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Women and Beds: Gender Portrayals in Hotel Advertising in Santa Elena, Ecuador

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Title: Women and Beds: Gender Portrayals in Hotel Advertising in Santa Elena, Ecuador

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Abstract:

Pritchard and Morgan (2000) have used the term “gendered landscapes” to describe how tourism marketing language and imagery privileges the male gaze through photographs and descriptions of tourism destinations. The authors discuss how destinations in the Global South and Southeast are portrayed as seductive female landscapes that invite the (male) tourist to come and discover their (her) treasures. Moreover, “these representations of gender and heterosexuality have led to women being represented as exoticized commodities which are there to be experienced” (Pritchard & Morgan, 2000, p. 891). Previous studies on gendered portrayals in tourism advertising have focused on destinations (Sirakaya & Sönmez, 2000; Chhabra et al., 2011), airlines (Westwood et al., 2000), and tour operators (Pritchard, 2001), most of them in the Global North. Less research has been done on the analysis of the gender stereotypes that pervade tourism advertising in the Global South, especially in the context of accommodation services and coastal destinations. This ongoing research aims to identify how the image of women is being represented in the advertising of luxury, first-, and second-category accommodation businesses of the coastal province of Santa Elena, Ecuador. The study is being conducted through the visual content analysis of 482 advertising images from 94 hotels in the Santa Elena province.

Pritchard’s (2001) scale for measuring gendered portrayals is being followed, in which images are classified into four levels. Level 1 depicts women and men in sexual or decorative roles; in level 2 images, women and men perform traditional gendered roles; in level 3, traditional roles are reversed, and women can be portrayed working or doing sports, while men appear caring for children; and in level 4, women and men are depicted as equal individuals. Early results indicate that, of the 482 images analysed, 383 (79.4%) contain images of women. Of these, 257 (67%) represent women either as sexual or decorative objects (level 1), or through traditional gender stereotypes (level 2). These results agree with previous studies, in which tourism promotion campaigns depict women disproportionately more in traditional stereotypical roles (sensual, subordinate, submissive) than men (Sirakaya & Sönmez, 2000; Chhabra et al., 2011; Westwood et al., 2000), reinforcing unequal power relations in society and reproducing traditional gender stereotypes in leisure spaces and tourism destinations.

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