

Drug lords tainting Colombian beauty pageants

By Juanita Darling=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times
BOGOTA, Colombia -- Girls in Colombia dream of growing up to be queen. They imagine hearing their names being called and walking down the runway to be crowned queen of rice, queen of the sea, queen for a harvest or a day.

"Every girl wants to be queen, even if it's the queen of the house," quips Angie Melissa Arbelaez, Miss Choco 1997. "It's very obsessive here," says anthropologist Maria Victoria Uribe, Miss Bogota 1968. "There are more beauty contests here. ... There are millions of queens."

Within these millions, there is a hierarchy. Being queen of a local festival is not the same as being queen of tourism. The queen of Bambuco, a folk dance, is recognized for having talent as well as beauty.

Further, the lesser contests are often rehearsals - or consolation prizes - for the most royal contest of them all: queen of Cartagena, Miss Colombia. "To have been Miss Colombia is almost like having been president," says Santiago Medina, who for many years was a member of the committee that selects Miss Bogota.

The Cartagena pageant, known as "el reinado," the reign, paralyzes Colombia every November. The army may bomb the Supreme Court - as it did days before the 1985 contest - and presidential candidates may be assassinated - as they were in 1989 - but the whole country stops to discuss measurements, smiles and gaits.

"The queens are a sort of oasis, an opiate of the masses," Uribe says.

But in recent years, separating el reinado from Colombia's national problems has become nearly impossible. This Colombian obsession has become infested with a Colombian woe: drug money.

As the focus has moved from the pageant to the scandals surrounding the contest, organizers' efforts to clean up the pageant have spawned their own controversies, with charges of elitism and invasion of privacy.

The problems stem from narcotics traffickers who sponsor candidates, paying tens of thousands of dollars for the designer clothes, haircuts and training needed to compete in Cartagena. Drug cartels compete against each other to see whose candidate ranks higher in the judging, according to Eccehomo Cetina, author of "Queen in Check," a book about corruption at the Cartagena pageant.

"It is a symbiotic relationship," he says. "There are social-climbing women ... and the desire of drug traffickers to receive recognition."

The result: embarrassment for pageant organizers and a decline in the prestige of the pageant.

In 1990, Maribel Gutierrez resigned as Miss Colombia to marry Jairo Duran, who is estimated to have invested more than \$70,000 in her pageant wardrobe alone. Federal prosecutors said that Duran, who was killed in 1992, was under investigation at the time of his death for his ties to the Coastal drug cartel.

Gutierrez had worked hard to become Miss Colombia. She had competed in the pageants run by the selection committees of Cesar,

Magdalena and Bogota provinces - and lost. She finally got to the competition by representing Atlantico, a province too poor to put on a local competition.

In poor provinces, Cetina says, drug traffickers buy the title for their favorite aspiring queens. Intermediaries persuade the governor to issue a decree naming the woman the province's representative.

On the night of the Miss Colombia pageant, the computers calculating the scores crashed. Hours later, when the hand-figured scores were revealed, Gutierrez had won.

According to rumors, never proven, two of the five contest judges - all prominent foreigners - had refused Duran's offer of a bribe. Nevertheless, they believed the death threat he allegedly made against them and kept quiet when the results were announced.

Two years later, when police searched the cell of the late drug lord Pablo Escobar after his escape, they found a photograph signed by Patricia Azcarraga, one of the five finalists in the 1991 pageant. "I am your favorite girlfriend," she wrote. "Thank you for the trip and all the lovely things you gave me for Cartagena."

Last year, police found suspected drug lord Justo Pastor Perafan at his hide-out in Venezuela by following his girlfriend, Luz Adriana Ruiz, Miss Vichado 1993.

Such revelations have devastated Colombians, who love their queens the way other countries love their sports teams. Especially here, fans need a respite from violence and hostility: their queens provide that, they say. To have their queens touched by such worldliness has been unbearable.

Further, Colombians believe that the scandals have affected their candidates' performance in the Miss Universe pageant. Colombia has produced no Miss Universe since 1958, although Miss Colombia is often among the five finalists. In fact, Miss Colombia was first runner-up three years in row, from 1992 to 1994.

In an effort to clean up el reinado, pageant director Raimundo Angulo has spent the past three years hiring private detectives, supervising provincial selection committees and devising rules that will exclude candidates sponsored by drug traffickers.

Many of the designers and hairdressers most closely associated with the contest have done the same. "Five years ago, I would not have thought that I would ever say this," notes Alfredo Barraza, who designed wardrobes for nine of the candidates in the November contest. "I always check things out. The family has to come."

Uribe, who was known as "the anti-queen" because of her outspoken ideas and such pranks as swimming in the hotel pool after the swimsuit competition, says she is appalled by what the contest has become.

"The whole thing seems grotesque to me," she says. "For women to allow inspections of their past, their ideas, is grotesque." But organizers argue that they have no other way to keep drug money out.

AOL named 'gay' man to Navy, officials say

By Rajiv Chandrasekaran=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

When Navy sailor Timothy R. McVeigh created a "user profile" on America Online, he didn't think his use of the word "gay" to describe his marital status would violate the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy on homosexuals in the military. He said he was careful not to include his full name or his occupation, referring to himself only as "Tim" in "Honolulu, Hawaii."

But last week, in an unusual case that has outraged gay-rights groups and electronic-privacy advocates, the Navy's deputy personnel chief ordered

that McVeigh - who is not related to the convicted bomber of the Oklahoma City federal building - be dismissed from the service for violating the policy, after a naval investigator testified that he obtained McVeigh's identity with a telephone call to American Online Inc.

The investigator said at a November discharge hearing that a technical-support employee at the Virginia-based online service did not ask for a court order before imparting McVeigh's full name and the state of residence, according to a transcript of the proceeding. Privacy advocates contend that AOL, which has 10 million subscrib-

Two Maryland counties ban books by black authors

By Annie Gowen=(c) 1997, The Washington Post

Two Maryland public school superintendents have removed books by prominent African American authors from high school English classes in recent weeks at the urging of some parents who called the works "trash" and "anti-white."

In Anne Arundel County, Superintendent Carol S. Parham ordered Maya Angelou's autobiographical "I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings" removed from the ninth-grade English curriculum, although it will still be taught in the 11th grade.

In St. Mary's County, School Superintendent Patricia Richardson recently removed Toni Morrison's "Song of Solomon" from the schools' approved text list. In both cases, superintendents overruled faculty committee recommendations to keep the books, yielding to the wishes of small groups of parents.

In each case, the removal of the book has angered many students,

teachers and community activists, who believe the objections are racially motivated attacks against African American literature.

Free speech advocates say the Anne Arundel case is highly unusual, because race-based complaints about books used in U.S. classrooms typically have focused on concerns about negative portrayals of African Americans, such as in Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn."

Both "Song of Solomon" and "Caged Bird" are considered by many scholars to be modern classics of African American literature. Angelou's book, a searing look at her childhood in segregated Arkansas, is a staple in high school English classes across the country and is on approved text lists in Howard and Fairfax counties.

The book's defenders say Angelou uses her poet's gifts to give students an evocative portrait of life under segregation, a firsthand account of a dark period in history that has the same immediacy as

Anne Frank's did.

"It's the voice, the honest young voice," said Julia Pruchniewski, a South River High School English teacher who called it "ridiculous" that she can no longer use the book in her ninth-grade classes. "It's one thing to read about segregation from a history textbook, another to read it in a teenager's young voice. It's much more vivid."

Parents and educators who favor keeping the work have expressed dismay that such a small group of parents could wield such influence over a curriculum. About 1,500 Anne Arundel students read "Caged Bird" this year before Parham pulled it from the ninth-grade list of books. The decision is the first in Pruchniewski's 20-year teaching career in Anne Arundel that a book was removed from the curriculum because of parents' objections, she said.

"It's frightening," said Maura Stevenson, an Anne Arundel parent whose daughter read the book last year as an eighth-grader at

Severna Park Middle School. "The school board is listening to people who are ignorant."

Ronald Walters, professor of African American studies and political science at the University of Maryland, agreed. "What the school system has appeared to do is be sensitive to a few individuals, and that's a bad way to run a school system. I couldn't imagine them doing this to classics that were boosting white self-esteem to which black parents objected."

But Sue Crandall, the Anne Arundel parent who sparked the protest against the Angelou autobiography, called the removal a victory for common sense.

"I had to stand up for what I believed in," said Crandall, who is white. "Caged Bird," assigned to her son this fall at South River High School, is not appropriate for ninth-graders because it is sexually explicit and gives a dated and slanted portrayal of whites, Crandall said.

Court faces Solomon's choice on Ellis Island

By Joan Biskupic=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — With a bravado befitting the Empire state, New York assistant attorney general Daniel Smirlock began his arguments at the Supreme Court Monday with a simple declaration: "All of Ellis Island is in New York."

In the boundary fight between New York and New Jersey over who can claim most of the island that was America's immigration gateway, Smirlock told the justices, "When people were born in a hospital on Ellis Island, they were born in New York. When they died on Ellis Island, they died in New York." Tradition, he seemed to suggest, should be an overriding consideration.

But New Jersey assistant attorney general Joseph L. Yannotti insisted that when the original three-acre island was enlarged at the turn-of-the-century with landfill, creating about 24 more acres and making room for hospitals and other buildings, that new land became New Jersey's.

With the federal government now controlling the land and its preservation, what is mostly at stake are the boasting rights to a place at the heart of the country's historic identity. But there is also the potential for taxing the revenue generated by any future development on the island. The case of New Jersey vs. New York revolves mostly around an 1834 compact that gave New York jurisdiction over what was then a three-acre island but said the surrounding submerged lands and water were New Jersey's. The ques-

tion is whether New York's sovereignty is limited to the original land mass or grew as the island was expanded by the landfill.

Shortly after the Supreme Court agreed in 1994 to hear the dispute between the two states, it appointed a special master to take evidence and make recommendations since no other court had heard the dispute. The special master has urged the justices to rule, based on the 1834 compact, that part of the island is in New York and part is in New Jersey. The master departed slightly from what he believed the 1834 agreement dictated, suggesting New York be allowed to claim about five acres, rather than three, for reasons of practicality and convenience. Sticking with the original pact, for example, would mean splitting now-existing buildings between the two states.

Some justices suggested Monday they might be inclined to follow the special master's advice and side with New Jersey. Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist at one point rejected New York's argument that the master did not take account of New York's continual presence on the island, including births and deaths, noting, "We rarely second guess a master on a factual question."

Smirlock primarily argued that because landfiling was widely practiced in the mid-1800s, officials who signed the compact envisioned that the island would grow with landfill and remain New York's. "The use of landfill on Ellis Island was not unforeseeable," Smirlock told the justices, "it already had occurred."

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg (the court's only native New Yorker) questioned whether that theory would allow an island to expand to several times its original size, and Justice Antonin Scalia (the court's only New Jerseyite) observed that legal documents generally do not anticipate that an island will grow over time.

For New Jersey's part, Yannotti contended there was little jurisdiction for either state to exercise during the past century. And disputing New York's assertion that New Jersey gave in to New York's longstanding regulation of the island, Yannotti said, "New Jersey did not acquiesce."

Yannotti urged the justices to reject the master's recommendation that New York get more than the original size of the island, for practical reasons. "This is a case about boundaries, not about buildings," he said, declaring that the court is only allowed to set the boundary as was required by the 1834 compact.

An eventual resolution of the case - expected before the justices recess next summer - may not be felt by the nearly two million tourists who visit the Ellis Island museum each year. Justice Department lawyer Jeffrey P. Mincar, who argued on behalf of the federal government, supporting New Jersey, said some modest additional tax revenue may be available in upcoming years, but that the overriding interest is a place in history.

New York now taxes concessions at its main attraction, the museum run by the National Park Service. New Jersey, meanwhile, provides its utilities.

ber information. "Our policy regarding the release of personal information is very clear," the spokeswoman, Wendy Goldberg, said. "We don't release this information unless we are presented with a court order, a search warrant or a subpoena. That policy is very clear to our employees."

The case against McVeigh has been seized upon by gay rights activists, who see it as the latest example of what they say is unfair and discriminatory prosecution of homosexuals by the military. They insist the Navy was unjustified in pursuing McVeigh because of an AOL profile that he maintains did not include his last name.

"Under 'don't ask, don't tell,' there are supposed to be limits on investigations," said C. Dixon Osburn, the co-executive director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, a Washington-based group that assists military personnel charged with violating the policy. McVeigh "didn't work hard to get on the radar screen," said Osburn, who is providing legal advice to McVeigh.

A Navy official at the Pentagon, who requested anonymity, defended the investigation into McVeigh. "The Navy views this case as a straightforward application of existing policy." The Navy viewed the AOL profile "as a straightforward indication of McVeigh's statement that he is gay," the official said.

McVeigh, 36, a senior chief petty officer who has been in the Navy for 17 years, said the discharge proceedings began after he sent a civilian Navy employee an electronic mail message in September asking for the ages of children of sailors on his submarine to organize a holiday toy giveaway. McVeigh said he sent the request via the AOL account because he was heading out to sea and did not have time to see the civilian Navy employee in person.

As is true of all AOL messages, McVeigh's "screen name" appeared as the return address. Using that screen name, the employee searched AOL's public directory and discovered a profile screen, created by McVeigh, that included the designation "gay" for marital status. It is unclear from the testimony in the case what prompted the employee to search the profile.

At the November hearing, naval investigator Joseph Kaiser said he called AOL and talked to "a gentleman named Owen at tech services," according to the transcript. Kaiser testified that he "wanted to confirm the profile sheet, who it belonged to. They said it came from Hawaii and that it was 'Timothy R. McVeigh' on the billing."

Kaiser testified that the AOL representative did not provide any other data about McVeigh.

Sobel and other privacy advocates question whether the McVeigh case is

an isolated incident of privacy violations by AOL. "How many other similar disclosures have been made like this that we - or the actual account holder - don't know about?" he asked.

Others suggest that the Navy's apparent success at obtaining the information from AOL without a court order will encourage investigators to operate in a similar fashion in the future. "It's giving a green light for the government to start cyber-snooping on American citizens," said John Aravosis, an Internet consultant in Washington who has been trying to raise awareness of the case.

The 1986 Electronic Communications Privacy Act bars service providers such as AOL from knowingly giving subscriber information to law enforcement officials without a court order. In the McVeigh case, however, it is not clear from the transcript that the investigator identified himself to AOL.

McVeigh said the only evidence given at the hearing was the profile, which he does not deny writing. In an interview with The Washington Post, he would not say whether he is gay.

He disputes the Navy's contention that the word "gay" on his profile means he is homosexual. "You can put in male or female, that you are green or blue or purple," he said. "That doesn't make it true."