

Mothering tourists: a feminist political economy of  
tourism homestays in Guatemala

Paper prepared for European Conference on Politics and Gender 2017

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*\*Draft conference paper: please do not cite without authors' permission\**

## Abstract

This paper engages with recent debates on social reproduction in feminist political economy which have analysed issues such as migration and the global household, as well as attempts to conceptualise and account for the contribution of social reproduction to the global economy. It explores the conceptual foundations of social reproduction – namely, economic difference; alternative economies; and the centring of the household and social provisioning – and contemporary attempts to account for social reproduction in international institutions. In order to explore this further, the paper takes the case of tourism ‘homestays’ in Antigua, Guatemala. These ‘ways to stay’ form part of the informal tourism economy, in which tourists are provided with a ‘host-family’ – in particular a ‘host-mum’ – during their stay in Guatemala. Homestays are therefore co-produced through embodied enactments of ‘real family’. Through immersing oneself in a Guatemalan family, students are promised to not only increase their language skills and cultural capital, but also to have a Guatemalan familial experience which is represented and often experienced as being both ‘authentic’ and ‘unique’. In this paper, we interrogate the gendered social reproductive labour that is involved in homestays. Using the lens of economic difference and exploring the performative labour of (de-)differentiation, we consider what this specific kind of economic activity can tell us about social reproduction in global political economy.

## Introduction

A key component of feminist political economy projects is the de-centring of certain aspects of economic life, such as the market and the workplace, in favour of other sites such as the household. This involves an explicit engagement with non-market aspects of economic life and the ways in which these interact with and shape market relations. The political goal of such a project is to work towards societies where 'caring and provisioning are not gendered and racialized but rather are the framework that guides all of our actions' (Desai 2007: 802). Following this tradition, this paper explores recent attempts to conceptualise and account for the non-market aspects of economic life, usually referred to as social reproduction by feminist political economists. To date, empirical studies of social reproduction have tended to focus on areas such as migration or the global household. In contrast, this paper explores an under-researched aspect of gendered political economy – tourism homestays in Guatemala. The paper is concerned with three key questions: how do we understand the gendered social reproductive labour involved in tourism homestays in Guatemala? What economies and strategies of (de-)differentiation are evident? What can an exploration of tourism homestays in Guatemala contribute to our understandings of the global political economy of social reproduction?

Tourism is the world's largest industry and it is growing. Tourism accounts for 5% of the world's GDP, 6-7% of global employment and 30% of the world's export of commercial services (citation?). Besides its economic importance, there are a number of key reasons why tourism is interesting for the study of feminist political economy. First, it is female dominated. Worldwide, women make up 55.4 percent of the tourism workforce, with the lowest levels of female employment in the tourism workforce found in Egypt (2.4 percent ), and levels as high as 76.3 percent in Peru and 65 percent in Thailand (ILO 2013: 39). Second, the tourism labour force is highly gender-segregated, with women making up 90 percent of all employees as servers, cleaners, travel agency sales persons and tour guides (ILO 2013: 7). Third, the industry draws on and reinforces gender inequalities through its reliance on the 'embodied attributes of the worker, and his/her ability to perform emotional labor' (Webster 2010: 188). Recruitment in tourism enterprises tends to draw on 'male-constructed and male-biased gender stereotypes and to place women in occupations which in many respects crystallise and intensify their subordinate positions in society' (Chant 1997: 161). Nevertheless, to date tourism has received little attention in the feminist political economy literature. Likewise, the gender and tourism literature has not engaged substantively with feminist political economy analyses (exceptions include Ferguson 2010a; Vandegrift 2008: 794; Gentry 2007; and Tucker and Boonabaana 2012).

In this paper we are concerned with a specific aspect of the global tourism industry – homestays – which are located within the informal tourism economy. Homestays are an interesting phenomenon for feminist political economy due to the family discourse and performances which surround and produce them; that is, they are co-produced through embodied enactments of ‘real family’. If family is not performed then the homestay fails; it becomes another kind of commercial home. What is being produced and sold, then, is a set of reproductive services – including clean and safe accommodation and three meals a day, as well as conversation and care – *and* the experience of being integrated into a family, whose home and daily lives become a spectacle that one participates in. Homestays are also highly gendered, with ‘host-mums’ providing the majority of the reproductive and performative labour. The context of homestays, whereby women provide marketised social reproductive services and performances of family in the household to paying guests alongside non-marketised reproductive labour to permanent household and family members, provides a fruitful context for exploring the complexities of everyday economic difference and processes of (de)differentiation. Despite these clear gender dimensions of homestays, to date the literature on homestays has had little to say to feminist political economy approaches.

As such, the paper is primarily situated at the intersection of three sets of literature: the gendered political economy of social reproduction, the gender dimensions of tourism development, and literature on homestays. It draws from the insights of all fields in order to explore what the gendered nature of tourism and homestays can tell us about the political economy of social reproduction, and vice versa. The paper draws upon five months of ethnographic field research conducted in the small city of La Antigua Guatemala (Antigua for short), Guatemala’s main tourism destination and a popular Spanish-learning destination, of which homestays are a key part of the tourism experience. The first part of the paper defines homestays and sets out the context and methodology of the research. The paper is then developed in three further sections, which address the substantive issues raised by the research findings: intersections between gender, class, and nationality; performing motherhood for tourists; and the gendered labour of (de-)differentiation. In the conclusion, we explore what this analysis of tourism homestays can contribute to our understandings of the gendered political economy of social reproduction and identify future lines of enquiry in this area.

### **Setting the scene: homestays in Antigua, Guatemala**

In contrast to other approaches (Lynch 2005a), we suggest that it is not the private space of the home which makes a homestay, but rather the family discourse and performances which surround and (re)produce them. The discursive apparatus surrounding homestays is very different from other

commercial homes offering hospitality for a price. Instead of using terms such as 'landlady/landlord' or 'host', hosts are called 'family' and descriptors such as 'host-mum', 'host-dad', and 'host-sisters and -brothers' are used. Very different from the discursive scripts attached to 'landlady' or 'host', calling someone a 'host-mum' or '-dad' can produce parental identities and kin-like relations (see, e.g. Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart 2002; Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight 2004). Furthermore, host-families aim to treat their paying guests like 'real family'. Thus, it is not enough to simply take a tourist into a private home; the tourist must also be integrated into daily activities and familial affairs (as outlined in detail below). Such interaction is rarely offered in other commercial hospitality homes. According to Kontogeorgopoulos et al. (2013) it is the intensity and, ultimately, intrusive quality of the interaction offered in homestays which separates them from other commercial hospitality homes. Taking a performance perspective suggests that merely staying in a private home does not make a homestay. Rather, homestays are co-produced through embodied enactments of 'real family'. Following, this means that the homestay can fail. If the people involved do not perform family, the homestay can very easily turn into another kind of commercial hospitality home.

The interrelationship between home, gender, and commercial hospitality is explored in Tucker's work on cave-homes in Turkey, where she shows how gendered spatial divisions play out in such spaces (Tucker 2008: 129). Brandt and Haugen explore women's work in family farm tourism in Norway and Spain, arguing that to some extent such work has challenged gendered power relations in the household (Brandt and Haugen 2007). Acharya and Halpenny's research on homestays in Nepal also concludes that these are 'pro-woman' tourism opportunities which foster gender equality (Acharya and Halpenny 2013). In contrast, Mottiar and Laurincikova show how female home-based entrepreneurs in Ireland have not challenged gendered roles but rely on the extension of domestic roles, and that such work perpetuates gender inequity by reinforcing women's greater responsibility for childcare and household management (Mottiar and Laurincikova 2008: 48). However, for our purposes, the current literature on women's work in commercial hospitality homes falls short for two reasons. First, it does not engage with feminist political economy analyses and therefore does not address issues of social reproduction in any substantive way. Second, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies on household tourism enterprises in the Global South. The aim here is to bridge these gaps, as well as highlight how a feminist political economy analysis of homestays offers new theoretical insights.

The paper draws on the feminist political economy tradition, which decentres the analysis away from the mainstream areas of political economy analysis such as states and markets. Instead, the

household becomes one of many sites in which economic activity takes place. Focusing on the household creates a bottom-up approach to political economy in which everyday social provisioning is conceptualised as the starting point of all economic activity, as opposed to a marginalised and invisibilised aspect. In doing this, previously marginalised aspects of economic life – the ‘micropolitics and minutiae of the everyday’ (Silvey 2008: 112) – are woven into our analysis, and local processes and small-scale actors are re-cast as ‘the very fabric of globalisation’ (Freeman 2001: 1009). For example, as Avakian and Haber (2005: 1) argue in relation to feminist approaches to food, ‘studying the most banal of human activities can yield crucial information and insights about both daily life and world view, from what is in the pot to the significance of the fire that heats it’. Following Safri and Graham (2010), we understand the household as an economic actor which produces and distributes a large quantum of social wealth in the form of unpaid household labour, household-based business income, monetary and in-kind remittances, and gifts. It thus participates in international production, finance, and trade in addition to the coordination of international migration (Safri and Graham 2010: 100). Based on extensive calculations, they conclude that non-capitalist production in the household in the form of domestic and caring services by household members accounts for as much as half of world economic activity, estimating the value of gross global household product in 2006 at \$4.8 trillion, a significant quantum of social wealth’ (Safri and Graham 2010: 111). While home-based work has long been a focus of feminist inquiry (see, for example, Prügl 1999 for a global perspective; Floro and Pichetpongsa 2010 on Thailand; or López Estrada 2002 on Mexico), what is distinct about homestays is the fact that home, family, and embodied self become part of the product consumed, raising new questions around economic difference and highlighting strategic processes of (de-)differentiation.

The research is grounded in an ethnographic methodology, considered a powerful means by which researchers can highlight domination and exploitation, but also provide ‘a richer, more nuanced trajectory for understanding their durability, potency, contingency, points of alteration, and other contradictory conditions’ (Fischer and Benson 2005: 15). This is embedded in a number of key ethical and normative commitments: that the research emerges from the interaction of researchers and their fields (Sundberg 2003; Sundberg 2005); that ethnographers produce ‘partial knowledge’ of the places and people that they research (Frohlick and Harrison 2008: 7); an emphasis on ‘reflexive ethnography’ (Davies 2008 [1998]); and a close analysis of local, concrete issues of women’s lives in order to better understand global phenomena (see, for example, Freeman 2001). Both of the authors have conducted extensive research on tourism and gender in Central America, and, thus, the paper’s insights draw upon their collective knowledge of and experiences in the region. The ethnographic

material used here was conducted by one of the authors in 2013 and includes: five months of participant observation in a homestay run by Juana,<sup>1</sup> a single mother living with her adult daughter; three nights in a further homestay; visits to four other homestays; and conducting in-depth interviews with five 'host-mums'. The topic of homestays was also discussed in many of the thirty-nine interviews conducted with people living and/or working in Antigua, as well as through informal conversations with tourists who had stayed in one of Antigua's many homestays.<sup>2</sup> The data was read and interpreted in line with different 'theory driven codes' and 'in-vivo categories and themes' (Marshall and Rossman 2011).

Antigua is a UNESCO World Heritage Site characterised by colonial architecture and ruins, its 'Eternal Spring' climate, and the three volcanoes surrounding it. It is a popular domestic and international tourism destination and its economy is largely tourism dependent. Often called Guatemala's tourism jewel, it is located approximately 22 miles south-west from Guatemala City, is home to approximately 45,000 people, and is made up of a '12 square block historic heritage zone' and surrounding areas (Little 2014: 397). Antigua hosts a plethora of Spanish schools and is a popular Spanish-learning destination. Indeed, many of the 'tourists' in Antigua are 'students', or foreigners who primarily come to Antigua to learn Spanish, but who also engage in a plethora of touristic activities while in the country. There are various ways of staying in Antigua. There are large-, medium-, and small-sized expensive and/or cheap hotels, hostels, bed and breakfasts, various houses and apartments that can be rented out for short- or long-term holidays, as well as many homestays. Indeed, Antigua is full of homestays. However, because homestays remain invisible to the naked eye (i.e. look like normal houses) and form part of the informal tourism economy, it is impossible to know just how many homestays are actually in Antigua. Nonetheless, as most of the large number of students coming to Antigua stay in homestays, it is clear that there are many. Students may stay for one week or many months. Homestays exist on a spectrum – from large and luxurious, to those which are smaller and simpler in nature, such as those included in this study. In these homestays, the majority of the labour provided by adult women – or 'host-mums' – who also live in the homestay and use hosting students as a business opportunity and/or 'survival strategy' within difficult economic times (Elson 1992). We now turn to the analysis of how global power dynamics play out in homestays in Antigua.

### **Intersections between gender, class, and nationality**

Homestays are bound up in the intersections between gender, class, and nationality. Given the fact that culture, home, and family are often coded as feminine (Massey 2004)(Yuval-Davis 1997), studies of homestays from around the world have consistently highlighted that they are highly gendered,

with women often initiating and running them (Harris, McIntosh and Lewis 2007; Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart 2002; Lynch 2005b; Prasad Acharya and Halpenny 2013; Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight 2004). Gender divisions of labour within the home see women tasked with the re-creation of home and family, including domestic labour and maintaining social relations. Part of the attraction of homestays is their gendered nature. As this New York Times travel blog depicts perfectly, travellers expect to see and participate in a certain pattern of gender relations in these homestay experiences:

‘And then I did what just about any foreign visitor for whom Guatemalan gender roles don’t carry any stigma would do: I asked if I could help make the tortillas.’

While on the one hand homestays help to reproduce traditional gender divisions and roles, as outlined in more detail below, on the other hand they may also challenge them. Reflecting the contexts from which students come from in the Global North, one host-mum explained that students do not like to see host-mums doing all of the housework or being treated poorly by husbands, and thus greater gender equality may be performed (and indeed produced) within homestay homes. Nevertheless, the homestay is primarily embodied and performed by host-mums. This is so much the case that, while it is possible to imagine and find homestays run by single-women, it is almost impossible to either imagine or find homestays run by single-men.

Homestays draw upon women’s symbolic, physical, emotional, and caring labour. However, this work is often not recognised as work and thus is ‘devalued’ (Lynch 2005b: 541). Indeed, as outlined in more detail below, homestays are a ‘cheap’ form of accommodation in Antigua. Pointing out the exploitation of women’s flexible and cheap labour in the Global South for the benefit of capitalists and consumers from the Global North is not new. However, unlike the Bangladeshi women who produce clothing (Ahmed 2001), the Barbadian women who enter data in software centres (Freeman 1998), the Colombian women who cut fresh flowers (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007), the Chilean women who pick grapes (Bee 2000), and the Indian women who make jewellery (Soni-Sinha 2006), all for markets/consumers in the Global North, host-mums come face-to-face with the consumers of their services and, likewise, their homes, families, bodies and selves become part of the product sold. They must embody and perform the proper ‘host-mother’ in highly intimate embodied encounters with foreign ‘Others’.

While highly gendered, homestays are both touristically and pedagogically valued, and draw explicitly on the unequal global dynamics played out in tourism and international development. The notion of home space evokes, in tourism terms, the idea of a ‘back-stage’ (MacCannell 1999 [1976]). Following, touristic movement into ‘home spaces’ is often interpreted as facilitating more ‘authentic

experiences' (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng 2013). Spending time in home spaces and interacting with non-professional locals also suggests the creation of 'intimate experiences', which are read as being both singular and unique (Andersson Cederholm and Hultman 2010). But homestays are also sold as learning experiences and are widely implemented into study abroad programmes, which have grown in popularity and proliferated (Rodriguez and Chornet-Roses 2014; van Wijk, Go and van'T Klooster 2008). Part of the emphasis on and development of study abroad programmes stems from concerns surrounding globalisation. Having international experience is thought to give students the skills they need in an increasingly globalised and competitive job market (Vrasti 2013) as well as help to create a 'global citizenship ethic' (Caton and Almeida Santos 2009: 195). University students also increasingly want the experience of studying abroad (Marx and Pray 2011), and universities, which are increasingly competing to attract students (Ayikoru, Tribe and Airey 2009), have developed international offices which encourage and facilitate such overseas 'learning experiences' (Rodriguez and Chornet-Roses 2014; van Wijk, Go and van'T Klooster 2008).

In particular, going to the Global South offers young people from the Global North the semiotic and material conditions upon which they can test and prove themselves, as well as gain the 'right' skills to improve their own labour market positioning (Vrasti 2013). Homestays form a key part of this as students are promised that through immersing oneself in the everyday lives of 'Others', they will increase their foreign language skills and cultural capital. In the case of Antigua, Spanish schools often recommend that prospective students stay with Guatemalan families while they are in the country and readily arrange homestays. Likewise, homestays are represented and sold as enjoyable and pedagogical experiences. Through living with a Guatemalan family, students are promised the opportunity to use their newfound Spanish skills outside the school environment, learn about Guatemalan culture and traditions, and feel part of the local Antigüañan community. Thus, they are marketed as 'the perfect way to immerse in the Guatemalan local life and culture'.<sup>3</sup>

These romanticised ideas about the place and role of women, home, and family feed into a broader political economy context in which 'the traditional family is often set up as a haven against the world of capitalism, a notion that reinforces some traditionalist views of the family, if in modified form' (Keating, Rasmussen and Rishi 2010: 165). This leads to a blurring of boundaries between home, household, care, and workplace, in a qualitatively different way to home-based work in the garment sector or teleworking industries. The performance of real family entails intimacy. Intimacy is said to occur within the 'zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, the family' (Berlant 1998: 281) and is linked to the closing of distances – real and imagined – as well as to the emotions of love



and trust.<sup>4</sup> Thus, experiences of intimacy are linked to *embodied intimacy* (the closing of physical distances) and *emotional intimacy* (the sharing of ideas, values, experiences, and perhaps a common identity, as well as affect).<sup>5</sup> Homestays invite tourists into home space (creating embodied intimacy) and family space (creating emotional intimacy). Although often connected, home space and family space are not the same. While home space may be understood as emerging in relation to place, family space may be understood as emerging in relationships with others. Home and family spaces are both imagined, and often experienced, as *intimate* spaces not open to the tourist gaze or touristic relations. However, homestays suggest the touristification of intimacy (see: Bialski 2012). Many scholars have already highlighted the role of intimacy in touristic relations, especially between locals in the Global South and tourists from the Global North (Cabezas 2009; Conran 2011; Frohlick 2007; Kempadoo 1999; Simoni 2014; Trauer and Ryan 2005). The notion of 'touristic intimacy' helps describe this phenomenon. It suggests intimate sojourns, capturing the idea of temporality (intimacy with often pre-defined spatial-temporal borders), as well as intimacy strategically performed with stranger 'Others', often (but not always or exclusively) for economic gain and/or in pursuit of authentic experiences.

Despite the marketing of 'authenticity' and 'intimacy' to homestay guests, and in contrast to studies of homestays and other commercial homes, such as B&Bs, from the Global North which suggest that homestay providers are 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' and, thus, position hosting as a choice which allows for a different (and often desirable) kind of lifestyle (Andersson Cederholm and Hultman 2010), for Guatemalan families hosting often represents a means of economic survival. Indeed, the rising cost of living in Antigua (in part as a result of tourism and the influx of expatriates), the lingering effects of the 2008 economic crisis, and the lack of economic opportunities and high rates of poverty in Guatemala in general, has turned hosting students into a means by which families can afford to keep their homes and/or stay living in Antigua. Moreover, these experiences are embedded in the economic inequality between local residents and foreign tourists, creating the conditions for such exchanges and shaping the power dynamics involved.

In addition to the intangible benefits outlined above, homestays – which include: a clean furnished room, 3 meals a day/six days a week, electricity, hot water, and often the Internet – are sold as affordable accommodation. Depending on the room, in Antigua a homestay can cost as little as US\$ 110.00 for a week (what Sarah paid in 2013). However, when receiving students through Spanish schools, host-families do not receive the full price paid by students. Spanish schools take considerable commission for 'making the connection', with host-families estimating commission rates from 30 to

50%. Furthermore, with the money that families do receive they also have to provide all of the services promised. While food and utilities prices have risen considerably in recent years, the amount received from Spanish schools has stayed the same. Some families have also invested considerable sums to improve their homes to meet the Spanish schools' and tourists' standards, accumulating substantial debt in the process.

As far as a business goes, hosting is not very tenable. Indeed, various host-families suggest that sometimes they only break even. While host-families do not want to cut corners in the service they provide, many try to find ways of lowering their costs. For example, some may ask students to participate in paying for the Internet and/or other utilities, limit the amount of meat they cook, only offer hot water at specific times of the day, or do not change the sheets and towels every week. Other strategies for cutting costs and/or making extra money are to make use of any items that students leave behind, such as toiletries or clothes. But, in making these decisions, host-families also risk student complaints to Spanish schools and thus fewer students being sent to them in the future. Host-families try to make hosting work for them by getting around the Spanish school system of commission. While schools help make introductions and provide a context of trust, host-families build their own trust networks with students while they are living with them. Indeed, host-families demonstrate considerable global networks. By way of recommendation to friends and family, former students help host-families attract future guests from outside the school system. One host-mum simply states: 'Thank God they recommend us'. Thus, every current student represents a potential future source of income. Consequently, host-families are keen to build friendly relations with current students. Indeed, host-families may even feel that they have to tolerate anti-social behaviour in their homes, lest the student spreads the word that they are not good hosts or forecloses a deeper helping connection. Creating friendly relations with foreigners can also provide a security net for people in the Global South, who have little else to fall-back on in times of economic trouble (Simoni 2014).

While hosting may be an economic survival strategy, it is an exclusive one. . As found in other studies, the foreign standards that houses have to meet means that poorer families are often not able to become homestays (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen and Duangsaeng 2013). Indeed, only middle-class Guatemalans, who are able to offer students the basic levels of comfort and services they 'need', can become host-families. Nevertheless, Guatemalan middle-class homes often come across as poor to students from the Global North. Consequently, as well as managing the cost of hosting, host-mums also aim to manage and navigate students' shock at the relative poverty of their homes and the comfort levels provided. Juana describes how she experiences this:

To the house, to the family, it is like a shock, the change of culture and environment. If they come from a very comfortable house or a well-off family ... When they enter into the house they see how small it is or experience environments that are not familiar to them and it is a shock. It is hard. It is tough, tough ... To watch it is difficult.

Maria expresses similar experiences:

There are people who adapt quickly, there are people who do it off and on, and, well, they are not able to leave their world and their place. So, they expect more in the sense of material things. So, sometimes they are looking for comfort, and then they tell you and I understand them perfectly, because they say 'Well I come from a very comfortable situation' and then they come and they find themselves here with only the basics, a small room with your bed, with your wardrobe, with the food that we try to give and that we also eat, and they see how we live, but I think that in some situations for many it is also a shock.

In their work as host-mums, Guatemalan women are performing multiple roles in the global political economy. In addition to providing an authentic, intimate experience, they are also producing a culturally and linguistically skilled global labour force, performing 'international relations' within the home, and producing network capital for themselves and their families. These global dynamics are useful for contextualising the multi-dimensional labour which goes into the work of a host-mum.

### **Performing motherhood for tourists**

Juana, a single-mother who lost her government job due to ill health, found that hosting was her only means of earning an income. While hosting may appeal to single-mothers, as it allows them to earn an income through being at home and, thus, also be there for their children, other women host students as a means of supplementing their husband's earnings. As Juana explains, it is something that women can do while still staying in the home:

Look, I think this is a source of work, we can say it is a work opportunity, mostly for women who are in the home, who don't have another source of income than this ... It is easy in the sense that you don't have to be a professional person to get involved in this, you only have to have the space and the will to give a good service.

This raises two key points: (1) the simultaneity of, or breaking down of, difference between, commodified and non-commodified forms of social reproductive labour and (2) the assumed lack of skill needed to be a host-mum.

A key attraction to hosting students is that women can turn their domestic and caring labour into income earning activities. The assumption is that hosting students merely amplifies the work they already do – thus, instead of cooking dinner for four, they cook dinner for six – but does not necessarily create new work per se. This assumption is wrong. As is outlined below, hosting foreign students not only demands new kinds of labour, but also transforms how social reproduction is done and why. This signals a transformation in social reproduction; through touristification, activities done within the home and that may have once been done as part of ‘daily, unconscious routines’ (Bakker 2007: 543) become highly reflexive practices performed as part of an experiential commodity.

As Juana suggests, an underlying assumption is that homestays do not require ‘professional’ labour. Rather, women are imagined as already having all of the skills necessary for hosting students and, furthermore, these skills are not recognised as such, but naturalised. As in other forms of work, there is a lack of recognition and, following, remuneration of women’s gender specific skills (Elson and Pearson 1997, Seguíno and Grown 2007, Soni-Sinha 2006). Indeed, it is not an over exaggeration to suggest that part of the success of Antigua as a learning destination relies upon the devaluation of Guatemalan women’s labour in both Spanish schools and homestays. It is upon devalued feminised labour that Antigua has built a ‘gender competitive advantage’ (Elson, Grown and Çagatay 2007) as a Spanish-learning destination.

Affective and emotional labour (Hochschild 2003) is another key aspect of the analysis of tourism homestays. This intersects with Brickell and Chant’s analysis of female altruism, and how it is constructed within contemporary development policy as something natural and inevitable (Brickell and Chant 2010). There is a clear tension within this discourse, as women are considered ‘sufficiently rational and autonomous to work but, ultimately, their labour is motivated by love’ (Roberts and Soederberg 2012: 955). These tensions are perhaps even starker in tourism homestays, where expectations of female altruism combine with the high levels of emotional and affective labour required to provide hospitality in the home. Benmore’s work on bed and breakfast establishments in the UK offers one of the only detailed studies on such tensions. She discusses, for example, the sense of abuse felt by women when the limits of their emotional labour were tested, especially if such limits involved gender expectations - e.g. caring for elderly people, washing clothes, etc. (Benmore 2008: 125). However, overall, Benmore found that such emotional labour was used flexibly and autonomously. To date, there has been little research on such dynamics in the Global South.

What is interesting for the purposes of this paper is the way Guatemalan host-mums are not only

engaging in social reproduction in relation to their own children and families, but also to foreign students. In hosting students, Guatemalan host-mums are tasked with four key jobs: creating an inviting home, reproducing the tourist body, teaching language and culture, and building affective relations. In practice this includes: decorating and presenting the house, cleaning rooms and bathrooms, washing and changing bedding, buying food and preparing meals, learning about and accommodating different diets and restrictions, sitting with tourists during meals and cleaning up after meals, teaching tourists about Guatemalan culture, helping students learning Spanish with their homework and teaching them how to speak Spanish, listening to and helping tourists with their practical and/or emotional problems, giving tourists advice about staying safe and worrying about students when they fail to return when they said they would, and helping and caring for tourists when they are sad or ill. In short, hosting tourists is akin to mothering tourists. 'Mothering labour'<sup>6</sup> (Maher 2010) is the engine of homestays. In their roles mothering students, Guatemalan host-mums compete in a local marketplace. They try to be the best host-mums and provide the best homestay experiences for their paying guests. They engage in the competitive mothering of foreign students, creating new antagonisms between Guatemalan women. Rather than coming naturally to Guatemalan women, the competitive mothering of foreign students is something they learn and become skilled at doing. In particular, they learn 'tourism reflexivity' (Urry and Larsen 2011) – or to see Guatemala, their homes, families and daily lives through a foreign 'tourist gaze' – and find strategies to meet or exceed students' expectations.

The competitive mothering of foreign students starts with the materiality of the house. Not all households can host students. When Spanish schools are deciding whether or not to send students to a household, they take note of: the location of the house (for example, houses close to the school are preferred as they are seen as safer for students); the size and quality of the room for the student; the bathrooms and how many people will share them; how many members are in the family and who they are; if there are animals or pets in the home; if there is privacy for the student; what services it has (for example, electricity, hot water, Internet); what kind of ventilation there is; and the standard of hygiene and cleanliness. Host-families often work hard to create the kind of house that meets the demands of students, sometimes even going into debt to try and meet these standards. Host-mums are tasked with preparing and maintaining the house for students. Of upmost importance is cleanliness; no lapse is allowed when students are in the home. But it is not only the house which has to be materially prepared. Host-mums also prepare themselves physically, making sure that they look presentable at all times within their own homes; they perform 'aesthetic labour' (Witz, Warhurst and Nickson 2003).

A key part of the homestay is three home cooked meals a day (except Sundays). Host-mums indicated that cooking for students is time consuming, complicated, and costly. Meals are prepared and served at the same time every day; host-mums must plan and shop for food ahead of time and schedule all other activities around the time it takes them to prepare, serve, and clean up after each meal. Host-mums emphasized how they try to offer diverse, plentiful, and quality meals to their students, and how they must take great care in what they buy and how they prepare it, especially as students are not accustomed to the bacteria found in Guatemala. Every time a new student arrives, they must also take into consideration their dietary requirements and likes and dislikes. Host-mums expressed considerable knowledge about 'Western' diet trends, such as vegetarianism or veganism, low carbohydrate, high protein, or gluten-free diets, and suggested that they have had to change their cooking practices because students do not like high levels of salt, oil, or sugar. Special diets mean more work for host-mums, who have to go to more shops to buy different ingredients and learn to cook new things, and greater costs, as speciality items are more expensive. Cooking for students, as host-mums indicated, is one of the most difficult things about hosting. As Maria states:

No, he is a vegetarian, the other one isn't, yes they eat meat; the other girl is affected by gluten, she is allergic to gluten. All of these things are difficult and you have to get used to them ... And if they tell you 'I don't eat beans', 'I do, and I love them', 'No, I don't eat chicken because it bothers me', 'I do'. So, like this, yes, yes, this makes you tired.

Mealtimes are meant to be shared. Thus, if they are home, all permanent members of the household will sit with the students and eat the same food. They are also key times for communication. Indeed sitting and talking with students during meals is regulated by Spanish schools. It is through communication that students get to practice their fledgling Spanish skills and learn about Guatemalan culture. This communication entails considerable labour on the part of host-mums, who become *de facto* Spanish teachers. Host-mums stressed how they teach their students to speak Spanish like they did their own children, choosing their words carefully, speaking slowly, and repeating things. This takes considerable patience and 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983). When linguistic communication is not possible, host-mums use body language to communicate with students. Indeed, body language is highly important within the homestay, with host-mums using gestures and expressions to communicate with students. Even when students can speak Spanish, body language plays an important communicative role. Maria explains that she is constantly watching students' gestures and expressions as a means of telling whether they are comfortable or not. Host-mums also watch their own gestures and expressions, less students feel uncomfortable. With different linguistic

and cultural backgrounds, miscommunications can easily happen, and host-mums have to learn how to defuse any bad energy, whether between themselves and a student, or between different students staying in the house.

Host-mums also have to learn how to hide their own ideas, opinions, and feelings not only about what students say and do, but also about students' themselves. Students come from around the world and often hold very different world perspectives to Guatemalan host-mums. As Maria noted: 'We have realised there are some things that are very different, like the food, well many situations, their ways of being, their attitudes to various things, for us they are different'. In tolerating difference, the host-mums interviewed stressed that they are 'cosmopolitan' in their 'attitudes, practices and abilities' (Vertovec 2010: 64); that is, that they have learned to accept students of all nationalities, religions, sexualities, and so on. While cosmopolitanism is often associated with corporeal mobility (Kofman 2005; Vertovec 2010), in Antigua host-mums become cosmopolitan through staying home and opening their doors to foreign 'Others'.

Beyond the touristification and, thus, transformation of everyday domestic practices, such as cooking, a key point to highlight from this analysis is that host-mums perform a wide range of social reproductive tasks in their work "mothering tourists". This has implications both for gender politics and for intersectional, global power dynamics, as discussed in the conclusions. However, in addition to these social reproductive tasks, a further kind of labour must be performed - that of (de-)differentiation. It is to this form of labour we now turn.

### **The gendered labour of (de-)differentiation**

The analysis thus far has suggested that the homestay is an interesting case because it highlights how everyday social reproduction activities – which are often imagined as outside of the market – have become marketised. Here one finds a process of economic de-differentiation, whereby the market economy appears to subsume and incorporate other kinds of economic activities, and, in the process, breaks down distinctions such as public/private, market/family, and production/consumption.

However, this is only part of the story. Indeed, we suggest a reading which focuses on the complex and simultaneous processes of (de-)differentiation.

The concepts differentiation/de-differentiation are used to describe characteristics of modernism and postmodernism respectively, which represent two different 'cultural paradigms' or 'ideal types' that can coexist to varying degrees within the same time/space (Urry 2002 [1990]: 77). Modernism entails

both horizontal and vertical differentiation. Horizontal differentiation produces distinct domains, such as the economy and culture, whereas vertical differentiation produces distinctions within each domain, such as production/consumption, or high/low culture. Postmodernism, in contrast, entails both horizontal and vertical de-differentiation, whereby the distinctions between different domains and their internal divisions and logics become blurred. Likewise, while modernism suggests structure and stability, postmodernism suggests new and shifting configurations (Lash and Urry 1994; Urry 2002 [1990]). While (de-)differentiation is often approached and researched as cultural processes, here we want to suggest that it can also be analysed as a form of labour which is performed on a daily basis. Indeed, other studies have highlighted how de-differentiation (or 'holism') is actively negotiated and produced by institutions and individuals, especially women in caring roles (Utriainen 2010). Taking homestays as our case study, and focusing on the roles of host-mums, one can identify the everyday labour of (de-)differentiation.

While homestays may be an emblematic example of processes of economic de-differentiation, somewhat ironically, it is their presumed alterity to fully marketised ways of staying, such as hotels, which helps give them their touristic value. In other words, the market value of homestays is found in the notion that they are somehow outside (at least partially) of the market economy and, thus, a great amount of labour is invested in maintaining this differentiation. Those host-families which do not successfully perform this economic difference – that is, those who treat hosting and students as a mere means of earning economic capital – fail at performing the homestay and, thus, risk losing hosting as a means of earning economic capital.

Homestays compete on the level of authenticity of family they offer. As such, the successful performance of a homestay – or 'real family' – requires denying the market-ethos and relations of the performance and, thus, breaking down or hiding any distinction between marketised and non-marketised relations and practices within the home. In other words, producing the homestay as economically different requires the de-differentiation between real and performed family. In the context of B&Bs, Andersson Cederholm and Hultman (2010) suggest that this is done by employing a 'hospitality ethos' over a 'market ethos'. In the context of homestays one might speak of a 'family ethos', which places emphasis on affect and intimacy. Thus, as Maria explains, homestays only work if you do them with 'love':

At first it was complicated. But ... we have the opinion that when you do things with love it works. Because it is not only to receive money, as I told you it [money] really helps, it is a way



to survive, it is working for us, but if you do it with love and because you really enjoy it, I think that this is how it works.

Maria goes on to explain that homestays are about 'closeness' and that this helps to distinguish them from hotels:

Many [students] are more interested in the quality of closeness between the people, with the family... Unlike a hotel ... [we] offer more contact with the people. We are able to give them more as a human being.

Maria suggests that if you approach students through a family ethos, which includes giving love and being close, the homestay works. She further suggests that those homestays which approach hosting through a market ethos are not 'real homestays':

You hear comments. Many say, they say that 'Here in the families they don't speak with you' ... Many say 'They do it for the money, not because they really want to do it'. And it is unfortunate to hear this, but sometimes, yes, it is true. So if you have 6, 7, 8, 9 people in a house for me it is a hotel, small, but it is a hotel, it is not a family. So I know that the income is good, of course, 9, 8 people is good ... But sometimes there is not a lot of communication and so they [students] complain. They complain about many things, right, to be insecure, or because of too many tourists, or because there is no opportunity to have a real family that communicates with them.

Maria clearly explains how treating students like 'real family' is strategic: 'They feel like part of the family, right. I think that they really appreciate and value this'. The success of homestays lays in women's emotional labour in making their students 'feel at home', and this creates considerable touristic value. This is well demonstrated by the following testimonial from a Guatemalan homestay:

Because I have embraced the culture so well, my host-mother thinks that I will get sick from American food when I return. According to her, I am now 'pura Chapina' (100% Guatemalan) since the Maya believe they are made from corn. I feel completely at home. I love my room, the kitchen, everything. They treat me like a member of their family. It's the best feeling ever. I am welcome to be myself here.<sup>7</sup>

While Antigüean host-families strategically perform family with tourists, the line between 'touristic intimacy' and 'true intimacy' - which is imagined as 'something that is 'real' rather than superficial' (Trauer and Ryan 2005: 484) - can be hard to draw. However, host-families do draw lines in practice. Host-mums indicate that they find ways of reserving parts of their home space and family space from touristification and commodification. They find ways to being intimate, without being intimate; they find ways of maintaining both embodied and emotional distance in very intimate settings. In other

words, while the production of the homestay requires simultaneous (de-)differentiation – or that which aims to maintain the homestay’s economic difference through denying any difference between real and performed family – host-families find strategic ways of differentiating between real and performed family which do not jeopardise the homestay as such. They do so through various distancing strategies, which are more or less successful.

The host-mums interviewed for this research emphasised that their students are given access to communal areas of the home, including kitchens, bathrooms, living rooms, courtyards and terraces – like ‘real family’ – and that those homestays which relegate students to their own floors are not ‘real homestays’. However, within all homestays the home is divided; the communal areas of the house become homestay space – the space within which real family is performed with foreign ‘Others’ – and bedrooms become private space – the spaces which students and host-families can retreat to in order to leave the homestay without ever leaving the home. Thus, the house is divided into touristic ‘front- and ‘back-stages’ (MacCannell 1999 [1976]). According to host-families, this delineation is an implicit rule that needs no voicing. Having private space within the homestay was expressed as something important for both the students and the host-family; they both want and need it. Indeed, being in the homestay space takes a lot of emotional labour for all involved. While host-families must perform the hospitable Guatemalan no matter how they are feeling, the constant pressure to be pleasant and social can be challenging for all involved.

While houses are divided with the intention of creating private spaces that both students and host-families can retreat to, this division is often breached. Indeed, all it takes is an open door. One host-family explained how they found a student sleeping on the toilet with his pants down. In his drunken state he had left the door wide open. Furthermore, sometimes the bedrooms of host-families are opened to students, allowing them access for communal TV watching or to discuss problems. Furthermore, such divisions may only offer visual privacy. In many of the smaller homestays, embodied intimacy is forced by the spaces shared. For example, bodily noises and smells do not respect the visual lines between front- or back-stages. Indeed, sharing a house forces embodied intimacy. As Raquel, a former host-mum now guest-house-provider notes:

They sleep in your house, use the bathroom, they wash, they have their partner or they have their friends, they cook. So, you are acting in a form, I don’t know, much more intimate I think, because you can see them in underwear, you know what I am saying? In underpants!

While host-families try to maintain distance, this is hard to maintain. Consequently, host-families

indicated that, at least in their houses, they are always 'on stage'. Maria clearly states: 'There is no privacy. It is clear that they hear everything'. Juana openly expresses how there is no privacy from tourists in her home:

In fact there isn't any [privacy]. In fact, in this really small house, in this really small apartment, there is no privacy. So, I think that in the beginning it was not easy for us ... There were certain things that we would not be able to do ... Well, the thing is that since the beginning we have had problems in this sense, because we don't have privacy.

Always being on stage changes how host-families embody their homes and relate to one another. Juana explains that when students are in the house she and her daughter are 'more cautious ... if we are going to discuss between mother and daughter or something, it should be between us'. Sometimes familial privacy is gained through taking 'family space' outside of the home, such as going for walks together in the city. Maria further suggests that when marital problems arise they have to be particularly careful not to have arguments which can be heard by students; they have to wait for the right time and place, best when students are out of the house. The amount of emotional labour needed in the homestay is immense. While the constant struggle to find private space can be experienced as oppressive, host-families also indicated that they adapt to having less privacy; the worry about privacy changes. Juana goes on to say:

But, little by little, I think that you adapt to this; you need to adapt, that is the truth. You give up certain things and you get used to it in the end, because what can you do? So, there is none [privacy]. It is difficult, this theme.

Maria also suggests that she and her family have got used to it: 'Maybe we don't feel it because ... it is already habit. I think it is already the habit to do it [share their private space]'. As Maria indicates, the touristification of familial intimacy becomes 'normal'.

This analysis highlights two key dimensions to the labour of (de-)differentiation performed by host-mums – the labour of differentiation between purely marketised ways of staying and homestays and, furthermore, how this relies upon the labour of de-differentiation between real and performed family. We now go on to explore what these ideas mean more broadly for feminist political economy.

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have explored in rich empirical detail the ways in which tangible and intangible social reproductive activities interact with market and non-market activities in a specific context. This speaks to a core theme in feminist political economy - the limits and boundaries of the marketization of

social reproduction. Where, for example, does an activity such as kissing children goodnight fall in our analysis of what is work (Ehrenreich 1992: 143)? The key contribution of the paper lies in its contribution to understanding how intangible social reproductive activities become part of the product to be marketised. Moreover, by using the tourism household as an empirical and ontological starting point, we contribute to a broader project of decentring political economy analysis in order to ‘accommodate the power of what is small, dispersed, unorganized, and relatively invisible’ (Safri and Graham 2010: 121). The paper explores three key aspects of the gendered political economy of social reproduction in tourism homestays – intersectional global power dynamics; mothering tourists and economic difference; and the gendered labour of (de-)differentiation.

First, the paper sets out the global dynamics of the homestay context. While performing ‘authentic family’ is vital to the success of homestays, the stage on which these performances are set is built on highly asymmetrical power relations between hosts and guests, in terms of nationality, class, and gender. The relative poverty of Guatemalan homes is part of their touristic attraction, but it also creates ‘shock’. Through students’ embodied reactions to Guatemalan homes, host-mums come to feel their relative poverty more deeply *and* learn strategies to assist students through their shock. However, while Guatemalan host-families’ homes may be experienced as poor by students from the Global North, they are locally middle-class and, it is their middle-class-ness which allows them to use hosting to maintain their local class position in an increasingly difficult economic environment. While highly dependent on Guatemalan women’s labour, the marketing of homestays relies on a somewhat calcified depiction of gender relations – to stay with a ‘traditional Guatemalan family’ and all the expected gender norms and roles that accompany that. However, hosting can also change the ‘traditional Guatemalan family’, which may not sit well with paying guests who expect (at least nominally) more equal gender relations. More research is needed here. The analysis of homestays, therefore, allows us to explore how these intersectional power dynamics of global political economy play out in the specific context of homestays in Guatemala.

Second, Guatemalan host-mums are required to “mother” tourists; indeed this is an explicit part of their role. This involves a wide range of complex social reproductive activities which span tangible and intangible activities. These include cooking, cleaning, and other domestic tasks, but also caring, communicating, welcoming and supporting students. That is, in the homestay household women are performing multiple, overlapping social reproductive tasks – both for their own families and for paying guests. This substantively blurs the boundaries between market and non-market activities, in line with an “economic difference” approach, in which “the heterogeneity of economic activity is

foregrounded rather than obscured' (Safri and Graham 2010: 101). While an ontology of economic difference highlights 'the diversity of, complexity, and interdependence of capitalist and noncapitalist economic activity', thus calling into question the 'presumptive subordination or inferiority of other economic forms' (Safri and Graham 2010: 101), in this paper, we have shown how the opening up of the household – and family – as a site of tourism activity troubles the boundaries between market and non-market activities. Non-market activities are converted into income-generating strategies and, moreover, a marketable product in themselves. The framework of economic difference would suggest that such work shifts from non-market to alternative market to market, however such a linear analysis belies the complex interplay between such activities in the tourism household. As such, we suggest that greater work needs to be done to theorise and methodologically explore the complex interplay of multiple, overlapping, parallel economies, where activities are being performed by the same person at the same time for different types of economies.

Finally, the third substantive theme explored in the paper is the gendered labour of (de-)differentiation. This is additional work for host-mums – on top of "mothering tourists" – as it requires the complex tasking of masking the marketised nature of such labour and, at the same time, finding strategies which save the home, family, and self from complete touristification. As set out above, one finds Guatemalan women labouring to deny de-differentiation (or the marketisation of the home and family). Three key strategies can be observed: the denial of the economic grounds for hosting, the use of a family ethos over a market ethos, and, following, the labour of de-differentiation between real and performed family. However, while host-mums work hard to de-differentiate between real and performed family, in practice they do differentiate, as one sees in various distancing practices. Thus, part of the labour of de-differentiation between real and performed family is hiding or finding rationales for these distancing practices so that they do not disrupt the performance of real family with foreign 'Others'. This added 'layer' of economic activity moves beyond the analysis of economic difference above and adds further nuances for the analysis of gendered political economy. This phenomenon merits further research, but raises interesting questions about the overlap and distinctions between market and non-market, tangible and intangible social reproductive activities.

In this paper, we have aimed to shed light on the tensions and complexities involved in the interaction and blurring between market, semi-market, and non-market activities. These kinds of studies can contribute to the construction of a body of knowledge on economic difference, and, following, the challenges and opportunities for a broader post-capitalist politics based on social provisioning. The empirical findings and preliminary analysis presented here point to a wealth of further research,

exploring the complex intersectional dynamics of the global political economy of tourism homestays, especially in the Global South. In particular, greater research is needed in regards to how homestays may reinforce and/or transform gender relations; how they are creating new relations and tensions *between* host-families; and, how the everyday labour of (de-)differentiation is understood, experienced, and performed by host-families.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All names used are pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> The research was conducted by Sarah Becklake as part of her PhD, which more broadly investigated everyday enactments of global tourism competition in Guatemala. Her PhD was generously supported and funded by Lancaster University's Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and the Sociology Department.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.do-guatemala.com/index.php/accommodation/home-stay-host-family>

<sup>4</sup> While these descriptions are positive, intimacy should also not be idealised; intimacy can also be unwanted and, thus, can be linked to discomfort, fear, and disgust, as well as experienced as violent or oppressive.

<sup>5</sup> [http://frugaltraveler.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/10/a-homestay-among-the-tzutujil/?\\_r=0](http://frugaltraveler.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/08/10/a-homestay-among-the-tzutujil/?_r=0)

<sup>6</sup> Following Maher, 'the term "mothering" refers to the component labours of motherhood: the biological reproductive elements and activities, the social and emotional care, and the broader communal and national contributions. All these aspects of mothering labour are crucial in illuminating and understanding the globalization of motherhood' Maher, JaneMaree. 2010. "Motherhood: Reproduction and Care." Pp. 16-30 in *The Globalization of Motherhood: Deconstructions and Reconstructions of Biology and Care*, edited by Wendy Chavkin and JaneMaree Maher. London and New York: Routledge..

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.magiccarpetrides.com/pages/homestays.php>

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