrator within the safe space of her own bedroom, she is now sitting in the living room of her house with her daughter, assuring her that "bodies change," and emphasizing the importance of lubricant and exploration- all concepts which, when introduced to her by Jane, made her feel shameful and sinful. Her caretaker role has expanded to include giving her daughter advice and consolation about her sexuality and aging body-

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<sup>17</sup> Translation: "Of course its not!"

<sup>18</sup> Translation: "You just need to be patient. Bodies change. You need time to explore what you like now. I've discovered that there is a vibrator for every woman."

<sup>19</sup> Translation: "Ah, it's my pleasure."

something which her daughter had originally dismissed when it came to conceptualizing Alba's. Xiomara, though uncomfortable, having always hidden her sexuality from Alba, shows gratitude, and the place of the couch, within the house, is now a social space where they can dialogue about sex and aging bodies.

Alba is introduced in Chapter 1 presenting Jane with a white flower. After having Jane crush the flower, she asks her to attempt to make it new again. "I can't," Jane says. "Así es," Alba replies. "Nunca puedes volver atrás. Eso es lo que sucede cuando pierdes tu virginidad."<sup>20</sup> Now, in Chapter 90, Jane presents Alba with a wedding gift: the framed flower, and the three women laugh together. Jane mocks Alba, saying to her, "Si la estrujas, nunca puedes volver atrás, Alba."<sup>21</sup>

Not only do we observe Alba laughing at her former admonishments of sex, but her character, who formerly denounced the notion of ever dating again due to the religious confines of being a widow, is now planning a wedding. Additionally, she is openly displaying physical affection with her fiancé, and she makes the decision to forego a larger, traditional Catholic mass, so that she can get married immediately. "Sé lo que estás pensando,"<sup>22</sup> she says to Jane, when she springs the news on her and Xiomara, "pero no es solo por la intimidación física. La cosa es que Jorge y yo estamos en un punto de nuestras vidas en que preferimos estar juntos todo el tiempo que tenemos."<sup>23</sup> In this chapter, we get to watch Alba get married, and have sex with her new husband.

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<sup>20</sup> Translation: "You can never go back. That's what happens when you lose your virginity."

<sup>21</sup> Translation: "If you crumple it, you'll never be able to go back, Alba."

<sup>22</sup> Translation: "I know what you're thinking."

<sup>23</sup> Translation: "but it isn't just about physical intimacy. The thing is that Jorge and I are at a point in our lives in which we prefer to be together for all of the time that we have left."

It is important to note, however, that Alba's newfound sexuality, redefining of religious boundaries, and prioritization on her own needs do not replace her formerly established identities, but rather expand them. Chapter 90 shows Alba performing her newly formed identities within the safe space of her home, demonstrating how she has challenged the one-dimensional notions of her Latinidad, choosing instead to perform these roles with nuanced complications and depth, making her representation unique to U.S. media, and a challenge to the idea that Latinx characters can only be successfully represented within the confines of a specifically "white heterosexual familial domesticity," or as "model minorit[ies]" (Molina-Guzmán 74-75).

Right in the beginning of Chapter 90, Alba's boyfriend, Jorge, proposes to her, and she happily accepts. He says to her, "Con toda la familia presente, Alba Gloriana Villanueva, ¿te casarías conmigo? ¿Ahora sí, de verdad, frente de Dios?"<sup>24</sup> Spatially, we see the expansion of Alba's physical safe space, her house, to include romance, something she previously refused to engage in due to her Catholic beliefs. Now, not only does this space include her accepting a marriage proposal, but she does this "in front of God," as opposed to shunning religion in favor of love, showing how her character has developed and increased in complexity, as opposed to simply shedding labels. Jorge is also intentional to propose to Alba in front of her family, indicating the importance of family to Alba. Her identity as a caretaker has not disappeared, but grown, allowing her care for her family while also making space for her own happiness and fulfillment. Lastly, Jorge and Alba communicate in Spanish. Just because Alba has accomplished

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<sup>24</sup> Translation: "With all of your family here, Alba Gloriana Villanueva, would you marry me? For real this time, in front of God?"



proficiency in English, and everyone in the space of the house speaks it, does not mean she now needs to. I not only assert that Alba and Jorge's use of Spanish here is an indicator of their comfort and primary linguistic safe space, as it is their first language, but also an intentional reminder to the hegemonic viewer that Alba, an American citizen, is a Latina woman, who communicates in Spanish, and that these two identities are able to be performed together.

Alba's caretaker role continues to be challenged throughout this chapter. For example, Jane feels conflicted because her ex-boyfriend Rafael has requested that their child, Mateo, meet Luisa, Rafael's sister, who is former criminal, and Jane is not sure what to do. She is seated at the dining room table in their household with Alba and Xiomara, a much-visited place over these past ninety chapters for consolation and advice:

**JANE:** I wanna say yes. I mean, Rafael seemed convinced that Luisa's changed...

**ALBA:** ¿Pero? <sup>25</sup>

**JANE:** But... I don't know if I'd be agreeing to it because I believe it too, or if I'm secretly hoping that Rafael will be so grateful that he'll realize he made a mistake and he'll fall back in love with me.

**NARRATOR:** I'm guessing... that latter.

**ALBA:** Mi amor... Quizás, debieras de enfocarte solo en Mateo. Por ahora, y pensar, ¿Qué es lo mejor para él? <sup>26</sup>

**XIOMARA:** Agreed. So you good?

**JANE:** Well, not great.

**XIOMARA:** Good enough. Come on guys, we're starting the wedding meeting!

Alba listens and gives Jane advice, but Xiomara changes the place of the table from its typical space of Alba's caregiving to a space of caring for Alba, by cutting the

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<sup>25</sup> Translation: "But?"

<sup>26</sup> Translation: "My love... maybe you should just focus on Mateo. For now you should think... what's the best thing for him?"

conversation with Jane short, and by calling in the rest of the family to plan Alba's wedding. Though Xiomara is abrupt with the change, and it takes both Jane and Alba by surprise, Jane is immediately excited by Xiomara's plans for Alba, and I believe that her honesty ("Well, not great") combined with her enthusiasm for Alba allows Alba to be taken care of in a place she is used to caring for. Jane is "good enough," as Xiomara says, and sometimes that is okay.

Outside of the house, Alba maintains an evolved understanding of religion and caretaking on her wedding day. As she is getting ready for the ceremony with Xiomara and Jane, Xiomara is arguing with a florist on the phone about a specific type of orchid not arriving on time for the ceremony. She gets very upset, and Alba tells her that the flowers are not important to her. "No las necesito,"<sup>27</sup> she tells Xiomara. "Yes you do," her daughter responds angrily to her, turning away with tears in her eyes. Alba gets up from the mirror where she had been adjusting her wedding veil and asks Xiomara, rubbing her shoulder:

**ALBA:** ¿Qué es lo que te está pasando realmente, Xiomara?<sup>28</sup>

**XIOMARA:** I just wanted to do one thing, for you, for once, because you've done such a great job with being my Mom, and this was my chance, to finally do something for you, to thank you.

**ALBA:** Xiomara...

**XIOMARA:** Especially after the year I've had, and how you've been with me through all of it... I never thought at 46 I'd still need my Mom so much.

**ALBA:** No necesitas agradecerme. Como padre, o como madre, uno nunca deja de hacer lo que pueda para ayudar a un hijo.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Translation: "I don't need them."

<sup>28</sup> Translation: "What's really bothering you, Xiomara?"

<sup>29</sup> Translation: "You do not need to thank me. As a father, or a mother, one never stops doing what they can to help their child."

Minutes before she is about to get married, Alba stops her preparations to tend to the emotional needs of her daughter. However, the fact that she is getting married, shows that she has also tended to the needs of herself, and her ceremony shows the importance of family to her and her emotional wellbeing. She tells Jane as she is getting ready, “Solo estaba pensando en lo distinta que será esta boda de la primera, cuando solo éramos tu abuelo y yo, empezando todo solos. Y ahora aquí estoy, casándome de nuevo, y rodeada de toda mi hermosa familia. Se siente muy especial.”<sup>30</sup>

Alba chose to forgo a larger, traditional Catholic mass, in favor of a small service, with only immediate family. Her daughter walked her down the aisle, and the service was in Spanish. She intentionally facilitated a space of care, religion, and Spanish language. Though these labels are the exact tropes that we would be wary of perpetuating, Alba’s character complicates them, showing how the care of her family is reciprocal, and necessary to her wellbeing, not just theirs. As she gets married, she imagines the choir is singing a hymn encouraging her to go have sex, bringing sexuality and pleasure into the same space as religion, which she used to associate with purity, chastity, and shame. And again, though the ceremony is in Spanish, Alba’s citizenship and her occupation of a physical space outside of her house (the church) show this intentional choice and ability to communicate in Spanish as an American citizen without the physical fear of deportation, nor the social fear of rejection.

Alba’s last scene in this chapter is in her bedroom, where her wedding night with Jorge begins. As with the vibrator scene in Chapter 74, her Bible remains on the

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<sup>30</sup> Translation: “I was just thinking about how different this wedding is going to be from my first, when it was just your Grandfather and I, beginning everything alone. And now, here I am, getting married again, surrounded by my beautiful family. It feels very special.”

nightstand, as she rushes in the door with Jorge and he unzips her dress. This fusing of pleasure and religion within her safe space communicates acceptance of now a new level of sexual pleasure- intimacy with another person. Alba's sex scene cuts to an animation with a hashtag: "#Jorgasm," utilizing the social media space to communicate the significance of Alba's newest transgression.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, I feel it crucial to return to the understanding of “safe space,” and how this idea, even in its capacity to be both protective and limiting, contributes to a feminist understanding of Alba’s identity journey. The idea of safe space is a topic currently being actively debated in academia, as universities seek to implement safe spaces, but are unsure how to effectively establish them, or what they mean. Is a safe space a space of political correctness, filled with trigger warnings, cautious non-categorical language, and an intent to not offend the subjects within it? Or, is a safe space one where subjects are free to express themselves and their identities, however *unpolitically* correct they may be, without fear of judgement or retaliation? For the purposes of this narrative study, I have worked with a safe space in conjunction with the latter definition, not the former, and this brings up the challenge of not necessarily agreeing with the identity expressions and performances that people choose to bring to their safe spaces. For example, returning to the model of the classroom within a university- how would it feel to establish this safe space as an instructor, and then have a student express anti-immigration opinions, or feelings of anti-blackness?

The intention of this space is to facilitate a space for marginalized subjects to express themselves safely, and through doing so, to learn and to grow. In *Jane the Virgin*, though Alba often performs these identities in compliance with various oppressive stereotypes, and is usually excitedly doing so, she continues to return to these physical and linguistic spaces and safely, honestly express herself, expanding these identities as she does so. These are the established physical and linguistic spaces where Alba

possesses agency to perform identities exactly as she feels she should, and this does not necessarily equate resistance- it may often be the opposite. The various transgressions I highlight in the first section are minor, particular examples in the context of one-hundred chapters representing Alba's continuing narrative and journey. Each transgression in a foreign space is a small, yet significant step in challenging her identity, and each convergence of spaces is, again, a small, but crucial expansion of this notion of Latinidad that she, as a character, is choosing to perform.

Remembering that this investigation only identifies some of Alba's many spatial transgressions, it is also necessary to return to the point that this T.V. series is an extensive, complex narrative, tackling the representation of the identity transformation of a Latina immigrant. Just as one would not read a few chapters of a novel and claim to understand it, one cannot watch a few episodes of this show and claim to understand Alba's plight, or the representation of it. The entire first season establishes, through various physical and linguistic spaces, Alba's oppression, which can be fully understood and accessed through the successful *telenovela* spatial adaptation. The next four seasons demonstrate, through many significant actions of resistance in foreign spaces, and the ultimate convergence of the non-safe and the safe, Alba's transformations and growth.

It is also important to note that these spaces are not fixed. As Alba continues to challenge, expand, and ultimately transform her stereotyped identities of Latinidad, she also begins to expand her own safe spaces. This can be clearly seen linguistically by the end of the fourth season, not only through the convergence of linguistic spaces in her Naturalization Test referenced earlier, but through various interactions she has with people around her. Speaking English is no longer a necessary spatial transgression, but

becomes a means of communication and a linguistic space in which she occupies and comfortably performs her transformed identity as an immigrant. Similarly, though her home seems to remain her safest physical space in the sense of her comfort in identity performance, as the seasons progress, foreign spaces become more accessible and less dangerous to Alba with each transgression. For example, in *Season 1* she is punished for leaving the safe space of her home and entering the foreign space of the Hotel Marbella by getting pushed down the stairs. Not only is she physically hurt, but she is put in immediate danger of deportation as an illegal immigrant in an American hospital. However, as the series progress, Alba secures employment at the Hotel Marbella, begins to date, and meets her eventual husband. Not only do these changes challenge her Latina identities as a caretaker, a Catholic widow, and an immigrant, but they also begin to transform the space of the Hotel Marbella into one that is less foreign and more safe.

I find it fitting and satisfying that I type this conclusion as the finale of *Jane the Virgin* draws near. When I started investigating Alba's character in 2017, she had not yet taken the Naturalization Test, was not proficient in English, and her home was primarily her safe physical space. She was not drinking or dancing, and the idea of dating, though it had emerged for her, was still a struggle against her established religious beliefs. The idea for this project started after I watched Alba uncomfortably look at vibrators with Jane in Chapter 74 and use one for the first time in what I established as her safe space. As my study has continued, her character has developed, her spaces have changed and expanded, and her identity has been further challenged, complicated, and growing. In Chapter 1, we are introduced to Alba as a strict, Catholic, matriarch, lecturing Jane on the importance and sanctity of chastity. Now, in Chapter 87, Alba, the woman who could not even look

at vibrators with Jane, the woman who equated being in an erotic store to entering “the gates of Hell,” sits down and educates her daughter about different kinds of vibrators, and explains which she has found the most satisfaction from.

This is not to say that Alba discovering sexual pleasure equates empowerment; that a woman’s narrative must include orgasms to be feminist. As this narrative concludes, however, we can observe that Alba’s character has grown, explored, and expanded, without shedding her identity of Latina, or notions of Latinidad. She still very much embraces a caretaker role, giving advice and consolation to her family within the space of their house. She cooks, she cleans. She is still Catholic, and these rituals are still a vital component of her personhood. She does not stop speaking Spanish, just because of her gained proficiency in English. However, these identity performances have ceased to limit her. Being a caretaker does not equate neglecting her own needs and desires. Religiosity no longer means chastity or shame. Spanish no longer isolates her or endangers her.

So, in establishing Alba’s physical and linguistic safe spaces, even if they are transient, we are able to identify the ways in which Alba practices places to break with the, culturally established representations of her Latina identity within the narrative itself. Beyond the narrative, spatial manipulations within *Jane the Virgin* have facilitated a successful adaptation of the *telenovela* genre, making it accessible and entertaining for the dominant American viewer, thus challenging U.S. stereotypes of Latinidad and immigration through this new access point. The safe space, whether it be the physical space of a character’s home or the familiar cultural tropes of a viewer’s preferred



television genre, once established, help us to feel comfortable and brave enough to begin to understand and challenge what it means to expand them and break them.

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