

## **Of Pageants and Feminism: The Ms. Universe 2015 in a Feminist Lens**

### **Ms. Aiko SHIMIZU (The Philippines)**

Just this 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2016, Ms. Universe 2015 Pia Wurtzbach did her homecoming special at the Smart Araneta Coliseum. She finally had her victory walk after not having the chance to do so because of the announcement fiasco that happened last December during the Ms. Universe 2015 held in Las Vegas. There is no doubt that Filipinos are proud of the crown Ms. Wurtzbach has brought home judging from the adoring crowd that awaited her during her parade last Monday. (January 25, 2016). After 42 years of not winning the crown, a Filipina is once again Ms. Universe, the first two winners being Ms. Gloria Diaz (1969) and Ms. Margie Moran (1973). There is no wonder why Filipinos are just glowing with pride.

As a Filipina I too am glad for Ms. Pia Wurtzbach and her win. But as a feminist who is against any form of female objectification and promotion of impossible standards of beauty, I do not support beauty pageants. In these competitions, women parade in their bikinis in front of a panel to impress them with their looks, talent, and intelligence. It's as if women need validation for all of those. Furthermore this sexist tradition perpetuates the thinking that only women who are thin can be considered beautiful judging from the absence of plus size women.

I am not alone in my opinion towards beauty pageants, most feminists are against it as well. One remarkable event to note was the Miss America protest of 1968 when hundreds of feminist activists gathered on the Atlantic City Boardwalk and distribute publicity materials saying "No More Miss America!" Their main concerns were: the impossible standards of beauty, female objectification, and perpetuation of the double standard on women (Madonna/whore fantasy) in which men irrationally want women to be innocent yet provide sexual gratification at the same time. Also at that time, they considered the pageant racist for not allowing the entry of women of color.

Although Ms. Universe is far more diverse considering the different ethnicities that join the pageant, I'd like to also take note of the fact that Ms. Pia Wurtzbach is half-German. I have discussed in my previous article that Filipinos mostly prefer people with "white" features: straight nose, straight hair and light skin. Pia Wurtzbach is another example of that preference. I am bothered that Filipinos are celebrating the representation of our country by a woman with a German family name without batting an eye. I do not intend to sound antagonistic in any sense, but I am against the idea of white supremacy in our very much Asian country and culture.

Speaking of whiter supremacy, there is also the issue on Ms. Pia Wurtzbach's controversial answer in the Question and Answer portion of the pageant. She was asked if she thinks the US should have a military presence in the Philippines to which she replied with an answer that sounded a lot like she is Pro-US Military bases. Filipino activists who are against the US Military bases weren't that happy with her answer. Although some like Mr. Renato Reyes of Bagong

Alyansang Makabayan opted to blame the organizers of the pageant for giving her an unfair question. There are many issues surrounding the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) between the Philippines and the US, most notable recently was the murder of Jennifer Laude by the US Marine Joseph Scott Pemberton.

It might seem that I am against Ms. Pia Wurtzbach and her title as Ms. Universe, but I'd like to clarify that I am against the patriarchal, white supremacist and sexist notions perpetuated by the pageant and not her individually. What is notable about beauty pageant winners is they get the spotlight and can push forward their advocacies. I am happy that she's an LGBT rights supporter and would like to raise HIV/AIDS awareness.

Beauty pageants remain to be a tradition that permeates patriarchal and sexist notions however if contestants and pageant winners are more socially aware, then maybe receiving a crown from such an oppressive institution won't have to be in vain after all.

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