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## Images of Women in Tourist Catalogues in Semiotic Perspective

**Keywords:** semiotics, gender, woman, a tourist catalogue, language of tourism

### Abstract

The article attempts to read semiotically a transmission of informational and promotional character in the form of tourist catalogues, focusing primarily on representations of women. The starting point for the analysis of content has become a theoretical discussion about the importance of catalogues for the tourist experience. A sociolinguistic paradigm proposed by Graham Dana has been adopted as a fundamental framework. The research project was to analyse the content (images) of catalogues published by the largest Polish tour operators. The women in the photographs were divided into two basic categories: tourists (alone, in couples, with a family or in a group of friends) and non-tourists. It was shown that the images of women to a large extent duplicate patterns of gender representations rooted in the Euro-American culture. The catalogues themselves precondition the way of spending the holiday by tourists who seek to adjust their individual experience to the canons presented in promotional and informational materials.

### Introduction

This article attempts to read semiotically a transmission of informational and promotional character in the form of tourist catalogues, focusing primarily on representations of women. Currently a refreshed, critical look is postulated in the sciences on tourism and travelling [Ateljevic et al. 2007]: today's debates, focusing on a new epistemological or ontological dimension of research, take into account increasingly the gender aspect, because tourism as a subject of academic reflection is not excluded from the once dominant and now discredited, masculinist optics, fitting into the positivist paradigm of studies [Pritchard et al. 2007, p 5]. The main protagonists of gender studies in tourism are generally (though not exclusively) women. The two most important collective works appeared more than fifteen years ago [Kinnaird, Hall, 1996; Swain 1995]. Since that time, a mini-explosion of interest in women's issues has appeared in the research and academic reflection; it is still an inconvenient topic, treated with neglect and pushed aside to give the field to issues more acceptable in the scientific community. [Ateljevic et al. 2005]

In the Polish scientific reflection, the research on tourism and travel from a gender perspective is still a *terra incognita*. The issues of gender, in the context of leisure and cultural patterns of travelling women, were undertaken by Sabina Owsianowska [2011, 2012] and Magdalena Banasziewicz [2010], the issue of sex tourism - Jacek Borzyszkowski [2011, 2012] and Marta Duczewska [2013]. The issues of travelling women are approached more often in a historical context [Badowski 1999 Kubica in 2006]; there is a need for studies relating to the current trends. In addition to research of the changing market trends, emergence of such niche products as trips exclusively for women, or a generally growing importance of women in consumer decision-making, an interesting challenge may be a reflection on the presence of women / an image of women in the culture of tourism. The issue is therefore not only to study specific tourist products, but rather to look in the direction of products of symbolic culture, accompanying travelling. In other words, the subject taken from the perspective of cultural studies, which include gender optics, is to determine the role that images play in maintaining or modifying the accepted forms of social practice. [Banks, 2007, p. 42]

## Catalogues as part of the language of tourism

Guided by the division proposed by Graham Dann [2012], it should be noted that the tourist catalogues are part of the monologic model of tourism. Under this model, promotional materials fit into the traditional, one-way sender-recipient relationship, in which the tourism industry creates a message, while tourists are the passive recipients without being able to co-create the message. In other words, the world of tourist catalogues is the world of the monologue where ready narratives are "served", not allowing tourists to participate in their co-creation. Regardless of the channel, and regardless of the fact whether it is a transmission medium using a text, vision or sound (or any combination of two or three of these elements), we have always the unequivocal sender that creates the message and the receiver, who reads, watches or listens.

According to Dann, this model, although it still best characterizes the classic "package tour", is currently not the only one describing comprehensively the capabilities of modern travel. Therefore, it should be considered that because of the transformation of tourism forms, involving above all the Internet popularization, and thus a kind of ensuing democratization of communication, proposals of alternative models are enforced, classified by Dann as a dialogic model and a trialogic model. [Dann 2012, 67-68]

An intensification of interactivity between the creator of the tourist offer, its seller, and the customer-tourist is a noticeable tendency, but not negating, at least so far, more "traditional" forms of marketing and sales. For most mass tourists, the tourist catalogue is still the fundamental source of information on the offer. Moreover, the patterns that are a specific communication code, characteristic for tourist catalogues, are moved into the virtual space, becoming part of booking portals. Thus, an analysis of the traditional means of promotion and information, allows, at the same time, for extrapolation of the conclusions to other forms of marketing communication with the customer.

## Methodology

Femininity in tourist catalogues is problematized by analyzing the content (in this case, the image analysis). This method, considered typical of anthropology and ethnography [J Collier, Collier M. 1989, Banks 1999 Pink 2006] also appears in the history of art [Freedberg 1989], more rarely in sociology [Becker 1974 Konecki 2005 Sztompka 2005] in particular in research projects in the area of *media studies*, using research methods drawn from various scientific fields. The image analysis became popularized especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the so-called visual return, but its origins are accompanied by studies conducted in the spirit of anthropology. [Banks, 2007, p 44] Due to the research objectives, this article adopts an anthropological perspective, especially highlighting the qualitative, interpretive, and reflective approaches. At the same time, as it is noticed by Pink, [2007, p 21] "visual research methods are not purely visual. Rather, they only pay attention to the visual aspect of culture, but not with exclusion of other methods. There is no clear visual ethnography or only visual approach to culture." G. Dann comes to similar conclusions [2011, p 29]: iconographic representations do not have a semiotic autonomy. They require additional text for a kind of "anchor" and "communication". Therefore, the image analysis is completed in some areas by the text analysis, which extends the horizon of reflection.

The adopted research method should be referred to a wider approach to tourism in the semiotic perspective, and that means its location within the sociolinguistic paradigm and analysing as a form of symbolic communication. [Dann 2011, p 27] The images are therefore part of the language of tourism, which Dann calls "the structured, monologic, multistrategic, and controlling way of communicating between senders who are often anonymous, and acting

in the role of a parent, and the easily identifiable audience, taking on the role of a child". [Dann 2011, p 27] The comparison of the relationship between the creator of an offer and the client to the relationship between the parent and the child reflects perfectly the monologic nature of the tourism model proposed by Dann, and is a good starting point to illustrate the type of the tourist, who is the "packet" tourist. In the "refreshed" issue of "The Tourist Gaze" John Urry writes explicitly that, especially in organized trips, tourists play the role of children, giving the lead in a literary way "by the hand" to the pilot or the guide. [Urry, Larsen, p. 114]. "Travellers are treated as children, subjected to the processes of socialization. Their behaviour is guided by various persons and institutions: guides, pilots, employees of hotels and regional tourism organizations, directly and through tourist catalogues, guidebooks, promotional materials." [Owsianowska 2013, e-document] The language of tourism is therefore the language of social control, the language modelling behaviour adequately to how a parent directs a child through a system of orders and bans.

## The power of catalogue impact

Tourist catalogues<sup>1</sup> from a formal point of view, are printed materials serving the informational and promotional purposes. Their task is to present tourist products offered by tour operators. In terms of the offer, we can distinguish between two basic types of catalogues. Those that propose the so-called tours and those that present a package holiday (usually consisting of accommodation with or without food, and transportation, with the possible option to purchase on-site excursions). The purpose of the catalogue is to inform about the offer and to encourage its purchase, hence its twofold function, and the ensuing presence of the communication highlighting the positive aspects of the products (which is part of a wider phenomenon of idealizing the world of tourism).

Tourist brochures or catalogues through their images have a great power to create ways of looking at reality, creating patterns of perception on the stage of the so-called imaginary travel, and thus, shaping patterns of tourist behaviour. According to the division of M. Boyer, there are three stages of travel: imagined, experienced, and extended travel and the corresponding three types of literature: encouraging traveling (e.g., a tourist brochure or catalogue), accompanying during the trip (e.g. a guidebook), formed after the trip (e.g. a travel diary). In turn, B. Farrel divides travel to the pre-contact (images of the country influenced by stories of friends, media, etc.), the proper contact (during which the tourist is "bombarded" with new experiences, under whose influence his/her ego embraces a growing range of the visited environment) and the post-contact (during which the tourist slowly forgets about his/her experiences, and this can be prevented by reviewing the imported souvenirs, reading certain books, and telling friends about his/her experiences, etc.)." [Podemski 1988]

Catalogues, accompanying tourists during the imagined travel, prepare them to the experience of the real meeting with the place, creating a specific pattern that will be faced with the reality. As Morgan and Pritchard write [1998, p 6] "[T]he images projected on brochures, billboards and television reveal the relationships between countries, between the genders and between races and cultures. They are powerful images which reinforce particular ways of seeing the world and can restrict and channel people, countries, genders, and sexes into certain mind-sets."

Images contained in catalogues are later translated into the perception of the tourist experience on the site and have a direct impact on what Urry calls "the tourist gaze": "Even in the production of unnecessary pleasure many professional experts help to construct and

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<sup>1</sup> A catalogue is a folder or a book containing a list of goods, structured based on the criteria adopted by the author (in this case of tourist products), along with their prices. It differs from a tourist brochure above all by size; brochures are a kind of larger leaflets, whereas catalogues are more of the size of books. It also happens that tourist brochures are for information only, while catalogues are usually a marketing offer.

develop one's gaze as a tourist". [Urry 2011, p 1] Physical watching of tourists is mediated by images, created as part of the tourist offer (as well as through other media with which the tourist has to do before the actual trip). With the images produced in their minds, tourists are prepared for productions arranged by the tourist industry: "The best shots in countless reproductions appear on postcards and websites, in newspapers, tourist literature, and albums of travellers. They will become a measure used to compare the object with the image captured in this way (it happens that the direct contact with the original is disappointing and then the copy known from guidebooks and advertisements will survive in the memory). "[Owsianowska 2013, e-document]

Tourist catalogues, being a means to ensure that the concrete tourist offer is sold, provide a lever to develop the desires of potential tourists. According to the theories derived from the pioneering work by Crompton [1979], a decision and purchase of a particular offer is affected by a combination of factors, both of emotional and intellectual nature. Supporters of the holistic approach believe that only joining in the analysis pushing factors (generally speaking, those resulting from internal human needs) and attracting factors (which arise on the outside, but also motivate to acting) allows us to understand the complex process of making individual decisions [Pearce 2005]. Especially in the postmodern society, external factors, which include advertising, lifestyle magazines, TV, internet, etc. exert a powerful influence on fashion designs and thereby creating the needs of the individual. We have never been subjected to so much pressure of measures deliberately designed to guide our choices in life. Catalogues, affecting consumers, trigger needs that can be met only by buying trips. They promise to implement the project of being the ideal tourist by spending the ideal holiday. Brochures evaluate the reality of tourist attractions and destinations through an appropriate choice of persuasion means, such as photographs or a text. They show that what is beautiful seems to be good (which corresponds to the Platonic feeling that beauty is goodness) and this should be desired. As Mocini writes [2005, 154], referring to Greimas and Courtès [1979, pp. 305] "the brochure is the spatial representation of a tension between an individual and a targeted valuable object". Catalogues are therefore part of the great machine of creating tourist myths and consequently, the perception of the tourist does not meet the criteria of the reality perception in everyday life - it refers rather to fictional worlds, worlds of dreams. There is no coincidence in the fact that the set phrase, so willingly used, is "the dream holiday". Tourism is a specific form of acting contemporary myths. It is through participation in the tourist experience that the real life goes towards something that belongs to the world of imaginations and allows for the sensuous experience of an imaginary world. [Hennig, 2002, p. 174]

It is worth referring the analysis of the tourist catalogues to the rich research area of the literature of travel, which has been experiencing, in recent years, a special interest on the part of representatives of different disciplines. A number of monographic publications [Blanton 2002, Holland and Huggan 2000, Hulme and Youngs 2002, Hooper and Youngs 2004], magazines (*Studies in Travel Writing and Journeys*) and the existence of associations of researchers, exploring the theme of travel literature (*International Society of Travel Writing*) allow to conclude that the study related to travel narratives covers more and more circles and is an interesting object of interdisciplinary inquiry.

Sticking to the narrow definition, the literature of travel is a type of a narrative, whose authors are people travelling (and hence, the distinctive feature of this type of publication is usually the first-person narration, a description of events and places, the author's reflection). However, according to the broader definition proposed by Jan Borm [2004, p 13], the travel literature will be all texts whose theme is the journey, and therefore tourist catalogues, guidebooks, blogs, etc.

Studies that attempt to analyze tourist catalogues or brochures are not as common as studies on the "classical" travel writings. The authors face issues of tourism marketing,

focusing on the transmission precluding certain groups out of target customers, using tourist services. The discriminatory category in this case is the age [Pritchard and Morgan 1997] and gender [Pritchard and Morgan, 2000]. In addition, offers directed to strictly specialized audience are analyzed [Jenkins 2003]. Investigators also take a closer look at tourist catalogues as a case study to examine the language of tourism [Edelheim 2007; Mocini 2005]; Margaret Marshment devoted her project to issues of gender [1997]. This is her article that seems to be the most appropriate for comparison with the present text.

In conclusion, tourist catalogues create images, and thus the need that tourists desire to satisfy. They are a form of a narrative modelling social practices. In addition to verbal means of persuasion, catalogues largely use the visual elements, especially important for societies after the so-called visual return. The paradox of fascination with images, accompanying humanity from the beginning and the specificity of the contemporary visual culture was perfectly characterized by Susan Sontag, "Mankind continues to vegetate in Plato's cave and according to the ancient custom, it still finds delight in the images of truth alone. [...] First of all, we now have to deal with much more numerous images trying to catch our attention. [...] That insatiability of the photographing eye changes the terms on which we are imprisoned in our world, in a cave. Teaching us a new visual code, photographs alter and extend the understanding of what is worth watching, and what we are entitled to notice. They are a grammar and – which is even more important – an ethics of viewing." [Sontag 2009, p 9] We absorb images and they teach us to look at the world and be in this world. What impacts have catalogues? To try to get closer to the answer to this question, one should try to characterize their content, which was not constructed coincidentally.

## Criteria for the selection of materials for the analysis

Tourist catalogues selected for the analysis were to meet primarily all three criteria.

1. Popularity - the catalogues were to represent offers of companies enjoying the greatest popularity and trust among Poles. The easily accessible ranking prepared annually by the influential national newspaper "Rzeczpospolita" was used; it classifies credibility of the tour operator based on an assessment of its financial standing<sup>2</sup>.
2. Availability – it was assumed that the catalogue should be available "offhand" in any travel office selling offers of various operators. For this purpose, ten sites in the centre of Krakow were selected, where using the method of the "secret customer"; it was requested to see the catalogues of different tour operators for the season of 2013. Next the catalogues were selected only for those operators (out of the 31 ones listed in the "Rzeczpospolita" ranking), whose offer was available in most offices.<sup>3</sup>
3. Diversity - because tour operators specialize in specific regions or types of tourism, ten catalogues were selected that correspond to diverse forms of travelling, and at the same time they represent firms classified on different places in the "Rzeczpospolita" ranking.

Finally, on our list of the catalogues are offers of the following offices (in the alphabetical order):

1. Alfa Star - a tour operator that is the leader in trips with a stay in Egypt; it also offers stays in other countries on the Mediterranean Sea and tours;
2. Almatour Poland – a tour operator operating in the segment of youth tourism, enjoying a high social trust, thanks to a long-lasting presence in the market.

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<sup>2</sup> 31 liderów turystyki wyjazdowej - ratingi i ranking [31 leaders of outbound tourism - ratings and rankings], "Rzeczpospolita", the branch service "Tourism", 23 Aug. 2013, <http://www.rp.pl/temat/984572.html>, date of access: 25 Oct. 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Not all tour operators classified in the ranking publish their catalogues; some of them use only the presentation online of their offer.

3. Grecos Travel – an office operating for less than a decade, whose offer almost totally concerns Greek directions, where it continues to strengthen its specialist position (currently the vice-leader).
4. Itaka (Itaka-Gala<sup>4</sup>) – the leader of the Polish organized outbound tourism. It has a much extended product range, diversified in terms of both geographical areas and forms of travel.
5. Logos Tour - an experienced tour operator under the aegis of the Association of Polish Teachers, specializing in exotic expeditions, touring trips, but also incentive tourism.
6. Oasis Tours – the last office in the ranking, which specializes in several destinations in Southern Europe (Tunisia, Egypt, Greece, Bulgaria).
7. Rainbow Tours - for more than 20 years on the Polish market, a large tour operator, offering a wide range of trips in both the summer and winter (tours, exotic holidays for children and families, skiing).
8. Sun & Fun – a tourist office formerly concentrated largely on North Africa destinations and competing on the market with low prices of their trips, now offering also trips to Bulgaria or the Arab Emirates.
9. TUI – part of Europe's largest tourist TUI Travel Plc, based in London; it offers a wide range of products, most recently also lower priced.
10. Wezyr Holidays – in previous years the agency specialized in trips to Turkey and Egypt, nowadays it differentiates its product by introducing trips to Spain or Bulgaria.

### An analysis of the catalogues - general consideration

Following the opinion of Pierre Bourdieu [2005], one can say that tourist products can be ranked in respect to their class, price, and taste of clients. The basic dichotomy is a division of offers addressed to "the average bread eater" and those who can afford the luxury, authenticity and their own interests. Package tours, and therefore travel catalogues, are seen as mass, standardized products, although here there is also internal differentiation. They are indicated by a purely technical quality of the catalogue (paper type, photo quality, composition), their volume and precision of the offer description (in accordance with the principle that for the richer, a trip offer may be shown even on two pages, while catalogues of cheaper tour operators try to cumulate information on the minimum number of pages). Another issue is, of course, the offer itself (price, level of services, extra bonuses), which helps determine whether the description in the catalogue is an example of mass tourism or the more exclusive tourism (in terms of price). Among these materials, catalogues of Logos Tour and Itaka-Gala stand out definitely. They emphasize the aspect of luxury and uniqueness. A particularly interesting example is the catalogue of Itaka-Gala, offered by Itaka, created in collaboration with the fortnightly *Gala*. The catalogue proposes recreation "in 4- and 5-star, carefully selected hotels, combined with arrangements for superstars and a lot of fun in a unique atmosphere. All tours, presented to Clients have been personally checked by stars of the magazine *Gala*." [Itaka&Gala, e-document]. Itaka advertises its products as "travelling in the style of stars", which is to enable tourists (or rather female tourists), who bought the trip to feel for a moment like a "star" that adorns the cover of the catalogue. On the other hand, the catalogues of "Oasis" or "Almatur" look like "poor relatives" of the mentioned above, and instead of luxury they try to emphasize affordability "for everyone".

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<sup>4</sup> One of the catalogues of Itaka, featuring trips under patronage of the bi-weekly "Gala" - one of the luxurious magazines published by Gruner+ Jahr Polska since 2001. It focuses mainly on celebrity gossip, interviews and guides for women. The target group of the bi-weekly is women between 20 and 50 years of age (i.e. those whose tourist activity is the greatest). [http://www.guj.pl/index.php/nasze\\_wydania/magazyny\\_luksusowe/gala](http://www.guj.pl/index.php/nasze_wydania/magazyny_luksusowe/gala), date of access: 25 Oct. 2013.

Generally, as it is noted by M. Marshment [1997, p 17], it is hard to see in catalogues the gender lines, which correspond to the lack of gender differentiation in terms of tour operators' offer. Although the catalogues reveal some phenomena of valorisation of gender, as it will be described below, it does not result in selecting potential consumers on grounds of gender. Tourist products of large tour operators are not structured according to gender divisions (however these of small organizers are<sup>5</sup>).

The layout of all brochures is similar. On the cover, there is usually a large colour photo, sometimes supplemented by a few small ones, which develop and detail the offer to be found in the middle of the catalogue. On the initial pages, there is general information about the company (an introduction presenting the organizer's ideas, the network of offices and agents, and the rules of booking flights, buying visas or administering necessary vaccines). The core of a catalogue is descriptions of trips and accommodation. The proportions of text and photographs are slightly different depending on the tour operator, but the illustrations can be said to cover about 50-75% of each page. They create a photo collage usually around the main text (often enriched with a colourful frame to discuss one issue, such as a detailed description of the attractions of the site, or an offer of optional excursions). The basis here is images of hotels and tourist resorts: bright, elegant buildings against the blue sky, situated near the beach and the sea, usually in a perspective view of a swimming pool. In addition, there are photos of hotel interiors illustrating rooms<sup>6</sup>, cafes, restaurants, and additional entertainment (e.g., Jacuzzi or massage rooms). The people depicted in the photographs are actors placed in a particular setting, but rather resembling puppets stopped in movement; they should be treated much more as part of a daub, allowing showing better its qualities and charms. If they do not appear cropped in the foreground, they are usually just ordinary tourists, probably even unaware that they have become actors in tourist catalogue illustrations. Because you cannot see their faces and the silhouettes are very small, they maintain the anonymity of the crowd, which, however, authenticates the presented offer. Quite a different situation seems to be with characters in the foreground. They are usually professional models playing tourists, and scenes appearing on the pages of catalogues, though they look authentic, only imitate the authenticity (since the marketing creation requires proper retouching, which has to show reality better and more beautifully than it actually is).

For better orientation in the discussed issues, images of women appearing in the analyzed catalogues are divided into several categories, which facilitate to identify interesting images out of the sheer volume of illustrations. At first, it should be noted that the images of women in the catalogues appear more often than of men. Barbara Czerska notes that "contemporary advertising does not use a woman, but it is a woman. Because the dream of culture - for men and for women, for children and for the elderly, the poor and the rich - has always been a woman" [Lewiński 1999, p 99]. Is the question purely about advertising or catalogues, the woman dominates, and her images are as much diverse as typical.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, offers of offices specializing in feminine tourism: "Babki travel" ["Women Travel"] – an office based mainly on family trip organizations <http://babki-travel.pl/index.php/o-firmie>, or "Dzika baba" ["Wild Woman"], i.e. an agency of alternative travel for women, <http://www.dzikababa.pl/>, date of access: 25 Oct. 2013.

<sup>6</sup> It is very interesting that there is a sort of a canon for presenting a hotel room: usually in the center there is a perfectly made bed (a double one, which immediately leads to the conclusion that the holidays are designed for couples), in the background you can see a panorama of the open balcony, a TV set at the side, a desk or a table. Such images have a substantial impact on the imagination of tourists about the holiday place, leading to widespread misunderstanding, which is best witnessed by guide-residents, constantly struggling with the problem "that my room does not look like the one in the catalogue". As G. Dann writes [2011, p 35]: "hotel rooms presented in catalogues are of a cocoon-like structure [Dann, 1989] of a tourist environment bubble" [Cohen, 1972]. According to Cazes [1976, pp. 21, 41-42], "it is the so-called. *narcissism hotelier*, the inner world protecting Ego against external dangers."

## A woman alone

Just as minor silhouettes of tourists gathered in public spaces of resorts, a single woman in tourist catalogue photographs is rather a decoration in the landscape. She appears in different guises, whose common feature is romanticism (and eroticism to some extent). Therefore, a woman may be alone on a sun lounger next to a pool or on an empty beach. Another option is a woman lying just on an edge of a pool in a pose suggesting sunbathing (and at the same time highlighting her natural charms). A more dynamic version is a woman emerging from the sea in a bathing suit and reaching toward the tables / sun loungers on the beach. The direction may also be different - a woman heading towards the sea or walking along the coast. Usually, she wears a bikini bathing suit, allowing you to admire freely her slim figure. A woman in a bathing suit seems to be a holiday symbol (because most of the holidays are associated with relaxation on the beach). Her feminine attributes are important, although not necessarily the sexual dimension in this image is predominant. She embodies beauty – an element of an important European cultural canon, which is the original image of Venus emerging from the sea foam. A woman coming out of the sea is nothing but a paraphrase of this image belonging to the classics of Western civilization painting.

Regularly used is a motif of a woman leaning against a balcony window frame, a terrace door, etc. Her presence opens up the prospect of the view, thus creating a pattern of looking. Shown in this case from the back, she exposes her silhouette (she is usually dressed in a flowing dress or sarong), and at the same time she evokes a caryatid supporting the ceiling elements. Catalogue viewers, looking at the woman, automatically look in the direction she is looking at and they see the space of blue sky, a patch of an empty beach or a white terrace. Romantic thoughtfulness, tranquillity emanating from this image show the comfort of peace and relaxation, which, according to the catalogue offer, are guaranteed to tourists in the hotel building.

The female body is sometimes treated in catalogues as fragmented. As it is emphasized by Lewiński [1999, p 100]: "a woman in pieces is always sexy. She is a selection of the best parts of the female body, traditionally treated as the most attractive sexually." In catalogues there is most often a woman's face shown in close up, expressing joy (a wide smile, gentle wrinkles around her eyes), peace (closed eyes, relaxed mimics) and the silhouette of a woman or only a part of the silhouette (e.g. the shoulders and the head, the back and the head ) seen from behind. In this case, we are dealing with a kind of depersonalization, rather with a typical beautiful body than a particular person.

## A woman in a couple

The most common catalogue image is an image of a woman in a couple with a man. As Urry writes, this tourist offer is directed to heterosexual couples, not singles, or persons other than of the prevailing sexual orientation. [Urry, Larsen 2011, p 71] Of course, it is a big generalization, but catalogues designated for a standard mass customer, enforce such a generalization.

If a woman appears in a couple it is not „a family vacation photo caught red handed", but a nicely stylized portrait – the characters do not usually look at the lens, but at space, for example, at the sea and most often towards the partner. The couple enjoys the holiday together, accompanying each other in all activities, which generally can be compared to "the romantic hedonism". Staying at the resort means, therefore, walks along the coast on the empty beach, lying on the beach, lying in a Jacuzzi, swimming in a pool. The pair seems to be the only guests of the hotel. They are very attractive physically, in their thirties, (the only exception is the photograph from the "Oasis Tours" catalogue presenting holiday for



"senior citizens", where the couple are about 60 years old). They usually wear bathing suits or light, flowing white clothes, and are often barefooted (especially when walking along the seashore). Their relation to each other is shown by their physical closeness – they are firmly snuggled, and turn to each other with glances expressing affection, holding hands, their eyes, if not directed to the partner, get lost somewhere deep in thoughts; they talk or are silent, but all is always done "jointly"; they create a mirror reflection of gestures and posture. An indispensable component of the holiday is having meals, so the pairs are also "caught up" on the ritual of eating. The food itself is here of secondary importance. It is for the possibility of revealing a further act of the romantic performance: couples sitting opposite each other at a table are holding each other's hands or making a toast (usually with water); they are looking at each other. Paradoxically, their plates are empty, which testifies to the fact that the gastronomic offer is not in question but an important social ritual.

Even if a woman appears alone, a man should be considered as present-absent. A single woman is not lonely, because her man is being expected, which is suggested by an empty chair (and the table has been laid for him) or an empty sun bed standing next to the woman's. It is interesting that while in the catalogues there are single women; the man is always surrounded by women or with one woman (he is rarely seen with other men/man).

Very rarely two persons of the same sex can be seen in photographs. Such images leave room for imagination, although most often they point to two female friends who spend their holidays together (similarly to the female-male pattern they can sit together in a pool, drink, or speak). The only illustration of a somewhat ambiguous erotic overtone is a photo from the "TUI" catalogue, where in the foreground you can see a heterosexual couple sitting at a table and talking; they are obviously young and smiling, while in the background two girls in tops and skirts to the knee are going up the stairs; one is embracing the other with her arm, both are directing their gaze out to the side - their proximity may lead to a thought whether they are friends or Lesbians (if we saw the same pair of men, there would be virtually no doubt as to their sexual orientation).

## A woman and a family

When a woman is in the pictures in the role of the mother and the wife, her beauty recedes into the background (although, it so happens that women are presented in the catalogues, even if they are shown with two children, their bodies absolutely do not seem to bear any traces of motherhood). The most important is her social utility reduced during the holidays only to taking care of her family safety and well-being of the loved ones. The woman shown in the photos with her family is happy, smiling, and relaxed - this is a clear message to all the wives and mothers tired of daily necessities: "all inclusive holidays are the only chance for non-cooking, non-cleaning, non-doing homework with children". It is important that the relationship with the partner and children are illustrated in harmony, and even idyllic. Children (up to three in number, at the nursery or early school age) may romp but always with the consent of their parents, who are also carried by the frenzy of fun. Such Arcadian idea appears, for example, in the "TUI" catalogue: a family of three lying on a sun lounger, the mother is very young and the storm of fairly short red hair is distinguishing her in the photo; on her body, there is a little girl about 5 years old; the dad in the type of a beauty model is sitting slightly behind, and is talking to them watching their mischief and smiling indulgently.

The family pose for a photo or deliberately set up collective portrait conventions, such as in the "Wezyr Holidays" catalogue: she, he and the child are standing in a group of three, although we only see their heads and shoulders - the heads are close together, the child is in the middle, the father is embracing the two with his both arms; all are looking at the camera posing for the picture. The man in the family pictures is caring but slightly

aloof. The woman still holds the dominant role as a parent: the catalogues show a woman with children only, usually during frolics with a child / children in a pool, where an inseparable attribute becomes a big inflatable lifebuoy, or posing with a child (for example, on the cover of the catalogue of "Oasis Tours" where crouching on the beach there is a young, maybe more than 30-year-old woman, in a bathing suit and sunglasses, who is hugging a smiling little girl of about 3 years old, wearing glasses similar to her mom's. There is no corresponding image of a man, alone at play or posing for pictures with children. Children in the pictures are not dirty, tear-stained, and tired; that would not comply with the image of "paradise" holidays. Since the children are perfect, so the woman-mother can be perfect and satisfied.

A family circle, you need to add – of a nuclear family- introduces a lot of positive associations : "the theme of family is primarily a point of reference for commonly accepted moral values like love, care, trust, tradition, etc.." [Lewiński, 1999, p. 120] Women and men emerging from the family photographs are always lined up close to each other; their bodies are in contact; they are smiling and thus happy, additionally sexually attractive, despite being parents at the first place.

### A woman with friends

A woman appearing in a larger group is the most common example of photographs illustrating offers addressed to young tourists. As tourism psychologists conclude, particularly in youth groups a greater emphasis is put on the social aspects of experiencing holidays and spending leisure time in groups. In the pictures there are more images of people than hotels or cultural objects; physical activity and sexual attractiveness are emphasized. Characters in photographs show fashionable, independent, and exciting lifestyle promoted in magazines for young people. An excellent example of the above statements is a catalogue of the office "Almatur" which specializes in organizing youth camps. Already on the cover, we can see three girls in bathing suits running along the banks of a lake, and behind them a larger group of young people is following them, most of them are girls; all have wet hair dispelled by the wind; they are slim, and wearing colourful costumes emphasizing their young bodies. In addition to the main photograph a series of small images are stretching along the entire page, adding details to the catalogue offer. There are, therefore, two portraits of girls (one with photo camera, one with a video camera), three groups of young people (they are dancing, swimming, jumping in the rays of the setting sun), and a photograph of a man playing paintball. In the middle of the catalogue authentic photographs from trips are included (with no styling or retouching); although, they were taken by a professional photographer using a variety of lenses. Regardless of the holiday camp offered, the pictures are dominated by young active girls - there are different types of summer sports, photos from events. In most illustrations, there are groups of several people. There are frequent images of two very young and beautiful women embracing - it seems that it is tenderness of friends, although a slightly erotic subtext in interpretation is also possible (at least these associations can be induced in male viewers of the catalogue).

In other catalogues, a woman shown in pictures in a larger group is a person spending holidays with her partner and friends. Thus, we can see two couples drinking or joking in a swimming pool. Another option is a female group exclusively, such as a few friends talking in a pool or guarding children together.

### A woman - non-tourist

Among the images of women, we can distinguish two types of women who are not tourists. First, they are representatives of the tourism industry, including workers of travel

agencies, flight attendants, room service, tourist guides. Secondly, the locals (natives) whom tourists can meet to make their stay more attractive.

A woman appearing in directories as travel office worker symbolizes the institution. Since her image is to guarantee reliability, confidence, but also openness and friendliness, she combines the features of a typical office worker and a good friend. The former are achieved through her dress and surroundings. In "TUI" catalogues, next to the list of agencies co-working with the organizer, a member of the staff appears in the photo: it is a young woman in a corporate uniform with a tie in the colours of the office, who is sitting at her desk on the background of shelves with folders; she is smiling addressing a customer and explaining something to her. Interestingly, this is a picture of genuine office worker, because her image is subscribed with a real name and place of employment. At the same time, if it were not provided, the professional make-up and the way the picture has been taken might suggest that we are dealing with a model that is only acting to be an employee. The woman in the photo looks trustworthy because of her professional appearance. At the same time, the relationship distance is not that large as to cause the feeling of fear and uncertainty (due to her wide smile and open posture). Also in the "Alpha Star" catalogue people cooperating with the organizer appear. They are animators responsible for the organization of free time. In the offer, their photos are of the ID card format. They are placed on the following pages of the brochures. In contrast to the "TUI" photos, the environment is not in their background (due to the size of the photo), and their natural look is not the result of styling. Showing their photographs, however, allows the viewer of the catalogue to see that the firm has a human face and that pretty and young girls are the staff in the company.

When it comes to servicing tourists in hotels and restaurants, images of women appear less likely than images of men, which does not correspond to the realities of employment<sup>7</sup>. On the one hand, it must be admitted that the room service is rarely placed in the catalogue pictures, and one might say that the order, lavishly laid tables, and decorations seem to be the work effect of invisible dwarfs. However, this time it has a direct reference to the reality of big resorts - service should be invisible to tourists, because it spoils the myth of the perfect holidays.

In fact, only waiters or bartenders out of the hotel staff appear in catalogues and almost in 100%, they are men (which actually reflects the cultural specificity of certain countries). The exception is the catalogue of "TUI" where in one image we see a woman in a white uniform showing something on a tray – we must therefore assume that she is probably a waitress<sup>8</sup>. The offer of Oasis Tours provides one image presenting the work of masseuses: two women are standing at two beds (obviously dressed in white uniforms) and massaging a pair of people lying on them. They are doing their job, but the viewers' eyes are not to be focused on them, but on the massaged tourists. The women are the background allowing a more colourful picture of the luxurious rest. Thus, if the staff is visible in a picture, they become a decorative element, like a swimming pool or deck chairs.

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<sup>7</sup> Accurate and comprehensive data illustrating the scale of the employment of women in tourism are unavailable, but we can definitely say that the number of women working in this sector is higher than in other industries, particularly with regard to developing countries. [*Global Report ...*, e-document] The second important feature of tourism is the fact that the work of women in tourism is usually limited to the least complex and therefore the least paid jobs, which corresponds to typical division for many societies into male and female activities. Work done by women used to be limited to the space of a home is transferred into the sphere of tourism: women are employed in positions that reflect their traditional roles associated with care and order (receptionists, cleaners, waitresses, animators of free time). Kinnaird and Hall [1996: 96] rely on research conducted in hotels and catering industry in the UK, which showed that, although there are male waiters or cleaners, these are activities dominated by women, while men occupy more exposed positions - of personnel managers and executives.

<sup>8</sup> Although the offer applies to holiday in Turkey, the representative of the hotel is a blonde-haired woman with fair skin.

Somewhat similarly treated are locals who placed in photographs give an offer a "local colour". Either they are recognized as "alien" due to their outfit, which must of course be "traditional", or due to their activities (it may be their occupation, such as crafts, fishing, or art, such as dancing and singing). Performances of the local population in catalogues visually realize the myth of the good, noble savage. This image evolved in the European culture in the late eighteenth century, on the wave of romantic ideas (derived from the Enlightenment's Rousseau's ideas) and the increasing industrialization. In contrast to the modern man, the man of the city and the machine, the noble savage personified a harmonious contact with Nature, the primary good that has been contaminated with the development of civilization. Joyful, spontaneous and naive 'primitive' people leading a quiet life in the rhythm of Nature resembled rather innocent children who allowed themselves constantly to have simple fun<sup>9</sup> so needed by weary tourists. Besides the joy of life an "exotic" man is inevitably described as exceptionally moral (hence the adjectives "good", "noble" understood as not spoiled, better in terms of the rules of life than the man coming from the modern society). The pre-modern idyll has become one of the most important myths of mass tourism since the very beginning, extended in time with numerous narratives used in tourist marketing. [Hennig, 2002, pp. 176-177].

In the analyzed set of the catalogues, representatives of the local population are primarily beautiful women. In the "TUI" catalogue, a half-a-page photograph of a young girl invites to the Bulgarian Riviera. She is standing on the background of summer fields and is holding in her hands a basket of rose petals. The photographer is "catching" her picking flowers. Except the natural, youthful face without make-up, we see a dazzling-white blouse in a slightly folk-like style. It is difficult to say whether it is just a part of a traditional regional costume, but it can bring such associations. The image suggests youth, freshness, innocence, but also joy of life, energy, and above all hospitality (the woman is holding the basket as if to boast of roses, but at the same time to offer them). In the "Itaka&Gala" catalogue, in the section on the Balearics we can find a photo of a flamenco female dancer in a beautiful red dress with a white fan in a gooseneck body bending. A woman dancing flamenco is probably the most common tourist symbol of Spain. It embodies feminine beauty, but also the intangible cultural heritage of the region. Traditional costumes also appear in the picture illustrating a group of folk dancers in the "Oasis Tour" catalogue. The photograph allows imagining a trip offer familiarizing tourists with the history of Crete. Dress is also a trademark on the cover of the "Grecos" catalogue. The catalogue is decorated with a pretty woman around 40 years old dressed in contemporary well fitting summer dress, but in the colours of the Greek flag (white and blue stripes and asymmetrical ornamentation in the form of a flag).

To determine a region characteristic attributes are also used: in the "Alpha Star" catalogue, we can see a Burmese woman of Paduang tribe, photographed in easily recognizable rims lengthening the neck (which currently are often put on only in order to have a photo with tourists). The more exotic tourist destination is presented in the catalogue, the more often are natives in it. This is why they are the most common element of photographs in catalogues of "Logos Tour" office specializing in exotic tourism. Reducing the number of photographs of hotel facilities for the benefit of "local colour" corresponds to the specificity of trips organized by the tour operator. Women shown in the pictures are recognizable by both costumes and activities. Thus, we can see photographs of a group of dark-skinned, half-naked women with babies strapped to their back with special scarves or while weaving baskets. There is a Cuban woman in a colourful costume with exposed arms, who is offering a basket of flowers or a Mexican woman sitting on a blanket and putting souvenirs on it. Local women, as opposed to tourists, may be older or even ugly (in the canon of the aesthetic beauty recognized in Europe). So "beautiful in a different way" is a Cuban woman with a long cigar and wearing a bright yellow dress; she is not in her first youth, but is smiling

<sup>9</sup> This in turn brings us to the ludic concept of tourism.

subtly and thus she is arousing sympathy with her mature face. In the pictures, exotic population enjoys life primarily through dance: laughing islanders of the Caribbean in colourful costumes are creating a parade full of energy; a Georgian woman in a folk garment is dancing in an empty street. Women are also shown in situations of "everyday life", for example, Chinese women who are sitting and talking (though the everyday situation is a little retouched, because all of them are wearing folk costumes). Colombia is symbolized by young girls dressed in tight tops that are more revealing than covering (which undoubtedly puts them in the role of sex objects)<sup>10</sup>.

It is also worth noticing that in popular images of 'exotic' societies a very strong element is a theme of poverty, which is shown in a way to be picturesque. Although dark-skinned women that are sitting on mats are obviously poor, the picture does not show dirt or poor sanitation, and the characters present smiling faces in photographs. "Positive imaging and euphoria, one of the characteristics of the tourism language, are creating the image of "a tropical paradise", "the place chosen by the gods", "an oasis of infinite beauty and eternal happiness." The metaphors carry the imagination of tourists into the world of mythical references, excluding from their experience what is ordinary and routine. [...] The technique of mystification is irreplaceable in the description of the countries economically and socially underdeveloped. The retouch of reality tends to expose romance and mystery, and to avoid images of poverty and backwardness, to rationalize the anxiety associated with going to a strange place." [Owsianowska 2013, e-document]

## Conclusion

The article was to present images of women in the selected tourist catalogues of the Polish largest tour operators from the semiotic perspective. The starting point for the analysis of the content became a theoretical discussion about the importance of catalogues for the tourist experience. A sociological and linguistic paradigm proposed by Graham Dana was adopted as the fundamental framework. A reference to the experience of gender studies relating to tourism was made; issues of the tourist experience stages and the role of literature in shaping perception of travel determining the nature of the experience were cited. The importance of a marketing machine in creating modern myths associated with travelling, with particular emphasis on the role of photography was emphasized.

The content analysis of the selected catalogues revealed that women dominate as images appearing in photographs. Generally, it should be noted that the photographs in catalogues form a specific demographic representation: the illustrations show almost exclusively representatives of Western civilization belonging to the white race. They are people at the age of their early thirties, very attractive physically. Covers are trying to suggest the catalogue contents - whether they are exotic trips or rather family trips or youth camps. The women in the photographs were divided into two basic categories: tourists (alone, in couples, with a family or in a group of friends) and non-tourists. It was shown that the images of women to a large extent duplicate patterns of gender representations rooted in the Euro-American culture. The catalogues themselves precondition the way of spending the holiday by tourists who seek to adjust their individual experience to the canons presented

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<sup>10</sup> Erotism is one of the oldest travel motivations and the sex tourism industry is one of the most important branches of the contemporary tourism. According to C. Enloe [1989] his strength is based on three factors: 1 Poverty, which is afflicting a huge number of the world's population is forcing women to participate voluntarily or under duress in the sex industry;

2 Political and economic institutions interested very much in encouraging men to consume sexual services in underdeveloped countries

3 Education of men in Western societies to perceive women in developing countries as the quintessential of exotic temptresses. Erotically marked images of women in tourism catalogues can contribute to the treatment of "exotic" women as sexual objects more easily "accessible" than women from Western societies.

in promotional and informational materials. Moreover, it is hard not to agree with Susan Sontag [2009, p 103] that the photographs are widely considered as a tool of cognition, but at the same time they have changed the way we see the world. You can even go further claiming that they change not only the way of seeing the world but being in this world.

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