

FEMINISM IN MISS U: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN BEAUTY PAGEANTS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND THE PHILIPPINES.

Feminismo en Miss U: un estudio de caso comparativo de la representación de género en concursos de belleza entre Colombia y Filipinas.

Gabrielle V. Arcamo, Kendra Valerie B. Ramos, Sandra T. Chua, Royce Lyssah Malabonga y Andrés F. Rodríguez.

Abstract

Beauty pageants are popular and consumed fervently by the public in both Colombia and the Philippines, through a comparative content analysis of journal articles on beauty pageants in these countries. This paper aims to identify how beauty pageants shape the notions of femininity and beauty standards of women from both countries through a comparative content analysis of journal articles gathered on beauty pageants in both countries. Results show that there are three themes in the study of beauty pageants: symbolic representation, empowerment, and domestic beauty standards. Furthermore, beauty pageants have greatly influenced the development of gender identities and beauty standards in both Colombia and the Philippines.

Keywords: Beauty pageants, symbolic representation, empowerment, beauty standards.

Resumen

Los concursos de belleza son populares y consumidos fervientemente por el público tanto en Colombia como en Filipinas, a través de un análisis de contenido comparativo de artículos de revistas sobre concursos de belleza en estos países. Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar cómo los concursos de belleza moldean las nociones de feminidad y los estándares de belleza de las mujeres de ambos países a través de un análisis de contenido comparativo de artículos de revistas recopilados sobre concursos de belleza en ambos países. Los resultados muestran que existen tres temas en el estudio de los concursos de belleza: representación simbólica, empoderamiento y estándares de belleza domésticos. Además, los concursos de belleza han influido mucho en el desarrollo de identidades de género y estándares de belleza tanto en Colombia como en Filipinas.

Palabras claves: Concursos de belleza, representación simbólica, empoderamiento, estándares de belleza.

Para citar este artículo: Arcamo, G., Ramos, K., Chua, S., Malabonga, R., & Rodríguez, A. (2025). The jeepney dilemma: examining the feasibility of electric public transportation in the Philippines. *Revista DiversidadEs*, 3(II), 227-250. <https://www.fundaciondiversidades.org/revistas>



VI EDICIÓN
REVISTA DE LA FUNDACIÓN
DIVERSIDADES



DiversidadES

DiversidadEs

Vol. 3 (II) Enero, 2025

ISSN:

2954-9167

Director

General: Robert

Ojeda Pérez

Universidad de La Salle,

Colombia

robert.rojeda@gmail.com

diversidadesrevista@gmail.com

320 803 7099

Jefe editorial:

Robert Ojeda

Pérez **Editor**

invitado:

Suelen

Castiblanco

Diseñadora:

Diana Carolina Torres López



Semillero

Publicado en Bogotá, Colombia

Comité Científico



Sebastián Alejandro González. Ph, D. Titular Professor at Doctoral Program in Studies in Development and Territory - Economics, Enterprises, and Sustainable Development Faculty - FEEDS Bogotá D.C. Metropolitan Area.

Ricardo Antonio Sánchez Cárcamo. Doctor en Ciencias Sociales. Docente de la Escuela de Negocios de la Universidad de la Salle. Investigador Grupo de Investigación y Desarrollo Social - SocialGRID. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2258-3927>. Email: ricsanchez@unisalle.edu.co

Cristian Yepes-Lugo. Doctor en Industria y Organizaciones, Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Investigador visitante doctoral, HEC-Montréal. Magíster en Negocios y Relaciones Internacionales. Universidad Militar Nueva Granada. Administrador Público, ESAP, Director programa de Negocios y

Relaciones Internacionales, Universidad de La Salle.
Cryepes@lasalle.edu.co

César Niño. Profesor asociado de Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad de La Salle (Colombia). PhD en Derecho Internacional por la Universidad Alfonso X el Sabio (España), Doctorando en Estudios de Paz y Conflictos en la Universitat Jaume I (España). Magister en Seguridad y Defensa Nacionales por la Escuela Superior de Guerra y Politólogo e Internacionalista por la Universidad Sergio Arboleda.

Carlos-Germán van der Linde. Profesor asociado de la Universidad de La Salle y doctor en literatura latinoamericana contemporánea de University of Colorado (Boulder). Es editor académico de los libros Representaciones estéticas de las violencias en Colombia. Novela y cine sobre el conflicto armado con una mirada a la violencia bipartidista (2022) y “iPa’ las que sea, parce!” Límites y alcances de la sicaresca como categoría estética (2014). Cuenta con diversos artículos sobre la violencia en la literatura y el cine de Colombia y Latinoamérica, así mismo sobre la obra de García Márquez.

Dorismilda Flores Márquez. Profesora-investigadora en la Facultad de Comunicación y Mercadotecnia de la Universidad De La Salle Bajío. Licenciada en Comunicación Medios Masivos

por la Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes, Maestra en Comunicación de la Ciencia y la Cultura por el ITESO y Doctora en Estudios Científico-Sociales, en la línea de Comunicación, Cultura y Sociedad por la misma institución. Integrante del Sistema Nacional de Investigadores de Conacyt en el nivel I.

Suelen Emilia Castiblanco Moreno. Profesora asociada de la Facultad de economía, empresa y desarrollo sostenible de la Universidad de La Salle. Doctorado en Estudios Interdisciplinarios sobre Desarrollo del Cider, Universidad de los Andes. Experta en temas asociados con género, economía del cuidado y mercados de trabajo. Ha dirigido trabajos de pregrado y maestría asociados al mismo tema y ha participado en diferentes proyectos de investigación y consultoría. Ha acompañado el proceso de diagnóstico para la implementación del sistema de cuidado municipal de la ciudad de Medellín, bajo la coordinación de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia, sede Medellín. Es investigadora asociada según clasificación del Ministerio de Ciencia y Tecnología de Colombia -MinCiencias-. (CvLac; Google Scholar; ORCID).

Germán Ulises Bula Caraballo. Profesor investigador de la universidad Pedagógica Nacional. Doctor en Educación por la misma universidad, con maestría y pregrado en Filosofía de la Universidad Javeriana.

Gina Reyes. Doctora en Estudios Sociales de América Latina de la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba - Argentina. Magíster en Sociología de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Socióloga de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia. Integrante del grupo de investigación Intersubjetividad en Educación Superior. Investigador Junior (IJ) Minciencias. Docente de la Escuela de Humanidades y Estudios Sociales de la Universidad de La Salle. https://scienti.minciencias.gov.co/cvlac/visualizador/generarCurriculoCv.do?cod_rh=0001368706

Elizaveta Sergeevna Golousova. PhD thesis on Journalistic discourse of terrorism; 1996-2001 – Department of Journalism of the Ural Federal University. (Graduated with honors); Expert in the field of intercultural communications, business communication, foreign media awards, achievements: victory in the contest "The best electronic educational resource in English" (2016, 2017) Teaching experience – more than 15 years Scientific interests: Cross-cultural management, business communications in international business, the specifics of the foreign media, the Russian-speaking diaspora in Latin America.

Jorge Eliecer Martínez. Postdoctor en Bioética de la Universidad El Bosque, Postdoctor en Filosofía Universidad de Cádiz, Estudios Postdoctorado en Ciencias Sociales CINDE-CLACSO. Doctor en Filosofía programa Historia de la

Subjetividad. U. Barcelona Doctor en Ciencias Sociales. Niñez y Juventud. CINDE-UM, Diploma de Estudios Avanzados (DEA) en Filosofía U. Barcelona. Magíster en Desarrollo Educativo y Social CINDE- UPN, Licenciado en Filosofía USB. Líder del grupo Intersubjetividad en la Educación Superior y miembro de la red Bioética de la UNESCO. Ha sido invitado como profesor y conferencista de la Universidad de Barcelona, España; la Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, Argentina; la Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez de Chile. Universidad de Cadiz-España. Nombrado “Profesor visitante Distinguido” por la Universidad de Nacional de Córdoba –Argentina (2013) autor de diversos artículos y libros de los que se destaca “La Universidad productora de productores entre Biopolítica y subjetividad” y el libro “Subjetividad, biopolítica y educación: una lectura desde el dispositivo”. Profesor Titular de la Universidad de la Salle.

Martha Fabiola Rodríguez Alvarez. Bacteriología, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. Magister en inmunología Universidad de Antioquia, Doctora en Agrociencias. Universidad de La Salle. Docente Investigador Universidad de La Salle. Editora y co-editora de la revista Ciencia y Tecnología para la salud visual y ocular, 2007 2010, 2022-actual. Directora Maestría en Ciencias de la Visión, 2010-2012. Directora del

Centro de Investigación en Salud y Visión CISVI, 2010-2018. Líder del grupo de investigación cuidado primario visual y ocular (categoría B Minciencias). Investigador Asociado Minciencias 2014-actual.

Robert Ojeda Pérez. Profesor investigador líder del grupo de investigación GIDEP con clasificación A1 avalado por Minciencias Colombia. Doctor en Educación y Sociedad de la Universidad de la Salle, con magister en Historia de la Universidad de los Andes, pregrado en Historia de la Universidad Javeriana. Director e investigador de la Fundación DiversidadEs. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1227-7854>.

FEMINISM IN MISS U: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF GENDER REPRESENTATION IN BEAUTY PAGEANTS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND THE PHILIPPINES.

**Feminismo en Miss U: un estudio de caso
comparativo de la representación de género en
concursos de belleza entre Colombia y Filipinas.**

**Gabrielle V. Arcamo, Kendra Valerie B. Ramos, Sandra T.
Chua, Royce Lyssah Malabonga y Andrés F. Rodríguez.**

Abstract

Beauty pageants are popular and consumed fervently by the public in both Colombia and the Philippines, through a comparative content analysis of journal articles on beauty pageants in these countries. This paper aims to identify how beauty pageants shape the notions of femininity and beauty standards of women from both countries through a comparative content analysis of journal articles gathered on beauty pageants in both countries. Results show that there are three themes in the study of beauty pageants: symbolic representation, empowerment, and domestic beauty standards. Furthermore, beauty pageants have greatly influenced the development of gender identities and beauty standards in both Colombia and the Philippines.

Keywords: Beauty pageants, symbolic representation, empowerment, beauty standards.

Resumen

Los concursos de belleza son populares y consumidos fervientemente por el público tanto en Colombia como en Filipinas, a través de un análisis de contenido comparativo de artículos de revistas sobre concursos de belleza en estos países.

Este artículo tiene como objetivo identificar cómo los concursos de belleza moldean las nociones de feminidad y los estándares de belleza de las mujeres de ambos países a través de un análisis de contenido comparativo de artículos de revistas recopilados sobre concursos de belleza en ambos países. Los resultados muestran que existen tres temas en el estudio de los concursos de belleza: representación simbólica, empoderamiento y estándares de belleza domésticos. Además, los concursos de belleza han influido mucho en el desarrollo de identidades de género y estándares de belleza tanto en Colombia como en Filipinas.

Palabras claves: Concursos de belleza, representación simbólica, empoderamiento, estándares de belleza.

Resumo

Os concursos de beleza são populares e consumidos fervorosamente pelo público tanto na Colômbia como nas Filipinas, através de uma análise comparativa de conteúdo de artigos de revistas sobre concursos de beleza nesses países. Este artigo tem como objetivo identificar como os concursos de beleza moldam as noções de feminilidade e os padrões de beleza das mulheres de ambos os países através de uma análise

comparativa de conteúdo de artigos de revistas reunidos em concursos de beleza em ambos os países. Os resultados mostram que existem três temas no estudo dos concursos de beleza: representação simbólica, empoderamento e padrões de beleza domésticos. Além disso, os concursos de beleza influenciaram enormemente o desenvolvimento das identidades de gênero e dos padrões de beleza tanto na Colômbia como nas Filipinas.

Palavras-chave: Concursos de beleza, representação simbólica, empoderamento, padrões de beleza.

1. Introduction

Beauty pageants have been a widely celebrated form of competition for decades, particularly in the Philippines and Colombia, where they highlight the beauty, intellect, and talents of women. International pageants have been held since the mid-20th century, with the Miss World contest inaugurated in 1951 and Miss Universe following in 1952 (Cohen, 2015, p. 2). According to Cohen (2015), pageants that chose a national beauty queen to compete internationally became significant platforms for expressing nationalist sentiment, particularly in the context of decolonization and the nationalist movements that emerged after World War II (p. 2). Additionally, globalization along with liberalization led to the emergence of beauty pageants all over the world for women to represent their nations at the international, national, and local levels (Srivastava, 2020, p. 2). Srivastava (2020) claimed that beauty pageants are an effective level playing field as despite the disparities in development and economic growth, representatives from developing and developed countries have equal chances of winning the crown (p. 2).

The researchers argue that beauty pageants influence the notions of femininity and beauty standards of women in Colombia and the Philippines. From the journals gathered in

both countries, though by no means exhaustive, three themes about beauty pageants have been identified: symbolic representation, empowerment, and domestic beauty standards.

King-O’Riain (2008) stated that the women competing in beauty pageants have symbolic representation, as they also portray their collective identity at a national or even international level (p. 74). According to the study of Virtucio (2016), young people view international beauty pageants as a tool for women empowerment (p. 8). Lastly, according to a study, international beauty pageants in the Philippines promote Western beauty standards as domestic beauty standards are influenced by Spanish and American cultures (Gato, 2019, p. 79). This paper aims to answer: (1) how women are represented symbolically in the Philippines and Colombia, (2) how women are empowered in the contexts of beauty pageants in these countries, and (3) how beauty pageants affect domestic beauty standards.

2. Background on beauty pageants

2.1. Beauty pageants in Colombia

“In a world full of so many institutionalized beasts, beauty represents the feminine, life-giving, peaceful and functional essence all crave but few enjoy.” - Michael Stanfield

Pageantry culture in Colombia can be seen as a symbol of beauty overcoming adversity by providing a sense of relief and positivity. With Colombia often marred by violence and conflict, beauty pageants emerged as a source of joy and escapism for the public. Many viewed the beauty of Colombian women as a counterforce to the threats posed by drug cartels that dominated the nation's politics and economy during the 1980s and 1990s. (López, 2013, p. 63). Beauty pageants, then, were effective means to counter the danger of violence and economic agitations. With the favorability of beauty pageants as a way to escape even for a moment from the harshness of reality, the Colombian beauty industry thrived. Undeniably, the said industry also provided employment for numerous citizens, mostly women. However, Jones (2017) pointed out that the beauty industry pushed strict definitions of beauty on generations of women, likely exacerbated racism in the country rather than addressing it, and fostered conditions where breast implants and buttocks injections were considered the norm (p. 14). Furthermore, the emerging Latin American beauty culture was predominantly white, as indicated by the prevailing presence of whiteness in beauty competitions (Jones, 2017, p. 11). Indeed, the concept of whiteness in Colombian conception of beauty is largely influenced by the West. According to Becerra

(2017), to comprehend the consumption of cosmetics like apparel, cosmetics, hair products, as well as other nonsurgical treatments, one must employ the notion of fantasies of social elevation (p. 81). Expectedly, the most affluent families in Colombia have traditionally produced pageant candidates (Becerra, 2017, p. 72). With that said, in 2001, Vanessa Mendoza was crowned as the first black Miss Colombia from Chocó, one of the country's most impoverished areas with mostly black residents. For the country, Mendoza's win was influential in expanding the paradigms of Colombian beauty. Additionally, Stanfield (2013) mentioned that considering the poverty, marginalization, and insecurity Colombians experience daily and throughout history, they yearn for beauty (para. 4). Similar to Colombian governance, beauty pageants have the appearance of being democratic and modern yet are frequently elite and exclusive (Stanfield, 2013, para. 5). The manifestation of the beast could be found in the array of troubles in Colombian society that, arguably, only beauty could conquer. For Colombian women, the beauty industry is a double-edged sword of utopian ambition coupled with the danger of consumption and desire.

2.2. Beauty pageants in the Philippines

In the context of Philippine pageantry, feminism has played a significant role in shaping the perception and representation of women in beauty pageants. The Philippines is known for its strong tradition of beauty pageants, and the country has produced several winners of international pageants, such as Miss Universe.

In the Philippines, beauty pageants, or 'beauty contests,' have a longstanding cultural history. According to Fanella Cannell (1999), the origins of these contests trace back to the Spanish colonial era, when affluent families entered their daughters in pageants to enhance the family's social standing and improve the prospects of securing favorable marriage alliances. (Farrales, 2019). The first beauty pageant in the country was held in 1908 during the Manila Carnival. The shaping of beauty queens and pageantry in the Manila Carnival Queen contests from 1908 to 1939 was directly influenced by the racial tensions and patriarchal systems of competing U.S. imperial and Filipino nationalists agendas. The evolution of the contest from a showcase of U.S. imperial "success" and "progress" in the Philippines to a nationalist pageant that displayed ideal Filipina womanhood was tracked. The contest's large-scale colonial spectacles made Filipinas' bodies, clothing, and accessories

subject to public display, assessment, judgment, and potential admiration by a mass audience (Clutario, 2014). Since then, beauty pageants have become a significant part of Filipino culture and society, with numerous local and national yearly contests. The details of their appearances served as a visual résumé that signalled to onlookers their qualifications as a beauty queen: their physical attractiveness, their wealth, style, and social status and familial background. As such, Filipina Manila Carnival Queens embodied ideal Filipina femininity along gendered, racial, ethnic, and class lines (Clutario, 2014). Historically, mestizos, or women of mixed Filipino and Spanish ancestry, have been famous participants in beauty pageants in the Philippines.

Contemporary notions of "mestizo" beauty and the "white skin standard" used to describe Filipina beauty are being historicized and complicated through an examination of discourses and articulations of beauty and feminine physical attractiveness during the 1920s and 1930s. The term "mestizo" is approached as a construct that is racial, sexual, and gendered, resulting from the collision of existing paradigms of race and gender, vestiges of four hundred years of Spanish colonialism, and U.S.-based ideologies. Multiple and

dynamic definitions of mestizo beauty are located in local and global advertisements, images, beauty products and regimens, and beautification articles to track the processes of creating and circulating racialized icons and definitions of beauty (Clutario, 2014).

In the early years of beauty pageants in the Philippines, mestizos were often favoured as winners due to their perceived beauty and social status. However, as the pageant industry became more competitive and diverse, women of various backgrounds and ethnicities began participating and winning titles. In recent years, there has been a growing movement toward celebrating and promoting diversity and inclusivity in the beauty industry. One of the most popular and prestigious beauty pageants in the Philippines is the Binibining Filipinas pageant, held annually since 1964. It is one of the country's most prestigious and popular beauty pageants, and it selects representatives to compete in international beauty contests such as Miss Universe, Miss International, and Miss Supranational. The pageant has evolved over the years but has always been known for its focus on beauty, intelligence, and cultural awareness.

The study emphasizes the importance of understanding different perspectives on the issue of whether international beauty pageants empower or objectify women, which is a key

aspect of feminist discourse. Feminists seek to challenge societal norms and promote equality, and this statement touches on the ways in which beauty pageants can be seen as problematic in this context.

However, there are also criticisms that the beauty pageant industry perpetuates harmful beauty standards and reinforces gender stereotypes. Some feminists argue that the emphasis on physical appearance and traditional gender roles in pageants sends a message that women's worth is primarily based on their looks and ability to conform to societal expectations.

Despite this, many Filipinas continue participating in beauty pageants to empower themselves and promote their causes. Some beauty queens have used their platform to raise awareness about women's rights, gender equality, and environmental protection. Feminism has had a complex relationship with beauty pageants in the Philippines, with some seeing it as a form of empowerment and others viewing it as perpetuating harmful stereotypes and objectification of women.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Feminism

Feminist perspectives on beauty pageants reveal a range of opposing views. Some feminists argue that these pageants promote feminist ideals by empowering women and providing them with a platform to express themselves. Conversely, others contend that beauty pageants reinforce patriarchal values and objectify women by emphasizing their physical appearance. Banet-Weiser (2006) argued that critics say that pageants blur the lines between femininity and national representation while revealing the underlying assumption that the 'ideal' American woman is characterized in terms of whiteness, heterosexuality, or inferior femininity (p. 257). Banet-Weiser (1999) also expressed in her book that feminist critics oversimplify women and beauty pageants when they argue that the industry of beauty pageant is a political tool for the exploitation and oppression of women (p. 10-11).

However, following the theory of Foucault on gendered bodies, Banet-Weiser (2006) claims that beauty pageants actually depict the female body according to liberal ideology, where it is seen as an autonomous individual with the ability to make choices and exercise freedoms (p. 258). On the liberal feminist

lens, beauty pageants construct the identity of women in terms of providing them voice, liberty, and citizenship. Furthermore, recognizing power as a fundamental component in the cultural production of feminine bodies is crucial because it helps to explain how dominating norms of femininity are established in beauty pageants (p. 262).

3.2. Sustainable Development Goals

A unifying framework for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, both now and in the future, is provided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development accepted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. Women's empowerment and gender equality are included as a distinct target SDG 5 and are intertwined with several other goals such as SDG 10 (Nowacka, n.d., para. 1). The fifth SDG aiming to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls as well as the tenth SDG focusing to reduce inequality within and among countries are relevant to the discourse on women representation and gender identity formation in beauty pageants. In 1979, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979) which outlines and recognizes the rights and freedom of women. From public representation to employment opportunities, the convention states the equality between

women and men. Hence, discriminatory practices and prejudicial treatment of women must be dealt with appropriate measures towards its elimination both at the domestic and international spheres of life. Currently, beauty pageants across the world depict representations of empowered women by imparting notions of femininity as well as beauty standards. The paper analyses the construction of gender identity of women from Colombia and the Philippines through beauty pageantry.

4. Methodology

This study used a comparative content analysis design to examine gender representation in beauty pageants between Colombia and the Philippines. The sample consists of articles and journals related to the beauty pageant from over the years, which focus on the representation of gender, femininity, and feminism in beauty pageants in Colombia and the Philippines. Data were collected through a systematic review of scholarly articles and journals from reputable databases. The inclusion criteria were articles and journals published in English which explore the representation of gender, femininity, and feminism in beauty pageants in Colombia and the Philippines. The data collected were analysed using comparative content analysis. This involves comparing the themes identified in the data from both countries to identify similarities and differences in gender

representation in beauty pageants. The study only uses data from publicly available sources, such as articles and journals, to ensure ethical considerations. No personal information of the participants was collected or used.

5. Findings

5.1. Symbolic Representation

Women in beauty pageants embody symbolic representations of their countries by showcasing their collective identities. As King-O'Riain (2008) notes, pageants create beauty queens who personify shared identities, reflecting aspects of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture in the process (p. 82). Women, then, must capture the ideal features, lifestyle, and traits of the nation being represented. Srivastava (2020) stated that as social institutions, beauty pageants establish the desirable or faultless lady, whose way of life, characteristics, and consumption style ought to be followed (p. 8). By employing women as national symbols, nationalism appropriates modernization, capitalism, and feminism to advance a traditionalist objective. In addition to being society's primary reproducers and the principal messengers of culture, philosophy, and ideals to the future generations, women are regarded as the most valuable asset of any country (Srivastava, 2020, pp. 10-11). Hence, beauty

pageants display and cultivate ideas that are chiefly favourable to bolstering the current economic system and social hierarchy through women. They produce and reproduce symbols, meanings, and practices that are meant to be socially acceptable and standard. Additionally, beauty pageants are scenes of convergence. In the Philippine context, Bonus (2000) explained that pageants are an opportunity to socialize and celebrate pride while bringing communities together, especially abroad. The author also mentions the terms "damay," which means "commiseration," and "bayanihan," which means "communal unity." Both words are integral to the Filipino interactions and relationships. Viewing their country's beauty pageant representatives, they affirm the symbolic signifiers being projected as one of their own. Indeed, despite the rapidly increasing gas prices and consistently high unemployment rates, Filipinos connect for and support beauty pageant representatives. To an extent, they involve themselves in the dissemination of traditional principles inclined towards consumption and ideal customs. Likewise, as mentioned earlier, the first black Miss Colombia eventually ventured as an aspiring political candidate on behalf of the black community in Colombia. Above all, Mendoza's political philosophy did not threaten the current political and economic system (Becerra,

2017, p. 86). This demonstrates that despite the perceived empowerment and feminism ascribed to women in beauty pageants, it could be more participatory and performative in nature. Hence, Estill (2017) states that beauty functions as its own form of violence, an instrument that requires a body or bodies to yield in order for it to be deemed acceptable (p. 181). Thus, to be symbols of a nation means to be valuable and acceptable. Then, one must fully grasp the ideals, aspirations, and principles of the entity being embodied without question.

5.2. Empowerment

In societies dominated by patriarchal structures, where women are often objectified, beauty pageants serve as platforms for empowerment, offering participants a prominent stage to display not only their beauty but also the diverse skills that set them apart. In the case of this paper, the authors will delve into the modes of women empowerment in the Philippines and Colombia through a comparative lens.

In Becerra (2017), the first black Miss Colombia Vanessa Mendoza used the beauty pageant platform to challenge the prejudiced notions of elite pageant supporters that black women contestants lack intelligence, prepare poorly due to economic circumstances, and are culturally immature. When she won the

contest, her victory was seen as an indicator of racial progress and a vindication to the thousands who were part of the historic exclusion. While there were some instances where Mendoza denied the existence of racism, having won the pageant, the discourse surrounding her victory is still seen as a step away from the delegitimization of black beauty in Colombian pageants. She even denounced the reduction of women as a means for market-based consumption.

In her post-pageant career, she even continued her advocacy of black representation, starting up a political career and a charity project. Even though she lost the 2010 election, it is a worthwhile endeavour being a woman candidate in a male-dominated arena. From this notion of empowerment, a Marxist and postmodern lens of discourse can be drawn out wherein the challenges to the neoliberal notion of beauty are being employed as well as the dismantling of grand narratives of prejudice that black women lack the traits to become beauty queens. De La Torre (2013) characterized pageants as an expression of national cultural identity and regional pride such as in the case of the pageant in Houston in the 1980s. Political statements and symbols were presented in a homogenizing manner to evoke a single national identity. The *Concurs Señorita de Independencia de Colombia* (CSIC) not only serves as a platform for them to

showcase their Colombian identity but also become “advocates” for the nation to redeem its international image associated with narco-trafficking and violence. Magnified by the film “*Colombiana*” starring Zoe Saldana whose character grows up to avenge the murder of her parents at the hands of narco-traffickers, the international image of Colombia is now seen through the lens of women who are beautiful, unrelenting, and enticing.

Moving on to the cases in the Philippines, Virtucio (2016) believes that international beauty pageants empower women but there are some instances where the fine line between empowerment and objectification becomes blurred. In measuring perception towards international beauty pageants (IBPs), the author employed a survey questionnaire asking the respondents whether IBPs empower or objectify women. The results yield that most of the students or 43% of them believe that IBPs empower but it should be noted that female respondents generally took a neutral stance on the matter. They were also asked which among all the segments of the beauty pageant are significant in choosing a true beauty queen. A staggering number of respondents decided the question and answer as a significant segment, while the swimwear segment got the lowest percentage. Unsurprisingly, most of the

respondents voted to remove this segment as this is the obvious factor that objectifies women, which reduces the purpose of empowerment to objectification. Additionally, the removal of the swimwear segment should be replaced with another one which will greatly bring out the purpose of showcasing the capabilities of women.

Contributing to the Marxist notion of non-Western countries acquiescing to the contours of Western ideals is the study of Gato (2019). Her study revolved around the question of how the Philippines manifest and propagate Western standards of beauty through international beauty pageants. In fielding candidates internationally, countries generally conduct a local beauty pageant across different regions, communities, and cultures which subsequently compete against each other in pursuit of national representation and the international crown. While it can be argued that this is the opportunity for local cultures to stand out, a different but familiar concept of beauty is adhered to on the international stage. The author underscores the apparent illusion of multiculturalism and diversity that international pageants paint but are highly overshadowed by the tendencies of mainstream pageants to reaffirm whiteness and Western beliefs. The author came to the conclusion that Western ideals and construction of beauty are defined as

standards of beauty through the influence of Spanish and American cultures being enmeshed with ours. Despite the multicultural face value of international beauty pageants, it cannot be denied that there is still the preponderance of the English language as the medium of communication and the use of heels and gowns that highlight a particular style of dress during the Spanish colonial period. Even physical features such as straighter hair, thinner bodies, whiter skins, taller noses, and bigger eyes are still favoured over curly or wavy hair, darker skin tones, and flat noses. This reaffirms and reinforces the claim of the author that there is indeed a manifestation of Western bias in international beauty pageants, which also cascades onto different countries, especially postcolonial ones. Even mestizos always achieve high rankings. Thus, there is this hybridized conception and representation of beauty, which may also be the reason mixed races are fielded in the Philippines.

From the two cases presented, the Philippines and Colombia share a postcolonial consciousness stemming from being occupied by different colonizers in the past. This may be the reason both share the struggle of the perpetual need to be empowered, since local cultures and physical features are fervently influenced and overshadowed by Western notions of beauty. The different but similar predicaments of the

Philippines and Colombia are the way local beauty pageant candidates are framed in the literature. In Colombia, black women are prejudiced by their supposed lack of intelligence, capacity to prepare, and their culture in general while in the Philippines, women are sexualized in some pageant segments, although there may be cases in other countries, and are hybridized in conformity with Western ideals. It can be argued that these pageants really do showcase and empower women, but genuine empowerment and representation can only be conduits of change in how women are viewed when society gradually accepts diverse constructions of beauty. Women can be empowered through these platforms if there is a shift in the socio-cultural world order where individual cultures are respected, recognized, and viewed as equally important and beautiful with the existing notions of beauty. Genuine multiculturalism and women's equality can be achieved if society will fairly value dark skin as much as white skin, curly hair as much as straight hair, flat nose as much as tall nose, and thicker bodies as much as thinner bodies. Above all of these physical characteristics and beyond what is seen as a spectacle in beauty pageants, women can be empowered if they are treated with basic decency and respect as human beings equally capable of anything. A difficult and daunting task, but attainable.

5.3. Domestic Beauty Standards

The Philippines is known for its unique blend of cultures, beautiful landscapes, and diverse people. Beauty standards have evolved and vary across cultures. In the Philippines and Colombia, beauty standards are influenced by colonialism, globalization, and socioeconomic status. One aspect of this diversity is the country's perception of beauty. Beauty standards in the Philippines are deeply ingrained in society and vary depending on various cultural factors such as geography, socioeconomic status, and historical influences. Over the past years, more and more *morena* beauties are now joining different pageants in the Philippines. This shift is attributed to the growing pride in Filipino identity and the recognition of the beauty of all skin tones. *Morena* beauty is now celebrated in pageants, advertisements, and media, challenging the traditional *mestizo* beauty standard. While there has been a shift in beauty standards, there is still a long way to go in terms of inclusivity and representation of all types of beauty in Philippine pageantry and society.

In East Asia, the beauty standards have everyone striving for a slim figure, pale skin, double eyelids, a high nose bridge and melonseed-like face. A thin figure is especially important in many Asian cultures. The media, celebrities, and companies all

perpetuate these standards (Gao, 2021). Celebrities who embody these beauty standards are often held up as role models, further reinforcing that these are the ideal features to aspire to. These beauty standards are not universal across East Asia, and there is still a great deal of diversity in terms of what is considered beautiful in different regions and cultures. However, the overall emphasis on a slim figure, pale skin, and specific facial features is a trend that has persisted for many years.

Beauty standards in Colombia have undergone significant changes over the past few decades. In Colombia, the cultural model of the ideal body for women has been established as having large breasts, a thin abdomen, and large firm buttocks and legs. Additionally, according to these standards, a 'beautiful woman' should preferably be blonde, tall, and have light eyes. Colombians are mostly Spanish-influenced, though they are a combination of Amerindians, Europeans, and Africans. Colombian girls look sultry with their healthy lifestyles and medium to dark appearance (Stanfield, 2013). The negative impact that unrealistic beauty standards could have on individuals and society. The emphasis on having a particular body type and appearance has, unfortunately, led to body dissatisfaction and the development of eating disorders in young girls.

6. Conclusion

In summary, beauty pageants have long played an influential role in global culture, providing a platform for women to present their beauty, intellect, and talents. In countries like Colombia and the Philippines, these pageants have additionally emerged as symbols of national pride and as an avenue for temporary reprieve from issues of violence and economic instability. However, the beauty industry has also perpetuated strict definitions of beauty, exacerbating racism and fostering a culture where cosmetic surgeries are normalized. Despite these challenges, beauty pageants continue to evolve to represent a broader definition of beauty and provide opportunities for women to pursue their dreams.

Similarly, beauty pageants have played a significant role in shaping gender identity formation and promoting beauty standards in Colombia and the Philippines. While these competitions have empowered women and promoted femininity and beauty standards, there is still a need to ensure that these representations are inclusive and diverse. Though there have been efforts in both countries to promote diversity and inclusivity in beauty pageants, much progress still needs to be made. Feminist discourse has brought attention to the adverse effects of beauty pageants, such as the reinforcement of harmful

beauty ideals and gender stereotypes. As society continues to evolve, it is essential to reflect on the impact that beauty pageants have on women's gender identity formation and to strive for greater inclusivity and diversity in these competitions. By doing so, we can promote gender equality and empower women to achieve their full potential in all aspects of life. Some women continue participating in pageants to empower themselves and promote their causes. It plays a significant role in social institutions that produce and reproduce national symbols, meanings, and practices intended to be socially acceptable and standard. Women who participate in beauty pageants uphold symbolic representations of their nation, showcasing collective identity and bringing about the same identities in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and culture. However, despite the perceived empowerment and feminism attributed to women in beauty pageants, they could be more participatory and performative. Additionally, beauty functions as a form of violence, requiring a body or bodies to yield to be deemed acceptable. Beauty pageants employ women as national symbols to advance a traditionalist objective by appropriating modernization, capitalism, and feminism.

Furthermore, beauty pageants in patriarchal societies can serve as platforms for women's empowerment, allowing them to

showcase their beauty, skills, and talents. The cases of Vanessa Mendoza and the *Concurs Señorita de Independencia de Colombia* illustrate how beauty pageants can challenge prejudiced notions and serve as a means for women to become advocates for their nation's image. However, the line between empowerment and objectification can become blurred, as seen in the case of international beauty pageants in the Philippines. These pageants can propagate Western beauty standards, highlighting certain physical features and adhering to a particular dress style. Despite the illusion of multiculturalism, international beauty pageants can reinforce Western biases and ideals, even in postcolonial countries. Thus, it is essential to critically examine beauty pageants and their effects on women's empowerment and the perpetuation of societal norms.

References

- Banet-Weiser, S. (1999). *The most beautiful girl in the world: Beauty pageants and national identity*. Univ of California Press. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CbAwDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CbAwDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=beauty+pageants+feminism+theory+&ots=vdcoPYCk1N&sig=NMtThPzZPEcvH2p wq42x9dU-XoY) & [dq=beauty+pageants+feminism+theory+&ots=vdcoPYCk1N&sig=NMtThPzZPEcvH2p wq42x9dU-XoY](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CbAwDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR9&dq=beauty+pageants+feminism+theory+&ots=vdcoPYCk1N&sig=NMtThPzZPEcvH2p wq42x9dU-XoY)
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2006). "I just want to be me again!": Beauty pageants, reality television and post-feminism. *Feminist Theory*, 7(2), 255–272. doi:10.1177/1464700106064423
- Becerra, D. (2017). The first black Miss Colombia and the limits of multiculturalism. *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 12(1), 71–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17442222.2016.1273858>
- Bonus, R. (2000). *Locating Filipino Americans : ethnicity and the cultural politics of space*. Temple University Press.
- Clutario, G. A. (2014). *The appearance of filipina nationalism: Body, nation, empire* (Order No. 3646472). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1639698816). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/appearance-filipina-nationalism-bodynation/docview/1639698816/se-2>
- Cohen, C. B. (2015). Beauty pageants. *The International Encyclopedia of Human Sexuality*, 113–196. doi:10.1002/9781118896877.wbiehs045
- De La Torre, M. R. N. (2013). Bellas por naturaleza: Mapping national identity on US Colombian beauty queens. *Latino Studies*, 11(3), 293–312. doi:10.1057/lst.2013.17
- Estill, A. (2017). From Big Screens to Pasarelas: Studying Beauty in Latin America. *Latin American Research Review*, 52(1), 173–182. doi:10.25222/larr.95
- Farrales, M. (2019). Repurposing beauty pageants: The colonial geographies of Filipina pageants in Canada. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 37(1), 46–64.
- Gao, A. (2021). *The Contrast Between East Asian and Western Beauty Standards*. Retrieved from <https://www.thediversitystory.org/post/the-contrast-between-east-asian-and-westernbeauty-standards>
- Gato, G. M. B. (2019). The politics of pretty: how international beauty pageants promote western standards of beauty in the

Philippines (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from <http://dspace.cas.upm.edu.ph/jspui/handle/123456789/746>

Jones, G. (2017). Globalizing Latin American Beauty. *ReVista Harvard Review Of Latin America*, 16(3), 10–82. <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/globalizing-latin-american-beauty/>

King-O’Riain, R. C. (2008). Making the Perfect Queen: The Cultural Production of Identities in Beauty Pageants. *Sociology Compass*, 2(1), 74–83. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00056.x

López, S. S. (2013). Review of Michael Edward Stanfield *Of Beasts and Beauty: Gender, Race, and Identity in Colombia*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 62–63. https://colombianistas.org/wpcontent/themes/pleasant/REC/REC%2044/Rese%C3%B1as/44-15-Resena_Sanchez_Lopez.pdf Nowacka, K. (n.d.). How to make the SDGs walk the talk about gender equality and women's empowerment. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/dev/development-posts-gender-equality.htm>

Srivastava, S. (2020). Global Production of a Feminine Ideal: Behind the Scenes of Beauty Pageants. *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, 1-15.

https://www.academia.edu/download/65306057/Amnd_Srivastava_gjcpi_2020_1.pdf

Stanfield, M. E. (2013). *Of beasts and beauty: Gender, race, and identity in Colombia*. University of Texas Press.

Stanfield, M. E. (2017). Beasts and Beauty in Colombia Power, Politics and Pageants. *ReVista Harvard Review Of Latin America*, 16(3). <https://revista.drclas.harvard.edu/beasts-and-beauty-in-colombia/>

UN General Assembly, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cedaw.pdf>

Virtucio, J. A. B. (2016). *Pretty Hurts: University of the Philippines Cebu Students’ Perception towards International Beauty Pageants*. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/download/47255203/PRETTY_HURTS_UNIVERSITY_OF_THE_PHILIPPINES_CEBU_STUDENTS_PERCEPTION_TOWARDS_INTERNATIONAL_BEAUTY_PAGEANTS.pdf



Para citar este artículo: Arcamo, G., Ramos, K., Chua, S., Malabonga, R., & Rodríguez, A. (2025). The jeepney dilemma: examining the feasibility of electric public transportation in the Philippines. *Revista DiversidadEs*, 3(II), 227-250. <https://www.fundaciondiversidades.org/revistas>