

Negotiating Space:

Women's Use of Space in Low-Income Urban Households
Surabaya, Indonesia

In fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Sarah Cahyadini

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape
Newcastle University
April 2018

Negotiating Space:

Women's Use of Space in Low-Income Urban Households, Surabaya, Indonesia

Abstract

Space as a container of activities reflects more than the physical interaction of its users as it is produced materially and culturally. Users' identity, belief system, worldview and power relation are among many attributes that construct meanings and assign values to space. Therefore, space can never be considered 'neutral'. Over the last decades, studies in the built environment have contributed to understanding the interrelationship between space use and power relations. Such studies have focused heavily towards spatial dichotomies, emphasizing the difference in male/female, public/private, outdoor/indoor or work/leisure among others. Although these divisions are useful in conceptualising how spaces are arranged, used and given meaning, the lived experience does not always fit neatly into these categories. Moreover in low-income urban households, home space is central to the productive, reproductive and community managing role of the occupants.

This serves as a starting point for challenging the notion of spatial binaries, identifying and exploring the concept of boundaries by looking specifically at how women use their spaces at home and the neighbourhood in relation to their roles and activities. Recruiting participants from women's groups in two low-income settlements in the Indonesian city of Surabaya, this study sensitizes women's everyday life and spatial experience and confronts the multiple identities and messy realities of urban routines in order to discern the co-constitution of space use and gender practices. A variety of data collection techniques such as auto photography, simple diary, drawing, interview and observation were employed during two periods of fieldwork. This range of methods provides complementary elements in analysing the complex dynamics of the relationships.

Drawing on empirical evidence from the fieldwork, this study argues that women's use of space in low-income urban households is particularly flexible. In this sense, spatial dichotomies are problematic as they limit the spatial choices and therefore create a greater gap between women's and men's lived experiences. This study is undertaken as part of the efforts towards more symmetrical gender relationships within the built environment. Ultimately, it offers a nuanced understanding of privacy and domesticity in delineating boundaries, through a qualitative study that is highly context-specific.