The Concept of Privacy and the Malay Dwelling Interior Space Planning

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Abstract

The privacy value in spatial organisation, floor plan design and wall opening is a prime determinant in Malay Traditional Dwelling (MTD) and Low Cost Flat Dwellings (LCFD). The practices of religious beliefs would create better quality of life, privacy value and education to the occupants. This study examines the concept of privacy in Islamic and Western perspective so as to measure the female privacy in the MTD and LCFD through space planning. The result reveals the understanding of privacy values and needs that will influence the interior space planning of Malays living in urban LCFD.

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1. Introduction

There are plenty of social behavior studies related to the built environment. The studies focus on the concept of privacy related to the cultural, behavioral, built environment, privacy in the dwelling and other privacy realm (Altman et al. 1981; Altman and Chemers, 1980).

The interest of privacy has been discussed in a variety of disciplines and have been address by few philosophers namely psychologist, sociologist and architect. According to Altman and Chemers (1984) define privacy as 'selectively control access to one-self'. It is part of the privacy regulation that had emphasized closeness and openness which may leads to human behavior development and moral growth.

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(Newell, 1995). Altman (1981) and Newell (1995) view theory of privacy regulation refers to the process of change and adaptation to human development throughout the life. The closeness which is refers to a person who is isolate from others and vice versa to an openness person attempts to be more easy to access. Therefore, the privacy regulation is to control the closeness or openness accessibility to others, by creating a “boundary control” (Altman and Chemers, 1980).

Newell (1995) determines the privacy as ‘a temporary condition in the separation of the public domain’ by aspects of ownership and responsibility in making alternative choices according to the nature of the changing conditions in relation to the separation of the public domain. Moreover, Margulis (2003) examined the privacy ‘as part or in whole represents control over the relationship between individual and the others’. The sociologist defines privacy as a ‘boundary between person, environment and outsider’; where they can declare their boundaries are restricted, and the outsiders will not intrude (Fahey, 1995). However, Mortada (2003) from the Islamic built environment view the ‘privacy in Muslim society is more towards gender segregation and separation between the privacy life and public intercourse’. Thus, all disciplines investigate on privacy has been assumed that people have to avoid contact and make a distance with others on specific times or occasion (Altman and Chemers, 1980, Altman et al 1981).

In the behavior framework that has been described by Altman et al (1981), there have four elements namely verbal, para-verbal, non-verbal and environmental. The environmental behavior elements emphasize on personal space, territory and crowding or physical environment. This behavior theory and privacy are a two-way connection involve person and with others including team, group, family and the rest of other social entities, which do not conduct a specific time.

2. Muslim perspective on privacy

From the Islamic view dwelling is defined as the safe shelter and private sanctuary, best place to enjoy tranquillity, refuge from the outside world, as a form of education to the occupants, expressing, resting, happiness and strengthening the family relationship (Omer, 2010).

Mortada (2003) mentioned that every Muslim family should take into considerations about the dwellings function and design emphasises on segregation of gender, seclusion of female, privacy (Mortada, 2003; Asiah, 2008) and individual rights that are free from any intrusion of privacy in life. The privacy provision could be achieved with consideration of two elements namely visual and audio privacy (Mortada, 2003). Both of these elements had been stated in Qur’an verses below:

“Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: ..” (Ali, Sr. 24:30)

“If ye find no one in the house, enter not until permission is given to you: if ye are asked to go back, go back: ..” (Ali, Su. 24:27-28)

Concept of privacy in Islam is segregation between male and female, segregation spaces between privacy lives and public intercourse to protect the security of a family member. Islam only allows free social interaction between male and female known as Mahram referring to a family member. (Mortada, 2003) Islam also suggests ways in dressing to cover the ‘awrah’ means a private part of the body need to be concealed (Omer, 2011), behaviour, relationships between male and female (Mortada, 2003; Asiah, 2008).

The house functions as place for family education and development centre, to produce Muslim traditional society and will contribute to the stability of society (Omer, 2010). The layout plan and house design should follow the Islamic principles of visual and audio privacy to prevent the un-ethical acts (Mortada, 2003; Omer 2011). The Qur’an stated in verses Su. 24:31, 24:58, which are emphasizes male
and female including adults or children in the dwelling to maintain the privacy of family members where there have to control their behaviour, ethics, courtesy, communication, and clothing (Omer 2011).

The spatial planning in the dwelling design should divide spaces that are public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces. The public space receives and entertains non-mahram guests namely neighbours, relatives and friends (Mortada, 2003). The private area is specially created for a family member and female without interfere by non-mahram guests (Mortada, 2003; Asiah 2008). The family private space or space that domain by a female in the dwelling should not being direct visual access by non-mahram guests. This due to protect from unwanted gaze and it has been stated in Qur'an. The female spaces are in the living area (family space), kitchen and bedroom. These three female domain spaces should be a place for them without being seen by the non-mahram guests (Mortada, 2003). Allah will give very pleasant and amaze blessing when they teach Islam in the dwelling (Omer, 2011) and it is written in the Quran and hadith below:

“House a place for worship and did not pray or recite Qur'an aloud except in the house.” (Sahih Bukhari Volume 003, Book 037, Hadith Number 494)

“We inspired Moses and his brother with this Message: Provide dwellings for your people in Egypt, make your dwellings into places of worship, and establish regular prayers: and give glad tidings to those who believe!” (Ali, Sr.10:87)

Mortada (2003) claim that dwelling as a key element in achieving hierarchy of female privacy and the elements of privacy in divided into the visual and the audio. The visual privacy in the dwelling protects the female occupants from the non-muhrim eye (Omer, 2010; Mortada, 2003). Mortada, 2003; Asiah, 2008 explain that, the visual privacy involves site location and layout plan. The Muslim scholars emphasised three elements of design that can control the visual privacy of the dwelling for instance the entrance door, windows, opening and screen height (Omer, 2010; Mortada, 2003; Asiah, 2008). To ensure the visual privacy, dwelling spaces must be hidden from the sight of non-muhrim. The location of the entrance doors need to be taken into account. Muslim scholars agree that the door should not face directly, opposite or adjacent towards the mediate neighbour’s (Mortada, 2003; Asiah 2008). Windows function to obtain natural light and fresh air, view the environment and neighbourhood. Window must build above the eye level for the upper and lower floor of the dwelling, to maintain the internal privacy (Mortada, 2003; Asiah 2008).

Mortada (2003) and Asiah (2008) mentioned that privacy of acoustic means controlling the transmission of sound from inside to the outside of the dwelling can be heard by opening doors and windows. The family private area is most notable area that needs to be protected from transmission of sound to the public guest area. The acoustical privacy can be includes the site and floor plans. The site is the elements of the dwelling that includes walls, floors and roofs that can prevent the voices of female occupants to pass outside the dwelling. This space organization and layout plan ensure the acoustic privacy between the internal zones and the outside zone (Mortada, 2003; Asiah 2008). The types of building materials and the wall thickness also will act as an acoustical insulation device (Mortada, 2003).

3. Malay Traditional Dwelling (MTD) concept and privacy

In general, dwelling is defined as a shelter to protect from weather and climate (Nasir and Wan-Teh, 1997; Mursib and Mohamad, 1998; Lim 1987; Mortada, 2003) also to find peace and place for relaxation mind, body and soul (Mortada, 2003). In the Malay village comprises several of MTD occupied by Malay Muslim people which is built up above from the ground primarily made of hardwood. Their lifestyle
The concept is more toward communal intimacy, sharing and cooperation with community. The personal intimacy become second fundamental, and it shows in the interior spatial organization (Ahmad, 1998).

Hashim et al. (2009) had mentioned that the Malay family has been known to be a close community and have a large family living together under one roof, which is, consists of grandchildren, children and grandparents. Therefore, their dwelling fundamentally could be extending in the future follow to the family needs. Nasir (1983), Lim (1987), Mursib and Mohamad (1998) explains the MTD concept as open planning concept for the interior space planning. This concept is attempted to use less wall as a divider to create space provision. This concept applied at the main house (rumah ibu) contains living hall and middle area, which is no walls and the curtain will be used as a requirement of privacy. Only bedroom had a wall divider. Open plan concept emphasizing the Malay culture tradition, which is shows respect to the elderly, family bonding and the position of female (Lim, 1987).

The long roof MTD in Melaka is a sample of Muslim dwelling in Malaysia. The sequence of the zoning spaces performed the importance of the activities and flexible uses followed to the Malays lifestyle (Lim, 1987). Nasir (1985, 1993), Mursib and Mohamad (1998) agree that mostly, the Malay community in the village is practicing Islam in their daily life; it could be seen in the interior layout that had been divided into several spaces, which are public space, semi-public space, private space and semi-private space for separation different gender (Nasir, 1983; Hashim et al., 2009). Nasir (1983) mentioned that one of the Islamic principles focus on space segregation as a privacy concept. Nasir and Wan-Teh (1997) define that Malay customs in MTD functions and culture is in line with the Islamic religious and does not conflict with Islamic teachings. Islam permits the dwelling could follow cultural norms and customs as long as they do not conflict with shari'ah. (Mortada, 2003)

In daily activities, the main house is for family member do to perform solah, usrah, recite Quran with their family members, sleep, eat and ironing (Hashim et al., 2009). Asiah (2008) and Hashim et al. (2009) explain that female privacy has been protected through the separation space, and it is located at the main house, bedroom and the semi-private area is kitchen and passageway. Bedroom is for unmarried daughter to sleep, rest, reading, sewing, handicraft and changing cloth and temporary place for newly married to stay. The female activity would be remaining inside the dwelling and they will not intermingle with different gender who is entertained at the verandah (Hashim et al., 2009; Nasir, 1993; Nasir and Wan-Teh, 1997).
Fig. 1. The twelve posts of Melaka long roof of Malay traditional dwelling layout plan
In the Fig. 1, shows the verandah is generally for male family members to entertain the male guest when they have a celebration such as a family gathering, social function or religious function. This area also could be a sleeping or resting area for male. At night, the middle area will be a temporary a sleeping area for male.

Hashim et al. (2009) explain on the certain occasion the male visitor will directly enter from the public space (entrance porch) and further to the semi-public space which is verandah. For the female visitor, they will enter from second entrance door at the side of the dwelling towards semi-private space for instance passageway and kitchen (Mursib and Mohamad, 1998).

The separation between both genders in family member is applying in the normal daily activities which is emphasize at the sleeping areas separation between male and female, parents and children. During social interaction, the segregation of gender (Abdul-Rahim, 2008) could be seen in the zoning of domain spaces in the interior spatial organization (Hashim et al., 2009). Abdul-Rashid (2005) explains that the space planning and function of the dwelling had already followed Islam rules and culture where female and male are not sharing the same space at certain occasion. Thus, the Islamic principles in MTD showed the separation gender, concept of open plan, the multipurpose space and private space for female.

4. Modern Low Cost Flat Dwelling (LCFD) concept and privacy

In 1970’s, modern house had been introduced into Peninsular Malaysia which is originated from the West known as detached house, semi-detached house, terrace house, townhouse, flat, apartment, and condominium (Radzi, 1998; Asiah, 2008). The modern house is remarkably well planned and in a grid system and was built in terrace, rows; stacked house also share a wall with neighbours on the right side or left side, front, upper level and below of the dwelling. The materials used for the wall are brick, reinforced concrete beams and slab and the dwelling concept is dividing by a wall as a barrier.

According to Radzi (1998), government had introduced low cost dwelling unit to meet a need for family with low income with cheap dwellings, basic materials and yet pleasant to live in. The living space are consists living hall, bedroom, bathroom and kitchen. Normally, this dwelling will have neighbours.

Nowadays, the modern house interior space planning is not dividing the space into public and private. In high density developments, the LCFD units are arranging side by side and the units are facing each other. These arrangements are probably affecting the family visual privacy. In the context of privacy and family life intimacy in the dwelling, the private space (for daily activity) needs to hide from the neighbor eye (Hashim and Abdul-Rahim 2008).

The lacking and weakness in flat design can be seen through the social interaction, cultural considerations, visual and acoustic privacy (Hashim and Abdul-Rahim, 2010). The Fig. 2 shows the layout plan of LCFD in Melaka. Those spaces had wall divider as partition and the living hall area emphasis only for public intercourse and there is no private space for female except for bedroom.
Fig. 2. The location of entrance door, bathroom, three bedrooms, small kitchen and narrow living area combining with dining

5. Objectives of study

This study is to examine on the definition of privacy from the western and Muslim scholars and the relationship between the needs of privacy and the spatial organisation of the dwelling. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To understand the definition of privacy that focuses on the individual, female and the family.
- To identify the elements of privacy in a Muslim dwelling spatial planning.
- To identify the architectural elements and spatial organization affecting the privacy of Malay families living in low cost flat dwelling.
6. Methodology

The method was used in this study is included physical on-site measurement (layout), physical on-site observation and in-depth interview with occupants. There are two dwelling samples were selected from the Malay families in Melaka including MTD and LCFD. Both of the selected dwellings were measure and produce documentation of floor plans. The floor plans were analysed to identify the relation of the space of a family member, guest and strangers. The physical on-site observation whereby need to observe the occupants and the relation towards the privacy in the interior. The site observation was taken using photos to analyse in details on the interior space, the architectural elements such as windows, door and openings. Lastly, the in-depth interview was conducted based on their willingness to participate with this study and particularly their respond toward the relationship of human being and privacy with the interior and quality of life. The interview was not in a structured form but based a list of questions. The question for in-depth interview is about the privacy needed in the interior, the activities in the dwelling that require privacy and place that receive and entertain non-mahram guest. The in-depth interview were analysed using SPSS (Statistical package for Social Science Software).

7. Findings

The in-depth interview from MTD reveals that the religious beliefs cultural norms, way of life, daily life social interaction and behavioural norms of the Malays remain to be important aspects in regulating the privacy in the families. Thus, the religious beliefs that have been applied would create better quality of life, space planning, positive environment, privacy value and education to the occupants. In the figure Fig. 3 shows the chart of zoning area, where it shows the occupant daily life living in MTD that domain by male and female and regulating privacy with the space.

Fig. 3. Chart of space shows zoning of public, semi-public, semi-private and private spaces in MTD followed the Islamic principles
The result from LCFD also shows that the way of life, daily life social interaction and behavioural norms are not consistent with Malay families living in MTD. The finding is toward zoning of space planning and regulating privacy is seen more towards individual, family and seclusion of female. Fig. 4 shows that the space planning is not in line with Islamic principles.

8. Discussion and analysis

The chart in Fig. 5 shows the Islamic principle of privacy; there are shows several components that should apply in the Muslim dwelling space planning especially for LCFD. The MTD space planning has been apply the segregation gender, visual privacy and architectural design component.

This study is consistent with Altman’s privacy regulation that relate toward the human behaviour. This paper also presents the concept of privacy from Islamic perspective view. The layout plan and spatial organization shows zoning between private and public space in the dwelling, segregation gender and seclusion of female. The security and safety of human especially female *awrah* should be concealed follow to the Islamic religious. It is also could protect the unwanted gaze from non-mahram guest. The visual and acoustic privacy should be taken seriously as part of seclusion of female, where non-mahram can’t really directly view or heard their voice. Using the MTD and LCFD, in relations with the needs of privacy and spatial organisation affect the level of privacy of individual, female and the family. However, in order to identify the privacy is extremely valuable to examine the territory privacy within the internal family privacy boundary and external boundary of the dwelling.
Fig. 5. The concept of privacy that followed the Islamic religious norms.

9. Conclusions and recommendations

This paper mainly studied generally on definition of privacy, segregation gender in space planning, elements of privacy, architectural design component, security and safety. The definition on privacy from various scholars illustrates some changes of attitude and behaviour in the society towards the cultural norms and religious beliefs. The Islamic teaching and cultural norms clearly been shown in defining the visual privacy where the use of curtain to block the view from intrusion from the non-mahram eye and also could be seen in spatial arrangement that emphasis on the segregation gender and separation between public and private space. The understanding of these divisions and the architectural elements such as windows, doors, opening and the opening treatments toward privacy should be taken into considerations in designing Muslim dwelling in future.

For further research, need to study more on MTD with different size of layout plan and have to research on the level of privacy of spaces that use for daily life (social interaction among family members), special occasion (e.g. Family gathering, Wedding feast, Raya feast, Doa selamat feast, Social function and Religious function) and function of the space.

In order to improve the quality of life among the dwellers in the Low Cost Flat Dwelling (LCFD), it is recommended that the concept of privacy in Islam should be implemented in Low Cost Flat Dwelling (LCFD).

References


