

Islamic Perspectives of Integrating Muslim Cemeteries Planning with Recreational Areas in Urban Setting

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ABSTRACT

The provision of Muslim cemeteries is a requirement stemming from the Quranic teaching that Muslims are buried upon death. Simultaneously, the provision of recreational areas is equally important for a healthy living environment and be part of the ten percent calculation of open spaces required by planning guideline. Due to the scarcity of land particularly in the urban area, one of the ways is to integrate these two types of land uses. This study seeks to examine the Islamic perspective of integrating Muslim cemeteries planning with recreational areas. Using content analysis, Islamic injunctions of the Quran and Hadith were examined together with their exegesis by Muslim scholars. In principle, it is permissible to integrate Muslim cemeteries with the recreational areas provided that their sanctity is preserved. There are limitations of recreational activities that could be done there and only the area with severe land scarcity is allowed to do so. Consequently, a specific planning guidelines for a hybrid cemetery is required as the current GP-010A and GP-005A are standing alone in guiding the cemeteries and open spaces planning respectively. This shariah permissibility based on Maslahah mursalah helps to address the requirement of recreational areas and Muslim cemeteries in an urban setting.

Keywords: Islam, Muslim cemetery, recreational area, urban planning.

Land scarcity in the urban area is phenomenal nowadays. According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia, urban is "gazetted areas with their adjoining built-up areas, which had a combined population of 10,000 or more at the time of the Census 2010 or the special development area that can be identified, which at least had a population of 10,000 with at least 60 % of the population (aged 15 years and above) were involved in non-agricultural activities". In the capital city of Kuala Lumpur, the data on 2020 land uses shows that open spaces occupied 9.61 percent of the 242.2km.square feet of Kuala Lumpur area. These open spaces are made of public (7.47%), private (1.86%) and reserved forest (0.28%). These land uses are planned for 1.8 million of the Kuala Lumpur population which 40.56% are Malays. Noticeably, 5% of its population are aged 65 above. Although cemeteries, Muslim and non-Muslim, occupied 361.40 hectare areas (1.49%) are not considered as open spaces, they are

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part of green areas in Kuala Lumpur other than public and private open spaces, reserved forest, transmission lines, river, tasik, pond, infrastructure corridor and few others.

Public recreational areas in Kuala Lumpur (1,808.64Ha) are categorized into *Taman Bandar*, *Taman Daerah* (200,000 population), *Taman Kejiranan* (50,000 population), *Taman Tempatan* (10,000 population), *Kawasan Permainan Tempatan dan Taman Poket*, *Kemudahan sukan dan rekreasi*, *Kawasan hijau linear* (Kuala Lumpur City Plan 2020). However, GP005-A by PLANMalaysia categorized open spaces and recreational areas differently in terms of the population covered. They are; *Taman Nasional* (whole country), *Taman Wilayah* (whole regions), *Taman Bandaran* (50,000), *Taman Tempatan* (12,000 – 50,000), *Taman Kejiranan* (3000 – 12,000), *Padang permainan* (1000 – 3000), *Lot permainan* (300 – 1000) and *Laman rekreasi* (less than 300 people). These discrepancies may affect the type of recreational areas to be integrated with Muslim cemeteries. As the study is about the urban setting, Kuala Lumpur's categorization prevails representing other urban areas in Malaysia. Nevertheless, both Act 267 (Federal Territory (Planning) Act 1982) and Act 172 (Town and Country Planning Act 1976) define "open space" as any land whether enclosed or not which is laid out (or reserved for laying out) wholly or partly as a public garden, park, sport and recreation ground or pleasure ground or walk, or as a public place.

Meanwhile, there is no specific categorization for cemeteries other than Muslims and non-Muslims. Hitherto, there are potentials of merging between Muslim cemeteries and recreational areas. However, further study on the readiness of current GP010A and GP005A to integrate cemeteries and recreational areas respectively is required as they are standing alone at this point. More importantly, the matter requires deliberation from Islamic rulings that becomes the centrality of this study.

Islamic Principles Influencing Cemetery Planning

In Arabic terms, the cemetery is referred to as *al-qabr* which means a place for burial death human (Ibn Manzur, 1414H; Majma' Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyah bi Al-Qahirah, N.d). Allah the Almighty said in the Holy Quran: *Then He causeth him to die, and burieth him in his grave* (Al-Quran, 'Abasa: 80;21). This verse means that after creating man, Allah causes him to die and makes him the inhabitant of a grave (Ibn Kathir, 1999). Man is created from sounding clay moulded into shape and breathed into him of Allah's spirit (Al-Quran, Al-Hijr 15: 28-29; Al-Quran, Al-Hajj 22:5). In the end, man is returned to the earth upon his death (Al-Quran, Ta Ha 20:55; Al-Quran, Nuh 71:17-18): *"And Allah has produced You from the earth, growing (gradually). And in the End He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)"*. Simply said, the provision of cemetery areas is inevitable in Muslim settlement which its planning is influenced by the following Islamic principles:

Burial of Death People

Generally, Muslim scholars agreed upon that the dead Muslim's believers are to be bathed, shrouded, and prayed before burial in the cemetery ('Abd Allah Al-'Abadi 1995). Muslim scholars also agreed upon that it is compulsory to bury dead Muslim believers in the cemetery if it is possible to do so. If not, for example when a person dies on a ship which is on sailing ocean duty far away from the port, the dead person will be tied to heavy stuff and submerged into the ocean (A-Jaziri 2003). Allah the Almighty mentions in the Holy Qur'an the story of two sons of the Prophet Adam (Peace Be Upon Him):

Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. "Woe is me!" said he; "Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother?" then he became full of regrets.(al-Quran, Al-Maidah, 5:31).

The burial of the dead people in Islam is an honour of humankind during life and after death ('Abd Al-Qadir ibn Mulla Hawish 1965). Allah the Almighty teaches humankind how to deal with the dead people through the story above ('Abd Al-Fattah ibn Sulayman 'Ishmari N.d). Thus, the dead people will be preserved from any bad change particularly in their body condition (Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi N.d).

The Honour of Corpses of Death People

The cemetery in Islam is designed for the purpose of preserving the dead people. Therefore, Islamic law rules that the depth of the cemeteries must be enough to protect the corpses of the dead people from being disturbed especially by wild animals (Al-Jaziri 2003). In addition, it is preferable to the majority of the Muslim scholars - which include the Hanafiy, the Malikiy, the Hanbaliy, and a view in the Shafi'iy schools of thought - to make a mound of soil on the cemetery after the dead person is buried (Yahya ibn Hubayrah ibn Muhammad 2002). It is also permissible according to the Malikiy, a view in the Hanafiy and the Hanbaliy schools of thought, and preferable in the Shafi'iy, to use rock or timber assign on the cemetery so that the cemetery will be known of its existence (Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi, N.d; 'Abd Al-Wahhab Mustafa Dhahir N.d). The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) instructs Muslim believers to visit the cemetery (Al-San'ani N.d). The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said in his tradition: "I prohibited you from visiting the graves, but now you may visit them" (Muslim N.d: 1977).

Generally, Muslim scholars agreed that it is preferable to visit the cemetery despite they have differed in their opinion on some issues regarding cemetery visits (Wuzarah Al-Awqaf wa Al-Shuun Al-Islamiyyah 1404-1427H; Al-Tirmidhi 1975: 1054). The wisdom of visiting the cemetery is that it will remind the visitor of the Hereafter (Al-Tirmidhi 1975: 1054). The visitor is also preferable to say a greeting, addressing politely, and praying for the dead people in the cemetery (Muslim N.d: 975).

The Prohibitions Regarding Cemetery

However, there are some prohibited actions during visiting the cemetery. It is not permissible to interfere with the honour of the cemetery in any way if any remains of the dead bodies are still to be found in the cemetery (Al-'Ayni Al-Hanafi 2000). It is by asking the opinion of an expert in the field whether the body of dead bodies are turned into dust or not (Al-Bahuti N.d). The sanctity of the dead is like the sanctity of the living. Breaking a dead man's bone is like breaking it when he is alive (Abi Dawud N.d: 3207).

Some examples of prohibition actions are stepping over the cemetery, sitting over the cemetery, and urinating or defecating over the cemetery. It is also prohibited to build any building over the cemetery. Jabir (May Allah be Pleased Him):

The Messenger of Allah forbade that the graves should be plastered, or they be used as sitting places, or a building is built over them (Muslim N.d: 970).

None of these actions is allowed unless the occupants of the cemetery have turned to dust and there is nothing left of their bodies (Al-'Ayni Al-Hanafi, 2000). The majority of Islamic schools of thought which include the Hanafiy, the Shafi'iy, and the Hanbaliy schools of thought agreed that it is permissible to utilize such cemetery either for plant cultivation or erecting a building or other utilization (Ibn Al-'Abidin Al-Hanafi 1992; Al-Nawawi N.d; Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi N.d).

Fatwas Regarding Cemetery in Malaysia

Fatwas play an important role in guiding the planning of cemeteries. Table 1.1 presents the list of fatwas available in Malaysia regarding cemeteries.

Table 1.1 Fatwas in Malaysia related to cemeteries

No	Fatwa Committees	Islamic Rulings
1	National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (11 April 1984)	It is permissible to plant fruit trees on the cemetery site. The fruits harvested are lawful (halal) as long as it is used for public purposes.
2	National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (19 February 1992)	(1) The old cemetery (which is over 90 years) can be reused in stages as there is no prohibition from the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet that prohibit the old cemetery be reused. (2) Disagreed to has an 18-foot high cemetery that could accommodate three corpses at once as it is currently not in the emergency (<i>darurah</i>) situation and many areas could be used as a cemetery. However, it can be considered if the situation is urgent based on the <i>fiqhiyyah</i> method in Islam.
3	National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (27 January 2004)	It is permissible to dig the cemetery after identification by the relevant authorities that the body has been decomposed for use in burying the new body or other reason which based on an emergency or permissible by Islamic law.
4	National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia (2008)	It is permissible to develop a building on the unused Islamic cemetery on the condition that the development is parallel with Islamic law and the remaining dead body (such as bones) must be managed respectfully; excavated and transferred to another place honourably.
5	Johor State (13 May 2003)	Large trees planted in the cemetery must be destroyed (cut down and cleaned) as the roots of the tree can spread to the bodies of the bodies buried in the cemetery.
6	Terengganu State (1989)	It is permissible to erect a building of either a worship building or a resting place on the cemetery site as long as not on the burial site.
7	Perak State (3 September 1985)	It was held that it is illegal to play any kind of game on the waqf land for a cemetery to respect the condition of the waqif and to respect the dead people.

Source: E-SMAF JAKIM, <http://e-smaf.islam.gov.my/e-smaf/fatwa/fatwa/find/3>, accessed December 23, 2019

Delving into the Islamic principles affecting Muslim cemeteries planning and the list of fatwas available in Malaysia, it can be inferred that:

1. The preservation of sanctity and the honour of dead people are paramount in matters dealing with cemeteries
2. The activities on cemetery sites are restricted not to invade their sanctity
3. *Maslahah mursalah* prevails under unavoidable circumstances (*darurah*) that cemeteries site to be used for other purposes.

Stemming from these three inferences, the discussion on recreational activities in Islam is put forward. This is to evaluate the possibilities of integrating them into Muslim cemetery planning thus giving effect to its design and layout. The recreational activities like running, jogging, picnicking, bicycling, bench sitting, docent tours and bird watching (Katinka et. al. 2017; Shu-Chun 2007; Klaufus 2016; Davies & Bennett 2016), whether or not they could be blended with the ordinary activities taken place at cemetery areas like visiting burial lot, recitation of Quran, Talqin reading and cleaning a burial lot (Putri Haryati et. al. 2020; Jamilah & Nursyaza Husna 2019).

Recreational Activities in Islam

The Islamic concept of recreation is based on Islamic teachings from the sources of the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). Islam encourages all kinds of games and recreations, which are within moral limits and are helpful in physical and mental refreshment help a pious character and personality (Abu Urad 1429H). Allah the Almighty said in the Holy Quran:

“Say: “Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds. No partner hath Him: this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who bow to His will.”(Al-Quran, Al-An’am 6: 162-163).

The above verse means to worship, sacrifice, and actions that are drawn closer to Allah are *al-nusuk* as prescribed by Ibn Jawzi (Ibn Jawzi 1422H). It is also as mentioned by Al-Zuhayli that the pilgrimage and other worship that are intended for Allah are *al-nusuk* (Al-Zuhayli 1418H). In addition, as believers, all good deeds in daily life and all good deeds before death (such as wills and alms) are purely intended for Allah, and are not intended for other than Allah (Al-Syawkani, 1414H; Ibn Jawzi, 1422H; Al-Zuhayli 1418H). This includes recreation which is intended for Allah.

Recreation means to make happy, joy, and fun outing and watching and surfing and recreation have been means to make fun and happiness (Mohsen Mazaherinia 2017). Recreation is allowed by all religions as it is a necessity of human instinct (*fitrah*). Recreation, which is intended to rest, does not comprehend sin, and sightseeing is permissible (Al-Jassas 1415H). God Almighty told us about the brothers of Prophet Yusuf (Peace Be Upon Him) once they attempted to take their brother (the Prophet Yusuf) for recreation. They said: “*Send him with us tomorrow to enjoy himself and play, and we shall take every care of him.*” (Al-Quran, Yusuf 12: 12).

The verse is an indication that recreation is permissible. Otherwise, the Prophet Ya’kub (Peace Be Upon Him) would forbid their children too (Al-Jassas 1415H). As recreation is intended to relieve stress and anxiety, it is permissible in all religions if it does not become excessive (Ibn Ashur 1984). In Islam, those who practice recreation is not a hypocrite as recreation is identical to human instinct. On an occasion, Hanzalah al-Usayyidi and Abu Bakr were touched by hypocrite’s feelings as they practice recreation with their wives and children. However, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said to them,

“By Him in Whose Hand my soul is, if your state of mind remains the same as it is in my presence and you are always busy in remembrance of Allah, the Angels will shake hands with you in your beds and in your paths. Oh Hanzalah, but time should be devoted to the worldly affairs and time should be devoted to prayer and meditation.” The Prophet said to them three times (Muslim N.d: 2750).

The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) also prohibited those who do concentrate his or her time for worshipping the Almighty God without allocating time to his or her body and family. The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said to Abd Allah bin Amr, “*Oh Abd Allah! I had been informed that you fast all day and stand in prayer all night. Do not do that. Observe the fast sometimes and leave them (the fast) at other times. Stand up for the prayer at night and sleep at night. Your body has a right over you, your eyes have a right over you and your wife has a right over you*” (Al-Bukhari 1422H: 5199).

There are some examples of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) practising recreation. Aishah reported that in an event, she and the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) saw some Ethiopians displaying their skill with spears in a mosque (Al-Bukhari 1422H: 454). She and the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) also had a foot race (Abi Dawud N.d: 2578). In another event, the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) jokes with Anas bin Malik (his companion) by calling him, “Oh possessor of two ears!” (Al-Tirmidzi 1975: 1992). It is also reported by Mahmud bin al-Rabia’ that the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) took

water from a bucket (which was used for getting water out of the well) with his mouth and threw it to his face to joke (Al-Bukhari1422H: 6422).

Last but not least, it is also narrated that the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) encourages parents to teach children archery, swimming and horse riding (Al-Bayhaqi 1423H: 8297). As we know, the stronger believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer (Ibn Majah 2009: 4168).

Urban Muslim Cemetery *Vis-A-Vis* Recreational Activities

In so far, the authors submitted that the rule on this issue of integrating Muslim cemeteries with recreational areas is permissible based on the Islamic legal maxim "The origin of all rules is permissibility" which means that a particular activity is permissible unless there is a clear prohibition against it. This is based on the principle of *maslahah mursalah*.

Literally, *maslahah* means benefit. Technically, *maslahah mursalah* is the interest or benefit that *syara'* does not provide for a ruling to achieve it, and no legitimate evidence has been given to consider or cancel it. An example of *maslahah mursalah* for which Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) started to take the prisons and document the passports of the soldiers. This is an interest in which there is no legitimate evidence of support, consideration, cancellation or revocation (Al-Zuhayli 2006). In order to practise *maslahah mursalah*, three conditions applied namely:

1. It must be a real interest to benefit people or avoid harm to them, nor a lesson to the apparent or imaginary interests.
2. It is a public interest for the whole nation or the majority, nor for personal and individual interests, or for serving a certain sect in society, because it is often detrimental to the totality, and because legislation is not for individuals, however for public interests.
3. The provisions based on the interest are not a legitimate ruling fixed by the Quran, Sunnah or consensus of scholars (*ijma'*). This is because the opposition indicates that this interest is canceled by the legislator because of the consequences of the evils (Al-Zuhayli 2006).

As stated before, nowadays, there is a demand from the public for more open spaces to fulfill their recreational needs, particularly in urban areas. Apart from that, there is no rule fixed by the Quran, Sunnah or consensus of scholars (*ijma'*) regarding this issue which fulfill the third condition to apply the principle of *maslahah mursalah*.

To address the issue of land scarcity, this principle is also similar to the practice of multilevel grave. It was narrated that Hisham bin 'Amir said:

"My father was killed on the day of Uhud, and the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) said: '*Dig graves and make them good and wide, and bury two or three in a grave, and put in first the one who knew the Qur'an most.*' My father was the third of three, and the one who knew the Qur'an most was placed (in the grave) first" (al-Nasa'i 1986: 2018).

Sheikh Prof Dr. Hamid Abu Talib, Dean of Kuliyyah Syariah Al-Azhar University when questioned on this issue has responded that in an emergency such as a high population density with limited land, the general rule of build the multilevel is allowed (Irsyad al-Fatwa 2015). In Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Irsyad Fatwa no. 245, which was issued by the Office of Mufti Federal Territory on 16th September 2018, there are two situations on the issue of building the multilevel grave.

Firstly, the situation in the villages. In the village, as there is a lot of vast state of the land and *wakaf* for the grave, then there is no need to build a multilevel grave. However, it is very desirable that the management began to organize, save as much as possible the burial ground, and manage the grave to maximize the possibility of a dead person being buried so that the problem of out of graveyard space will not occur in the future. Secondly, in major cities like Kuala Lumpur whereby due to rapid development, has caused the burial ground to be limited while the number of deaths

from time to time increases, the building of the multilevel grave is allowed and even is a must. Therefore, the respective authorities must work together to implement a multi-storey burial to maximize the use of the burial ground.

In Pahang, it has been decided on 7th January 2011, that is necessary situation of addressing the shortage of Muslim cemetery nowadays by building the multilevel grave that the concept and method are not contrary to *syarak*. The Muzakarah of the National Council of Fatwa Committee for Islamic Religious Affairs Malaysia on its 92nd meeting convened on 15th-17th December 2010 has also decided the multi-storey of the graveyard is allowed and not contrary to *syarak*. However, it must be in a state of emergencies such as high population density and the limited location of burial ground. Therefore, the construction of a multilevel burial grave should be implemented in a necessary situation to overcome the shortage of Muslim cemeteries today.

In a nutshell, the multilevel grave can be built based on the principle of '*necessities render prohibited things permissible*' and '*whatever is permissible due to excuses ceases to be permissible with its cessation*,' whereby there is no need to build a multilevel grave in the village, however, it is allowed to build it in town due to limitation of the burial ground.

Therefore, it is submitted that the practice of dual function of the urban cemetery for recreational activities can be practiced similarly to integrate recreational area based on the following rules:

1. The role for the urban cemetery to be a dual function to accommodate the needs of open spaces for recreational activities is permitted as long as it is not interfering with the honour of the cemetery in any way if any remains of the dead bodies are still to be found in the cemetery.
2. It is permissible to integrate urban cemeteries into a recreational areas to conduct activities if the expert opined that the dead bodies are turned into dust and there is nothing left of their bodies.

In short, the practice of dual function of the urban cemetery for recreational activities can be practiced due to the same reason of multilevel grave i.e. the concept of *maslahah mursalah*. Therefore, from 10% open space required by planning guideline, 7% must be a functional one to include recreational areas. The remaining 3% may consist of reserved lands for public facilities, utilities and amenities that were surrendered to State Government Authority. Masjid, surau and religious reserved places are among the public facilities taken into accounts apart from thirteen others without mentioning the cemeteries. Indeed, cemeteries are governed by different planning guidelines namely the GP010-A. Figure 1.1 illustrates this requirement where hybrid cemeteries could be considered.

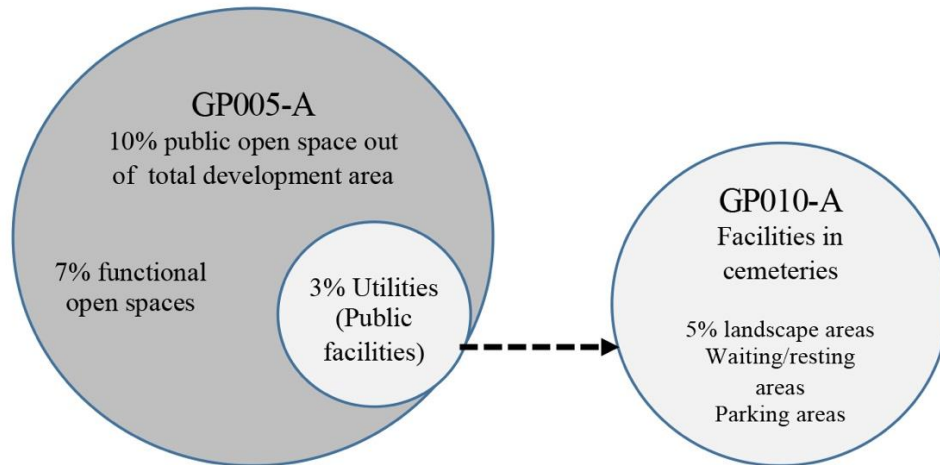


Figure 1.1 Proposal for hybrid cemetery

Source: Adapted from GP005-A Open Spaces and Recreational Areas

In conclusion, hybrid cemeteries in urban areas could happen subject to further study on the GP010A and GP005A themselves. As of their current state of provisions, hybrid cemeteries are unlikely to be materialised. In other words, the provisions of these two GPs must be synthesised in producing a specific guideline for a hybrid cemetery. With regard to shariah requirements, it must be proven the scarcity of land in that particular area and limited recreational activities are allowed to preserve the sanctity of a dead person. Recreational activities like walking, jogging, bird watching, light games and physical exercises are recommended. In addition, the integration of these two land uses must look into the form, public perception, rules and regulations, historical and cultural values, ownership and management of these two entities that now become as one.

Acknowledgement

This research work is financially supported by Fundamental Research Grant Scheme (FRGS/1/2018/SSI11/USM/03/4)

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