

## HUMANISING MIGRANT WOMEN'S WORK

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## Abstract

Female migrants make an important contribution to the global tourism industry yet their employment experiences and histories are poorly understood. This paper draws on a phenomenological position to explore the life-world and ten-year employment trajectory of one highly skilled Polish immigrant to the UK as told through her own voice and artwork. It challenges prevailing de-personalised and gender-blind accounts of tourism migrant workers, and demonstrates the methodological potential of one-voice research to humanise the female migrant experience, document long-term employment trajectories and foreground complex working lives. The paper provides nuanced understanding of intersectional gendered and ethnic marginalisation in the labour market and explores the ways in which employment creates spaces for both oppression and self-determination for precarious workers.

## Key words

Women; migration; gender; precarious work; one-voice research; tourism labour.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Humanising explorations of migrant experiences could not be timelier in light of contemporary debates over global migration governance, trans-regionalism and national identity, and the politicization of immigration and integration, especially in Europe and North America (Koopmans, Lancee & Schaeffer, 2016). Contrary to popular misconceptions, it is skilled women who are at the forefront of many contemporary migration movements (Kofman, 2012) and their migration behaviour, use of social networks and employment challenges and opportunities differ markedly from men's (Anthias, Kontos & Morokvasic-Muller, 2013; Dyer, McDowell & Batnitzky, 2010; Lugosi, Janta, & Wilczek, 2017). Such migrant workers are hugely important to the global visitor economy and, whilst they have recently attracted increased attention (e.g. Baum et al., 2007; Janta, 2011; Janta & Ladkin, 2009; Janta, Ladkin, Brown & Lugosi, 2011; McDowell, Batnitzky & Dyer, 2008; Slavnic, 2013),

studies have not focused specifically on migrant women to examine their intersectional experiences.

Migrant women are triply disadvantaged in tourism employment as female, foreign and often low-status workers (Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan & Sedgley, 2013). Regardless of their skills and qualifications, they occupy predominantly low-paid, gendered and racialized roles and as a result, are vulnerable to exploitation and deskilling (Baum, 2013). This paper presents and analyses the story of Kasia, a Polish migrant, now in her 30s, as told through a series of in-depth interviews and her own artwork. Poles constitute 'the single largest foreign national group resident in the UK' (Pollard et al., 2008: 5) and many young, white, highly skilled, single Polish women work in the UK visitor economy. This paper seeks insights into their experiences and argues for greater inclusion of the subjective voices of migrant women and nuanced explorations of their working lives. As such, it challenges both tourism studies' reliance on multi-voice interviews and its gender-blind, de-personalised and homogenised representations of workers (Veijola, 2009a, 2009b).

As a study drawing on a phenomenological position and discussing sensitive issues of personal identity, it employed a person-centred, participant-led methodology. This approach is favoured by scholars in fields such as mental health and psychology (e.g. Gilbert, Rose & Slade 2008), where highly personalised testimonies have informed research and policy agendas, precisely because they embody emotion, experience, agency and individuality (Ray 2007). Central to this approach are the principles of critical humanism, which pay 'tribute to human subjectivity and creativity – showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble social worlds' and particularly focus on 'concrete human experiences – talk, feelings, actions...' (Plummer, 1983: 5). With so many accounts of migrant workers framed by negative media and political discourses, which reduce migrants' lives to homogenising descriptions, it is appropriate to turn to the subjective lived experience. By humanising an individual female migrant worker in this way, the paper provides a rich account of Kasia's complex post-migration experience and shifts the focus from the industry to the employee (Veijola, 2009a). It also demonstrates the capacity of one-voice research to complement traditional qualitative approaches in developing holistic understandings of employee lived experiences (Baum et al., 2016; Slavnic, 2013). Here, Kasia's testimony and artwork provide a fine-grained exposition of the complexities of her workplace experiences and interactions and

reveal how her tourism employment is both a realm of intersectional marginalisation and an opportunity for personal empowerment.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. *Migrant women, mobilities and working lives***

Migrant women are typically considered to be unskilled and therefore receive less scholarly attention than skilled migrant men (Kofman, 2012). Skilled migrant women actually outnumber migrant men but are disproportionately affected by deskilling processes, which depreciate their cultural and social capital (Dumont, Martin & Spielvogel, 2007). Migrant women's skills and qualifications are overwhelmingly under-valued in receiving countries, meaning they are often over-qualified for their jobs and/or work in sectors outside of their fields of expertise with low entry thresholds (Kofman, 2012), such as tourism (Sinclair, 1997). Women represent a high proportion of the visitor economy's migrant workforce, predominantly filling lower-skilled, lower-paid, and gendered positions, such as hotel housekeeper and receptionist (Ladkin, 2011). In the UK after 2004, white, young, single and educated EU8 migrant women filled many of its customer-facing roles, such as reception work, regarded as *white women's work* (Adib & Guerrier, 2003). EU8 is the term given to the eight Central and Eastern European countries (CEE), Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, that joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. Although they are often 'othered' in media discourses (Fox, Moroşanu & Szilassy, 2012), EU8 migrant women's whiteness constitutes a significant advantage in positions where emotional (Hochschild, 1983) and aesthetic labour (Nickson, Warhurst, Witz & Cullem, 2001) form an inseparable element of their job (Dyer et al., 2010).

Over-represented in unskilled low-paid jobs, EU8 migrant women are often exposed to exploitation and tend to accept poor working conditions, even though since the 2004 EU enlargement they currently constitute a legitimate UK workforce. In a 'migrant dense' industry like tourism, where over a fifth of all UK visitor economy workers were born outside the UK (People 1st, 2013), there is a risk that migrants 'could fall into the role of a semi-exploited (if often compliant) "underclass", with limited long-term prospects for social mobility and integration' (Sumption & Somerville, 2010: 29). Moreover, as tourism employers often classify migrants according to their country of origin, rather than their qualifications (Dyer et al., 2010), they regard EU8 migrants as willing to do any kind of job due to their

superior tourism employability skills, positive work attitudes and good customer service skills (Lyon & Sulcova, 2009; Anderson, Ruhs, Rogaly & Spencer, 2006). Nevertheless, EU8 migrants earn the least (Sumption & Somerville, 2010) and have the lowest rates of return on their education of any UK immigrant group (Drinkwater, Eade & Garapich, 2006) as employers 'assume that they [are] only capable of low-skilled work' (Baum et al., 2007: 237). Hence, EU8 citizens largely work in a precarious labour market with poor working conditions, which disproportionately affect women (Currie, 2009). Yet, very few challenge exploitative employment practices due to the cost, time and dismissal risk, which tribunals entail (Barnard, 2014). This prevalence of exploitation and harassment in tourism's low-paid and un-unionised workplaces are well established (Guerrier & Adib, 2000; Hoel & Einarsen, 2003), but few studies examine the intersection of gender, ethno-nationality and migration.

## **2.2. *Intersectionality and translocational positionality***

Several theoretical frameworks have been applied to gendered labour divisions and labour market inequalities, including 'emotional labour' (Hochschild, 1983), 'interactive work' (Leidner, 1993), aesthetic labour (Nickson et al., 2001), 'body work' (Wolkowitz, 2006), interpellation (McDowell et al., 2007) and performing (Kensbock, Jennings, Bailey, & Patiar, 2016). In this paper intersectionality is a key concept (Collins, 1990; Browne & Misra, 2003; McDowell, 2008; Valentine, 2007). Intersectionality emerged from black feminism and centres on those whose voices are ignored, examining the juncture of privilege and oppression (Nash, 2008). It constitutes a theoretical tool to analyse women's experiences of identity and repression, and highlights the subjectivity and multidimensionality of their lived experiences. Intersectionality 'emphasises the importance of attending to the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities' and highlights the 'need to simultaneously attend to processes of ethnicity, gender, class and so on in order to grasp the complexities of the social world and the multifaceted nature of social identities and advantage/disadvantage' (Anthias, 2012: 106).

The framework utilised in this paper – translocational positionality (Anthias, 2002, 2008) – has evolved from the intersectional approach, is embedded within it and is applied in the context of migration. Translocational positionality is conceptualised as 'a tool for making sense of the positions and outcomes produced through intersections between a number of different social structures and processes, including transnational ones' (Anthias, 2012: 107).

It moves away from considering intersectionality as an interplay of categories of class, gender, ethnicity and sees it as a process, which gives rise to specific forms of positionality for social actors; it pays particular attention to social locations and processes and 'relates to both structures of power and how these impact on people's lives and identifications in complex and often highly contradictory ways' (Anthias, 2012: 108). The concept considers 'issues of identity in terms of locations which are not fixed but are context, meaning and time related and which therefore involve shifts and contradictions' (Anthias, 2008: 5) - as exemplified through Kasia's trajectory.

The working lives and voices of migrant women have been left on the outskirts of tourism scholarship. Indeed, little is known about the employment trajectories of female migrant workers, with the exceptions of domestic, healthcare and sex workers (e.g. Anderson, 2007; Brush & Vasupuram, 2006; Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; McDowell, 2009; Parreñas, 2001). Yet, given migrant women's significance to the visitor economy, tourism labour research can play a leading role in understanding the complex nature of their employment trajectories and thereby contribute to 'current wider societal debates' (Ladkin, 2011: 1135-1136) over migration, integration and citizenship. In this paper, the lens of translocational positionality serves to explore the working life of a female migrant tourism worker through narratives of location, which are also accounts of dislocation and alterity, essentially 'stories about time and space', which involve 'dislocation and relocation at multiple levels: structural, cultural and personal' (Anthias, 2002: 499).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Feminism promotes women's essential right to have a 'voice' (Araujo, 1999) and this study centralises 'a situated woman with experiences and knowledge specific to her in the material division of labour and the racial stratification system' (Olesen, 2000: 222). It integrates standpoint and post-structural feminism, approaches that are 'at their most powerful when developed in combination' (Aitchison, 2005: 221). Standpoint feminism 'builds on and from women's experiences, placing the lives and subjective interpretations of marginalised people at the heart of research' (Humberstone, 2004: 120), whilst post-structural feminism goes beyond uncovering structural inequalities by acknowledging the role of women in constructing survival strategies and negotiating, contesting and transforming power relations. As a feminist exploration of a migrant woman worker's experiences, our study thereby

responds to calls to challenge both 'the exclusion and occlusion of under-powered voices in our societies' (Richards, Pritchard & Morgan, 2010: 1098) and homogenising, gender-blind studies of tourism employees (Duncan, Scott and Baum, 2013).

To achieve this, we draw on a phenomenological position to uncover the affective, relational, lived experiences (Habermas, 1987) of a migrant women employed in tourism. As a theoretical position phenomenology is concerned to investigate the ways in which people experience their reality, how they engage with people and the meanings these relationships hold (Eatough & Smith, 2007). In contrast to approaches, which attempt to generalise participants' thoughts and feelings, it explores the nuances of an individual's lifeworld; as such we make no claim that are our findings are 'representative' or 'generalizable' or without interpretation. Whilst critics may regard this as a flawed approach, we present this project in light of recognized qualitative research studies, which reveal and celebrate such imperfections (Parker, 2004). We utilised the well-established psychological methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, Osborn 1997), previously used on a range of projects to investigate for example, experiences of people with mental and physical health problems (Schweitzer et al., 2012; Lawson, et al., 2013). This methodological approach affords attention to the lived experience of the individuals, including their feelings, emotions, belief systems, and their understanding of behaviours. As Chodorow (1999, p.166) explains, it addresses the: "...web of thought-infused feelings and feeling-infused thoughts experienced by an individual as she creates her own psychic life within a set of interpersonal and cultural relations".

Qualitative researchers frequently address the question of 'how many interviews?' Answers vary by epistemological perspective, discipline and research context and question, with 'a wealth of epistemological writings [making]... the argument for the single case approach' (Adler & Adler, 2012: 8). Such one-voice or single-case research is particularly valuable in research projects, such as ours, which foreground the testimonies of marginalised people (Ashby, 2011). There are prominent examples of 'one-voice' studies in disability research (e.g. Ashby, 2011) and in oral history (e.g. Passerini, 2012; Sandino, 2012) that demonstrate how one case is sufficient since it 'involves a method of instances' (Denzin, 2012: 6). Single cases have been used in life and work history studies and in feminist explorations of women's subjective and situated experiences, recognising the value of the 'common life' (Araujo, 1999; Chase, 2005). Such life and work history methods create powerful accounts of

participants as social actors in their own right (Sosulski, Buchanan & Donnell, 2010: 35) and provide clarity on under-explored subjects (Gray 2003). In IPA research there has been similar debate regarding an optimum sample size, with notable projects based on one participant (Eatough & Smith, 2006). Indeed, IPA researchers would contend that sample sizes in excess of three people result in a diffusion of the lived experience of the individual, and a reduction of the interpretations of their unique life world: the very key characteristics that define IPA (Reid et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2009).

Despite their potential to provide nuanced insights, tourism studies based on auto-ethnography (e.g. Slavnic, 2013) or one voice are rare as most qualitative researchers in the field use traditional multi-voiced approaches (Harris, 2009). Whilst a single case approach cannot and would not claim the scope of those interviewing more participants, the deep and profound relationship established between the researcher and respondent dissolves asymmetric power relations, providing an in-depth, participatory and even empowering account of subjective experiences (Wolcott, 2012); in this case narrating one woman's oppression and resistance (Olesen, 2000). Moreover, whilst for some research questions it is useful to collect and analyse aggregate data to uncover patterns and processes, for others it is more important to gather individual, rich and complex information (Ladkin, 2004). As Plummer (1983: 102) argues, '[i]f the subjective story is what the researcher is after, the life history approach becomes the most valid method'.

Whilst this paper reports Kasia's story, the single case belies a large effort. Kasia was a participant-researcher in a larger six-month-long multi-method study designed to explore how gender, age and ethno-nationality intersect and how media discourses and low status work impact on migrant women's experiences and career opportunities in tourism. Kasia's story was chosen above those of other participants for several reasons. Firstly, her migrant journey and career in tourism employment began before the 2004 EU enlargement and spans over a decade, offering an in-depth insight into long-term career trajectory. Secondly, Kasia's long history of employment in tourism, with high spatial and occupational mobility, helps capture the transitions and complex nature of tourism work. Thirdly, Kasia's trajectory, as a young, single, highly skilled migrant woman who saw tourism as a career choice, mirrors those of many EU8 women tourism workers. In this respect, it gives voice to some of the inherent issues highly skilled migrant women face in the industry.

Kasia shared her post-migration employment experiences in a series of three unstructured interviews and produced her own artwork entitled '*On the road*' (Figure 1) with the aim of releasing 'vivid memories, feelings, insights, thoughts and memories' (Collier, 2001: 46). Accompanied by Kasia's auto-ethnographic commentary (Figure 2), the artwork was subsequently exhibited at a public arts event, alongside other installations by EU8 migrant women tourism workers. Over the six-month period leading up to the exhibition, a number of one-to-one meetings discussed the process of artwork creation. The final interview was an artwork elicitation interview (Collier & Collier, 1986; Emmison & Smith, 2000; Heisley & Levy, 1991; Kolb, 2008), during which Kasia explained her process of artwork creation and interpreted the collage. She reflected on participating in the study and creating the collage: 'If I had an opportunity to do more things like this, I would ... it proves that you are creative, involved in other things ... You have an opportunity to get to know yourself better'.

The nature of the study – the frequency of meetings and six-month collaboration – provided a chance for the lead researcher (a Polish migrant woman and a former tourism worker) to build a close rapport with Kasia (and other participants in the study); a relationship based on trust and empathy; and a bond that lasted beyond the project. This meant that there was a responsibility to represent her subjective experience without overly abstracting it. As a participant-researcher and the expert on her own migrant experiences, Kasia has commented extensively on this paper, although she decided against being a named co-author. Narratives of location have been chosen as the most suitable way to represent Kasia's working life and migration journey. These are accounts that tell 'a story about how we place ourselves in terms of social categories such as those of gender, ethnicity and class at a specific point in time and space' and do not always 'have a beginning, plot or ending; they are composed of fragments whose place in the whole text is emergent and at times contradictory' (Anthias, 2002: 498-499).

Figure 1: Kasia's collage

Figure 2: On the road... Kasia's accompanying artwork commentary

#### **4. A MIGRANT WOMAN'S NARRATIVES OF LOCATION**

#### **4.2. *Spatial and occupational relocations: territories of gendered and precarious work***

Kasia's story gives us an insight into her multiple relocations, fluid migrant status and occupational mobility in three different UK cities over more than a decade. She arrived in the UK on a language student visa as part of the mobility, which followed Poland's transition to a free market economy in the early 1990s. Kasia was an experiential and an economic migrant. She saw migration as an opportunity to experience living abroad, although Poland's female high unemployment and significant gender pay gap at that time of socio-economic and political transition (Coyle, 2007; Heinen & Portet, 2009; Schmitt & Trappe, 2010) also influenced her decision to leave. As a young, single, highly skilled woman she saw her migration as open-ended. She arrived with a Master degree in Economics and having written her thesis on hotel competition, sought a career in the hotel industry: 'It seemed to be the right professional path at that time I wanted to follow'. Prior to 2004, Polish migrants on a student visa could work in the UK for up to 20 hours per week (Anderson et al., 2006), so after initially working in a drycleaners, Kasia soon became a receptionist in a London hotel. Thus she began her decade-long career in the UK's visitor economy.

Kasia soon discovered that her status as a non-EU migrant made her vulnerable to exploitation as she was denied her days off, excluded from tips and threatened that if she left the country, she would have no job on her return:

When I wanted to extend my student visa and go to Holland only for couple of days, the woman [a colleague] tried to pressurise me, by saying that when I get back, there may not be the job for me anymore at the hotel ... Getting a day off on the weekend was a big problem or any day really, whatever request I made, there was a big fuss. She tried to convince me that I would not find a job anywhere else. She knew people from outside EU were more vulnerable and desperate for jobs... They were doing many unfair things on purpose, I realised it after some time.

Knowing that her working rights as a migrant were limited, Kasia stayed in that hotel for a year, tolerating unfair treatment. Her non-EU migrant status became an overriding issue at work, negatively impacting on her experience, increasing her vulnerability and limiting her choices. For Kasia, her early experience in the hotel industry was particularly difficult as her limited English language proficiency, lack of support networks (Lugosi et al., 2017) and inadequate knowledge of worker rights led to a normalisation of exploitation.

After a year, Kasia relocated to Egypt to work as a tourist representative, returning to London six months later when Poland, together with the other EU8 countries, joined the EU and thus as a Polish citizen, she gained unlimited access to British labour markets. As a result, Kasia felt less vulnerable and more confident that new opportunities would open up for her: 'the fact that we could now work legally in the UK... brought a big change for us, we felt safer here and it was much easier for us.' Translocational positionality 'relates to the importance of context, meaning and time in the construction of positionality' and 'to the shifting locales of peoples' lives in terms of movements and flows' (Anthias, 2008: 17). For Kasia, gaining EU citizenship shifted her positionality and increased her agency, since her status changed from vulnerable irregular migrant with limited rights to a worker with (in principle) complete access to labour markets.

As an EU citizen with full employment rights, Kasia continued to pursue a career in hotels. Over the next few years, she moved from one hotel receptionist job to another, relocating from London to Bristol and then to Edinburgh, a hypermobility common among migrant tourism workers (Duncan et al., 2013), especially EU8 women (Rydzik, Pritchard, Morgan & Sedgley, 2012). As hotel receptionist jobs were plentiful and employers regarded EU8 migrants as hardworking, Kasia found it easy to move from one hotel to another, although usually at the minimum wage. Many such service sector jobs are considered appropriate for women due to their association with 'feminine skills', creating a female dominance at the bottom of the labour market (McDowell, 2013), roles often occupied by overqualified migrant women. Employers in this sector have been said to make stereotypical assumptions based on national characteristics and/or gender, and to not value qualifications (Dyer et al., 2010). Kasia certainly felt that her employers failed to value her education, saying: 'I haven't noticed that my education matters [when applying for jobs]'. In her experience, her nationality and gender remained the main determinants of her employment opportunities, so that despite being highly educated and, by now very experienced, she remained limited to low-skilled, low-paid, gendered customer service roles. Translocations are defined by boundaries and hierarchies (Anthias, 2008). Yet, despite the increased employment protection offered by her EU citizenship and even with relocating across countries, cities and workplaces, as a white-skinned Polish woman, national and gender stereotypes combined to deskill Kasia in the job market.

### **4.3. Alterity: White Yet Other**

There is an intimate relationship between migrants' work-based negotiations of self and others and wider public and media discourse, some of which are revealed in Kasia's story and in the artwork she created for this project. The media play a leading role in shaping perceptions of migrants within local communities by entering 'our collective social understanding' of inclusion or exclusion (Tickner, 1984: 19). As the numbers of EU8 citizens in the UK grew after 2004, Eastern European migrants became increasingly stigmatised in the British media and political discourses (Fox et al., 2012; Rasinger, 2010). Kasia describes her awareness of this growing tendency 'to over-exaggerate certain things and provoke reactions'. She confronts these negative representations in her collage '*On the road...*' (Figure 1) and in her commentary (Figure 2), in which she negotiated her female migrant identity. She says: 'I wanted to present my life, my reality, such as everyday life, holiday, work, and contrast it with the portrayals in the media'. Divided into three parts, the collage is constructed to juxtapose Kasia's lived experiences with stereotyped representations, which she considers to be simplistic, homogenising and unrepresentative of Eastern European women living in the UK: 'I do not copy these stereotypes. I am a person who leads a normal life... Women who have awareness of what is happening can change it and can prove that this bad opinion isn't necessarily true'. Kasia believes that negative stereotyping of Eastern European women could be confronted on an individual level. However, with the media increasingly othering migrants through homogenised, sexualised and objectified portrayals of Eastern European women, Kasia felt the impact of these reductive media portrayals in her work interactions as customers' reactions to her accent made her aware of her Eastern European otherness.

On the one hand, Kasia's white skin privileges her compared to some migrant groups, but on the other hand her accent represents a disadvantage and makes her otherness salient. As McDowell (2008: 53) argues, '[n]ot all white skins signify equally-valued people', as 'whiteness is a fluid and mutable concept' and there exist hierarchies of whiteness. Kasia describes feeling this through unpleasant customer interactions:

I had an impression that the customer wanted... to see your reaction... perhaps, you know how it is, to find a reason to have a laugh or to stress you, to show you your place... many customers were pretending they couldn't understand me, although I tried to speak very clearly.... It's a general feeling as sometimes they don't have to say anything because if you ask something and that person

recognizes you are foreign, you see this person will look at you differently. It's automatic and evident.

Kasia actively challenged this behavior and developed a coping strategy to deal with the asymmetric power relations in such situations:

In the beginning it was irritating me greatly and I was getting stressed in front of them. But then I decided the more I take it calmly, the better the effects. And it worked... So my method was to speak even clearer, like to a child learning how to read and write. So such a person, seeing my firm approach and that I didn't want it to affect me and I wasn't getting shy, started to behave more respectfully... And also I noticed that with time I learnt to just put [on] a sweet smile and say slowly: "Could you repeat that please?"... If the customer has the right and calm approach, it helps you and you calm down. However, if somebody looks down on you it's not a pleasant feeling.

For front-line workers like Kasia, their race, ethnicity, nationality, age and gender as well as physical appearance, voice, accent and behaviour form an inseparable part of their work persona, impacting on how they are perceived and treated, as '[g]endered and racialized stereotypes have particular power in customer-facing jobs' (Dyer et al., 2010: 637). Whilst Kasia tried to take control and to confront negative discourses on an individual level, her experiences show that public and media discourse structures exert a powerful influence over one's positionality and limit individual agency as 'being labelled as a member of a national or racialised group may affect how one sees oneself and ideas of belonging and otherness' (Anthias, 2008: 14). Thus, Kasia's experiences are not isolated from media discourses on migration but rather impact on her self-perception and identity formation, which she articulated in her artwork and negotiated within her working environment.

#### **4.4. *Dislocations: Disillusionment and Withdrawal***

After several years of working as a hotel receptionist, Kasia secured a position in hotel reservation, which meant that she left the front desk. She was not the inexperienced, vulnerable immigrant who had arrived in the UK but someone who knew her industry and her employment rights. However, within 10 months she was demoted back to reception and unfairly dismissed, an incident, which had a considerable emotional impact but also demonstrated her resilience in confronting unfair treatment. This part of her story is quoted at length.

One day she [the manager] gave me a letter stating that I don't do my duties properly and that there will be a meeting... Two other people were made redundant... but in my case I was being dismissed which means that you've done something wrong and this has to be proven. According to the law, first you are supposed to be warned orally three times before you get the dismissal letter. This never happened... I read the letter with the cosmic accusations, and I found out that I had one month of work left and had to move for that month to reception. They made other people redundant and paid them one month salary and they didn't have to go to work anymore. In my case I was supposed to go to work... My nerves couldn't take it, I lost appetite and everything and I told myself I won't give up... Finally, I did go to work to reception. However, I couldn't take it and additionally, the manager told me off for something. At the end of my shift I told her that I'm very sorry but I'm leaving because I cannot work like that. She started shouting at me so I left the place... I went to the doctor and got one week sick note... The doctor wrote a note that it was stress related. Because the situation was not pleasant at all and I'm not a marionette to shuffle me from one place to another. I decided to appeal because I thought that it was not fair what they did...

The main manager set a meeting... During the meeting I presented my point of view and my arguments... I also asked if the hotel made any losses in terms of group bookings due to my actions. There were no such situations. They couldn't present any proof of my supposed mistakes or comparison with other staff members. I asked if there were any complaints from customers. They didn't have anything and were not able to present any proof. I also presented all the emails from customers praising my service and thanking me... I presented all my arguments and that was the only reason for appealing. I didn't want my job back. I wanted to hear a response to my questions and explanations of the unfair accusations made against me. They had no evidence, and each question I asked the reply was: 'Well, no'. I didn't have to go there again. They paid me my monthly salary as they paid others who got made redundant.

Having now become proficient in English, with a firm knowledge of her workers' rights, Kasia was confident in confronting her employers and in defending her case, actively refusing to be perceived and treated as a vulnerable and precarious worker (Currie, 2009; Slavnic, 2013). Kasia was not the same person who had normalised her unfair treatment several years previously as the spatial and temporal context of her experience and value system had changed. Following this experience, Kasia needed a steady income and so returned to reception work in another hotel. Three years later, she was still working in that same hotel reception, earning just above the minimum wage. Despite her qualifications, broad industry experience and hard work, she was never promoted again: 'apart from hotels in London, where the teams tend to be very international, it's generally quite difficult to get through'. Although she still saw her career in tourism, Kasia felt disillusioned with the discriminatory

management practices she had experienced and with her lack of development opportunities. After three years of being unappreciated and marginalised, with her suggestions to improve operational practice constantly ignored, Kasia's motivation was all but gone:

There is no feeling that one is developing or is appreciated, or that somebody wants to do something to improve the workplace and increase the profit... Several times I mentioned a few things, but nobody cares... So that's why I'd like to rethink my employment within this hotel. What would motivate me to stay, apart from the financial side, would be better organisation and attention from the managers' side.

Like many migrant workers, Kasia felt that her employers not only failed to acknowledge her skills and qualifications (Janta, et al. 2011) but considered her 'only capable of low-skilled work' (Devine et al., 2007: 129) and assumed that 'international workers are temporary and do not need to be included in normal career development, promotional or training initiatives' (Devine et al., 2007: 128). Thus, despite her qualifications, English proficiency, employment experience and her clear desire to have a long-term career in the industry, Kasia was unacknowledged and unrewarded by her employers, who offered her few developmental or promotion opportunities. Seeing her ambitions for career development again stalled, Kasia decided to leave:

[W]hen you get to know the place and your job, and you don't see any possibilities of development, then the need to change comes by itself.... There are not many opportunities for development in the hotel where I work now and this is also a bit tiring.

However, this proved problematic and her applications for managerial positions in Polish hotels were unsuccessful:

On the one hand, as I have experience in hospitality, it would be easier to continue within this industry. On the other hand, I don't really know exactly what I'd like to do and in which direction to go. Sometimes I'm really passionate about hospitality but sometimes I've got really enough, so I could try somewhere else.

Kasia moved to Edinburgh to start anew and applied for a range of jobs but, as employment in tourism was her only work experience, her options once again proved limited. Her first two job offers were as hotel receptionists and due to her financial situation, she accepted one in a four-star hotel chain even though it was an entry-level zero-hours contract on a salary below what she earned in Bristol. That the hotel did not offer her a role commensurate with her extensive experience as a receptionist perhaps above all else, demonstrates just how little appreciation employers have for migrant workers' skills, experience and qualifications and how they view them as transient workers suitable for only low-skilled jobs (Baum et al., 2007). After 10 years of being denied a genuine route to promotion and career development, Kasia finally decided to leave the hotel industry, to switch her career path, to retrain in sports science and move into what she hopes will be higher paid work. Her story provides a rich insight into the complexities, transitions, contradictions and shifting locales of a highly qualified migrant woman tourism worker. Above all, her decade-long employment trajectory reflects the 'multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities' (Anthias, 2012: 106). Kasia's ten-year journey from her first employment in the UK up until her withdrawal from the industry provides an unique insight into the sustained deskilling of an educated and experienced migrant woman. Seen through the translocational positionality lens, her story enables us to see the importance of context and how, through multiple mobilities and relocations and dislocations, structures of power ultimately stalled her preferred career path.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

As a feminist exploration of one migrant woman's experiences, which draws on a phenomenological position, this paper contributes to a tourism research agenda which challenges the silencing of under-powered voices (Richards et al., 2010) and confronts homogenising, androcentric and gender-blind studies of tourism employees and migrant experiences (Duncan et al., 2013). The UK visitor economy, like many worldwide, is heavily reliant on female migrants (People 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013), workers who are both disadvantaged in the labour market and overlooked by academia, where the dominant business and managerial approaches neglect the practical and theoretical value of the employee perspective (Ladkin, 2011). Yet, to appreciate the fine-grained complexities, contradictions and paradoxes of tourism work, it is important to approach it through the experiences of those whose voices

are often unheard (Anderson et al., 2007); those 'crucial agents of expertise, experience, knowledge and know-how in the tourism industry' - the workers themselves (Veijola, 2009a: 83). Engaged in emotional and aesthetic labour in stressful, low-paid customer-facing roles, these women are key to the quality of the tourist experience but remain under-valued at every level and by most influential players (Janta et al., 2011).

Whilst tourism employers praise the high education levels of their EU8 migrant workers (Lyon & Sulcova, 2009), there is little evidence that they value their skills and often hire migrants as flexible labour, aiming for profit maximisation which 'underpins the notion that people employed are a resource or cost to be minimised and controlled, rather than a resource to be nurtured and developed' (Lucas & Mansfield, 2008: 4). Employers need to recognise the skills and qualifications of their migrant employees and provide career progression opportunities in order to improve job satisfaction and employee retention. However, 'ready access to low cost migrant labour, both legal and illegal, permits many tourism businesses to... ignore issues of productivity, skills development and general workplace enhancement' (Baum, 2007: 1396). Many tourism employers regard migrants as transient employees, who after improving their English will simply move to other sectors (Janta & Ladkin, 2009). Yet, whilst tourism work can be a 'refuge' or a stopgap employment for some migrants (Janta et al., 2011; Szivas & Riley, 1999), for others like Kasia, it constitutes their long-term career-choice. Yet as her story illustrates, such skilled migrants often become trapped in a cycle of low-paid, low-skilled work, regardless of their experience or qualifications. By providing insight into the employment trajectory of one highly skilled migrant woman, the paper has therefore humanised (Plummer, 2001) and illuminated just how 'current practices and conditions in the sector are a clear obstacle for long term career commitment' (Janta, 2011: 1017) for these workers.

The paper has also shown the value of adopting an intersectional approach, in particular the translocational positionality lens (Anthias, 2002, 2008, 2012), to explore tourism labour market inequalities and workplace power relations (Browne & Misra, 2003). By exploring how gender, ethno-nationality (i.e. East-European-ness, Polishness), migration and age intersect in shaping the experiences, identities and opportunities of a white migrant woman, the paper contributes to existing studies of the intersection of gender, ethno-nationality, hierarchies of whiteness and age in tourism labour research (e.g. Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Dyer et al., 2010; McDowell, 2009). In particular, by examining tourism work through

the perspective of one individual, the study complements traditional multi-voice qualitative methods to develop nuanced, empowering, collaborative and humanised understandings of a migrant woman's work and life. The one-voice approach provides rich, insightful and less fragmented understandings and Kasia's story privileges the often marginalised, depersonalised and silenced voices of migrant women, revealing her experiences of discrimination and de-skilling, her coping strategies whilst working the front desk and her resistance to unfair employment practices.

Considerably more research is needed into the career trajectories of highly skilled migrant women and especially into the barriers and levers to their career progression in the tourism industry. Given contemporary movements of displaced populations and the subsequent politicization of immigration and integration, especially in Europe and North America (Koopmans et al., 2016), research is also required to understand the experience of other precarious workers in the tourism sector, such as relocated refugees. Such studies can provide an evidence base to inform labour market policy and employment practice and can counter persuasive stereotypical assumptions about the suitability of migrant women for supervisory and managerial roles. Whilst one-voice approaches such as that employed here have limitations and do not claim the authority of scope or scale (Wolcott, 2012), they do provide powerful human testimonies of women workers' hopes, fears, transformations and resistances. Certainly when looking at one person's experience in isolation of others it is difficult to disentangle those factors that shape her unique experiences from those affecting other migrants and in places other workers. As such, as with all good qualitative research, we acknowledge that there are alternative readings of Kasia's story (see for example Willig, 2013). However, approaching labour issues from the perspective of the worker's voice has potential to further the field of tourism research in many ways (Veijola, 2009b). Indeed, given migrant women workers' significance to the visitor economy worldwide, tourism labour research can play a leading role in understanding the complex nature of their employment trajectories and thereby contribute beyond the field to 'current wider societal debates' (Ladkin, 2011: 1135-1136) over migration, integration and citizenship.

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Figure 2: On the road... Kasia's accompanying artwork commentary

**ON THE ROAD...**

In this collage, I wanted to present how I perceive the stereotypes of Eastern European women in the British media along with fragments of my life in UK.

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**Part I:** Shows my daily activities and my reality in the UK (anywhere else probably would be a very similar story) including working, shopping, cooking, and the most exiting part of my life – holidays. As the collage shows, despite the fact I come from Eastern Europe, my life is not much different from Western European girls (may be even better in some cases). This contradicts the stereotypes used in the British media, as you can mainly see in Part III.

No matter how good Eastern European girls are, there will always be background stereotypes created by the media, so as migrants we must keep up and carry on with our life!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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**Part II:** It's me with travelling in my mind. Still so many places to see. Above me is the unknown road to follow, mine, yours, his, hers, theirs, ours.

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**Part III:** Presents typical opinions about Polish women, which can be found in the British media. Although most of the time this is negative, positive comments can also be spotted. The small drawings show the most popular professions of Eastern European women in the UK.

**Thank you for your attention 😊**