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# Venezuelan Femininity

## The Painful Embodiment of Beauty

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by Michelle Roche

**L**AST SUMMER WHEN I WENT BACK HOME TO CARACAS, VENEZUELA, FOR THE first time in about four months, the first thing my mother said when she saw me was: “My God, you *are fat!*” I had gained about twenty-two pounds, yet had not realized it. I spent each day of my two-week-long vacation working out for hours and dedicating myself to a strict diet regime. For the first time ever, I felt out of place in my favorite dance club: while the zipper of my old dress was on the verge of explosion, 16-year-olds wore miniskirts that showed their size-two bodies and cleavage that showed off their breast implants. All over the place I felt women looking at me, measuring my thighs and disapproving of my hips— feeling pity for that oversized-me. Under the dance club’s darkness, wounded by blue, green and red flashes of light, I looked grotesque, “abnormal,” in Michel Foucault’s use of the word. Women questioned my appearance, rejoiced at my newly-gained weight, because my abnormality established a contrast and validated their Barbie-like bodies. It also produced a subtle power dynamic in the room: the Barbies were quick to find dancing partners that night (and for the rest of their lives?) and I, Miss Piggy, remained sitting at the bar watching them have a good time (hoping it was not for the rest of my life). Today, I am back to a size six, but my family and friends advise me to keep dieting, since six is already a “big” and “unfashionable” size. My grandmother prays to the Virgin Mary that

I be as “beautiful” and thin as I was before “having the idea of going to graduate school in New York City.”

This anecdote is indicative of women’s obsession with beauty standards in Venezuela. *Venezolanas* are proud to say that they are the most beautiful in the world. Yet, I wonder, are they naturally beautiful, or do they make certain body aesthetics a standard of normality (Foucault) and therefore build themselves up to be beautiful? Body aesthetics in Venezuela are constructed as metaphors for success and even normality. Obesity is not a pressing problem for this society; depression and self-pity are.

In this essay I will analyze Venezuelan beauty standards through a Foucauldian lens of production. Female beauty in Venezuela has a dual cultural importance. On the one hand, since women themselves produce the idea that Venezuelan ladies are pretty, they perpetuate the country’s patriarchal system, by which *Venezolanas*’ role in society remains secondary to men’s, and reduced to their attractiveness. On the other hand, Barbie-like prettiness (mainly tall, blond, white and skinny women) is the foundation for this culture’s body aesthetics, reinforcing what Latin American researcher Nelly Richard calls “cultural mimesis,” a representation of foreign cultural traits “without any awareness of its context.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in Venezuela, this “beauty myth” is a device by which women insert themselves into a national macho system and, more importantly, into a foreign modernization process. Naomi Wolf defines the “beauty myth” as a behavior that perpetuates the modern patriarchal power structure, economy, and culture through the establishment of the quality of “beauty” as a “currency system.”<sup>2</sup> In Venezuela, the prevalence of Barbie-like body aesthetics represents the idea that Venezuelans can only be “modern” by looking like Anglo-Americans; it is a measure of success, like having a thousand dollars in a foreign bank.

Accepting this beauty myth allows Venezuelan women a way to emulate, or “embody,” modernity—they become “modern” by subscribing to the aforementioned Western standards. Similarly, democracy is a device used to

make Venezuelan society egalitarian through “modern” and inherently Western political ideas. Venezuelan body aesthetics draw on national and international cultural influences, proving that Venezuelan culture and its societal manifestations include a mixture of foreign-inspired national desires. First, during Spanish colonial times, a woman was beautiful inasmuch as she could resemble the Virgin Mary’s life and looks: beautiful Venezuelans were chaste and white, as the Spanish Counterreformation pictured Virgin Mary to be. Later, as the country became democratic, women were beautiful inasmuch as they could resemble Anglo-Americans, because they represented the political ideal of modernity and development: democracy. Oddly, democracy, as the surplus of modernity’s belief of the infinite progress of science and knowledge towards social betterment, was a device emulated in looks, rather than a process to understand and practice. In sum, self-regulating body aesthetics were inspired first by Spanish repressive Catholicism and then by American democratic freedoms.

Michel Foucault explains that power devices are individually articulated as self-regulating means of cultural standards’ dissemination, which explains why it is so difficult to overcome the grip some forms of power have over people: they are not imposed by power structures, but rather made into a system of communication where everybody participates.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the *Venezolana* beauty myth is a manifestation of the country’s cult of virility practiced by women through what Latin American feminist researchers call *marianismo*, the female counterpart of *machismo*.<sup>4</sup>

*Marianismo* is an ideal, based on the Virgin Mary’s Biblical representation, which prescribes women’s “appropriate” behavior; its image “is self-abnegating motherhood.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically, through *marianismo* Venezuelan women have a prescribed foreign-inspired and contradictory role in society: to be both sexy and chaste. When Venezuelans were trying to emulate colonial Spanish culture, women mimicked the maternal and morally sound role of the Virgin Mary. Nowadays, as the country tries to emulate democracy in the first world, its women imitate what they believe is the epitome of their place in this political

system: Barbie dolls. The paradoxical relationship of these two roles for women, the chaste mother and the Anglo-fashionite, describes the contradiction of contemporary Venezuelan femininity.

Jana Sawicky, using Foucault's theories, says that a disciplining practice is one of "labeling one another or ourselves as different or abnormal."<sup>6</sup> In this case, the Venezuelan female custom of labeling their bodies as beautiful is a disciplining practice of producing themselves through a patriarchal society, where the expected behavior and looks are determined by *marianismo* and American pop-culture. Such definition of disciplinary practices is related to another concept in Foucault's theory: self-surveillance. Sandra Bartky defines self-surveillance as an "image of normative femininity," which has come to replace the "religiously oriented tracks of the past."<sup>7</sup> Thus, *marianismo* is a self-surveillance method by which women themselves make sure to perpetuate Catholic "morals." The Venezuelan beauty stereotype is a self-disciplining practice used by women themselves as a method of self-surveillance under a macho society, based on ideas of beauty resulting from a postcolonial cultural mimesis.

In order to analyze the development of the beauty myth in Venezuela and the paradoxical relationship between the Virgin Mary and the American Barbie, I will describe first the perpetuation of this myth in contemporary society, and then trace the historical background of female beauty behaviors in the country. The following paragraphs will explain how the beauty myth prescribes behaviors related to female excessive grooming as an example of self-repression. Then, I will use historical examination, a classical Latin American methodological approach, to show how female beauty has been constructed in the country since Spanish colonization.

## IMAGES OF THE **BEAUTY MYTH**

Naomi Wolf explains that the beauty myth is "composed of emotional distance, politics, finance and sexual repression,"<sup>8</sup> concluding that it strengthens

modern patriarchal institutions: “*the beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance.*”<sup>9</sup> She concludes that public interest in a woman’s virginity has been replaced by public interest in the shape of her body. In other words, what was once a religious and moral constraint for woman is now physical, political and, mostly, economic:

Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact...Beauty is not universal or changeless, though the West pretends that all ideals of female beauty stem from one Platonic Ideal Woman.<sup>10</sup>

The beauty myth is a powerful economic standard that serves the double function of constraining women in expected behavior patterns and creating industries to support them. For instance, the influence of the beauty myth in Venezuela can be analyzed through four variables: first, the cultural obsession with the Miss Venezuela competition; second, female spending on personal care; third, the importance given to fashion; and finally, the high percentage of women that have had aesthetic surgery.

Miss Venezuela, the national beauty pageant, is a cultural symbol of the country. In the last twenty years Venezuela has had five Miss Worlds, four Miss Universes, and dozens of other beauty queens in different international competitions. The Miss Venezuela web page states that in fifty-four pageants, organized in the last two decades, Venezuela’s representatives have been placed forty-five times among the “honor list” — this means among the world’s ten most attractive — and calculates that the country is 84% successful in beauty contests.<sup>11</sup> The first national contest of this kind was held in 1952, but it became a strong cultural symbol in early 1960s, after democracy was achieved. Ironically, the first dark-skinned title-holder was Carolina Indriago, in 1998. Coincidentally, this was the same year populist Hugo Chavez Frías, won — for the first time — the country’s presidential candidacy, which indicates that Chávez’s criticism of

the Eurocentric middle classes' imitative culture tainted even aesthetic body figurations. Since 1981, the Miss Venezuela Organization has directed the pageant. In 1991 it became the country's most successful industry, in the sense that it was among the few Venezuelan brands to be internationally recognized. This data reinforces the idea that Venezuelan women are the world's most beautiful; unfortunately this is a painful and costly standard to fulfill, as the next paragraphs will show.

Venezuela is the world's largest consumer of cosmetics per capita. A survey by the analyst bureau Datanálisis, published by *Producto* magazine in August 2006, shows that 77% of Venezuelans consider it "important" to invest in beauty care. In fact, the data shows that Venezuelans' spending privileges first food and then grooming products. In Venezuela, a country with roughly twenty-five million inhabitants, the personal care market is valued at about 1.3 million dollars.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, during 2002 and 2003, when the country was in one of its worst economic and political crises—after a general strike that paralyzed almost every industry for two months, including oil, the basis of the economy—the market of personal care grew by 81.4%.<sup>13</sup> These statistics demonstrate the importance of the way you look in Venezuela: it does not matter how much money you make monthly, you must always spend something in order to look like a million dollars. For instance, a Venezuelan woman spends more than 20% of her salary, monthly, in cosmetics and beauty treatments.<sup>14</sup>

Another cultural signifier related to the body aesthetics paradigm is the fashion industry. Venezuelans are proud to say that they have produced the world's best fashion designers, among them Carolina Herrera and Ángel Sánchez, who both have prêt-a-porter stores in Manhattan—on Madison and 7th Avenues. Venezuela has about thirty major designer names, most of them with prêt-a-porter stores in the capital. These stores cater largely to wealthy women and produce profits of about two hundred thousand dollars per month, this in a country facing its worst economic depression since the 1980s. General clothing retailers in the country make, in a bad year, more than one million

dollars.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the beauty myth has created a healthy industry, if not healthy women.

Finally, the high percentages of aesthetic surgeries in the country show that the beauty myth is difficult to fulfill in real life. In the last ten years, plastic surgery in Venezuela has skyrocketed.<sup>16</sup> According to statistics from the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery,<sup>17</sup> in the last two years the number of these surgical interventions increased by 60%. The most common surgical practices include liposuction, breast augmentation, and facial rejuvenation. Approximately five hundred doctors perform about four thousand aesthetic surgeries each month, the most popular being breast augmentation. The cheapest of these procedures costs approximately three thousand dollars. Today, Venezuelan private banks offer special loans for women that want to have aesthetic surgeries.<sup>18</sup> Even doctors and bankers make money off of the beauty myth.

In short, Venezuelans' proclamation that beautiful women embody national femininity is not a matter of fact, but a carefully constructed idea by which bodies are built, groomed, and expensively dressed to fulfill the 35-23-35 profile of the Venezuelan Barbie: the Miss.

## **A HISTORY OF BEAUTY**

According to Wolf, "the rise of the beauty myth was just one of several emerging social fictions that masqueraded as natural components of the feminine sphere, the better to enclose those women inside it."<sup>19</sup> Although Wolf refers here to Western societies, and makes no assumption about Latin American postcolonial societies, what she states is in fact also true for Venezuela. A close historical examination of beauty and female behavior standards shows how the Miss Venezuela stereotype came to stand as a female social behavior once the Catholic stereotype of virginity became out of date, and Venezuelans were not worried about imitating Spanish colonial culture, but rather the first world

culture represented by United States.

In order to trace the development of the beauty myth in Venezuela I would have to start at the very beginning—pre-Hispanic times—since the first beauty standards there were implanted by Spaniards as part of colonization. Before Spaniards conquered the region we now call Latin America, women had an active role in the public sphere. In fact, it was Catholicism and its belief in the passive Virgin Mary that implanted the first modern and Eurocentric codes of conduct and beauty. By sketching out the colonization process in Venezuela, I plan to pose the problem of beauty not only as a contemporary cultural phenomenon but as a long historical and postcolonial issue.

Ermila Veracoechea<sup>20</sup> explains that when Spanish Colonialism began in the land now called Venezuela, the predominant aboriginal group was nomad, the *Caribes* (Caribbeans). Their workforce was divided by sexes: while men hunted and fished, women harvested, collected fruits, made textiles and built utensils for the household. When Caribes ceased to be nomadic, women's work became more important: they were farmers. Women were crucial in Indian society, since it was their duty to sustain the groups' subsistence. During colonization's first decades, when Spaniards seized Indian cities, the colonizers also adopted aboriginal behavior in order to survive in the new environment.

Historian J. L. Salcedo-Bastardo explains that during Colonization's first period (1498–1600), few Spanish women came to America. In fact, for thirty years, less than 10% of Spanish colonizers were female. In the meantime, Spaniards took Indian female companions.<sup>21</sup> Conquerors' journals described the “beauty supremacy” of Venezuelan Indians—predominantly the *Caribes*—and compared them to those in the rest of the region. Conquerors Juan Bautista Muñoz, Juan de Castellanos, López de Gómar, Fernando de Enciso, and Antonio Herrera explain that aboriginal Venezuelan (from the *Caribes* tribe) women “were more relaxed”<sup>22</sup> than others on the South American continent. Apparently, beauty for the colonizers was directly related to aboriginal women's proclivity to give

sexual favors to Spaniards.

Namely, Gómara praised Venezuelan aboriginal women “for being naked, white, and to be Indians, discreet.” Although the grammar of this quote is ambiguous (even in its Spanish original) it can be pointed out that one of the most attractive feature of female Indians—other than living naked—was that they looked white, or more likely, that they resembled Spanish skin color—which, to tell the truth was not precisely “white,” but a darker shade of it—a result of years of Arabian invasion in Spain.

Thus, the crucial feature of beauty in colonial times was skin color. This explains why Indians and African slaves were treated different in colonial times. Yes, Africans and Indians were both racially different from Europeans, but Africans were considered animals, and Indians humans, because the latter group “looked white.” Moreover, this difference between Indian and Africans became paradigmatic when Catholicism was established as the official religion. The colonization process established the Catholic Spanish crown’s supremacy, empowered by the mercantilist economy, by which Venezuela was just a commodity provider for royal finances. This system nurtured the creation of feudal-like villas called *encomiendas*, where Indians lived under the protection and spiritual (Catholic) guidance of the conquerors. In other words, Indians were considered free vassals, but also immature, and thus, unable to live freely. Concentrated populations living in *encomiendas* facilitated Catholicism’s expansion and the Indian assimilation of Spanish culture. In the mean time, African slaves were imported: approximately one hundred and twenty thousand slaves came to Venezuela in the three centuries of Spanish supremacy.<sup>23</sup>

Yet, the issue of female Caribes’ beauty was not simply a compliment to their looks, it was a crucial racial and social differentiation from the rest of the Spanish empire. Because those Indians looked white, they could be more easily inserted into Catholic Spanish culture, which stated that European (white) women were closer to the figure of the Virgin Mary, a idea that was reinforced

by colonial women's education.

In sum, it can be said that Spanish colonization introduced two situations in the country that did not exist during aboriginal times: racial and gender discrimination. An astonishing fact of the colonization period was that although the male Indian population was almost entirely erased from the country, the female population remained an active part of the new society. This created a new racial type: the *mestizo* (crossbreed), a merge of Indian women and male Spaniards. Thus the true Venezuelan skin color is barely white. The most important figuration of Venezuela's identity is the idea of a *mestizo* society, and a culture of *mestizaje*, which translates into English as miscegenation, but in the Anglo-American tradition it refers exclusively to the sexual union between races, while for Hispanics it includes the biological and cultural interracial mixing.

Initially, women were used as translators between Indians and Spaniards. Then, when the Spanish crown established its supremacy, female Indians were adopted in the *encomiendas* as farmers, artisans and even conqueror's spouses. This inserted them in the new Catholic culture created by colonization.

In fact, gender and racial discrimination can also be seen in educational issues. Venezuelan scholar Sheila Salazar points out that during colonial times women's education was restricted to the higher classes: women of Spanish descent and black women were forbidden from going to school. Salazar points that the first school for women was Colegio Jesús María y José, founded in 1770, where white and orphan crossbred (*mestizo*) women received instruction segregated by their upbringing. Classes reinforced moral and religious dictates in order to make of them "virtuous ladies, wives and exemplary mothers."<sup>24</sup> Private female instructors were also frequent, since the idea that women could leave the house even to receive education was not welcomed. Women were raised and taught to become wives or nuns.<sup>25</sup> In both cases that meant they would live in seclusion, for married women were not allowed to wander freely around towns.

Private and school instruction was shaped by the ideas espoused by Juan Luis Vives in the book *The Education of a Christian Woman*, published in Spain in

1525.<sup>26</sup> Special attention was paid to women's virginity, for "In a woman, chastity is the equivalent of all virtues."<sup>27</sup> In his book, Vives advises women, whom are frequently called virgins, to sleep little and avoid "adornments" (because they were manifestations of vanity, a capital sin), the companionship of men, and dancing. In other words, even when women were not destined to become nuns, but to become wives, they would have to observe repressive laws:

The first model to place before herself...is the queen and glory of virginity, Mary, the Mother of Christ, God and man, whose life should be the exemplar not only for virgins to follow but for married women and widows as well...To virgins she was a most humble virgin, to married women a most chaste spouse, to widows a most pious widow.<sup>28</sup>

Vives points to a very difficult standard to emulate: the Virgin Mary, the woman that gave birth as a virgin, and whom her husband never touched. This idea that women's role was to emulate the Virgin Mary is the basis for *marianismo* in the Hispanic region. Not surprisingly, the most valuable women in colonial times were nuns. If we follow Wolf in understanding beauty not as a state of being, but as a behavior, in Venezuela the beauty standard two centuries ago was the nun, the closest resemblance to the Virgin Mary.

During the independence process and in the first years of the Venezuelan republic (from 1830 to 1900), women's role in politics was non-existent. Although republican government in the country was inspired by European theories, especially those of the French Revolution, it remains a paradox that books like Olympe de Gouges's *Women's Rights Declaration* or Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* were not even introduced in the time's political debates.<sup>29</sup> Rosa del Olmo explains that this situation was a consequence of Venezuela's closed society in the 19th century, which was still tied to *marianismo*'s idea of a chaste "woman-mother-wife."<sup>30</sup>

The first real change in Venezuelan women's passive role in the public sphere occurred during Juan Vicente Gómez's dictatorship in 1928, when the

Patriotic Society of Venezuelan Women was created with the aim of defending the government's political prisoners. This group was the female version of the Venezuela's Student's Federation, a group of male students that advocated for democracy. Yet the first women's organization was still tied to the "woman-mother-wife" Catholic stereotype, since the members were defenders, the spouses and sisters, of the new democratic heroes, the same way the Virgin Mary was Jesus's "woman-mother-wife."

The year 1928 is paradigmatic in the country's modern history, and even in its history of beauty. That year, Venezuela's Student's Federation organized a festival to commemorate student's week, which is celebrated in February just before Carnival. The highlight of the week was a beauty pageant where "the queen of students" was crowned. Her name was Beatriz I. But the contest was really used as a platform that allowed the Federation's leaders to make pro-democracy political speeches during Gómez's highly censored government.<sup>31</sup> For example, the poem that Pío Tamayo—a long data oppositionist to Gómez—dedicated to the newly elected queen compared her beauty with the ideal of liberty:

...But no, Majesty  
I have last 'till today,  
And the name of my girlfriend that reminds me of you!  
Is: LIBERTY!  
Tell your subjects  
—so young that they can't know her—  
to search for her, to look at her in you,  
Your smile promises hidden hopes!<sup>32</sup>

Tamayo's poem was not successful in challenging Gómez's dictatorship, but it did become a turning point in women's democratic history in Venezuela. Identifying "Majesty Beatriz I" with the abstract definition of Liberty, Tamayo and his generation of democrats relegated women to exterior representations of

liberty. Moreover, they presented a direct link between beauty and liberty, which is key to the beauty industry's development in the country.

The identification of female beauty with liberty and democracy did not really change the status of women since colonial rule; it was, in fact, a perpetuation of *marianismo*—the expected female behavior to be “woman-mother-wife,” emulating the Virgin Mary—which created a mechanics where women, in order to become politically active, disciplined themselves to be beautiful. In doing so, they upheld a standard that, like democracy, was foreign-inspired. This reinforced *marianismo*, because it did not collide with the “woman-mother-wife” stereotype. In other words, the new democratic Venezuelan woman was not to become part of an equalitarian society, but to represent it.

As a result, current industries of grooming and fashion promise women not only beautiful bodies, but also a comfortable way of being equal to men, without “losing femininity.” The image of the new Venezuelan woman is the professional, coincidentally the woman that makes enough money to spend on grooming, buy expensive clothes, and pay for aesthetic surgeries. Not surprisingly, feminist studies and demands in the country have been relegated to issues of equality into the work place.

Modern Venezuela, like modern Venezuelan looks, are a consequence of the country's oil economy, which began in the 1920s, and the democracy's establishment as political system four decades later. In fact, from 1928 to 1958 Venezuela still was subjected to different forms of dictatorships, but new democratic political parties—nurtured by the generation of Venezuela's Student's Federation—were clandestinely created. During the late 1950s and early 1960s Venezuelan political discourses were shaped by fear of Marxists guerrillas with ties to the Soviet Union and Cuba. In fact, the Venezuelan Communist Party—which had been the embryo of most democratic parties—was denied political participation for economic, rather than for strict political reasons. The United States, Venezuela's largest oil buyer, was already engaged in The Cold War. The “Red Scare” that created paranoia in the United States also shaped

binary discourses in Venezuela. Any political ideology different from that of the ruling party was identified either as anarchy (in the case of communism) or as dictatorships (in the case of former power elites and the army). As can be seen, Venezuelan democracy was not representative.<sup>33</sup>

The same way that the American “Red Scare” shaped Venezuelan political ideas, American culture shaped the beauty myth. A myriad of female organizations advocating women’s equality, from the laws to workplaces, were created from the 1960s to the 1980s—the first twenty years of democracy in the country. The logic was obvious: if Venezuela was trying to imitate American democracy, women had to become an active part of it. Yet, feminist movements were not welcomed in the country, for *marianismo* was and is still a powerful system. In fact, today, even feminist academic research is almost nonexistent in Venezuela. What *Venezolanas* imitated was the American looks they saw in television. In fact, television’s introduction in the country in 1958 was the most powerful device in perpetuating the Venezuelan beauty myth. For example, although the Miss Venezuela yearly pageant began in 1952, it was during the 1960s that it became a hit, due to its televised transmission.

**T**HE PRACTICE OF *MARIANISMO* EVIDENCES THAT CATHOLICISM IS STILL ALIVE in Venezuela. This perpetuation of religious morals may seem out of date, yet this reality is a powerful image of Venezuelan post-colonialism. Religion and the beauty myth can live together in a country like Venezuela because Barbie-like Western standards of attractiveness are introduced in this culture through “cultural mimesis,”<sup>34</sup> or the imitation of foreign standards without any awareness of the specific traits of cultures where they are being implemented. In other words, *Venezolanas* represent beauty as a foreign cultural trait without reproducing the post-feminist context in which it had been originally created in America. Why then, if the country still is very much tied to Catholicism has fashion has become such a strong industry? I believe this is consequence of the 20th century’s quick assimilation of oil riches and democracy in the country.

The aforementioned matches Wolf's views on the beauty myth in Western societies, because during colonial times public interest was in women's virginity, and in the 1960s—as the democratic system developed in the country—it was replaced by public interest in the shape of the female body. In other words, Miss Venezuela, the flesh goddess, replaced the nun, Catholic God's priestess. Fashion replaced religion.

Finally, the beauty myth is a power device (Foucault) individually articulated as self-regulating, because by trying to become beautiful, women are distracted from the most pressing gender and political issues in the country, thus perpetuating the idea that women's role is to be men's "women-mother-wives" (*marianismo*). The contemporary massive inclusion of women in the work place does not really challenge the "women-mother-wife" stereotype. Professional women throughout Venezuela are still worried about the way they look, giving credence to the saying that "to look like a million dollars is often more important than owning the cash." Beauty is a cultural prison that Venezuelan women embody.

My grandmother's prayers were answered: I am no longer a fat and abnormal Miss Piggy. Although I still live in the US, I am now a stereotypically beautiful *Venezolana*—thin and white, of course. As for me, I look forward to going to my favorite dance club, sitting at the bar and enjoying a 300-calorie *mojito* while looking at the rest of the girls dancing their beautiful bodies away: happy with their Barbie-like appearances, looking like something they will never be—modern. ❀

## NOTES

- 1 Nelly Richard, "Postmodernism and Periphery," *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Thomas Docherty, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 465.
- 2 Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 12. For further information on the Western beauty myth see: Arthurs, Jane and Grimshaw Jean eds., *Women's Bodies: Discipline and Transgression*, (London: Cassell, 1991).
- 3 Michael Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. Volume I*, trans. Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Also see: Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomoni eds., *Abnormal. Lectures at the Collège de France (1974-1975)*, trans. Graham Burchell, (New York: Picador US, 1999).
- 4 Evelyn P. Stevens, "Mexican Machismo: Politics and Value Orientations," *The Western Political Quarterly*, 18.4 (Dec 1965): 848-857. For further information see: Arrom, Sylvia Marina., "Teaching the History of Hispanic-American Women," *The History Teacher*, 13.4 (Aug 1980): 493-507; Asunción Lavrin, "Indians Brides of Christ: Creating New Spaces for women in New Spain," *Mexican studies/Estudios Mexicanos*, 15.2 (Summer, 1999): 225-260; Ann Pescatelo ed., *Female and Male in Latin America: Essays*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1973); and, Evelyn P. Stevens, "The Prospects for a Women's Liberation Movement in Latin America," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 35.2 (May 1973): 313-321.
- 5 Nikki Craske, *Women and Politics in Latin America*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999), 12.
- 6 Jana Sawicki, *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1991), 22.
- 7 Sandra Bartky, "Foucault, Femininity and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," *Women's Studies: Essential Readings*, ed. Stevi Jackson, (New York: New York UP, 1993), 227-231.
- 8 Wolf, 12-13.
- 9 Italics in the original.
- 10 Wolf, 12-13.
- 11 "Miss Venezuela Historia," Miss Venezuela Web Page (December 19, 2006), <http://www.missvenezuela.com/>
- 12 "Mi Jefe se Pinta," *Producto*, Number 246. May 2004.
- 13 "Lujo a la Venta," *Producto*, 258 (May 2005).
- 14 "Mi Jefe se Pinta."
- 15 Laura Vargas, "Moda Urbana," *Producto*, 276 (Nov 2006).
- 16 Vanessa Pérez Díaz, "Sin miedo al bisturí," *El Nacional*, (Dec. 2006): A/16.

- 17 Quoted in “Sin miedo al bisturí.”
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Wolf, 13.
- 20 Inés Quintero et al. *Las Mujeres de Venezuela*. Historia Mínima, (Caracas: Fondo Editorial de la fundación de los Trabajadores petroleros y petroquímicos de Venezuela, 2003), 59-84.
- 21 J.L. Salcedo-Bastardo, *Historia Fundamental de Venezuela*, (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, Ediciones de la Biblioteca, 1996). To legalize these de facto unions king Ferdinand the Catholic published a Real Cédula (January 14, 1514) allowing Indians to marry Spanish conquerors. In the 16th century there were 50 thousand people of Spanish-Indian descendant. Africans imported to the colonies had not the same deference: law strictly forbade marriages of Indians or Spaniards to blacks.
- 22 Ibid, 100.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Quintero et al., 121.
- 25 The first convent in the territory was established as early as 1638 in Trujillo, and the second in 1677 in Caracas.
- 26 Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth Century Manual*, trans. Charles Fantazzi, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000).
- 27 Ibid, 85.
- 28 Ibid, 119.
- 29 Rosa del Olmo in Quintero et al., 31.
- 30 Ibid, 32.
- 31 The festival was quickly repressed and five students were sent to jail, including Tamayo. In less than a day, the rest of the 214 students voluntarily turned themselves in. They spent twelve days in jail before they were released thanks to a women’s lobby. This anecdote is crucial to understanding how the beauty queen represents the idea of democracy in the Venezuela. Moreover, three decades latter, when the country adopted democracy, at least half of the integrants of Venezuela’s Student’s Federation were part of a democratic political party. It was in the early 1960s, when the democratic project was becoming strong in the country, that Miss Venezuela started to become a cultural icon.
- 32 Pío Tamayo, “Homage and Indian’s demand. To her Majesty Beatriz I, Student’s Queen,” *Guiguin Soy*, (December 19, 2006), <http://giugin.blogspot.com/2006/06/homenaje-y-demanda-del-indio-su.html> The original Spanish: (...) Pero no, Majestad / que he llegado hasta hoy, / y el nombre de esa novia se me parece a vos!/ Se llama: ¡LIBERTAD!/ Decidle a vuestros súbditos/ -tan jóvenes que aún no pueden conocerla-/ que salgan a buscarla, que la miren en vos,/ ¡vos, sonriente promesa de escondidos anhelos! (...). The translation is mine.

- 33 For further information see: Daniel Esteller Ortega, *La democracia representativa, apuntes para su historia en Venezuela*, (Caracas: Ediciones de la Biblioteca, 1995). For a brief history of Venezuela see Elías Pino Iturrieta et al., *Historia Mínima de Venezuela*, (Caracas: Fundación de los Trabajadores de Lagovén, 1992).
- 34 Nelly Richard.