



# Will Beauty Save the World?

— A historical context study of the Miss Venezuela pageant as a conceivable contributor to communication for development —

**Jassir de Windt**

Communication for Development

One-year master

15 Credits

Semester: Autumn 2018. Defense: January 2019

Supervisor: dr. Anders Høg Hansen

# Will Beauty Save the World?

*A historical context study of the Miss Venezuela pageant as a conceivable contributor to communication for development*

**Jassir de Windt**

---

## Abstract

In recent years, old-hand development scholars, in the category of Dan Brockington, have expressed their concern over academia's neglect of the significance of celebrities in the field. As has been the case of an outturn hereof, namely beauty pageants. In the last six decades, Venezuela has positioned itself not only as one of the world's largest exporters of oil but also as one of the leading engenderers of titleholders in international pageantry. The latter, which has resulted in Venezuelans regarding the pageant as a fundamental cultural undercurrent in their collective identity, seems to be a ceaseless manifestation in spite of the country's worrisome current socio-economic status. Rather than adopting a condescending paradigm towards the Miss Venezuela pageant, it is precisely this vertex of ambiguity that opens the avenue for an interesting development question. After all, if celebrity beauty queens from Venezuela are deemed as part of the nation's identity, could the pageant, in the same breath, be deemed as a contributor to communication for development? While espousing historical context as an analysing method and in pursuit of David Hulme's Celebrity-Development nexus and Elizabeth McCall's four strands of communication for development, this paper presents a qualitative study in which hands-on experts are given a platform. The findings show the evolution of a beauty pageant from a, nearly, nationalist device into a system that is grounded in the Millennium Development Goals and that aims to forge socially responsible beauty representatives that are competent enough to herald purposeful messages.

**Keywords:** Celebrity-Development nexus, celebrity beauty queens, beauty with a purpose, communication for development, cultural identity, national identity, popular culture, race and class, internationalisation, economic transnationalism, social norms of beauty, representation women, social change, Venezuela.

## **Acknowledgements**

As the saying goes: *supervision is an opportunity to bring someone back to their own mind*. Hence, I am extremely appreciative of the jolly, timely and sound advice I was permitted to receive from dr. Anders Høg Hansen over the course of writing this degree project and of dr. Bojana Romic for her useful feedback in order to take the paper to an even higher level. Furthermore, I cannot begin to express my gratitude to the personal communications who took the time to provide me with their priceless answers, without which it would not have possible to properly reflect the underlying aim of this paper.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
1. Introduction.....	4
1.1.1 Aims and Objectives.....	4
1.1.2 Research Question.....	4
1.1.3 Research Method and Core Theories.....	4
1.1.4 Empirical Data.....	5
1.1.5 The sought link with ComDev.....	6
2. Literature Review.....	7
Popular Culture and its Relevance.....	7
The link with development [communication].....	7
Emancipation versus Objectification.....	9
The Venezuelan Case.....	10
3. Methodology.....	11
Choice of topic.....	11
Initial research.....	11
Interviews.....	12
Survey.....	12
Findings.....	13
Ethnographical Study vs Historical Context.....	13
4. Analysis.....	13
4.1 Miss World 1955: SUSANA DUIJM.....	13
4.1.1 Queen by Popular Vote.....	14
4.1.2 A Triumph of Venezuela.....	15
4.1.3 Agent of Cultural Transformation.....	16
4.2. Miss Universe 1981: IRENE SÁEZ.....	17
4.2.1 Osmel Sousa.....	18
4.2.2 More Than a Pretty Face.....	18
4.2.3 One-Hundred Most Powerful.....	19
4.2.4 Political Revolutionist.....	21
4.3 Miss International 2018: MARIEM VELAZCO.....	22
4.3.1 Race in Venezuela.....	23
4.3.2 Aliados Contigo.....	23
4.3.3 The Millennium Development Goals.....	25
5. Conclusion.....	26
6. Area of Further Research.....	29
References.....	30
Appendices.....	36
Appendix 1 a: Selection of survey questions.....	36
Appendix 1 b: Gender respondents.....	37
Appendix 1 c: Age group respondents.....	37
Appendix 1 d: Income respondents.....	38
Appendix 1 e: Region of domicile respondents.....	38

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1.1 Aims and Objectives

This degree paper aims to put the Miss Venezuela pageant, a quintessence of popular culture, in a historical perspective, while prospecting for its potential link with development communication. The general assumption in this pursuit is justified by the base point that labelling this South American pageant as insignificant would stand in sharp contrast to the importance Venezuelans attach to it — even amidst the country's, arguably, deepest economic and humanitarian crisis in its recent history. Likewise, taking on a patronising tone in relation to the Miss Venezuela pageant might put the academic offshoot of *Communication for Development* at risk of missing out on several intriguing progressions.

In order to attain the aforesaid intention, a triptych approach will be taken: to mould an academic basis, applicable literature will be built on. Furthermore, for the purpose of enhancing the palpability of the topic, experiential individuals are heard and, ultimately, a survey will be conducted.

## 1.1.2 Research Question

With the domain of development in mind, this prospectus is intended to provide an answer on the following overarching question:

Can the Miss Venezuela pageant be deemed as a contributor to communication for development?

Hence, while closely examining the cases of some of the women that have been bestowed with one of the Miss Venezuela titles in the last sixty-six years<sup>1</sup>, it is thus the link between popular culture and development and, thereupon, development communication that is sought.

## 1.1.3 Research Method and Core Theories

Getting a comprehensive retort on the above-mentioned research question signifies analysing the Miss Venezuela pageant from its early beginnings, including all relevant contextual factors. Thus, this paper will be studying the external characteristics revolving around the overarching question as a means to obtain a nuanced outline of the current situation. This will be achieved by magnifying three narratives within the pageant's history, namely from the 1950s, the 1980s and 2018. In this respect, *Historical Context* will be turned to as an analysing method. On balance, Schensul (2012) states:

Most social scientists would agree now that individual behavior is shaped by broader social, economic, political, and physical factors that interact with psychological characteristics in a specific place and time. To understand these broader factors, which are influential in the present, it is important to know how they evolved and what shaped them (p. 2).

---

<sup>1</sup> Within the Miss Venezuela mechanism, the absolute winner is referred to as 'Miss Venezuela' [in appropriate cases as 'Miss Venezuela Universe'], while the first and second-runners up are respectively addressed as 'Miss Venezuela World' and 'Miss Venezuela International'. For the sake of clarity, this paper will thus show the interfaces of three international pageants that have been influential in Venezuelan history: Miss Universe (US-based), Miss World (UK-based) and Miss International (Japanese-based).

To take full advantage of this endeavour, the subsequent two core theories will serve as guiding principles for they offer a plain connectivity with the notion of celebrity and development and celebrity and development communication:

The concept of the correlation between media, celebrities and development, coined by dr. David Hulme: University of Manchester and reinforced by dr. Richard Vokes: University of Western Australia.

The concept entailing the four strands of Communication for Development, compiled by Elizabeth McCall: consultant at the United Nations Development Programme.

Moreover, the following views offer the, not insignificant, link with Venezuela and aesthetics:

The concepts of beauty practices in Venezuela, as proposed by dr. Elizabeth Gackstetter Nichols: Drury University.

Alternatively, the following comprehensions bid additional connectivities with beauty, identity and skills acquisition through pageantry:

The concept of the female inner and outer body, as proposed by dr. Nancy Etcoff: Harvard University.

The concepts of pageants and identity, as proposed by dr. Rebecca Chiyoko King-O'Riain: Maynooth University.

The concepts of skills acquisition through pageantry, as proposed by dr. Magda Hinojosa and dr. Jill Carle: Arizona State University.

#### **1.1.4 Empirical Data**

Further discussion of the above-mentioned concepts, will befall in the next chapters, alias the literature review and analysis. Thereupon, this paper will be building on the input of experiential individuals, as being personal communications:

Pilín León: Miss World Venezuela 1981 and Miss World 1981.

Julio Rodríguez Matute: Venezuelan beauty pageant historian.

Giselle Laronde-West: Miss Trinidad & Tobago World 1986 and Miss World 1986.

Sally-Ann Fawcett: British-born author of the pageant trilogy *Misdemeanours* and recurring judge at the Miss Great Britain, Miss Wales, Miss Northern Ireland and Miss International UK pageants.

Ultimately, the perspectives of a sample size of one-hundred respondents<sup>2</sup> in the United States of America will be taken into consideration. The reason why the US was chosen a sample country was, first and foremost, historical experimentation or historical curiosity. After all, the Miss Venezuela pageant came into existence thanks to the, once, largest and principal air carrier in the United States of America: Pan American World Airways<sup>3</sup>. As such, this survey grounds itself on a group of people in the country that, as it were, sent the starting signal to the Miss Venezuela pageant. Secondly, the US-based Miss Universe pageant is heavily popular in Venezuela, even more so than the UK-based

<sup>2</sup> Carried out by means of a paid feature on SurveyMonkey in November 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Please, refer to section 4.1.

Miss World or the Japanese-based Miss International pageants. Thirdly, it cannot go unnoticed that Venezuela's current socio-political impasse has prompted a considerable migration influx to the US, making Venezuelans the main group applying for asylum in the United States of America (Migration Policy Institute, 2017).

It is hereby worth mentioning that since this paper encompasses a qualitative study, the idea of running a survey is not to determine a statistical summation nor to verify a hypothesis. Rather, it is meant to gain more inductive insights about this topic or, as commonly called in qualitative research, reach a more satisfying level of "saturation" (Morse, 1995).

### 1.1.5 The sought link with *ComDev*

When it comes to the correlation between celebrities and development and the overall bearing on communication, Brockington (2014) is indeed convinced that:

The importance of celebrity in communicating poverty and development issues is likely to increase (p. 89).

By doing so, Brockington refers to the situation in both the so-called developed nations and nations in transition<sup>4</sup>. He bases his opinion on the fact that, thanks to the catalyst function of internet availability, media industries and mobile phones in nations in transition, the celebrity industry in this part of the world is on the increase<sup>5</sup>.

By all means, this paper will thus be seeking for the conceivable link between the Miss Venezuela pageant and communication of development issues. Against this background, and while turning to McCall's (2011) first UN inter-agency publication illustrating the diverse approaches to communication for development, the possible subsistence of the following four Communication for Development strands<sup>6</sup> within the Miss Venezuela pageant will be unravelled:

*Behaviour Change Communication*: particularly relevant to the healthcare industry, this type of communication aims to prompt social and individual change by virtue of information.

*Communication for Social Change*: underlining the role of people as change agents and long-term social change, this type of communication encourages dialogue by means of participation and empowerment.

*Communication for Advocacy*: this type of communication aspires to positively shift governance, power relations, social relations, attitudes and institutions.

*Strengthening an enabling media and communication environment*: the pursuit of this type of communication is to ensure a supporting surface for free, independent and pluralistic media as well to increase the access to media channels and to mobilise freedom and expression and accountability systems.

---

<sup>4</sup> Brockington uses the term 'Global South'. Though I prefer to adhere to the term 'Nations in Transition' as coined by Raicheva-Stover & Ibroscheva (Eds, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Indeed, recent figures show an increasingly large tracking from Venezuelans, as well as other Latin Americans, when it comes to watching the Miss Venezuela pageant, or elements hereof, via Instagram, Twitter and YouTube (Blum, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> As noted by McCall, these four strands are identified by UN organisations with the annotation that there are overlaps among them.

## 2. Literature Review

### ***Popular Culture and its Relevance***

On the eve of the release of the first issue of *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, a publication that aims to promote contemporary scholarship into the fields of fan and audience studies across various media, the pressing question seemed to be why popular culture mattered. The journal's publisher thereafter printed a collection of thoughts on the matter out of which one stood out:

Popular culture matters because in reflecting, expressing, and validating the spirit of our epoch – the zeitgeist – it generates meaning, and not only interacts with and situates the current state of our society but also helps shape and inform its future (Block, 2012, p. 15).

Godsil, MacFarlane & Sheppard (2015) subscribe to the influence popular culture has over meaning formation. Moreover, the authors manifest two new arguments. Firstly, the notion that popular culture can serve as a substantial agent of social change. Against this background, the authors elaborate on the unique ability of popular culture to circulate facts in an entertaining fashion and produce emotion and empathy to large audiences. Secondly, these scholars discuss the creation of collective identity through popular culture. In this light, they insist that as popular culture, as opposed to conventional forms of culture, is perceived as “shared territory” (p. 4), humans are more likely to reckon that its signals are trustworthy and, as such, use these signals in their interactions with peers. Horn (2009), in turn, expands the latter even more by adding that popular culture offers a form of cultural identity to those individuals in society who are denied one under other conditions.

On balance, and regardless of countries, languages, customs and religions, is popular culture not part of the day-to-day life of a great chunk of the world population? And has this not been subconsciously blended into the *identity* of many nations? For some time now, old-hand development academics in the category of Chouliaraki (2010, 2012) have delved into the not negligible influence of popular culture while advocating for further scrutiny of this domain. Tellingly, the notion amongst many thinkers, is that popular culture is a “residual category” and comprises those “texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture” (Storey, 2009, p. 6). Regardless of the spectrum one might favour, the argument of Labas & Mihovilović (qtd. in Kos-Lajtman & Slunjski, 2017) sounds rational:

Popular culture is an essential component of modern society, which has integrated into all its pores: media presentations, films, fashion, all kinds of art, technology, design, sports, food and entertainment (p. 74).

Edensor (2002) concur with this rationale by claiming that popular culture has come to reformulate many cultural forms with the result that various structures of national cultural authority are no longer self-evident. Edensor does also contend on a form of popular culture that was once devised to represent a close-knit sense of togetherness and to pass on specific convictions: pageants.

### ***The link with development [communication]***

When debating about beauty queens, a clear distinction shall be drawn between the terms *pageant* and *contest*. While, as will be proposed further onward, both terms advert to platforms that are akin to cultural identity and cultural production and thus collectivity, this degree project adheres to the

wording of Gackstetter Nichols (2016): contests are events in which women compete against one another while being judged by members of society on what is considered to be beauty parameters. Pageants, on the other hand, do likewise yet in the presence of a public and, more importantly, on a podium and by means of a spectacle. Tying this to cultural identity and production, Chiyoko King-O’Riain (2007) states that:

Beauty queens are symbolic representations of collective cultural identities and beauty pageants are fields of active ‘cultural production’ (p. 74).

When expounding on this statement, the author argues that beauty pageants are legitimate platforms in which culture and collective meaning are not only debated but also created. The author gets more precise by indicating that by virtue of the public nature of pageants, they are often the subject of debate about the common purpose of communities as they give women within such communities the opportunity to voice their worries. Similarly, Chiyoko King-O’Riain claims that beauty pageants are also a vessel to argue on the distress about collective identity. All in all, beauty queens themselves can be considered a cause to engage, within a safe public sphere, into a debate on collective identity. Carrying on the identity element, Okopny (2005) draws out a stirring claim. Her research geared towards the perception of women towards plastic surgery proved that the latter group regarded their bodily-identity as being separated from their inner-identity. This concept is in line with the judgements of Etcoff (2000) in that “appearance is the most public part of the self” (p.7) or that appearance is “the visible self that the world assumes to be a mirror of the invisible, inner self” (Ibid).

By and large, the above-displayed argumentation strikes an important grain within the media and development realm. In the last fifteen years, the humanitarian world has not been able to shun a trend that has made itself more keenly following the so-called Washington Consensus<sup>7</sup>. Hulme (qtd. in Vokes, 2017), refers to this trend as the “Celebrity-Development nexus” (p. 237). Thereby, Vokes argues that although the relationship between development agencies and celebrities has existed at least since 1954, from the year 2000 onwards this has increased dramatically. Witness the many UN Goodwill Ambassador designations that have taken place since the turn of the millenium. In addition to this, since then it has become habitual for larger NGOs to enjoy the collaboration of “celebrity liaison officers” (p. 257). Besides the fact that, in recent years, many celebrities have established their own charities with a focus on development. All this, has opened the avenue for a range of opportunities: in some areas of the world, it allows for development goals related to ICT4D projects to be accelerated by means of local and national celebrities. When it comes to participatory projects, the involvement of celebrities that are already associated to the development world, might help expanding such plans. Lastly, people who have been subjected to adversities, can be given the opportunity to become “celebrity-advocates in their own right” (Ibid). In this, the scaled-up relationship between celebrity and development is in line with the rationale of Chiyoko King-O’Riain and Etcoff: celebrities form a nexus between the public and private sphere. Or to put it more specifically, people perceive these individuals as “belonging to a nation” or “public good” (p. 247) which, in turn, is an attractive incentive for organisations that long to widen their message or cause. All this seems to be aligned with Brockington’s (2014) points of view when it comes to the

<sup>7</sup> Though contested, the term Washington Consensus refers to ten economic policy protocols that shall be seen as a basis for reform geared towards nations in transition while affected by financial crises.

link between celebrity and development: the need for development scholars to take celebrity involvement in the field seriously is imperative for it is “an active force” (pp. 88-89) within the development realm. As such, its exploration may be useful in understanding a number of forces that influence the way development is being presented, the way different audiences retort to this and the way similar development stories may or may not turn out to be appealing.

As is only logical, however, the coin has another side which will be elaborated below.

### ***Emancipation versus Objectification***

In conjunction with their article *From Miss World to World Leader: Beauty Queens, Paths to Power, and Political Representations*, Hinojosa and Carle (2016) put forward a discourse that will probably be frowned upon by many pageant opponents. While focusing on the playing field of women and politics, the authors argue that pageants, inasmuch as being open exclusively to women<sup>8</sup>, supply the latter with “both the skills and confidence necessary for a political career” (p. 40). In this respect, the authors claim that the following skills can be acquired by virtue of having participated in a pageant: public speaking, stress control, the solicitation of funds, the furtherance of a platform and self-belief. Of similar interest, is the clear distinction made by the authors with regard to what they define as “celebrity” and “ancillary” (p. 33) beauty queens. While the former group falls into politics thanks to their obvious name-awareness and, hence, celebrity status, the latter group is less able to make use of the previously discussed skills: that is their involvement in pageants is limited to less significant events or to cultures that are less responsive to beauty pageants. This skills acquiring process through pageantry is endorsed by Buyce (2013) in her investigation with a focus on former beauty queens and the procurement of communication competencies. As such, the author is able to demonstrate that, besides communication skills, women do also come to develop soft skills by dint of their pageant experience. Ultimately, claims Buyce, the tension field between emancipation and objectification might be magnified through pageants, though women are still of the opinion that beauty plays a decisive role in getting recruited and getting promoted. This corroborates the views of Kirby Letts (2014) in that, even in a postfeminist ensemble of popular culture, women are still under the so-called “male gaze”. Other scholars, such as K. Wright (2017), also denounce that beauty pageants reinforce the continuation of the misogynistic view generated by the male gaze.

Factually, while viewed from a development point of view, these observations are also very much in line with the arguments of Vokes. For even if celebrities, if so beauty queens, are to achieve personal advancement by means of their participation in a pageant or evoke social change by backing a good cause, they will be gazed at predominantly “for reasons of pleasure and as objects of fantasy” (p. 253). Brockington goes into more detail by stating that, besides the drawback that the common goal might be forgotten as the audience could get too involved with the individual and its shenanigans, the effectiveness of celebrity actions in the development field is not entirely foolproof. Ultimately, the question rises to what extent the above relates to a nation that, at a global level, has oftentimes has been associated with feminine beauty and pageantry: Venezuela.

---

<sup>8</sup> This automatically leads to the current global debate whether non-cisgender women shall be allowed to compete in pageants that were initially called into existence for the benefit of cisgender women.

### **The Venezuelan Case**

Avilés Santiago (2015) not only reaffirms the stake of beauty pageants in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean, but also argues that such pageants allow for social mobility and, what is more, room for the foregrounding of convoluted matters such as race, ethnicity, class and gender. When it comes to pageantry in, specifically, Venezuela, the first Miss Venezuela pageant was held in 1952 (Ochoa, 2014). Once again, the term *pageant* should be emphasised as the first recorded Venezuelan beauty contest dates back from 1905. Back then, a *Señorita*, or Miss, Venezuela was chosen based on a poll associated to a photo contest organised by a cigarette company (Ibid). Nevertheless, the latter, just as several other subsequent beauty contests in Venezuela, did not fulfil the criteria as previously proposed by Gackstetter Nichols to be considered a pageant. In flashforward, more than six decades after, Venezuela is considered a quasi powerhouse for having won a record amount of international *grand slam*<sup>9</sup> beauty titles. The notable Venezuelan author Salvador Garmendia stated back in 1995, perhaps as a prelude, that:

Our beauty queens are ours because beauty survives all calamities and is able to shine even above our deprived, ailing and senile democracy (p. 48).

Indeed, the Miss Venezuela pageant has developed into a tableau of popular culture which formula is applied beyond Venezuelan borders. Sally-Ann Fawcett, author and connoisseur in the area of beauty says:

Since Venezuela started its winning streak at the beginning of the 1980s, most countries have looked to the nation for clues as to its success. The UK, for example, has seen its own pageant fortunes decline at the very time Venezuela's was climbing. British pageant directors were known to study recordings of the Miss Venezuela pageant to try and attain a similar standard from their own winners, while countries of a similar economic standard as Venezuela put the pageant on a pedestal as a result of its successful track record (S-A. Fawcett, personal communication, 22 November 2018).

To begin with, it is proper to divide the Miss Venezuela pageant into three evolutionary components: the 1950s delineated by Venezuela's flourishing public works and hence diligent quest for mondialisation. The 1960s up to and including 1979 that stood for the usage of the pageant as a display for the offspring of Venezuela's wealthy class (Gackstetter Nichols, 2016). And finally 1979 until 2018 that symbolised a shift from elitist beauty to viewing all women "as raw material, needing only the intervention of society to transform them into queens" (Ibid, p. 123). As will be shown, it is also in the final stretch of this last line of progression, that the Miss Venezuela pageants puts on a more evident philosophy which is in line with the Celebrity-Development nexus. In fact, elements of the trend discussed Banet-Weiser (1999) is applicable here, in that it is precisely the feminist mindset that has shaped pageants since the 1990's. In the view of Banet-Weiser, pageants do reflect the constant changes in society thus enabling them to take along either mainstream or liberal feminine discourse:

And so beauty pageants, rather than operating as simple showcases for displaying objectified bodies, are actually a kind of feminist space where female identity is constructed by negotiating the contradictions of being socially constituted as 'just' a body while simultaneously producing oneself as an active thinking subject, indeed, a decidedly 'liberal' subject (p. 24).

---

<sup>9</sup> The term *grand slam*, was introduced in 1999 in the world of pageantry to distinguish between the so-called large-scale international beauty pageants and the thousands of others that exist throughout the world.

While this degree project will present a historical context study of this evolutionary process, the above already presumes that, in addition to splendour, the Miss Venezuela pageant is likely a complex concatenation of elements. With all the foregoing in mind, although many academics might have ostracised pageantry from all conventional academic discourse for not satisfying the criteria in order to qualify as high culture, the claims of Etcoff are sensible. That is many assumptions revolving around the field of physical beauty are indeed arbitrary. Still, this does not take away the fact that everyone, in some degree, takes the effort in examining it. Like so, cutting it out of all intellectual discourse only deepens the abyss between the real world and humanity's definition of beauty, and as such, beauty pageants. This would be a true deprivation because beauty pageants, for being components of popular culture, bring about beauty queens. The latter, which in turn are the equivalent of celebrities, constitute a very profound relationship, as drawn out by Vokes and Brockington, with the field of development.

### 3. Methodology

#### *Choice of topic*

My connection with Venezuela does not stop at having a Venezuelan great-grandmother. Having spent my childhood on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao, some kilometres off the coast of Venezuela, meant constant exposure to Venezuelan television. After all, back in the 80s and 90s, the Dutch Caribbean islands did not possess fully-fledged television stations. Thus, while chances are that the typical Dutchman or woman based in Europe watched the *Eurovision* once a year, the Dutch subjects living in the overseas territories got to see the *Miss Venezuela pageant*.

Throughout the years, I realised that, unlike the glamour and glitter, my interest in the pageant revolved particularly around its mainsprings. That is in the first half of the 1980s, Venezuela underwent a devaluation spiral, yet Venezuelan beauty representatives reigned supreme by bringing home two Miss Universe, two Miss World and one Miss International titles. Considering Venezuela's current impasse, the pageant has plainly tightened its belts, though its beauty representatives are still going strong in the international arena. In addition, the logic behind the extent of the Venezuelan national consciousness with regard to the pageant has always triggered me. *Es que nos corre por las venas*<sup>10</sup>, one would often hear. At any rate, this cultural phenomenon deserved a historical scrutiny in order to yield its conceivable social relevance and link to the field of communication for development.

#### *Initial research*

In June of 2018, after having heard that the topic of this paper would probably be approved, I started immersing myself in a wide array of online footage. If *Historical Context* were to be the method to peruse the details of the main query of this paper, I was convinced that both video and photographic material had to be accessed. The latter led me to interesting findings, such as a 1955 telegram displaying both joy and chauvinism.

---

<sup>10</sup> Spanish for 'it happens to run through our veins'.

Being a speaker of Spanish<sup>11</sup> and being acquainted with the Venezuelan realm, did certainly facilitate my working conditions and so did my background in journalism: approaching people, working through texts and relativising the ‘truth’ from many angles, were practices I was already familiar with.

### **Interviews**

The personal communications, geared towards experiential individuals, I planned to carry out, were meant to deepen and compare the findings of the above and of the literature review that was meanwhile in the making. The personal communications were also a very specific way of posing questions and herewith increase the certainty that I was investigating what I initially had in mind. The initial procedure implied that I approached five individuals, in my direct and indirect network, via electronical mail or social media with the aim for them to be interviewed, either through a conversation via video chat or via e-mail. Except for two interviewees, questions were drafted in English and itemised based on the background of the respective individual.

This procedure did surely entail letdowns: while interviewing a former Miss Universe, one of the few to originate from a certain geographical location and, on top of that, one of the few to have been appointed a United Nations Goodwill Ambassador, she agreed to help me provided that I did not cite her in my paper for reasons she and I discussed. The information this individual provided me with was certainly compelling and helpful. Witness an imperative sentence from her side: *“I think the real question is: when [as opposed to if] did pageants embrace humanitarianism and what influenced this”?* Including her by name in the paper, however, would have increased the perceived amenity of the research. Likewise, after having drafted specific questions geared towards a Central American missologist<sup>12</sup>, the individual in question decided not to follow up on the interview. In the latter case, this contribution could have possibly amplified the scope of this paper even more.

### **Survey**

As mentioned in subsection 1.1.4, I decided to carry out a survey amongst one-hundred respondents in the United States of America to enhance my inductive insights on the matter and elevate my level of saturation associated to this qualitative research. In doing so, I was faced with one dilemma: could I rely on online cloud-based survey software in order to so? Research of Bentley, Daskalova & White (2017) confirmed my gut feeling that, as compared to traditional market surveys, *SurveyMonkey*, which I was planning to turn to, did offer swift and reliable depictions of a wide range of audience behaviour. The latter was a vital component for me as I wanted to attain a comprehensive demographic overview when it came to gender, age, income and geographical region<sup>13</sup>. Insofar as the background of the sample group that did respond to this survey concerns, I believe I have achieved this goal.

---

<sup>11</sup> Unless stated differently, all Spanish to English translations in this paper were carried out by me.

<sup>12</sup> A term I became acquainted with over the course of writing this paper: an individual that studies beauty pageants.

<sup>13</sup> Please, refer to appendices 1b – 1e.

***Findings***

The findings in this paper are not necessarily general: while some scholars discuss the input of actors, singers and models apropos of development, pageantry, or celebrity as a whole, is not widely covered. Brockington (2014) endorses this thought by stating that articles covering the topic of celebrity in the main development journals are limited. Thus, the overall research can certainly be used by anyone wishing to build on the topic.

It must be said that the literature review takes a general, rather than a specific, stance. The reasoning behind this is that only after having carried out the analysis was I in the possession of satisfactory proof that specific topics such as race, ethnicity and social class are such paramount components of the Miss Venezuela pageant.

***Ethnographical Study vs Historical Context***

Throughout this entire process, the term *ethnography* did surface. Nonetheless, by turning to the work of investigators such as Fetterman (2012) and McGranahan (2014), it became increasingly clear that fieldwork is an inherent feature of a proper ethnographical study. This paper does most certainly comply with one essential criterion of ethnography, namely interviews. Yet, time-related motifs, did not allow for a fieldtrip to Venezuela. As such, this paper might contain ethnographical traces, but I believe it to be somewhat pretentious to label it as an ethnographic study. Therefore, an opportunity, rather than a weakness, that this paper provides for is a potential ethnographical study, carried out in Venezuela, which might possibly lead to even more permanent and nuanced conclusions.

**4. Analysis****4.1 Miss World 1955: SUSANA DUIJM**

Although by the 1950s, the world had largely emerged from the devastations revolving around World War II, several other global challenges were in the offing. While decolonisation, particularly in Africa and Asia, had made its entry, the world seemed also to be gripped by the frictions between communism versus capitalism. It is against this background, that Venezuela was experiencing an enormous growth spurth in the history of its public works. The latter, however, had already been set in motion thanks to the discovery and, subsequently, production of an occurring liquid back in 1914: petroleum. At the beginning of the last century, Venezuela, and it newly acquired oil wealth were ruled with an iron fist by dictator *Juan Vicente Gómez*. There is unanimity that Gómez stood at the cradle of what is known today as a modernised Venezuela. Indeed, scholars such as Yarrington (2001) do acknowledge this plea by uttering that:

Gómez, to a greater degree than previous national leaders, imposed his authority over local strongmen, built a more stable system of national finances and administration, professionalized the military, improved the physical infrastructure connecting Venezuela's regions, and thus laid the foundations of Venezuela's modern, centralized state (p. 2).

In addition to actively seeking an internationally oriented and technology-savvy nation able to take part in foreign enterprise and politics, Gómez' regime had also come to defy a key interface in Venezuelan society: social stratification or race and class. While until then, the derived power in Venezuelan society had laid in the hands of an elite, white and mostly Euro-descended minority established in the nation's capital of Caracas, Gómez' refusal to acknowledge this established order provided new opportunities for the common Venezuelan man and prompted social change (Gackstetter Nichols, 2016). It is in this quest of modernisation, technologisation and internationalisation that went hand in hand with a battle of social class, that Venezuela experienced its first Miss Venezuela pageant in 1952<sup>14</sup>. It is also in this same year, that the nation came under the rule of *Marcos Pérez Jiménez*. Equally aspirational as Gómez, Pérez Jiménez' rule was characterised by urbanisation and an outward, or international, gaze (Velasco, 2015). The general presumption amongst academics is that while radio in Venezuela bloomed as of 1926 under Gómez, television did so from 1952 on under Pérez Jiménez (Gómez Pérez, 2015; Gómez Daza, 2013). But the fundamental principle of the regime geared around "the neighbourhood and its working-class population" (Ibid, p. 22). The Miss Venezuela pageant fitted at least part of this perspective: it was organised by the, now defunct, U.S. airline Pan American World Airways (Gackstetter Nichols, 2016) as an answer to an American-based clothing company seeking representatives from all over the world to take part in the newly established Miss Universe pageant. In 1955, Venezuela saw the crowning of a queen that, inadvertently, would trigger substantial changes both in her home-country and offshore.

#### **4.1.1 Queen by Popular Vote**

As pointed out earlier, at the beginning of the last century Venezuela experienced a shift, by hook or by crook, in its social stratification paradigm. This did not mean, however, that this turnaround was taken lightly by the nation's upper-class. While particularly the race-related component of the latter will be further expanded in chapter 2 and 3, the selection of *Carmen Susana Duijm Zubillaga* on 9 July 1955 as Venezuela's fourth official beauty queen, seem to have been a battle in the, at the time, ambiguous social differentiation sphere of the South American nation. Firstly, it shall be said that although Duijm was selected in an event that adjudicated all the prerequisites, as previously argued by Gackstetter Nichols, to be considered a pageant, she ended up being selected in a contest. That is when the six members of the jury, all aristocratic civilians of Caracas (Bujanda, 1997), could not reach an agreement as to whether selecting Duijm, white but with a humble origin, or socialite Mireya Casas Robles as the new Miss Venezuela, the decision was made to allow the pitch of the applause of the public mark the deciding factor. As it happens, Duijm was thus selected by popular vote (Ibid). In this respect, she would later comment:

Never did I imagine that I could become a beauty queen, for in those days only Venezuelan high society girls would compete and I was only starting a career as a receptionist (Castellanos, 2016).

The Venezuelan establishment, however, was not left unmoved by Duijm's win. Venezuelan pageant historian, Julio Rodríguez Matute, denotes that by winning the Miss Venezuela pageant, Duijm was severely criticised by the Venezuelan upper-class but very much valued by the popular sector (J.

<sup>14</sup> After all, Scholars such as Lombardi (1982) indicate that the above-mentioned period of considerable technological and social changes in Venezuela lasted up and until the 1960s.

Rodríguez Matute, personal communication, 2 November 2018).

It can, in any event, well be assumed that the 1955 Miss Venezuela pageant, proved to be a public platform, as suggested earlier by Chiyoko King-O’Riain, in which the audience, even if only through their communal applause, made a prudent step towards a new form of collective identity in an evolving country.

#### 4.1.2 A Triumph of Venezuela



**Illustration 1:** On the onset of her Miss World reign, Duijm acquired the name ‘Carmen the untamed’ in the international media. However, rather than class- or race- related, this denomination reflected her, perceived, self-willed character (Bujanda, 1997) | © Paris Match, 1955.

Despite the fact that Duijm’s victory can be identified as an indicator or, perhaps even, a contributor to social change in the Venezuelan 50s, her job was far from over. The outward gaze, as formerly put forward by Velasco, implied that she was still expected to achieve transnational recognition by representing her nation at the 1955 Miss Universe pageant in Long Beach, California. The political preoccupation with Venezuela’s international perception was set so high, that Duijm, who had appointed herself as Venezuela’s first Cinderella (Castellanos, 2016), was partly instructed, sponsored and, thereafter, chaperoned during her trip abroad by Carola Reverón, an employee of the Venezuelan Ministry of Mines (Bujanda, 1997). The fact that, thanks to Duijm, Venezuela had made the cut, for the first time ever, by advancing to the top-12 at the 1955 Miss Universe pageant must have delighted Venezuelan politicians back then. Nonetheless, her biggest accomplishment in pageantry happened three months after, on 20 October 1955. At

the personal invitation of its organisers, Duijm travelled to the Miss World pageant in London. On this occasion, fully sponsored by Lola Alfaro de Gutiérrez, wife of the then minister of health (Ibid), Duijm became the first Venezuelan and Latin American to win the Miss World title. This clearly epitomised the spirit of internationalisation intertwined with the voice of the people, as advocated by Pérez Jiménez. In a telegram addressed personally to Duijm, he wrote:

I am exceedingly pleased by your triumph, as it is a triumph of Venezuela (Cable and Wireless plc, 1955).

Indeed, Garmendia (1995) acknowledges this thinking by observing that this conquest was converted in yet another symbol of the rapid modernisation process that the country was experiencing back then and also in a deed to reinforce the discourse of national pride that Pérez Jiménez was promoting by means of his endeavours:

That a humble girl from Caracas, pretty but tanned like the majority of all Venezuelan women, had defeated blonde contenders from Europe and North America in London, was administered as part of the retrieval of the national spirit predicated by the dictator (p. 51).

Having fulfilled the then Venezuelan international aspirations in their entirety must have, at minimum, reinforced Duijm's *raison d'être* as a national proxy, not least amongst her critics. As indicated by Rodríguez Matute (2018) she indeed managed to silence her opponents by winning the Miss World title (J. Rodríguez Matute, personal communication, 2 November 2018).

#### 4.1.3 Agent of Cultural Transformation

The area known today as Venezuela and Colombia is home to the pre-Columbian dish named arepa, a flat and round corn-based bun considered by many Venezuelan thinkers as a symbol of national identity (Dorta Vargas, 2015). In view of this, in the 1950s the Alvarez brothers had established a food vendor that sold arepas consisting of a variety of fillings which carried the names of several Venezuelan situations. On the occasion of Susana Duijm's victory as Miss World 1955, the brothers coined an arepa which to this day is ubiquitous in Venezuelan society: the *Reina Pepia da*<sup>15</sup> (Universidad Monteávil, 2011). As such, not only had Duijm's name clearly metamorphosed as part of the active field of cultural production, as argued above by Chiyoko King-O'Riain, but she was now also, as previously conferred by Vokes, considered a public good that belonged to the entire Venezuelan nation. Regardless of possessing all the preconditions to be considered a celebrity beauty queen, a term discussed above by Hinojosa and Carle, Duijm herself seemed not eager to capitalise on her newly bestowed social advancement. Having declined several offers in Paris in order to return to Caracas as soon as possible (Álvarez Portal, 1955), she declared:

To me, that thing of being Miss World is not of utmost importance. If anything, I am the same person I have always been (p. 66).

Duijm, strikingly enough, seemed to have placed little importance on her public part of the self or visible self, debated above by Etkoff. Yet, her entire career and until the last day of her life<sup>16</sup> can at ease be recounted as trailblazing. Rivas Rojas (2005) places the role Duijm has played as an agent of cultural transformation, in the context of the era in which she won the Miss Venezuela and Miss World pageants. According to Rivas Rojas, women like Duijm have been able to make the best possible use of the large plurality within the 1950s Venezuelan public space that had become available thanks to the boom of radio, local cinema and television. Rivas Rojas hypothesises that the system of public recognition that the then media supplied, not only provided women with more visibility but also nurtured their participation in public life by means of new paths. Others, like Gackstetter Nichols (2016), endorse the thinking that television has played an important role in popularising the Miss Venezuela pageant in the 1950s. Susana Duijm was thus now part of an era in Venezuelan media that ruled in favour of women. While in the international media arena she was spared major peculiarities, the then Venezuelan press linked her romantically to dictator Pérez Jiménez. In this context she stated:

Never, for God's sake, was I involved with that man. That's a lie that they invented to discredit all of us that had been paid tribute to by Pérez Jiménez at a given time (Rueda, 2016).

Incidents such as these, did seemingly never detract from Duijm's credibility in Venezuela. Witness, the strategic move by the Venezuelan researcher, Laudin Mora, to include her, a chain smoker for

<sup>15</sup> Venezuelan linguistic usage in Spanish for what at that time was referred to as an 'outstanding [pepiada] queen [reina]'.  
<sup>16</sup> Carmen Susana "Susana" Duijm-Zubillaga: 1936-2016.

years, in a groundbreaking programme that aimed to raise the awareness of Venezuelans with regard to this habit<sup>17</sup> (Mora, 2008). It might be short-sighted to ascribe Duijm's entire range of professional competencies, earlier observed by Hinojosa and Carle and Buyce, to the Miss Venezuela pageant. In fact, a few years back, when interviewed on the correlation between her skills and her pageant history, Duijm pointed out that she probably learned by looking as no-one had ever taught her (Alcubilla Bonnet, n.d). But on the occasion of her passing, her manager at a radio station on the Venezuelan island of Margarita, where Duijm had steered her own daily radio programme for twenty-two years, described her as a continuous spokeswoman, because, simply by exemplifying who she was, she posited truths in day-to-day life that often led to many people feeling uncomfortable (Marín Méndez, 2016).

One year prior to Duijm's win as Miss World, the American entertainer, Danny Kaye, was appointed as the world's first Goodwill Ambassador within the United Nations system. Hence, while the Miss Venezuela pageant had no official bearing on the development realm back in those days, it would not be accurate to state that the nexus did not exist on the whole. In current standards, many of the communication utterances revolving around Duijm's appointment as Miss Venezuela, and thereupon Miss World, do not seem far removed from the strand of *Communication for Advocacy*. That is, both her wins, despite their motivations, were very much geared, or steered, at triggering public perceptions of social norms and influencing a certain political climate. In turn, her involvement later in life in, knowingly, influencing public opinion when it comes to smoking, resembles the aims with respect to *Behaviour Change Communication*. Duijm thus, purposely and unwittingly, served as a communicator of development issues throughout her existence as a celebrity beauty queen.

#### 4.2. Miss Universe 1981: IRENE SÁEZ

By the mid-twentieth century, Venezuela's views towards black people<sup>18</sup> were both unique as well as ordinary. Unique in the sense that as opposed to the, virtually, violent anti-black activities in the United States of America or South Africa, the Venezuelan white elite praised itself for its non-violent approach towards black people. More importantly, since the latter part of the 1800's, the upper-white class had also been encouraging miscegenation in Venezuela in order to 'whiten' and thus 'civilise' the Venezuelan non-white population. In brief, Venezuela praised itself for its so-called "*café con Leche*"<sup>19</sup> society (W.R. Wright, 1990, p. 1). Simultaneously, this development had not a unique value, as it was common practice in the rest of Latin America (Ibid). Basically, the respective paradigm in Venezuela was that 'pure' black men and women could, somewhat, come along provided that they were able to emerge in the financial sense (Ibid). In terms of aesthetics, however, the country was faced with a true dichotomy: pure blackness was still associated with retrogression and barbarism. In this light, W.R. Wright (1990) states:

<sup>17</sup> Friedman (n.d.) has stated that the tobacco industry in Venezuela, other than generating numerous jobs, is also one of the country's largest taxpayers.

<sup>18</sup> In this respect, it is specifically referred to the Afro-Venezuelans that are descendants of the approximately 500.000 enslaved men and women that were brought to Venezuela between 1576-1810 (García, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> Spanish for 'Coffee with milk'.

Venezuelan elites judged people by their appearances. Accordingly, individuals with ‘anxious hair’ or ‘hair like springs’ lived in the shadows of their black ancestors (p. 6).

Gackstetter Nichols (2016) endorses this thought by stating that the preoccupation of the white established order had started to grow already in the early twentieth century. As such, they desperately sought to safeguard their family lineages and thus prove the absence of slaves in their bloodlines. Every Venezuelan sought to be *gente decente*<sup>20</sup> and this endeavour did, ideally, not equate with an African heritage (Ibid). In this tangle of racial complexities, the Miss Venezuela pageant had endured its second and third decade of existence: in the 1960s and 70s the pageant had become, even more so, a platform for the same upper-class discussed above to display the beauty and, if you will, purity of their daughters (Ibid). All this occurred at the expense of international success. The involvement of one man, however, was about to lead to a substantial change in the social norms of beauty in Venezuela.

#### 4.2.1 Osmel Sousa

In 1981, just having obtained the rights of the Miss Venezuela pageant, Venezuelan businessman, Gustavo Cisneros, coins the *Miss Venezuela Organisation* and appoints Cuban-born<sup>21</sup>, Osmel Sousa as its president (Auletta & Jaén, 2013). The move of Cisneros was certainly a strategic one: Sousa had already been affiliated to the former organisers of the Miss Venezuela pageant to the extent of having trained and coached Venezuela’s first ever Miss Universe two years earlier<sup>22</sup>. Public interest in the pageant had thus grown by leaps and bounds (Ibid). Sousa’s formal involvement in the pageant marks a before and after in its history: while perceived class had been indissociable to the pageant until 1979, Sousa, mercilessly, put an end to this by his presidency. In his eyes, all women were, as of then, construed as core material and the only thing required was rigorous training and the necessary cosmetic interventions (Gackstetter Nichols, 2016). Hard work and sacrifice were now the yardsticks in the pageant. This development was challenged in the 2014 BBC documentary *Extreme Beauty Queens*: British journalist and documentary filmmaker, Billie JD Porter spent six months in the proximity of the Miss Venezuela Organisation, by following, specifically, two potential participants of humble origin. Her overall findings were that Osmel Sousa’s transformative power, even when it comes to contestants originating from a *barrio*<sup>23</sup>, is substantial. In addition, she reached the conclusion that, becoming Miss Venezuela or a even a finalist, opens doors to Venezuelan women seeking big careers (BBC, 2014). Nevertheless, one aspect had not changed in all this: the inclusion of race. The latter will be discussed in more detail in subsection 4.3.1.

#### 4.2.2 More Than a Pretty Face

The selection of *Irene Lailin Sáez Conde* on 7 May 1981 as Venezuela’s twenty-ninth national beauty representative, seemed to be directly in line with the national aspirations in the 1980s

<sup>20</sup> Spanish for ‘Decent people’.

<sup>21</sup> It shall be noted that, different than expected, pageants have never been officially banned in Cuba under Fidel Castro. Domínguez (qtd. in Bunck, 2010) addresses this by stating that the then Cuban party congress did not do so, as it was very much aware of the large-scale popularity of this format of entertainment. In fact, Sousa himself has pointed out that his immense passion for pageantry has come into existence after having watched the Miss Cuba pageant back in 1958 (Varnagy, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Maritza Sayalero: Miss Universe 1979.

<sup>23</sup> Spanish for ‘a poor part of the city’.

Venezuela. For a fact, fair-skinned and blonde Sáez embodied the Venezuelan race-related pursuits discussed previously by W.R. Wright. Furthermore, her well-to-do and composed background and her pious upbringing (Jones, 2008), epitomised the behavioural expectancies as argued above by Gackstetter Nichols. The latter was possibly amplified by Sáez' refusal to undergo cosmetic alterations (Ibid) and her rejection to display herself in a swimsuit until the final pageant night (E!, 2009). Hence, not only was Sáez' bodily-identity and inner-identity, terms drawn upon earlier by Okopny, in a harmonious balance. She also personally steered her public part of the self or visible self, as argued by Etcoff, in a conscious attempt to diminish the possibility to be considered an object of pleasure by means of the male gaze, as argued by Vokes. Accordingly, Sáez' win at the 1981 Miss Universe pageant in New York City, while professing to Venezuela's international gaze established already at the beginning of the century, came as no surprise. In view of this, Venezuelan pageant historian, Julio Rodríguez Matute, says:

When Irene won Miss Venezuela and Miss Universe, she marvelled everyone with her overall natural beauty, not for being blonde. In my opinion, she never embodied feminine purity (J. Rodríguez Matute, personal communication, 2 November 2018).

Sáez did, in any event, not live up to one criterion: she did not fulfil Osmel Sousa's ideology in that beautiful women should not talk (Varnagy, 2016). Rodríguez Matute goes into more detail on this issue:

Over the years, she [sic] proved that she wasn't only a pretty face or another beauty queen, for she devoted herself to achieve positive changes in Venezuelan politics (J. Rodríguez Matute, personal communication, 2 November 2018).

Jones (2008) concur with this reasoning by arguing that, other than the 'frivolous' world of showbiz, Sáez had different plans: politics. When she ran for mayor at the beginning of her political career, many opponents had a good laugh as they deemed her another silly beauty queen. As it would turn out later, this was an erroneous thought.

#### **4.2.3 One-Hundred Most Powerful**

Sáez' runner-up in the Miss Venezuela pageant happened to be the equally blonde and virtuous, Pilín León<sup>24</sup>, who would be crowned Miss World in that same year. When interviewing León, back in 2016, on her involvement in Venezuelan politics through journalism, I was asked by several editors what bearing beauty queens had with regard to politics<sup>25</sup>. León's stances were, at any rate, prognostic:

Venezuela is affected by a big crisis. However, we cannot only speak of an economic crisis any longer as there is also moral emergency in Venezuela right now – the social fragmentation in Venezuela is immense (De Windt, 2016).

Essentially, many critics ascribe the root cause of the division León refers to, to a defining moment in Venezuelan politics: the 1998 Venezuelan presidential elections.

<sup>24</sup> Born Carmen Josefina León Crespo.

<sup>25</sup> On a global scale, and as noted by Hinojosa & Carle (2016), celebrity beauty queens, such as Jamaica's Lisa Hanna, and ancillary beauty queens, like United States of America's Sarah Palin, have already paved the way in politics for some time. Of equal interest, are the cases of Bianca Odumegwu-Ojukwu [Nigeria], Anke Van dermeersch [Belgium], Eunice Olsen [Singapore] and Tanja Saarela [Finland].

Having returned from her year as Miss Universe, Sáez completed a degree in political science and served for a year as Venezuela's cultural representative to the United Nations (Jones, 2008). But the young diplomat wanted more. Her years in the international arena had triggered the following questions in her:

Why can't we in Venezuela be neat and orderly? Why can't we have quality public services? Why not in my country? (E!, 2009).



**Illustration 2:** Scholars like García-Guadilla, Roa & Rodríguez (2000) have argued that under Sáez [pictured above] there was talk of a short-term vision on politics based on patronage and populist scenarios. According to the scholars, Sáez and her aldermen allowed for these situations as they all had future political aspirations that could have been weakened would they had spoken out about them | © AP Photo José Caruci, 1998.

Driven by a seeming vocation to lead transition, the celebrity beauty queen positioned herself as mayor of the Chacao municipality in 1992. In the subsequent six years, Sáez' degree of popularity resulted in her placing number eighty-three amongst The Times of London's one-hundred most powerful women in the world, finishing higher up than Mother Teresa (Jones, 2008). In fact, Sáez' pageant experience seemed to have facilitated her with the skills and confidence, as argued earlier by Hinojosa and Carle, which are required for a political career: while effectively tackling and drastically diminishing crime rates in her municipality, Sáez imported ideas that she had acquired during her reign as Miss Universe, from countries like the United Kingdom<sup>26</sup>.

Pronouncing herself on her history in pageants, Sáez said in hindsight:

They [sic] do lead to opportunities. They are indeed a trampoline. It is up to you and how you intend to steer it all. (E!, 2009).

Weighing, as a side note, against Sáez' interpretation, Giselle Laronde, Miss World 1986 from Trinidad and Tobago says:

As a naive 23 year old from my part of the world, the experience truly helped to shape who I am today. I have never stopped helping and I am in charge of corporate social responsibility in my company [sic] (G. Laronde-West, personal communication, 21 November 2018).

While some academics, like García-Guadilla, Roa & Rodríguez (2000), were critical with regard to Sáez' political time span, historiography proves that she won her second term as mayor with an overwhelming majority in 1995. A topical issue both in her municipality, dubbed as *Irenelandia*, and nationwide was now: would Venezuela be ready for its first female president?

<sup>26</sup> Jones (2008) pleads that several ideas that Irene Sáez implemented in the Chacao police force, were inspired by the the British Bobbies (UK) and that her municipality's golf carts police officers were based on ideas obtained in East Asia.

#### 4.2.4 Political Revolutionist

The Venezuelan phrase “beauty queens govern us” (Garmendia, 1995, p. 48) was never more pertinent in the South American nation than in 1997. In December of that year, not only was Irene Sáez’ candidature for the 1998 Venezuelan presidential elections a fact, she was also leading in the polls with 40% of voter preference (Neuman & McCoy, 2001). The former beauty queen, who had always taken an independent stance when it came to mainstream political parties, had instead established an electoral movement under the acronym *IRENE*. That is *Integración y Renovación para la Nueva Esperanza*<sup>27</sup> (Silva & Rossi, 2018). Sáez her, now it appears, foreboding slogan was: *a revolution is feasible, but in freedom* (ORCCConsultores, 1998). Four months later, her popularity amongst Venezuelan voters had dropped to 18% (Neuman & McCoy, 2001) and on completion of the Venezuelan elections in December 1998, Sáez finished third with solely 3.1% of all votes (Hinojosa, 2001). As is common knowledge, the elections were eventually won by the late Hugo Chávez Frías, who served as president until his death in 2013. In the current Venezuelan reality, the question seems to be more than ever: what went wrong? Scholars generally agree that Sáez’ deathblow was her assent to be endorsed by the traditional political party *Copei* (Derham, 2010; Jones, 2008; Lander & López Maya, 1999). Others, like Mitchell (1998), made correlations between Sáez’ history in pageants and her thus inability to connect with the “real experiences” in Venezuela (p. 20). In this respect, Sáez herself, months before her defeat, commented:

I’ve not lost my status of being autonomous, neither my command nor authority. The reverse might have been communicated through some print and mass media that are misinformed. I didn’t have the responsiveness, perhaps in the financial regard, to buy airtime or publicity to counter this (RCTV Internacional, 1998).

Indeed, Hinojosa (2001) pleads that, while it is not viable to ascribe the question of guilt revolving around Sáez’ presidential loss entirely to the traditional media, the latter did play a vital role in all this. As such, Hinojosa believes that gender stereotypes that hinged around Sáez’ campaign, were enforced by the media and therefore interfered with voter’s opinions while jeopardising Sáez’ probabilities to win the elections. Other thinkers, like the late historian, journalist and former president of Venezuela, Ramón José Velásquez (qtd. in Arráiz Lucca & Uslar Pietri, 2003) agree with Hinojosa’s assertions regarding Sáez, inasmuch as he believes that in that particular election any winner would have been a “mediatic product” (p.89).

Tellingly, Venezuela seemed not ready for a female president. After this political bereavement, Sáez served as governor of the Venezuelan state of Nueva Esparta, only to resign one year after for the sake of a complicated pregnancy and a life away from the spotlights. Still, the query for what could have been resonates more than ever amongst many Venezuelans. As stated by Rodríguez Matute:

I still believe that if she had won the presidency during those elections of 1998, Venezuela would have been different at present (J. Rodríguez Matute, personal communication, 2 November 2018).

In her career path, Sáez had been literally close to the UN system and, weighted on the Celebrity-Development nexus, her appointment as cultural representative to the United Nations on behalf of Venezuela, is perhaps an avatar of how a celebrity beauty queen could end up assuming the role of a

<sup>27</sup> Spanish for ‘Integration and Renovation for the New Hope’.

‘people’s-spokesperson’. In turn, elements within the underlying forces of her imposing subsequent professional endeavours geared at influencing Venezuela’s political climate, could be deemed as *Communication for Advocacy*. Yet, it would still take a long time before the Miss Venezuela pageant would, officially, engage into the Celebrity-Development nexus.

### 4.3 Miss International 2018: *MARIEM VELAZCO*

9 November 2018 was an extraordinary day for *Mariem Claret Velazco García*. Besides celebrating her birthday, she had just advanced to the top 8 on an international podium. In her speech, she asked for one birthday wish to be granted if she were to win: “to continue to stimulate children around the world to read” (Latino Vicente, 2018). In an utmost poised advocacy discourse, that would do justice to Etcoff’s claims that the visible self is a mirror perceived as the invisible inner-self, Velazco elaborated on her endeavours in working as a history storyteller in favour of underprivileged children. As the “living proof” (Ibid) that reading unlocks knowledge, she expanded on her purpose to give children on a global scale access to books that invoke “tolerance, respect and happiness” (Ibid). By means of the latter, Velazco had clearly assumed the role, what Vokes would refer to striking the Celebrity-Development nexus, of celebrity-advocate in her own right. What is more, following Brockington’s arguments, it is noticeable that Velazco’s aspirations could be placed in the overall notion of celebrities serving as communicators of development. As a matter of fact, in this specific case the *Communication for Social Change* strand, promoting people’s participation and empowerment, seems to be in place.

A short while later, Velazco became the eight Venezuelan woman to wear the title of Miss International. Her case is a particular one: having been born one month before the pivotal 1998 Venezuelan presidential elections and thus raised against the background of *Chavismo* and, subsequently, *Madurismo*, Velazco’s victory parallels a major shift in the Miss Venezuela pageant: the departure of Osmel Sousa. After all, it would not be just to refrain from identifying Venezuela’s outstanding slate in international pageantry, many of which were mined under the auspices of Sousa. Under Osmel Sousa’s direction, Venezuela has won six Miss World, seven Miss Universe and eight Miss International titles, in addition to a myriad of other international pageantry titles. While Mariem Velazco, acquired her international title after Sousa’s departure, she was selected as Miss Venezuela International under Sousa’s leadership. Accordingly, his withdrawal from the pageant in February 2018, caused both surprise and speculation amongst friends and foes. Opponents, such as the Venezuelan journalist and writer Ibéyise Pacheco, ascribed Sousa’s departure as the consequence of serious grounds:

The Miss Venezuela pageant serves as a façade for the business of trafficking in women. Girls who take part in the pageant are prostituted often with their own consent, particularly in recent years (2017, pp. 37-38).

This paper will not be entering into these imputations as, at the time of this degree project going to press, the investigation that was billed by the Miss Venezuela Organisation, in March 2018, had not

lead to concrete findings that could corroborate the above-mentioned<sup>28</sup> (Organización Miss Venezuela, 2018). Instead, two current developments will be probed.

#### 4.3.1 Race in Venezuela

During the weeks previous to the finale of the Miss International pageant in Tokyo, Mariem Velazco, captivated the public with her public part of the self or visible self, as denoted earlier by Etkoff. While scholars like Nakamura Lopez (2016) and Johansson (2017) have extensively researched the subject of race within Japanese pageantry, fair-skinned and raven black hair Velazco's designation raises the question whether the Miss Venezuela pageant itself has transcended the colour barrier cited in subsection 4.2.1. On balance, in its history, the Venezuelan pageant has only produced two Afro-Venezuelan winners<sup>29</sup>. In her article entitled *Virgin Venuses, Beauty and Purity for "Public" women in Venezuela*, Gackstetter Nichols (2014) taps into the contentious topic of race. In this respect, she indicates that, when it comes to physical beauty, race continues to be a guiding principle in contemporary Venezuela. More specifically, this way of thinking has likely been fueled by public statements made by Osmel Sousa indicating that "Venezuelan blackness is not beautiful" (Revista Latina, 1997). Likewise, Sousa observed that, as opposed to black women in neighbouring country Colombia, Venezuelan black women were not beautiful and could therefore not be admitted to the Miss Venezuela pageant (Ibid). Also worth noting are the claims made by the former Miss Venezuela runner-up and now *UNESCO Artist for Peace*, Patricia Velásquez. In her autobiography, Velásquez, who is of *Wayúu* extraction<sup>30</sup>, asserts that Sousa advised her to have eye surgery in order to attain a more Caucasian look (Velásquez, 2015). Venezuelan historians, such as Tinker Salas (2015), concur with the claims revolving around Sousa's persistent preference for white or slightly tanned women with distinct European features.

While it might be too simplistic to frame Sousa, instead of his looping approach, as racist, the observations in section 4.1 offer a more rational account of his behaviour. That is Venezuela's perpetual preoccupation with its international image versus the noteworthy fact that the three main international beauty pageants, that have come to occupy such an important position in Venezuelan history, have also only produced a handful of black winners<sup>31</sup>. At any rate, Sousa's expressions should be defined as dated. For, as will be discussed below, it is very much this sense of nuance that the Miss Venezuela Organisation has actively been looking for since 2009.

#### 4.3.2 Aliados Contigo

Having brought home the 2018 Miss International sceptre, mostly meant Mariem Velazco's associa-

<sup>28</sup> As an interesting note, in 2018 Venezuelan journalist Shirley Varnagy interviewed three former Miss Venezuela titleholders [1996; 2001 and 2002] of which all three specified never to have been subjected to indecent proposals i.e. sexual harassment during their particular reign.

<sup>29</sup> Please, refer to footnote 1. As it is, at least four Afro-Venezuelan women have successfully worn the Miss Venezuela International crown. Though, in the pageant's hierarchical structure this is the equivalent of the third place.

<sup>30</sup> A Native American ethnic group in Venezuela and Colombia.

<sup>31</sup> The Miss World pageant has produced five Afro-black winners [1970; 1979; 1986; 1993 and 2001] since its foundation in 1951, the Miss Universe pageant has produced three Afro-black winners [1977; 1998 and 2011] since its foundation in 1952, the Miss International pageant has produced three Afro-black winners [2004; 2010 and 2014] since its foundation in 1960.

tion to a Japanese entity which operates as a fundraising organisation for the sake of *UNICEF Japan* (Miss International, 2018). Yet, it is indeed this progression that the *Grupo Cisneros*, the media conglomerate to which the Miss Venezuela Organisation reports, has been pursuing for just a decade. In *Miss Venezuela: more than just beauty?*, Auletta & Jaén (2013) report on this furtherance by expounding on two major developments that took place as of 2009 in the Grupo Cisneros. Firstly, the conglomerate's inclusion of corporate social responsibility in their vision with the aim to:

Improve education in Latin America and foster global knowledge of the region's contribution to world culture; to strengthen democracy, free trade, hemispheric integration, economic development centered on social need and the application of technology as a transforming social force (Fundación Cisneros, 2010. qtd. in Auletta & Jaén, 2013, p. 402).

Subsequently, the uptake of the Miss Venezuela Organisation within the realm of corporate social responsibility took place. As of that point, this change became remarkably visible both during and after the Miss Venezuela pageant. Already during the 2009 Miss Venezuela pageant, Adriana Vasini, who later that night would be bestowed with the second place, was asked:

*Do you consider yourself to be a superficial girl?*

Upon which the prospective medical practitioner answered:

*No, by no means. I consider myself to be a very humane person, I'm a medicine student, and I believe that the fact of saving a life, of improving it or yielding health is anything but superficial. Beauty simply comes along with this* (Kyo, 2009).



**Illustration 3:** Mariem Velazco during her duties for UNICEF Japan | © Miss International, 2018.

In this context, the previously discussed hypotheses of Banet-Weiser becomes relevant: the Miss Venezuela pageant had seemingly become a “feminist space” in which self-aware, “thinking”, and “liberal subjects” (p. 24), such as Vasini, were entitled to speak up on individual choosings such as bringing their studies into practice. Of equal significance, is the post-pageant implementation of corporate social responsibility by the Grupo Cisneros. Having coined the *Aliados Contigo*<sup>32</sup> programme, the public could, as of then, observe YouTube footages of their beauty queens while involved in social activities. In doing so, Vasini, now holding the title of Miss World Venezuela, was seen for the first time, free of make-up, while putting her medical skills in practice in a children's hospital and UNICEF Venezuela (CisnerosRSE, 2010). As indicated by the programme, it started fostering the successful visibility of Venezuelan women and inciting the engagement of beauty queens in volunteering activities which allows for them to get sensitised thus becoming socially responsible beauty representatives (Ibid). Vasini, who later positioned third

<sup>32</sup> Spanish for ‘Partners with you’.

at the Miss World pageant, was now one of the figureheads of a new way of doing things in the Miss Venezuela pageant.

### 4.3.3 The Millennium Development Goals

Mariem Velazco's election as Miss International 2018, prompted a compelling online debate among pageants fans originating from the equally fanatic Philipinnes. Their contestant had captured the second place and some Filipino's believed that the missed opportunity was related to their contestant not having been sufficiently precise in putting forward the implementation of her altruistic endeavours. As Auletta & Jaén (2013) reveal, the Grupo Cisneros was faced with similar challenges in 2009. That is they feared a backlash from the public that would think that, by undertaking the step of linking corporate social responsibility to the Miss Venezuela pageant, they were merely polishing their image. In recent years, researchers such as Enghel & Noske-Turner (Eds., 2018) have, in fact, written about the tension-field between organisation's attempts in doing the right thing versus looking good. Being associated with a beauty pageant must have duplicated this respective point of concern for the Grupo Cisneros. This led to the organisation adopting a resolution in which not only their vision was shackled to the *Millennium Development Goals*, but also a clear stance was taken to vouch for local communities always being the ones to favour.

On a global scale, the most seasoned international pageant-development programme is plausibly the *Beauty With a Purpose* programme, as part of the Miss World pageant. Created in 1972, the UK-based pageant pleads that the programme is "at the heart of Miss World" (*Beauty with a Purpose*, 2018). Endorsed by the late Nelson Mandela, *Beauty With a Purpose* indicates to have raised millions of dollars for the benefit of, mostly, children's charity around the world (Ibid). Trinidad and Tobago's Giselle Laronde, one of the few black women<sup>33</sup> to have won the Miss World title back in 1986, says:

The Beauty with a Purpose system of Miss World was very rewarding. Coming from a small town in a small country of Trinidad and Tobago, I was not exposed to the dire needs and challenges of children around the world. I travelled to over 20 countries and each time this was solely to generate funds for a hospital, a home or a children's cause. What was most rewarding was that I was able to see first hand where the money raised went, as I actually made many of the financial presentations to the organisations myself (G. Laronde-West, personal communication, 21 November 2018).

Regardless of having had a pioneering role, *Beauty With a Purpose* reflects the unfoldment of an increasingly normal trend in local and international pageantry: the development component. Thereby, the Miss International pageant has established its own charity foundation as of 1984 (Miss International, 2018). In turn, since the late 90s, the Miss Universe pageant has embraced HIV/AIDS charities as its spearhead, resulting into several of its winners being named Goodwill Ambassadors for the *United Nations Population Fund* (United Nations, n.d.). The latter is perhaps the clearest reflection in international pageantry displaying the earlier statements of Vokes in terms of the coming into existence of the Celebrity-Development nexus in the early 2000s. Embracing this frame of reference, Laronde proceeds:

I think that all pageants should look at some element of charity incorporated into its format [sic]. After all, if entities are able to come together to generate so much money, some of it should be

<sup>33</sup> Please, refer to footnote 31.

given to those less fortunate in our societies (G. Laronde-West, personal communication, 21 November 2018).

Equally, it is obvious that, since 2009, the Miss Venezuela pageant has prolifically been seeking the interplay between the Celebrity-Development nexus. The Aliados Contigo programme is a pronounced illustration of the intentions of the Grupo Cisneros to impart skills, as discussed by Hinojosa and Carle, to young Venezuelan women with the aim for the latter to pass this down to society and, if you will, to the world. Hence, exploits, such as the one of Mariem Velazco, seem to be an attempt from the part of the Grupo Cisneros to thwart claims, like those of Kirby Letts, that women in a postfeminist world are still spotted solely as objects of desire or subjects of display. Ratifying the above-mentioned, British-born, Sally-Ann Fawcett, author and connoisseur in the area of beauty, observes:

Beauty pageants have only managed to survive by evolving. After the feminist uprising in the 1970s, they were forced to modernise and to turn their attention away from being just a 'beauty' pageant. Winners are now expected to have strong opinions, to be independent and successful career women or students, and most importantly to have humanitarian interests and charities to which they are committed. The notion of a pageant without a charitable element is now seen as unacceptable (S-A. Fawcett, personal communication, 22 November 2018).

In other words, Osmel Sousa's linear conception of female beauty has ceased to apply. Addressing this matter, Fawcett carries on:

I personally feel that the Miss Venezuela pageant will start to relax the intensive regime it puts its winners through. Now that Osmel Sousa is no longer president of the organisation, changes can already be seen in what they expect of their contestants (Ibid).

Indeed, during her reception party, Mariem Velazco was addressed by Nina Sicilia<sup>34</sup>, the newly appointed managing director of the Miss Venezuela Organisation, with the following words:

We don't want for this to cease in a beautiful face a crown and a celebration. This has to circumnavigate the world. We should, during one year, convey to the world that we are a great nation, that our women are indeed beautiful, but that we also have much more to offer. We would like to make you an ambassador for this message (Venevisión, 2018).

Sixty-six years since its foundation and nine years after it had officially started working towards the Celebrity-Development nexus, the Miss Venezuela Organisation was now, officially, wielding its own communicators of development. At present, titleholders are expected to be competent enough to herald purposeful messages and willingly enough to make a meaningful contribution to society. By now, it had become apparent that merely beauty cannot save a nation, let alone the world.

## 5. Conclusion

As popular culture still holds a non-negligible role in modern society, so do, as offspring thereof, beauty pageants in the category of Miss Venezuela. Following in the statements of Labas & Mihovilović, the pageant seems to have penetrated into all pores of Venezuelan society. What is more, Chiyoko King-O'Riain and Avilés Santiago's claims, debating the undeniable position of

<sup>34</sup> Alejandrina 'Nina' Sicilia Hernández: winner of the 1985 Miss International pageant.

identity, race, ethnicity and class in pageantry, seem to be applicable to the Miss Venezuela pageant as well. On the pageant's historical timeline encapsulating 1952 until 2018, some observations are worth recapping.

Firstly, the realisation that the inception of the Miss Venezuela pageant is rooted in the pursuit of internationalisation, which manifested itself later in economic transnationalism. Rather than the empty phrase 'all Venezuelans are obsessed with beauty', it could rather be argued that the preoccupation of the average Venezuelan when it comes to how he or she is perceived outside the country's borders, is by reason of strong historical grounds. In a recent interview with the Bahrain-based Venezuelan hospitality entrepreneur, Andrea Lira Triviño, she elaborated on the distress caused by the misbehaviour of a given group of Venezuelans who have fled the country (De Windt, 2018). Lira Triviño's thoughts confirm once more that *hacer el país quedar bien*<sup>35</sup>, is something that the ordinary Venezuelan is consistently concerned with.

In second place, while in the 1950s traditional media played a paramount role in propelling one of the most game-changing Miss Venezuela's in international pageant history, in the 1990s it manifestly served as a contributing factor in the significant political defeat of yet another pioneering titleholder. Evolving towards 2009, new media started to be deployed as a means to promote a transformed Miss Venezuela system evidently capable of forming judicious and socially involved Miss Venezuela's.

Thirdly, the acknowledgement that if an individual is regarded as part of a nation's collective cultural identity, politics cannot be obliterated. When interviewing the author and aid worker, *Saleem Haddad*, back in 2016 he said to me:

I also believe that everything is, fundamentally, political. I don't think this is just the case in the Arab world. Everywhere in the world, the personal is political. Only the privileged have the luxury to be blind to this (S. Haddad, personal communication, 26 May 2016).



**Illustration 4:** Example of a tweet by an anonymous person following the results of the most recent edition of the Miss Venezuela pageant: "Another negress. My God, Maduro is already enough of a punishment [sic]".

Hence, it cannot go unnoticed that, at least in the case of Susana Duijm, Venezuelan politics have clearly drawn upon the Miss Venezuela pageant to achieve both their international and nationalist ambitions. Forty-three years later, when Irene Sáez ran for president, she became the epitome of what Haddad referred to as the personal being political.

In fourth place, the basis that the Miss Venezuela pageant has indeed shaped the social norm of beauty, at a minimum, in this South American nation. While in the last thirty-seven years, most notably under the presidency of Osmel Sousa, social class has seemingly stopped being a

<sup>35</sup> Spanish for 'making sure that the country looks good'.

penalising factor in the pageant, time will tell whether Miss Venezuela's thus far standards in relation to race will be mitigated. Interestingly, the latest edition of the Miss Venezuela pageant in December 2018, which did not fall under Sousa's presidium, produced a black winner that was bashed in the national social media for her ethnicity.

This broad spectrum, offers the appropriate setting to explore this paper's main query once more: *Can the Miss Venezuela pageant be deemed as a contributor to communication for development?* First and foremost, the very clear-cut move from the Grupo Cisneros to have included the pageant under its overall corporate social responsibility objectives back in 2009, happened to be a strategic manoeuvre that could be regarded as a way to suffice for the Celebrity-Development nexus. Thereupon, almost a decade later and under new leadership, the pageant seems to be drawing on the competencies of its winners as communicators of development. More specifically, and acknowledging the crossover between the four communication for development strands, the pageant's most recent efforts seem to hover around the *Communication for Social Change* and *Communication for Advocacy* strands. Initially, the answer to the main question is thus an affirmative one.

Except that this thrust is not a unique one: the pageant's move toward the development realm and, subsequently, development communication was rather a resonance within a set of changes that had been occurring in international pageantry since 1972. Given Venezuela's prominent position in the latter, some might even say that the respective move by the Grupo Cisneros was a belated one<sup>36</sup>. The afore-mentioned fact that Venezuelans are prone to developments in the United States of America, does not add clarity to this postponement either: the US-based Miss Universe pageant might have been the last grand slam pageant to officially embrace the humanitarian realm, though this has been in place since the late 90s, as shown earlier. At any rate, my personal research shows that in the United States of America, the country that imminently triggered the foundation of the Miss Venezuela pageant, not only does a majority of 88% subscribe to the correlation between pageant involvement and soft skills acquisition, but 77% of all respondents do also believe that beauty queens could serve as agents of change<sup>37</sup>. Generally speaking, the Miss Venezuela pageant seems to be a steppingstone for Venezuelan women wishing to pursue careers in various branches. This does not mean, however, that all Venezuelan women in the international realm have achieved their success by means of the pageant. CNN anchors like Alejandra Oraa and María Alejandra Requena, just to mention a few, did never take part in the Miss Venezuela pageant. On balance, beauty pageants are a spectacle, an utterance of popular culture. As a consequence, in such representations the chasm between feminism versus objectification, as well as, altruism versus self-interest, will always remain an area of ambivalence. In the words of Sally-Ann Fawcett:

Pageants have to continually evolve to stay alive, but too many changes will destroy the very essence of such a unique competition, and it is a tightrope that directors must continually walk (S-A. Fawcett, personal communication, 22 November 2018).

---

<sup>36</sup> Some pageant followers claim that Venezuela's devolution in the Miss World pageant, is due to the failure of the Miss Venezuela Organisation to align itself with the altruistic aims of the British pageant.

<sup>37</sup> Please, refer to the appendices section for a detailed overview.

## 6. Area of Further Research

Though the elephant in the room, Venezuela's current crisis, might not have been extensively debated in this paper, this has not been for evasive so much as practical reasons: the historical perspective and corresponding research question chosen to analyse this paper, would have been eclipsed if the topic of debate would only have revolved around the Chávez and Maduro regimes. At this stage, being *enchufada*<sup>38</sup> seems to be the most offensive suggestion one could generate when referring to a Miss Venezuela contestant. Yet, as earlier said, politics and national identity go hand in hand. "Famine is demoralising Venezuela", Pilín León, Venezuela's former Miss World, told me in 2016 (De Windt, 2016). Back in 1981, León received a homecoming worthy of a true queen. One of the militaries to have, reportedly, presented her with a bunch of flowers was a young soldier that, twenty years later, would order the expropriation of the machinery of her husband, forcing the family into a voluntary exile: Hugo Chávez (Ibid). Whether she liked it or not, León, as part of



**Illustration 5:** Alicia Machado [right] Miss Universe 1996 from Venezuela, became a political plaything in the heated 2016 United States presidential elections | © AFP 2017.

Venezuela's national identity, had indirectly come into contact with Venezuelan politics. This ambiguity has been discussed by scholars like Gulbas (2012) in her attempt to explain the trend that, precisely, under the rule of Chávez, the popularity of cosmetic surgery has risen, as in the country's altered public health care system, public institutions may not charge costs. Nevertheless, building on the Miss Venezuela pageant as a mechanism of social change, one

pertinent question is: what is the role of those former Miss Venezuela winners and contestants, currently abroad, in the ongoing impasse and prospective reconstruction of Venezuela? Not only would this refer to US-based celebrity beauty queens, such as *Alicia Machado*, known for her alliance with Hillary Clinton, or *Carmen María Montiel*, who has run for US Congress, or the Grammy award nominee and activist, *María Conchita Alonso*. Rather, it could become an ethnographic study on the hundreds or, possibly even, thousands of former ancillary Venezuelan contestants around the globe. Who are they and, consulting the social skills they picked up during the Miss Venezuela pageant, what is their role in the 'here and now' and the 'hereinafter' of Venezuela? For what it is worth, the nexus between the sorrowful exodus currently plaguing the country and the social value of the Miss Venezuela pageant deserves to be further examined.

<sup>38</sup> Spanish for 'pulling the strings by means of, in this case, political connections in the current regime'.

**References**

- Álvarez Portal, R. (1955). Susana aclara en París: Para mi ser miss mundo no tiene mayor importancia. In: Rodríguez, A. [Ed.] (2005). *Misses de Venezuela: reinas que cautivaron a un país. Crónicas, reportajes y testimonios del concurso Miss Venezuela*. Caracas: Los Libros de El Nacional.
- Arráiz Lucca, R. and Uslar Pietri, A. (2003). *Venezuela en terapia intensiva*. Barcelona: Alfadil Ediciones.
- Auletta, N., and Jaén, M.H. (2013). Miss Venezuela: more than just beauty? *Academia. Revista Latinoamericana de Administración*, 26, (3), 395-414.
- Avilés Santiago, M. G. (2015). Colonial Bodies at the Media Universal Stage: The Case of Puerto Rico's Participation in Miss Universe. *Journal of Latin American Communication Research*, 5, (2), 51-71.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (1999). *The most beautiful girl in the world: beauty pageants and national identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barker, C. and Wiatrowski, M. (2013). *Popular Culture in the Twenty First Century*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Bentley, F.R., Daskalova, N., and White, B. (2017). Comparing the Reliability of Amazon Mechanical Turk and Survey Monkey to Traditional Market Research Surveys. Denver: CHI'17 Extended Abstracts.
- Block, M. (2012). *Popular Culture*. Bristol, Wilmington, Toronto: Intellect.
- Bourdieu, P. (2002). *Masculine Domination* (Translated by Richard Nice). California: Stanford University Press.
- Briceño Linares, Y. (2015). La revolución no será televisada. Subjetividades, estéticas y cuerpos impresentables en la escena mediática bolivariana. *Iberoamericana*, XV, 60, 27-39.
- Brockington, D. (2014). The production and construction of celebrity advocacy in international development. *Third World Quarterly*, 35, 1, 88-108.
- Bujanda, H. (1997). Cuando la belleza nacional entro a la modernidad. In: Rodríguez, A. [Ed.] (2005). *Misses de Venezuela: reinas que cautivaron a un país. Crónicas, reportajes y testimonios del concurso Miss Venezuela*. Caracas: Los Libros de El Nacional.
- Bunck, J.M. (2010). *Fidel Castro and the Quest for a Revolutionary Culture in Cuba*. Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press.
- Buyce, C. (2013). Attribution of Pageant Experience: Participants Self-Perceptions of Past Pageant Experience Examined as a Communication Competence Tool. *Synæsthesia: communications across cultures*, 2 (1), 159-178.
- Chiyoko King-O'Riain, R. (2007). Making the Perfect Queen: The Cultural Production of Identities in Beauty Pageants. *Sociology Compass*, 2 (1), 74-83.
- Chouliaraki, L. (2012). *The ironic spectator: solidarity in the age of post-humanitarianism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2010). Post-humanitarianism: humanitarian communication beyond a politics of pity. *International journal of cultural studies*, 13 (2), 107-126.

- Cuban Research Institute. (2014). *The Cuban Diaspora in the 21st Century*. Miami: Florida International University.
- Derham, M. (2010). *Politics in Venezuela: explaining Hugo Chávez*. Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Dorta Vargas, M. F. (2015). *¡Viva la arepa!: sabor, memoria e imaginario social en Venezuela*. Montevideo: Editorial Alfa.
- Edensor, T. (2002). *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life*. Oxford, New York: Berg.
- Ellner, S. (2009). *Rethinking Venezuelan Politics. Class, Conflict and the Chávez Phenomenon*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Engel, F. and Noske-Turner, J. [Eds.] (2018). *Communication in International Development. Doing good or looking good?* London: Routledge.
- Etcoff, N. (2000). *Survival of the prettiest – The science of beauty*. New York: Anchor Books, Random House.
- Fetterman, D. M. (2012). *Ethnography*. In: Given, L.M. (2012). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks.
- Gackstetter Nichols, E. (2016). *Beauty, Virtue, Power, and Success in Venezuela – 1850-2015*. London: Lexington Books.
- (2014). *Virgin Venuses: Beauty and Purity for “Public Women in Venezuela”*. In: Raicheva-Stover, M., and Ibroscheva, E. [Eds.] (2014). *Women in Politics and Media. Perspectives from Nations in Transition*. New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- (2013). ‘Decent girls with good hair’: Beauty, morality and race in Venezuela. *Feminist Theory*, 14, (2), 171-185.
- Gámez Pérez, J.M. (2015). *Televisión del Estado, comercial y comunitaria en Venezuela: la lucha por el poder y consumo mediático*. *Revista Orinoco Pensamiento y Praxis*, 6, 22-54.
- García, J. (2005). *Afrovenezolanidad e inclusión en el proceso bolivariano venezolano*. Caracas: Ministeriode Comunicación e Información.
- García-Guadilla, M., Roa, E., and Rodríguez, J.C. (2000). *Efectos del modelo de gestión local en la eficiencia y legitimidad política: el municipio Chacao, Venezuela*. *América Latina, Hoy*, 24, 55-65.
- Garmendia, S. (1995). *Las reinas nos gobiernan*. In: Rodríguez, A. [Ed.] (2005). *Misses de Venezuela: reinas que cautivaron a un país. Crónicas, reportajes y testimonios del concurso Miss Venezuela*. Caracas: Los Libros de El Nacional.
- Godsil, R.D., MacFarlane, J., and Sheppard, B. (2016). *#PopJustice, Volume 3: Pop Culture, Perceptions, and Social Change (A Research Review)*. New York: Perception Institute.
- Gómez Daza, A.M. (2013). *Venezuela entre el Estado Comunicador y el pluralismo mediático*. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca.
- Gulbas, L.E. (2012). *Embodying Racism: Race, Rhinoplasty, and Self-Esteem in Venezuela*. *Qualitative Health Research*, 23(3), 326-335.
- Hermans, M., Newburry, W., Alvarado-Vargas, M.J., Baldo, C.M., Borda, A., Durán-Zurita, E.G., Galli Geleilate, J.M., Guerra, M., Lasio Morello, M.V., Madero-Gómez, S.M., Olivas-Lujan, M.R., and

- Zwerg-Villegas, A.M. (2017). Attitudes towards women's career advancement in Latin America: The moderating impact of perceived company international proactiveness. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48 (1), 90 -112.
- Hinojosa, M. B. (2001). Women Political Candidates and the News Media: The Case of Irene Sáez. Washington: Latin American Studies Association.
- Hinojosa, M. and Carle, J. (2016). From Miss World to World Leader: Beauty Queens, Paths to Power, and Political Representations. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 37 (1), 24-46.
- Horn, P. (2009). Mass Culture, Popular Culture and Cultural Identity. In: Culture, Civilization and Human Society – Vol. I. Edited by Arlt, H. and Daviau, D.G. Oxford: Eolss Publishers.
- Hulme, D. (2015). Global Poverty. Global governance and poor people in the post-2015 era. [Series: Global Institutions]. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Johansson, L. (2017). A stunning portrait of diversity? Gender, race, and nation in Miss Universe Japan 2015. Stockholm: Stockholm University.
- Jones, B. (2008). Hugo!: The Hugo Chavez Story from Mud Hut to Perpetual Revolution. Hanover: Steerforth Press.
- Kirby Letts, G. (2014). Changing Representations of Women in Popular Culture: A Content Analysis of Postfeminist Images in Contemporary Magazines. In: Women in Popular Culture, [first edition]. Chapter: Changing Representations of Women in Popular Culture, Publisher: Tomson Nelson, Editors: A.R. Aujla, 49-62.
- Kos-Lajtman, A. and Slunjski, K. (2017). Influence of Popular Culture on Character Formation in the Contemporary Croatian Children's Novel. *Croatian Journal of Education*, 19, Sp.Ed. 1, 73-94.
- Lalander, R. (2016). Gendering Popular Participation: Identity-Politics and Radical Democracy in Bolivarian Venezuela. *Multidisciplinary Latin American Studies: Festschrift in Honor of Martti Pärssinen*, Harri Kettunen & Antti Korpisaari [Eds.], Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 149-173.
- Lander, L.E., and López Maya, M. (1999). Venezuela. La victoria de Chávez. El Polo Patriótico en las elecciones de 1998. *Nueva Sociedad*, 160, 4-19.
- Lombardi, J. V. (1982). Venezuela: The Search for Order, the Dream of Progress. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Maslin, J. (2011). Socialist Dreams and Beauty Queens: a couchsurfer's memoir of Venezuela. New York: Skyhorse Publishing.
- McCall, E. (2011). Communication for Development. Strengthening the Effectiveness of the United Nations. New York: United Nations Development Programme.
- McGranahan, C. (2014). What is Ethnography? Teaching Ethnographic Sensibilities without Fieldwork. *Teaching Anthropology*, 4, 23-36 .
- Mitchell, J. (1998). Political Decentralization: a new tool for the segregation of urban space? The case of Chacao in Caracas, Venezuela. Las Cruces: New Mexico State University.
- Morse, J.M. (1995). The significance of saturation. *Qualitative Health Research*, 5, (2), 147-149.
- Nakamura Lopez, M. (2016). A Blackanese Beauty Queen. *Contexts*, 15 (1), 73-75.

- Neuman, L. and McCoy, J. (2001). Observing political change in Venezuela: the Bolivarian constitution and 2000 elections. Latin American and Caribbean Program. Atlanta: The Carter Center.
- Ochoa, M. (2014). *Queen for a Day: Transformistas, Beauty Queens, and the Performance of Femininity in Venezuela*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Okopny, C.L. (2005). *Reconstructing women's identities: The phenomenon of cosmetic surgery in the united states*. Tampa: University of South Florida.
- Pacheco, I. (2017). *Las muñecas de la corona. Los crímenes y las perversiones del chavismo en el poder*. Miami: MEL Projects.
- Raicheva-Stover, M., and Ibroscheva, E. [Eds.] (2014). *Women in Politics and Media. Perspectives from Nations in Transition*. New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Rivas Rojas, R. (2005). The narrative of Gloria Stolk: Cultural Change and the Role of Intellectual Women under Pérez Jiménez's Dictatorship. *Núcleo*, 22 , 159-176.
- Rossi. C.A. (2011). Oil Wealth and the Resource Curse in Venezuela. *International Association for Energy Economics*, 3, 11-15.
- Schensul, J.J. (2012). Historical Context. In: Given, L.M. (2012). *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE Publications: Thousand Oaks.
- Silva, E., and Rossi, F. (2018). *Reshaping the Political Arena in Latin America: From Resisting Neoliberalism to the Second Incorporation*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Socorro, M. (2009). Señoras de la noticia. Ladies of News. *Anuario Electrónico de Estudios en Comunicación Social*, 'Disertaciones', 2 (2), Artículo 2, 47-60.
- Storey, J. (2009). *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*. [Fifth Edition]. Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Tinker Salas, M. (2015). *Venezuela: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Velasco, A. (2015). *Barrio Rising: Urban Popular Politics and the Making of Modern Venezuela*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Velásquez, P. (2015). *Sin tacones, Sin reserva. Diaro de una supermodelo en búsqueda de su verdad*. Bogotá: Cangrejo Editores.
- Vokes, R. (2018). *Media and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Wright, K. (2017). Sexual Objectification of Female Bodies in Beauty Pageants, Pornography, and Media. *Dissenting Voices*, 6, (1), 125-146.
- Wright, W.R. (1990). *Café con leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Yarrington, D. (2001). *Corruption, state formation, and popular response during the regime of Juan Vicente Gómez, 1908 – 1935*. Fort Collins: Colorado State University.

### **Digital Sources**

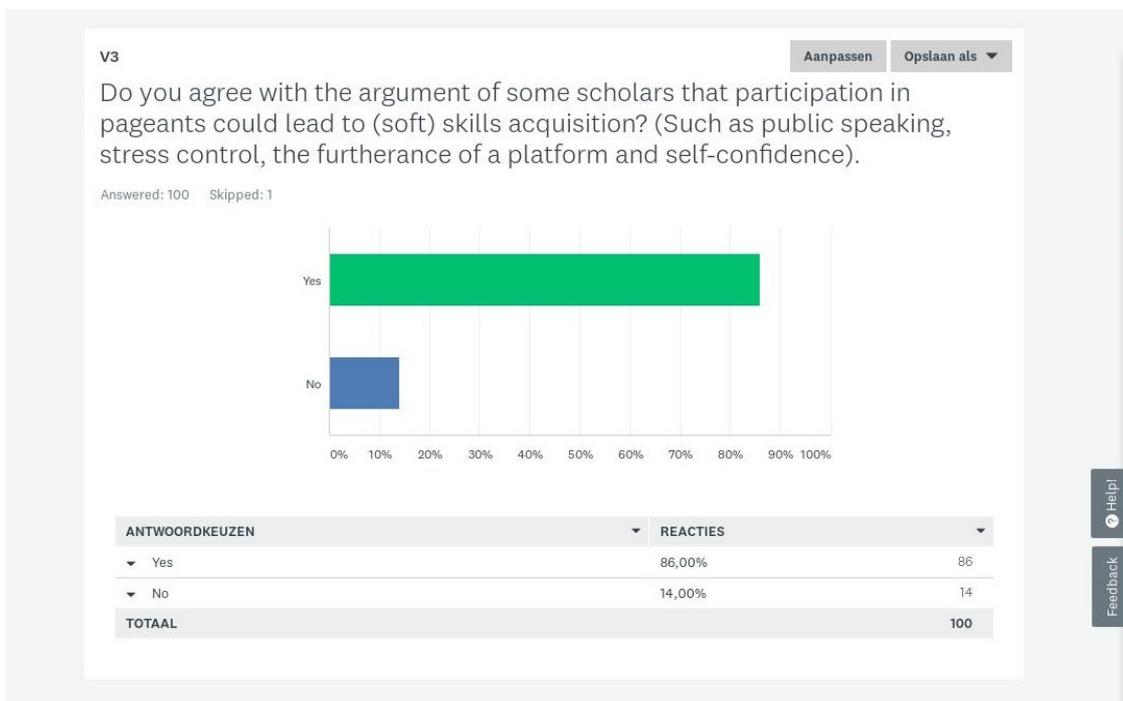
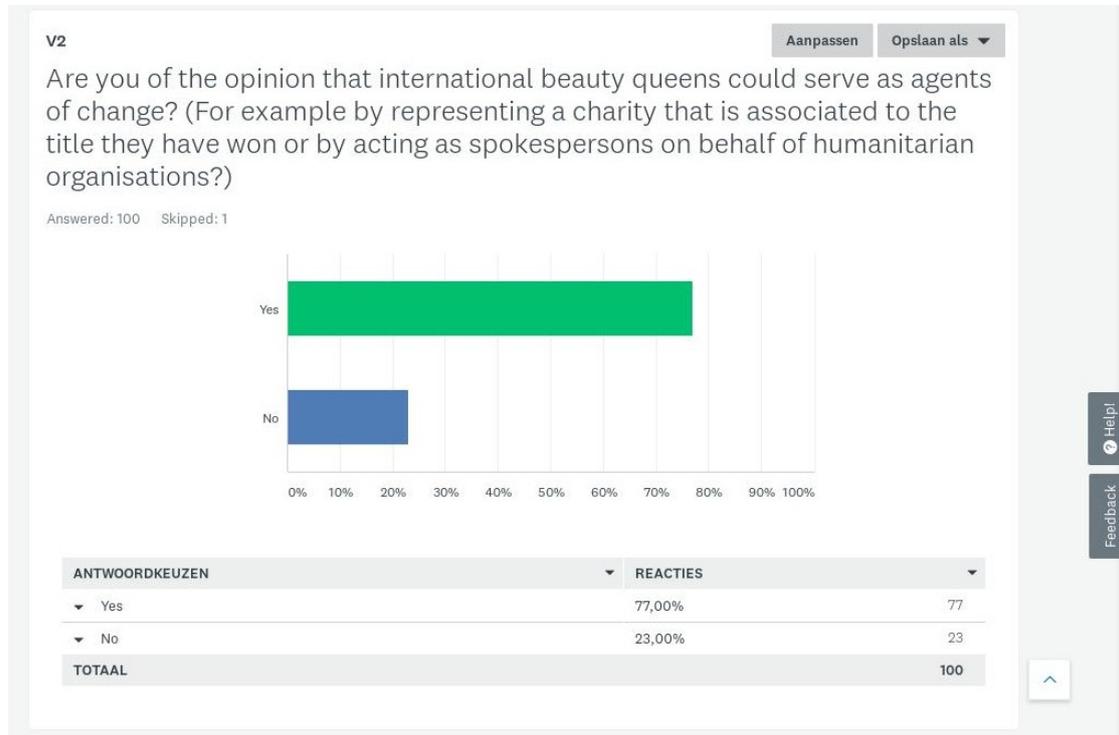
- Alcubilla Bonnet, J.C. (n.d.). Susana Duijm, el recuerdo de una reina eterna. Retrieved 3 November 2018 from: <http://www.noticias24.com/gente/noticia/140470/susana-dujim-el-recuerdo-de-una-reina-eterna/>

- BBC. (2014). Secrets of South America. Retrieved 11 December 2018 from:  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03tvjg8>
- Beauty with a Purpose. (2018). History. Retrieved 21 November 2018 from:  
<http://www.beautywithapurpose.com/en/about>
- Blum, J. (2016). El poder de la corona del Miss Venezuela. Retrieved 21 January 2019 from:  
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/el-poder-de-la-corona-miss-venezuela-en-internet-jonathan-blum>
- Cable & Wireless plc. (1955). Retrieved 20 November 2018 from:  
[https://deskgram.net/p/1819058046123693508\\_513697077](https://deskgram.net/p/1819058046123693508_513697077)
- Castellanos, L. (2016). Susana Duijm: semblanza de la primera “Cenicienta Venezolana”. Retrieved 1 November 2018 from: <https://cnnespanol.cnn.com/2016/06/19/susana-duijm-semblanza-de-la-primera-cenicienta-venezolana/>
- CisnerosRSE. (2010). Aliados Contigo Miss Venezuela Voluntariado Adriana Vasini Hospital Ortopedico Infantil 2010. Retrieved 21 November 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzE0aZSInxE>  
 and: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVti1WXM4\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVti1WXM4_Y)
- De Windt, J. (2016). Miss World 1981: famine is demoralising Venezuela. Retrieved 20 November 2018 from:  
[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/miss-world-1981-famine-in-venezuela-is-demoralizing\\_us\\_57e39828e4b09f67131e3d02](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/miss-world-1981-famine-in-venezuela-is-demoralizing_us_57e39828e4b09f67131e3d02)
- (2018). Venezuelan women in the diaspora on femininity, career choices and their involvement in the future of their country. Retrieved 29 December 2018 from:  
<https://thriveglobal.com/stories/be-respectful-to-other-cultures-as-a-component-of-diversity/>
- E! (2009). Historia del Miss Venezuela. Retrieved 11 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ew-F4qGP3uE&index=8&list=LLnnYgtu4P4QE0fTNaDOh14g&t=0s>
- and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlgtgdvgKqQ>
- Friedman, M. (n.d.). Venezuela cancels smoking ban. Retrieved 7 November 2018 from:  
<http://laht.com/article.asp?ArticleId=388453&CategoryId=10717>
- Kyo, J. (2009). Ronda de preguntas del Miss Venezuela 2009. Retrieved 21 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0lx8MaKJEc>
- Latino Vicente. (2018). Miss International 2018 – Top 8 Final Speech (Part 2). Retrieved 16 November 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfwHfdiN9C0>
- Marín Méndez, H. (2016). Carmen Victoria Pérez: Susana Duijm tenía una personalidad única e irrepitible. Retrieved 2 November 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VTJJgas-3No>
- Migration Policy Institute. (2017). Retrieved 22 December 2018 from:  
<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/amid-economic-crisis-and-political-turmoil-venezuelans-form-new-exodus>

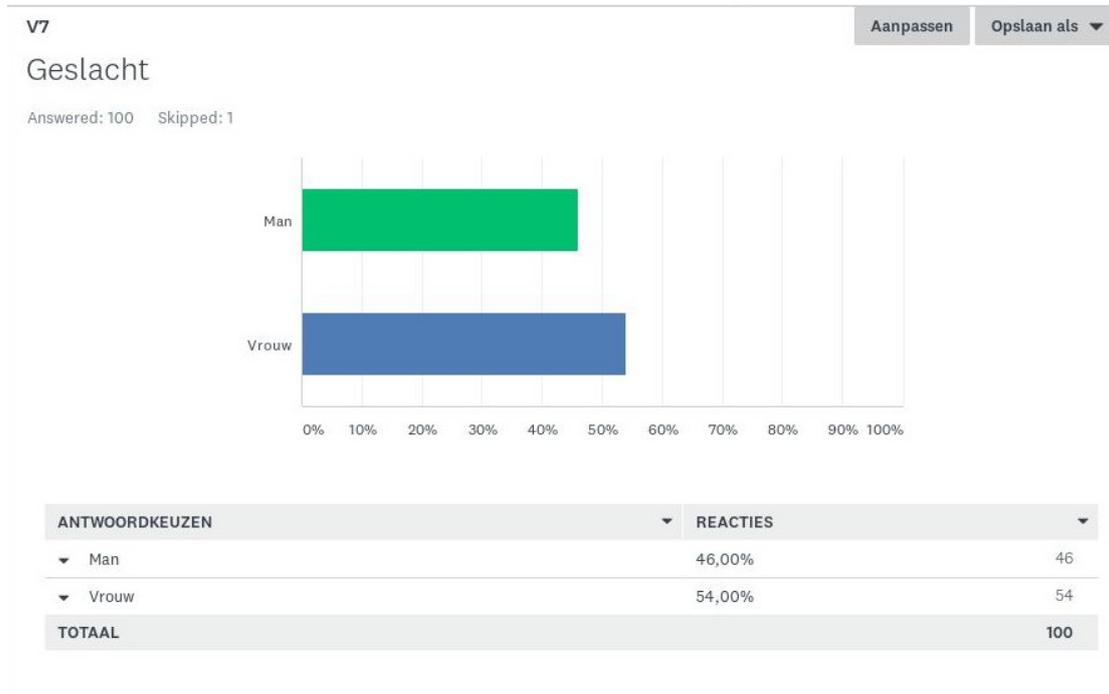
- Miss International. (2018). About Miss International. Retrieved 21 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.miss-international.org/en/about/>
- Mora, L. (2008). Laudin: testimonio de Susana Duijm. Retrieved 2 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKMCp3nhcvc>
- ORCConsultores (1998). Una revolución es posible – Irene Sáez. Retrieved 14 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDNiG6xi9so>
- Organización Miss Venezuela. (2018). Comunicado Oficial. Retrieved 20 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.missvenezuela.com/noticia/la-organizacion-miss-venezuela-realizara-una-revision-de-sus-controles-internos>
- RCTV Internacional. (1998). Irene Sáez. Retrieved 14 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4b9lERyz9u0>
- Revista Latina. (1997). Osmel Sousa: La negritud Venezolana no es bonita. Retrieved 19 November 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksmHA4upVpM>
- Rueda, J. (2016). Susana Duijm ‘fue la primera reina del pueblo, bella como ninguna’. Retrieved 15 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.elnuevoherald.com/noticias/mundo/america-latina/venezuela-es/article84702157.html>
- United Nations. (n.d.). Biographies. Retrieved 27 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.un.org/advocates/bios.htm>
- Universidad Monteávila. (2011). Historia de la Arepa en Venezuela y el mundo. Retrieved 2 November 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qiCJeLPDsI>
- Varnagy, S. (2016). Entrevista con Osmel Sousa. Retrieved 10 November 2018 from:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uO0UC5XQSKg>
- Venevisión. (2018). Miss International 2018. Bienvenida en SSS Venevision. Part IV. Retrieved 1 December 2018 from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hp3aGfjZ-g>

## Appendices

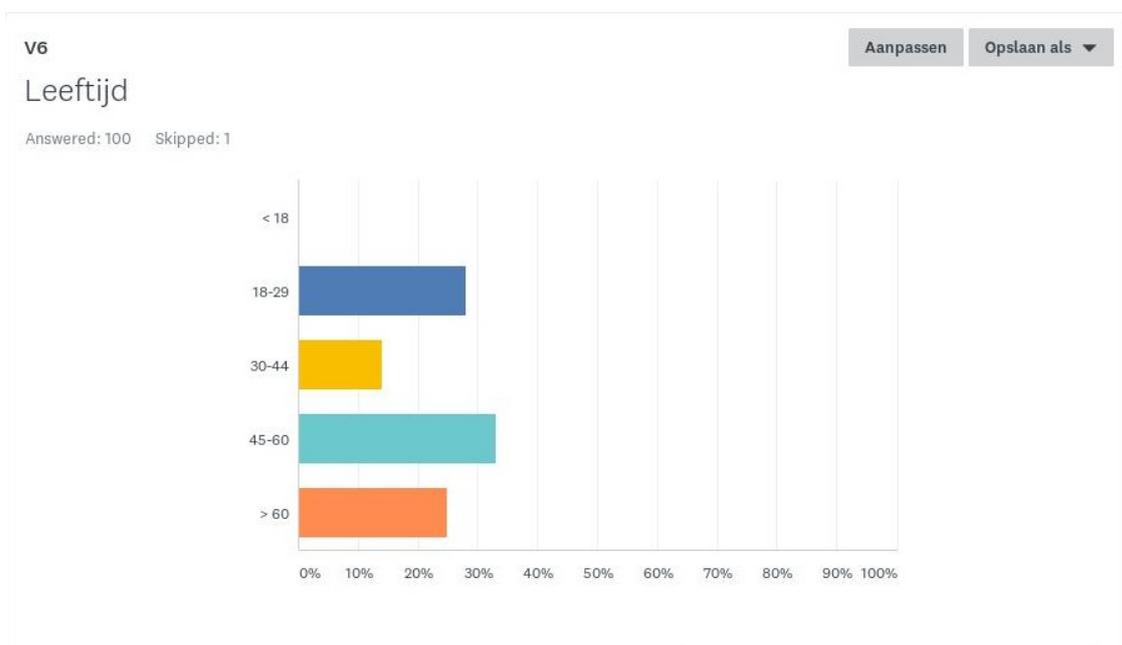
### Appendix 1 a: Selection of survey questions



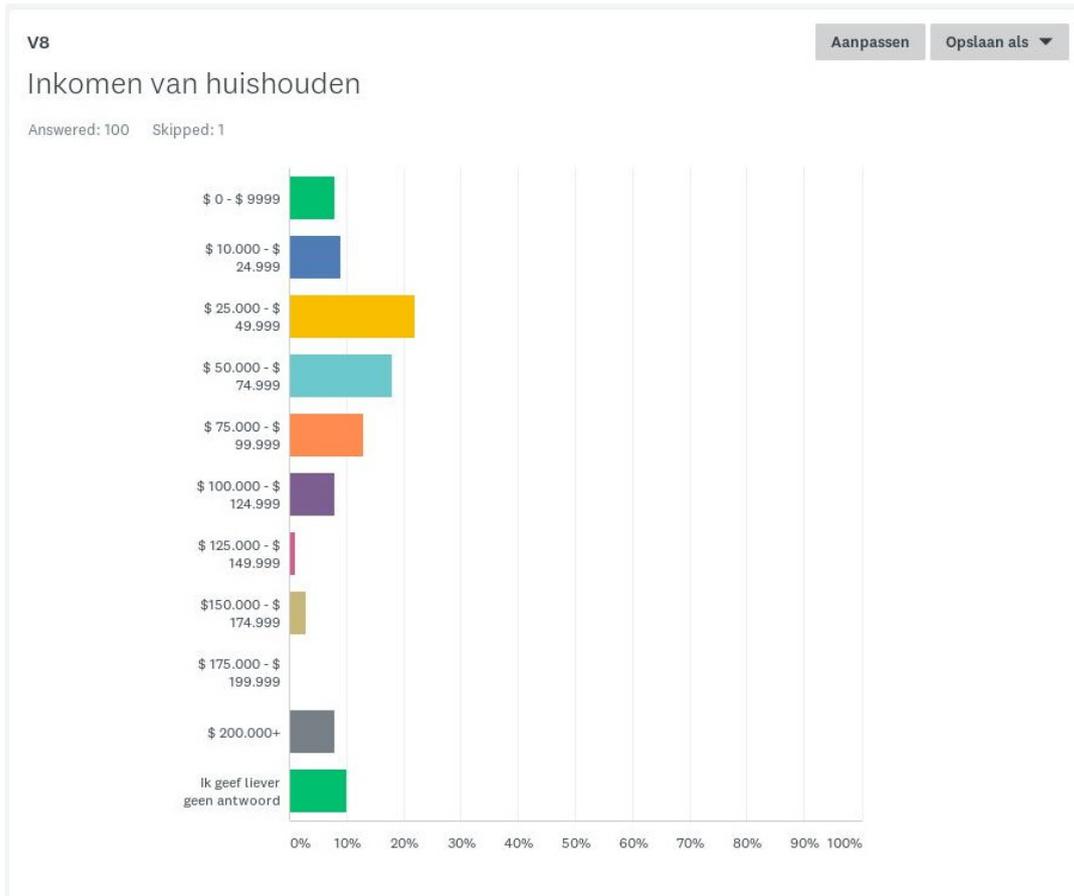
### Appendix 1 b: Gender respondents [man = male | vrouw = female]



### Appendix 1 c: Age group respondents [leeftijd = age]



**Appendix 1 d: Income respondents** [inkomen = income]



**Appendix 1 e: Region of domicile respondents**

