

MODERNISATION, ISSUES OF GENDER, AND SPACE

Titien Saraswati

Lecturer Department of Architecture YKPN Yogyakarta
Honorary Fellow Pada Universitas Melbourne, Australia, 1999-2001
titien@indosat.net.id

ABSTRACT

Jurgen Habermas proposes a theory of modernisation based on the notion of a progressive “uncoupling” or separation of some aspects of everyday life, and their take over or “colonisation” by an expanding state and formal economy. This model is criticised by Nancy Fraser on the basis that it ignores the place of gender in the various roles that the individual plays in society and which mediate between the world of everyday life and the “system world” of the state and the official economy. Habermas’s argument is further criticised for ignoring the issue of space (the house, the neighbourhood) in that mediation. Further, Habermas and also Fraser arguments however yield to what they call symbolic reproduction and material reproduction, socially integrated action contexts and system integrated action contexts, and also private sphere and public sphere. The above terms will be elaborated more fully in this paper.

Keywords : symbolic reproduction, material reproduction, socially integrated, system integrated, private sphere, public sphere.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an excerpt of review of literatures’ sections of author’s PhD thesis. Accordingly, this paper explains neither the findings nor conclusion of this thesis.

The author’s PhD thesis¹ examines the question whether, in the face of economic modernisation and cultural westernisation, the persistence of traditional values and local culture is manifest in present dilemmas concerning the planning and use of the house and its neighbourhood. In pursuing this the author turns to the theory of modernisation advanced by Jurgen Habermas, and then to Nancy Fraser’s critique of this theory on the grounds that it ignores issues of gender.

One needs to note however that both Habermas and Fraser are observing modernisation from a distinctively western perspective, there are other cultures where the roles of men and women are decidedly different.

CONCEPTS OF MODERNISATION

It is beyond the scope of this writing to review literature on “modernisation”; however some introductory remarks are necessary. In the following the focus especially on some recent concepts of modernisation. At a relatively simple level, modernisation has been conceived in term of technological advance and its accumulating effects. A classic statement of this hypothesis is in Nikolai Kondratiev’s² 1925 exposition of new transport technologies as the triggers for sudden and periodic surges in investment and economic growth - in other words, in “modernisation”. Much of this form of arguing also runs through the works of Mumford (1961)³, and also earlier in Mumford (1934). At another level, modernisation has been theorised in term of shifts in the mode of production - not just in the forces of production (new technology), but also in the relations of production⁴.

Harvey (1989) however, in his later writing, emphasises what he calls “time-space compression” as the distinguishing characteristics of modernisation - processes increase in speed, and distance disappears with modern communi-

¹ Titien Saraswati, *Housing and Neighbourhood Change. A Study of Attitudes and Behaviour of Middle-Class Householders in Yogyakarta, Indonesia* (Unpublished PhD thesis, The University of Melbourne, Australia, 1997).

² “Life is a Passing Wave” by Murray Sale. Australian newspaper *The Age*, 05 September 1992.

³ Lewis Mumford (1961, pp. 419-21) in his discussion of “Organization of Transport and Exchange”.

⁴ See discussion in Harvey (1989).

cations. Sassen (1991), in turn, sees modernisation as related more to the emergence of an increasingly globalised economy, with the agglomeration of central functions in a relatively few sites, which are the new global cities. Lyotard (1984)⁵, as quoted by Holub (1991)⁶, understands modernity and modernisation more as “ways of thinking” - modernity is the age of “grand theory” and of attempts to achieve simplicity in our understanding of the world.

Other writers, building on ideas mainly of Marx but also Max Weber, stress the shift from the simple life of extended family and village community to the “system world”. This conception of modernisation is especially useful in present instance because it stresses changes in the way that society is structured and transforms.

A problems with all of these models is that they are based on attempts to explain changes in “advanced” western societies. However in many countries of the so-called third world, modernisation has been a very complex process, of first colonisation (modernisation achieved by domination from another society), decolonisation (modernisation as the rejection of domination and the reassertion of indigenous values), and neo-colonisation or economic colonisation.

In the following we will look especially at Habermas’s ideas of modernisation.⁷

HABERMAS AND MODERNISATION

In the Theory of Communicative Action (volume 2, 1987⁸, German original 1981), Habermas pursues a theme that has run through all his major work - the “revolutionary” advance of reason in the world of human action. He sees that advance as having occurred on two levels, the cultural and the institutional. The cultural has

related to the fragmentation of fields of knowledge (especially dealt with in volume 1 of the above book, 1984⁹); the institutional level of transformation has had to do with the ways in which the different actions of people are integrated. Modern society, Habermas argues, have “uncoupled” a variety of aspects of the material reproduction of society from the realm of people’s everyday life and have handed them over to two specialised institutions: the “formal” economy and the state. However there is a profound difference in the ways in which these two realms are integrated. The world of everyday experience (the “life-world”) in “socially integrated”, where the various members of society co-ordinate their actions according to some intersubjective consensus about norms or values motives. The “system world” of economy and state, by contrast, is “system integrated” where actions are co-ordinated by the functional interdependence of their consequences.

The rationalisation - modernisation, in effect - has seen polarisation of the “private sphere” of life into the nuclear family and the official economy, while the “public sphere” has split into the space of political participation and the state (where “space of political participation” is understood as social space - the opportunities, as both times and places, for political argument and discussion). And in each of those oppositions, the first terms (nuclear family, and space of political participation) are socially integrated, and the second terms (official economy and state) are system integrated. Further, the point of Habermas’s argument is that the system world of family and state has then progressively “invaded” the life-world of family and space of political participation.

So we have a model of social transformation that can help us to understand the institutional dimensions of modernisation. There is however a further component of the model, for the real connections between system and life-world, and in effect the mechanisms for the progressive invasion of modernity, are the roles that individual fulfils in modern society. There are four of these roles, in Habermas’s explanation: worker and consumer (connecting nuclear family and official economy), and citizen and client (linking the space of political participation and the bureaucratic state).

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

⁶ Robert C. Holub, *Jurgen Habermas, Critic in the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁷ The author’s PhD thesis explains when applying Habermas’ theory it should be noted that we must remain sensitive to the issues of the post-colonial experience of the society under study, hence, Javanese society. A further focus of the thesis is to observe how these insights might need to be revised in order to throw light on modernisation processes in a non-western culture, namely that of Java, and more specifically of Yogyakarta.

⁸ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, volume 2, Life-world and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987).

⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, volume 1, Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

In a paper titled “What’s Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender”, Fraser (1991) takes this argument somewhat further by seeking to reveal the “unthematized gender subtext” that she alleges to underlie the more explicit text of Habermas’s theory. Her arguments are summarised in the following.

Fraser (1991) draws attention to two distinctions that are central to Habermas’s (1984) ideas on the modernisation of societies in the present age. The first distinction is between the “symbolic reproduction” and the “material reproduction” of societies. The former involves ensuring that the young takes on their parents’ values and ways of seeing the world and interpreting it; the latter, on the other hand, has to do with ensuring biological survival and social exchange. Whereas material reproduction occurs through “social labour”, Habermas holds that symbolic reproduction involves socialisation of the young, the ensuring of group solidarity, and the transmission and extension of cultural traditions. And whereas “social labour” is traditionally performed by men in the paid workforce, symbolic reproduction activities are more the domain of women, and are normally unpaid.

The second distinction is between “socially integrated actions contexts” and “system integrated action contexts”. In the former there is some consensus between different people, however arrived at, about norms, values and ends; in the latter, on the other hand, actions are co-ordinated by “self-interested, utility maximising” exchanges in the media of money and power. Whereas the modern nuclear family is quoted as the archetypal case of socially integrated action contexts, the capitalist economic system is seen as the embodiment of system integrated action context. Fraser finds this argument unsatisfactory, however. She insisted that both the nuclear family and the institution of the capitalist economy are permeated with both consensus (consensuality) and exchanges in terms of money and power (strategicality). Following Habermas, Fraser in fact insists that both nuclear family and formal economy are complex mixtures of consensuality, normativity, and strategicality. Stated otherwise, we find both consensus (whether voluntary or coerced), customs and traditions (whether

thought about or virtually subconscious), are strategic exchanges in money and power.¹⁰

Fraser focuses on these two distinctions in order to introduce an essentially feminist critique of Habermas’s theory. She points out that both the distinction between the household as site of symbolic reproduction and the paid workplace as site of material reproduction, and the further distinction between the household as socially integrated and the workplace as system integrated, lead Habermas to an oversimplified understanding of modernisation as a social process. For Habermas’s definition of a modern society is one where there are fundamental changes in the split between these two spheres: “modern societies differ from pre-modern societies in that they split off some material reproduction functions from symbolic ones and hand over the former to two specialised institutions - the (official) economy and the state - which are system integrated” (Fraser, 1991, p. 257) (Figure 1). But, insists Fraser, the household is, like the paid workplace, a place of labour; similarly some symbolic reproduction functions occur in both the household and institutions of the state and economy; and household and workplace are “both spheres (where) women are subordinated to men”. So a theory of modernisation needs to be sensitive to what Fraser calls the “gender subtext” underlying Habermas’s account.

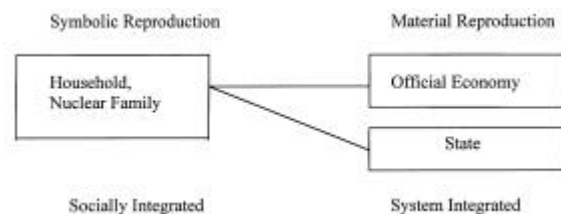


Figure 1. The process of modernisation (after Habermas, 1984)

FRASER, AND LOOKING FOR THE “GENDER SUBTEXT”

Fraser’s way of searching for this unthematized subtext is to observe the different roles that people play in modern society, and which link the world of everyday life (which Habermas calls the “life-world”) with the

¹⁰ The changing nature of these forms of integration is the focus of the investigations in the author’s PhD thesis.

institutions of the state and the official economy (“system world”).

Habermas sees the life-world as comprising the family (a “private sphere” of everyday life) and what he calls a “space of political participation” (a “public sphere”). This latter is the field of political debate and public opinion formation, the activities of mutual help and co-operation between households, neighbourhoods, villages or towns. In the system world (of money and power), as we have already seen, there is the official economy (a further “private sphere” in capitalist society) and the state (another “public sphere”). These four areas of individual and social life are linked by the roles that each person performs in modern (capitalist) society. Exchanges between family and official economy are channelled through the roles of worker and consumer, and these exchanges are in the medium of money. By contrast, exchanges between the space of political participation and the formalised state are through the roles of citizen and welfare state client, generally in the medium of power. (Figure 2.)

Fraser insists that this model needs to be elaborated by observing how each of these four roles is different for men and for women; we need, in other words, to read the “gender subtext”, in order to see how questions of gender run through every aspects of modern society and its evolution.

1. Worker

Fraser argues that the role of worker is masculine in “male-dominated classical capitalist societies”. However she quotes Carol Pateman to the effect that “it is not that women are absent from the paid workplace; it is rather that they are present differently” (p. 261). When they are in the workforce, women tend to be “feminised and sometimes sexualised ‘service’ workers;.... members of the ‘helping professions’ utilising mothering skills”; etc. Her conclusion is that these various differences demonstrate a “conceptual dissonance between femininity and the worker role in classical capitalism”.

2. Consumer

This, in contrast, has a “feminine subtext”. The sexual division of labour assigns to women the work of purchasing and preparing goods for household consumption. This is demonstrated in the overwhelming presence of women in the

market, the supermarket, and the western-style department store; but also in the forms of modern advertising.¹¹

The major criticism that Fraser levels against this part of Habermas’s theory is that it quite ignores the role of childrearer - the production of “appropriately socialised labour power”. It is a further role linking the family with the official economy; and in virtually all societies it is feminised and unpaid.

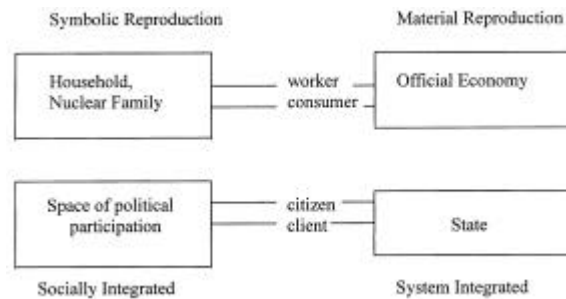


Figure 2. The roles of individual in capitalist society (after Habermas, 1984)

3. Citizen

This role, linking the everyday world of social life with the institutions of the state, is also seen by Fraser to be a masculine role. She observes that “citizenship means participation in political debate and public opinion formation”, and is crucially dependent on the “capacities for consent and speech”. But in many societies a wife is legally subject to her husband; in most, it is considered “unlady like” for a woman to argue at a political level (politics is “men’s talk”); worst of all, in most societies there is a tradition of disregarding women’s voices in cases of assault and harassment - if a woman’s “no” can be reinterpreted even in a court law as meaning

¹¹ A question is to be raised about the direction of changes in modern advertising. With the advent of modernisation in twentieth century western capitalist society, advertising for furniture, softgoods and food was overwhelmingly directed towards women, as this feminised role of the consumer was reinforced; at the same time, the consumption of cars was seen as the prerogative of the male, and somewhat ambivalently advertising of houses was directed towards the husband and wife as a couple. One of the effects of the feminist movement is a tentative breakdown of this gender bias in advertising. Accordingly, in societies such as Indonesia, there is likely to be a tension between these two directions, that is between advertising to strengthen the role of women as consumers, and advertising to reflect a liberalising or breaking-down these roles.

“yes”, then “how can they participate in the debate among citizens?” (p. 262).

4. Client

This is a comparatively recent evolution in the roles that the individual plays. With the welfare state, increasing activities of the local community are taken over by institutions of the state, with socialised income support (pensions, unemployment payments, financial support to parents), health care, various levels of education, etc. To Fraser, this role is overwhelmingly feminised.¹²

The conclusion that Fraser draws from this part of her critique is in three parts. First, by ignoring the role of childrearer, and by failing to bring out the “gender subtext” underlying the roles of worker and consumer, Habermas cannot explain “precisely how the capitalist workplace is linked to the modern male-headed, nuclear family” (p. 263). And by failing to thematise the gender subtext to the role of citizen, the full meaning of the link between the public sphere of political discourse and the modern state is also missed. Second, there are important cross-links that are also missed. For example, the citizen-soldier-protector role, while connecting state and public sphere, also connects each of the family and the paid workplace. Similarly, the citizen-speaker role also runs through the family and the paid workplace, as all of society is permeated with the assumptions of “men’s capacity to speak and consent and woman’s comparatively incapacity” (p. 263). Perhaps most significantly, the feminised role of childrearer likewise links all four areas of life, because it is here that the attitudes and values are formed, which ultimately support all roles and all institutions. Third, Fraser concludes that social control and social change are “multi directional” in classical capitalism, and that the most significant causal influences do not merely run from the official economy (that is, from economic relations and conditions) to all

other fields and roles in society. Rather, gender norms would seem to determine the structure of paid work, state administration and political participation, as well as the family.¹³ (Figure 3.)

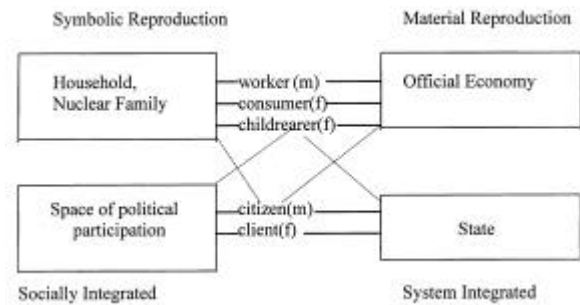


Figure 3. A feminist critique of Habermas’s model of the roles of individual in capitalist society (after Fraser, 1991)

THE QUESTION OF SPACE

All four of these sets of institutions have a spatial expression, and all five roles (where we add childrearer to Habermas’s four) are played out in space - in the home, the neighbourhood, the factory of office workplace, the administrative centre or court of law or presidential office. This further “spatial subtext” is also missing from Habermas’s theory, as it is from Fraser’s critique. In this paper (and the thesis) the interest is in focusing on a local dimension of this spatial subtext, specifically the house and the neighbourhood. There will be a number of themes to this subtext.

- The role of worker in modern capitalist society is changing rapidly with the onset of “flexible accumulation” (Harvey, 1989) and increasingly flexible work practices.¹⁴ People are increasingly having to improve their qualifications; many people work from their homes either as professionals or as outworkers. These changing practices have implications for house design.

¹² What makes this element of the model interesting, in a society such as Indonesia, is its relative absence. Indonesia is not yet at the welfare stage. An interesting question, therefore, is whether that society can avoid the effects of dependence and accentuation of gender differences by finding other, more community based ways supplying the services that welfare state institutions must provide in more westernised societies. What, in other words, are the implications for the organisation of local communities and neighbourhoods? These are issues that are raised in author’s PhD thesis.

¹³ It needs to be observed that Habermas is speaking specifically about the stage of “classical capitalism”, and that he sees this model applying somewhat differently at the presumably later stage of “welfare-state capitalism”. One advantage of focusing on Indonesian society is that it is more or less in a transitional state between stages, but far closer to the classical model, as discussed in the author’s PhD thesis.

¹⁴ Harvey refers to more “flexible” ways of organising the creation and appropriation of wealth: fragmenting the production process, out-sourcing, innovative arrangements, etc.

- In developing economies, there is the phenomenon of centralisation of some economic activity (as “pre-industrial” manufacturing and processing is gathered into larger factories, as corporations swallow smaller companies or household industry, and as “pre-Fordist” small-scale production transforms to “Fordist”¹⁵), but simultaneously a fragmentation of such activity as the move to more flexible and small-scale work practices, which is characteristic of the so-called developed economies, spreads to the corporations operating in the less developed societies. Accordingly, at neighbourhood level, there is simultaneously a loss of some activity (small shops, small factories, etc.) and a gain of other activity.
- Women’s movement into the paid workforce leads to changed demands on dwelling design and use.¹⁶
- The consumer role is also changing: modern packaging, refrigeration, fast-frozen foods etc. are killing traditional local or town markets. This increases available time; but this extra time puts demands on the dwelling, for hobbies, socialising, etc. In many societies, an increasing amount of food purchase and preparation is done by men in the family: there is a changed gender relation which will have implications for the use of dwelling.
- In many societies, childrearing is also increasingly shared by men and women. This too will have spatial implications. With both parents in the paid workforce, it is likely that a component of childrearing is transferred to the neighbourhood - to creches (childcare centres), etc. This might occur in a variety of ways. Traditional, informal practices of childminding by neighbours could increase; such practices might become commercialised as a childminder is paid by parents for the care of children; or arrangements may be more institutionalised, and conducted by a co-operative, by an employer, or by local government authority. Different arrangements will have different implications for the design and functioning the neighbourhood.
- An increasing focus on education puts demands on the dwelling, and on the neighbourhood for better schools, and on the local environment as an educational medium.
- Related to the above points is the increasing demand for the design of the neighbourhood (and of the whole city) to avoid sexist advertising, sexist and racist graffiti, and space where women can feel threatened¹⁷. On a more positive level, the demand is for an urban environment that educates both men and women to mutual respect (Hayden, 1984; also Deutsche, 1991). The task here is part of symbolic reproduction.
- With the decline of traditional market, there are changes in everyday social life, and thereby in the citizen-speaker role - women decreasingly meet at the market, to compare experiences and ideas. The children’s centre or the local school might now take on this role; in some communities, a park or children’s playground might be significant. Where this point is added to that immediately above, we begin to understand the new demands to be placed on neighbourhood design by the imperatives of symbolic reproduction in a contemporary society that now finds itself in the aftermath of “the feminist revolution” of recent decades.¹⁸

Part of these various notions is represented in Figure 4: the mediating roles of space and gender relations in the progress of modernisation are suggested. Where the “gender subtext” underlies the roles through which the “system world” of state and official economy colonises the “life-world” of everyday life, the institutions of family, economy, sphere of political participation and state are all both enabled and constrained in space - of home, neighbourhood, transport system, workplace, city and nation.

¹⁵ “Fordism” refers to the long consensus between large scale corporation, large scale unions and “big” government that especially enabled the long post World War II boom in US and other advanced capitalist economies (Harvey, 1989).

¹⁶ See Ihromi (1990) in discussing the case of women in Indonesia.

¹⁷ See discussion in Hayden (1981).

¹⁸ This issues also relate to the Indonesian women’s movement which discussed in the author’s PhD thesis.

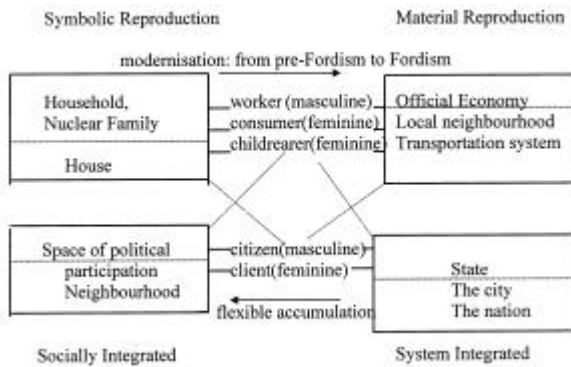


Figure 4. Space and gender as determinants of roles at home and neighbourhood level

CONCLUSION

It is therefore clear that the concern of this paper is with ideas relating to the broader question of economic modernisation and its cultural dimensions. In this broader context, we then turn to the theory of modernisation advanced by Habermas, and then to Fraser's critique to this theory on the grounds that it ignores issues of gender. Within this framework of a theory of modernisation and the role of women, we are able to speculate on the issues of space¹⁹, therefore, how modernisation (from pre-Fordist or pre-industrial to a Fordist organisation of production, and simultaneously from Fordist to post-Fordist or flexible accumulation), and the growing awareness of gender issue, are affecting the roles that individual plays in present society; how those changing roles are leading to new uses of the house and neighbourhood and to new understanding of their potentials (in other words to new meanings); and how these changes have implications for design of the house and for the planning and design of the neighbourhood. It is believed that such a community in the case study (in the author's PhD thesis) will yield insights into the usefulness of these theoretical ideas in a society at a different stage of development from that to which the ideas are more usually applied. It is necessary at this point to explore something of these roles in the community under study²⁰.

¹⁹ Which is to be central to the author's PhD thesis.

²⁰ It is discussed in the author's PhD thesis.

REFERENCES

- Deutsche, R. "Boys Town". *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, volume 9 (1991), pp. 5-30.
- Fraser, Nancy. What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender". In *Feminist Interpretations and Critical Theory*. Eds. Mary L. Shanley and Carol Pateman. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.
- Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1989.
- Hayden, Dolores. "What Would a Non-Sexist City Be Like? Speculations on Housing, Urban Design, and Human Work." In *Women and the American City*. Eds. Catharine R. Stimpson et al. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Hayden, Dolores. *Redesigning the American Dream. The future of Housing, Work, and Family Life*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984.
- Ihromi, Tapi Omas. *Para Ibu Yang Berperan Tunggal dan Yang Berperan Ganda*. Laporan Penelitian. Jakarta: Lembaga Penerbit Fakultas Ekonomi Universitas Indonesia, 1990.
- Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1934.
- Mumford, Lewis. *The City in History. Its Origin, Its Transformation, and Its Prospects*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1961.
- Sassen, Saskia. *The Global City. New York, London, Tokyo*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.