

# *Intersections of (infra)structural violence and cultural inclusion: the geopolitics of minority cemeteries and crematoria provision*

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# Intersections of (infra)structural violence and cultural inclusion: The geopolitics of minority cemeteries and crematoria provision

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Building on embodied and de-colonial approaches to geopolitics, this paper examines the relationship between forms of governance in municipal cemetery and crematorium provision and the needs of established minorities, arguing that inadequate infrastructure and services can constitute harm. Crucially, it is contended that forms of governance impact not only on the living, but also on perceptions of the wellbeing of the dead. Grounded in a study of four towns in England and Wales, the paper identifies firstly how intersectional identity fundamentally shapes people's experiences of deathscape governance; secondly, the possibilities of infrastructural benefits of inclusive services; and thirdly, the harms done by non-inclusive forms of governance, implicit territoriality and inadequate infrastructure. This is evidenced in the negative impact of poor municipal cemetery organisation and management on specific minority groups, such as inadequate burial space, high burial costs, hindrances to timely rituals, and reduced access to services as a result of government austerity measures; as well as protracted local planning processes. The conclusion calls for a wider conceptualisation of necropolitics, based on a critical-feminist-decolonial geopolitics of deathscapes in multicultural societies, and offers insights for the practical governance of inclusive cemeteries and crematoria.

## KEYWORDS

cemeteries, geopolitics, governance, minorities, necropolitics, post-secular

## 1 | INTRODUCTION: CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIA AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MINORITY PROVISION

When the dead [are] at peace, the living get peace as well. (Muslim focus group participant)

Cemeteries and crematoria are key components of everyday urban fabric and public-private infrastructure, part of wider urban spaces that are known to be characterised by various "fluid and fortified boundaries" (Secor, 2004, p. 357). As social demographics change, cemeteries and crematoria need to evolve to reflect the dynamic communities who call a given locality home, or they can persist as spaces of majority identity-based territoriality that are resistant to change. The governance

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of these highly sensitive and symbolic spaces and practices impacts on the emotional and spiritual wellbeing of individuals and communities.

Historically, English and Welsh cemeteries, crematoria, and associated gardens of remembrance have evolved under the primary influences of the Established church and the Metropolitan Burial Act in 1852, which tasked local authorities with local oversight of burials in the interests of public health. In addition to public health imperatives, the protection of the dead, and the avoidance of physiological or psychological injury to the living, were key tenets of British civic cemetery innovation and design in the 19th century (see Loudon 1843). Guided by these principles, municipal and other civic cemeteries were designed as secular spaces but historically included consecrated Christian areas and some provision for long-established minority religious groups, for example Jews and Christian Nonconformists. Local authorities also developed crematoria facilities as cremation became more popular, typically locating these purpose-built combined cemetery-crematoria complexes in urban peripheries. In Britain as a whole, cremation now accounts for over 77% of body dispositions (UK Cremation Society, 2019), and many choose permitted private dispersal outside of cemeteries rather than the formal interment of cremated remains. This trend, combined with the availability of land, increased secularisation, and social attitudes to death, have served to marginalise cemeteries spatially and rhetorically in England and Wales. Yet there is growing demand for dedicated burial space for minority religions such as Muslims and the Baha'i faith, and cemeteries remain deeply significant for anyone whose loved ones or community members are interred there, making both appropriate spatial organisation and the treatment of the dead of utmost importance.

Cemeteries and crematoria are commonly understood as material and representational deathscapes associated with funerary rituals, burial, cremation, and memorialisation, but deathscapes are more than landscapes associated with death. Crucially, they include the varied spatial dimensions and relations situating and contextualising embodied dying, death, and bereavement, and the representational, more-than-representational and virtual spaces and practices of mourning and remembrance (Maddrell, 2016; Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010; Maddrell, 2020). The relationality of the living and the dead, and any religious-spiritual beliefs about the dead, including their spatial expressions, are crucial to understanding (i) the ways in which deathscapes are shaped by mourning practices (see, for example, Klass, 2014; Maddrell, 2013; McClymont, 2018) and (ii) the ways in which that mourning impacts on the living. As the quote above highlights, for many, the wellbeing of the living is intimately connected to the welfare of the dead. Thus, it is necessary to take a wider framing of deathscapes into account in order to understand people's spatial expressions and experiences of bereavement and mourning, including forms of municipal cemetery and crematorium governance.

Both functional and symbolic, cemeteries-crematoria are on the one hand material and corporeal spaces for the remains of the dead, and the embodied experience of mourning and remembrance, but cemeteries, and crematoria also encompass the more-than-representational dimensions of deathscapes, including the emotional-affective geographies of grief, consolation, and ongoing attachment, the performance of rituals (formal and informal), and function as arenas of belief and identity (see Maddrell, 2016; Maddrell & Sidaway, 2010; McClymont, 2018; Rugg & Parsons, 2018). Cemeteries and crematoria therefore matter to individuals, families, and communities because they are symbolic-sacred places of the bodily remains of loved ones, and/or of belonging, grounded in a relational nexus of memory-family-community-belief-place-home. As such, they are deeply significant for individuals and communities. However, majority and minority communities are both dynamic and multifaceted, as are individual identities that are shaped by intersectional factors. Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw, 1991 captures the various relational dimensions of multiple identity characteristics and lived experiences, and recognises multifaceted rather than presumed dominant and fixed identity characteristics. Within the context of funerary practices, attention to intersectionality serves to highlight the complexity of group and sub-group interests and claims within cemeteries and crematoria.

While the adoption of host-country majority culture is welcomed by some migrants, ethnicity, religion, and attachment to country of origin/family origin are often strong factors in migrant and established minority intersectional identities. As society became more culturally diverse in the second half of the 20th century, so too did the requirements for funerary spaces and practices. For example, although South Asian migrants in England and Wales have commonly sought the repatriation of remains to their country of origin (Jassal, 2015), generational-sensitive studies evidence a trend away from repatriation to disposition in Britain (Gardner, 1998; Maddrell et al., 2018). Having the "right" sort of burial or cremation, and associated rituals, is important for the respectful treatment of the deceased and for those mourning them. This is especially important for those with specific religious funerary requirements that are believed to have implications for the eternal wellbeing of the dead. The needs of these groups are at the heart of this paper. For these mourners, there is a need to ensure local provision for appropriate rites and bodily disposition in line with religious and/or cultural requirements. A sense of unreasonable barriers to these needs can cause cultural and political resentment. A failure to fulfil funerary requirements can cause personal and communal guilt, especially if incomplete rites are understood to impact on the current or eternal

wellbeing of the deceased. Guilt occurs when a moral code is breached and can be exacerbated when there is limited or no ability to put right or make amends for such breaches (Faiver et al., 2000); clearly burial or cremation are examples of such irremediable acts. Additionally, stress and perceived lack of social support are recognised risk factors for Complicated Grief, the biopsychosocial condition defined as a harmful derailing of normal healing processes after acute bereavement, causing long-term debilitation, with some of the same characteristics as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and major depression (Neimeyer, 2006; Shear et al., 2013).

Clearly, cemeteries and their governance are as much about the living as the dead; they are also evolving spaces that can change in character, organisational form, and the ways in which they are used. Inevitably, there is a politics to these changes, and the ways in which they are implemented and resisted; this includes shifting combinations of understanding and misunderstanding, and momentum for, and resistance to, change. When these shifts centre on the needs of minorities and migrants, there is an added political dimension that is influenced by wider social attitudes to those groups, including narratives of national identity and belonging that are shaped by the legacies of colonialism and the rhetorical framing of “good immigrants” (see Shukla, 2016). In the absence of national guidelines for cemeteries and crematoria provision, arrangements for diverse communities’ needs are a matter of local negotiation. These negotiations between majority and minority cultures regarding access to public services are a matter of social justice, and it is argued here that migrants’ and minorities’ end-of-life experience (Gunaratnam, 2013) and appropriate disposition of bodily remains are an important part of this agenda. More recently, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with disproportionate impact on Black Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups in Britain, has brought fresh attention to the intersections of mortality and inequalities (see Islam & Netto, 2020). Attention to minority needs in relation to majority norms highlights political questions of “rights” and “the right to have rights” (Arendt, 1973), including an expectation of inclusive spaces and services in cemeteries and crematoria.

This paper examines municipal cemeteries as spaces of social inclusion and exclusion within the context of the needs of established minority and migrant groups in English and Welsh non-metropolitan settlements, referred to as “towns” for the purpose of this study. Towns and suburbs have been relatively neglected in both urban studies and work on ethnicity (Clayton, 2008; Dwyer & Bressey, 2008), and, likewise, studies of cemeteries tend to focus on big cities such as London or rural contexts (Francis et al., 2005). Yet towns, their spatial organisation, and trends are of particular interest because they are increasingly recognised as dynamic sites of demographic change, and consequently encapsulate unstudied experience of “living with difference” in and through plural and contested notions of place (Amin, 2002; Amin, 2004), and as such are geopolitical arenas. Likewise, politics are an inherent characteristic of deathscapes and the relation between the living and the dead, whether within the spatialities of extraordinary or everyday circumstances (Leshem, 2015 Maddrell, 2009; Stevenson et al., 2016). While questions of who is deemed “grievable” in Butler’s (2009) terms, as well as who is “publicly” remembered, how, where, and when tend to focus on extraordinary circumstances such as war or disaster, they are also a matter of everyday experience, everyday living and dying. This not only shapes people’s dealings with death, and their nuanced sense of identity and belonging, but also impacts on experiences of inclusion and exclusion. Here we argue this is a matter of geopolitics. The next section reflects on insights from the evolving conceptualisation of geopolitics and explores different forms of harm that are pertinent to cemeteries and crematoria governance.

## **2 | GOVERNANCE, SLOW-STRUCTURAL-INFRASTRUCTURAL VIOLENCE, AND INTERSECTIONAL GEOPOLITICS**

### **2.1 | The geopolitics of deathscapes**

Geopolitical practices and processes need to be understood in grounded, situated, and embodied contexts. Cemeteries and crematoria are subject to national regulation and inflected by their location, local demographics, and the hegemonic norms and cultural discourses of local providers and users. As public spaces, cemeteries are territorially bounded simultaneously by processes of inclusion and exclusion through the definition of who and what does/does not “belong” to that public, that is, which people and what forms and practices are considered appropriate within a given cemetery or crematoria. This reflects the ways in which “Identity and difference shape access to public spaces and the ability to cross (sometimes metaphorical) boundaries” (Wastl-Walter & Staeheli, 2004, p. 148). The study of cemeteries and crematoria is also a reminder that understanding multi-scalar power relations, violence, and (in)security includes the care of bodies by both public and private agencies (Hyndman, 2011).

Traditionally, geopolitics focused on international influence, statecraft, and territoriality, but critical interventions in the field have stretched the concept in terms of scale and scope. Feminist scholarship has defined geopolitics as the “practice

and representations of territorial strategies” at *all* scales (Gilmartin & Kofman, 2004, p. 113). This includes embodied experience of power relations (Massaro & Williams, 2013), including the power relations associated with corporeal race, class, and gender (Dixon, 2015, p. 9). This understanding requires attention to intimate and emotional geopolitics (de Leeuw, 2016), the global-local (Roberts, 2004), and being attentive to spaces and scales that link situated embodied experience with other sites. This approach offers an intellectual space in which to examine spatialised power relations *in situ* regardless of scale or political unit (Dowler & Sharp, 2001). Bodies are sites of sovereignty, and corporeal sovereignty is an important part of the wider geopolitics of power relations (Dixon, 2015). However, Dixon argues, while feminist work has placed living bodies at the centre of geopolitical thinking, human remains “remain a largely unremarked upon, “background” element of geopolitics,” when attention to the “afterlife” of human bodies can animate and shed light on unexpected geopolitical contexts (2015, p. 85). It is argued here that corporeal geopolitics applies to migrant and diasporic identity and experience, and the bodies of both the dead and those who mourn them, and that cemeteries-crematoria are one such site of unexpected geopolitics.

Given the centrality of the concept to geopolitics, revisiting and reviewing notions of what constitutes “territory” and how it is socially constructed is also useful for this study. Recent critical geopolitics has broadened understanding of the nature of territorialism, where and how it operates, i.e., the ways “in which territorial expressions of inclusion and exclusion are formed” (Wastl-Walter & Staeheli, 2004, p. 141). In so doing, the characteristics of territory (bounded, purposeful, symbolic) and territoriality (culturally defined, controlled, potentially inclusive and/or exclusive) can be applied to any space claimed by individuals and groups for specific functions, social action, and meaning-making. Cemeteries and crematoria, as institutionalised spaces and services, constitute a form of bounded territory that is highly symbolic, and as such can be inclusive, marginalising, exclusionary, or a dynamic interplay of any combination of these. Interrogating majority-minorities processes of territoriality in cemeteries constitutes one response to Brah’s call for a post-colonial “mode of genealogical analysis of different kinds of ‘borders’ and transmigration across those borders” (Brah, 1996, p. 244).

Cultural definitions are core to the situated framing and deployment of the notion of territory; as Wastl-Walter and Staeheli note: “Territory ... has a cultural component which links identity and sense of place” – including a sense of belonging or not belonging (2004, p. 142). Rather than being primarily concerned with state-centric security, effective geopolitical studies incorporate wider notions of security in everyday experience (Hyndman, 2004). Embodied security is ultimately tied to autonomy, something that is simultaneously process and practice, intimate, individual, and communal, a spectrum of autonomies constituted in everyday experiences (de Leeuw, 2016; Naylor, 2017). The recognition and incorporation of knowledge produced by the marginalised (Walsh, 2007) is vital to understanding these experiences; it requires a decolonial approach that

makes visible knowledges from below. It is a space of pluriversal thinking which recognises difference, while rejecting universalizing, colonizing, and normalizing ways of knowing and understanding. (Naylor, 2017, p. 28)

This means directing attention to embodied-human rather than state-centred understandings of security (Hyndman & Giles, 2011), including ontological security (Giddens, 1991; Laing, 1960). Ontological security is recognised as central to migrants’ personal sense of security (Botterill et al., 2020) and, we argue here, includes the security of the dead as well as the living. Attention also needs to focus on sites and processes where dominant geopolitical relations are challenged and reworked (Koopman, 2011), thereby seeking to identify the ways in which territorial power is manifest through strategies that operate across different scales (Gilmartin & Kofman, 2004). Here the remains of the dead and cemeteries-crematoria are positioned as a site of the working and reworking of majority-minority geopolitics expressed through mechanisms of territoriality via their discursive framing and associated governance.

## 2.2 | Governance through infrastructure

Governance incorporates the policies and actions of the state and its agencies, and the ways they are operationalised. This in turn can be linked to wider hegemonic discourses of governance that establish the social norms of roles, rules, duties, and practices. Governance that results in the control of life and death is referred to as “necropolitics” (Mbembe, 2002), which is situated at the interface of biopolitics, sovereignty, and life-death. Necropolitics is actioned via the use of “weapons,” most obviously through military deployment and the operations of the judicial system as instruments of violence, but also through everyday state governance, surveillance technologies, and vehicles (Leshem, 2015). While the discussion here is not about the deployment of instruments of state to control enemies, as was the central premise in Mbembe’s thesis, we

argue there is a wider form of necropolitics based on the everyday structural and infrastructural violence that can do harm to both the living and the dead through cemeteries and crematoria governance. As Leshem (2015) notes of cemeteries in politically contested locations, necropolitics is not simply about actions but also about places, and a politically situated place-based approach to understanding the status and treatment of particular dead bodies and their mourners brings necropolitical analysis into dialogue with the necrogeographies of cemeteries and crematoria.

### 2.3 | (Infra)structural harm to the living and the dead

This paper deploys the concepts of structural and infrastructural violence as a means to identify, name, and analyse the harm done to the bodies of the dead and their mourners when funerary spaces and rites do not meet religious requirements or are not deemed culturally “good.” This harm, we argue, can manifest itself in relation to intersecting religious, cultural, and social factors. In contrast to “personal or direct” violence, in which a specific person acts on another (Galtung, 1969; Springer & Billon, 2016), structural violence causes harm through the practice of unequal, often institutionalised, power relations with consequences for “unequal life chances” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). The notion of slow violence is also relevant here, as this highlights a form of harm “that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive,” often unseen and compounded by poverty (Nixon, 2011, p. 2). There are overlapping characteristics between structural, infrastructural, and slow violence, especially where there is evidence of reiterative harm, what de Leeuw describes as an “ever-present presence” of violence (2016, p. 15). The implicit and tacit nature of structural violence that facilitates its capacity to be institutionalised and normalised within wider structures (Davies et al. 2017, p. 7) is of particular relevance to the everyday necropolitics of English and Welsh cemeteries and crematoria management. This is further nuanced by attention to avoidable “*infrastructural violence*” – whereby infrastructure activates and sustains “broader processes of marginalization, abjection and disconnection” (Rodgers & O’Neill, 2012, p. 403), to the detriment of those who are already marginalised. By analysing processes in terms of both immediate and “slow” structural and infrastructural violence, the detrimental significance of simple everyday cemeteries practices can be exposed. Equally, it is argued, what could be termed as “Infrastructural Benefits” can be achieved through everyday acts, discourses, processes, and systems of inclusive governance.

## 3 | METHODOLOGY

The history of migration to and from England and Wales underscores the links between minorities and migrants and the international geopolitics of colonial, post-colonial, and intra-European mobilities. The 2011 Census evidenced a diverse multicultural society in England and Wales, with 13% of the population born outside of the UK and approximately 20% identifying their ethnicity as other than “White British.” In terms of religious affiliation, 59% of the population identified as Christian (all denominations), 15% as belonging to other religions, and 25% had no religion (ONS, 2012). These figures are indicative of a post-secular society, that is, one that is characterised by contiguous trends of increased secularisation *and* increased religious diversity (see Williams, 2015). The research participants in this study who self-identified as belonging to a religion described themselves as Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Taoist, as well as identifying with specific nationalities, ethnicities, denominations, or castes. The funerary practices and associated beliefs of these participants therefore reflect *interreligious* and *intrareligious* pluralism, the co-existence of the religious and the secular, and the potentially fluid boundaries between these categories. The research methods were devised to include insights from both service providers and users from various minorities, and to identify the diversity of needs and experiences within these complex multicultural contexts.

The findings discussed here are drawn from an interdisciplinary case study and participant-centred research project. Fieldwork was conducted in four large towns in England and Wales: Huddersfield, Newport, Northampton, and Swindon (2017–2018). Each municipality had a population of approximately 160,000 to 220,000 residents, including ethnically diverse populations as identified in Census data (ranging between approximately 7 and 17% of the residents), representing different countries of origin or heritage, religious groups, longstanding established ethnic minority communities, and clusters of recent migrants from within the European Union (EU) and beyond. Towns were chosen in contrast to large cities where multicultural communities tend to be most highly concentrated and minority-sensitive services are most highly developed.

Empirical research included initial mapping and photo surveys of cemetery and crematoria provision in each town, followed by 21 semi-structured interviews conducted with cemetery, crematoria, and funeral service providers (cemetery managers, planning officers, funeral directors, clergy, and celebrants); 15 focus groups (122 participants) representing different

local community interests across the four case studies; and 16 biographical interviews with service users representing diverse established minority and migrant backgrounds. Focus groups were conducted primarily with members of existing local community groups (e.g., lunch groups, national-heritage community hubs, civic and religious mutual aid cooperatives). Community interviewees were also drawn from these networks and from other “snowball” contacts. Biographical interviews were chosen in order to situate experience of cemeteries and crematoria governance in the context of individuals’ wider life experience and narratives. These participant-focused qualitative methods were adopted in order to understand the significance and impact of existing municipal cemetery and crematoria provision and governance on local residents’ options for the disposition of the mortal remains of their deceased, as well as how this inflected their lived experience of mourning and associated practices. In the discussion below, which focuses on established minorities rather than recent migrant communities, participants’ own self-identifiers are used to situate their quotes, e.g., “British born Shia Muslim woman,” “Hindu man of Indian origin.” The place-based approach enabled a focus on what Butler (2004) describes as the wider reach of necropolitics through “petty sovereign” acts and sites, and the role of the contingencies of lived space (Leshem, 2015, p. 36) in these necropolitics. These themes are developed in the following analysis and discussion.

## 4 | SITUATED EXAMPLES OF LIVED CITIZENSHIP, TERRITORIALITY, AND VIOLENCE

### 4.1 | Inclusion, exclusion, marginalisation

Many local government and private cemetery and crematoria service-providers work to the best of their ability to accommodate minority and migrant needs, evidenced for example in the widespread provision of Muslim burial grounds within municipal cemeteries in England and Wales. Some have also been proactive in consultations and collaborations with minority communities: for example, one cemetery-crematoria facilitated the building of an Italian community-funded mausoleum, live-streamed funerals for international mourners, and used the opportunity of scheduled building work to incorporate a small viewing room for Hindu and Sikh families to witness the charging of the cremator. Likewise, a Hindu woman of Indian origin praised her local municipal crematorium for sensitively organising Hindu icons and music for her mother’s funeral:

When we arrived at the crematorium that day, I hadn’t even thought about anything. But they had a CD playing with the Aum Nama Shiva, and ... the Hindu Ohm at the front. And one of the big things, they have got a Shiva murti, the god statue, which is all in place there.

Despite these examples of inclusive governance and the efforts by many service-providers, in-depth analysis of cemeteries and crematoria provision, and the experience of those services, shows that provision is uneven, with shortfalls in inclusive spaces and practices evidenced in all four case study towns. Uneven provision in part reflects the *ad hoc* basis on which cemeteries and crematoria planning tends to be addressed locally in the absence of national guidelines. While provision in towns typically lags behind developments in larger metropolitan areas, examples of good practice elsewhere evidence the possibility of more inclusive services in other contexts and can underscore local shortcomings of service provision and associated governance. The paper now turns to examining participants’ lived, relational, and embodied experiences of these shortcomings, centring on the themes of: inadequate burial space; care for the dead; the impact of austerity on infrastructure provision; increased burial costs; and the geopolitics of the crematoria–temple–river nexus for Hindu and Sikh practices.

### 4.2 | Lived experience of inadequate cemeteries and crematoria provision

Ideas of home and belonging are central to decisions about the disposition of loved ones (Hunter, 2016). Numerous study participants of South Asian origin or heritage in this study evidenced a growing cultural shift away from the repatriation of the dead to country of origin or heritage in favour of local disposition. This clear sense of place of residence as “home” while being interlinked with wider trans-local identity was expressed by members of focus group of Shia Muslim women of South Asian origin/heritage. One participant, a migrant whose children had been born and raised in England, shed light on the complex intermeshing of faith, place attachment, and familial ties that influenced her preference for local burial:



Because all our family is here ... it is our home. So, we want to be buried here. So, our children, they can come and visit our grave. But if you are buried in Pakistan, they would [have] to get a plane ticket and pray for us there [Laughs].

These shifts in cultural practices have implications for cemetery space and organisation in the immediate and longer terms, reflecting local demographic trends. They also have implications for the representational and more-than-representational symbolic status of cemeteries, including plural (and potentially competing) understandings of cemeteries as sacred places, and the varied associated meaning-making and cultural practices taking place therein.

Minority burials have long been part of selected English and Welsh cemetery landscapes, notably in historic Jewish and Chinese neighbourhoods, and near the earliest mosques, such as in Woking. Contemporary dedicated minority religion sections in municipal cemeteries can be read as a natural development from these earlier interments. Yet, although dedicated Muslim burial sections are now commonplace in municipal cemeteries, and Muslim graves have created “new kinds of relationship to British space – a sense of belonging in a minority Muslim context” (2007, p. 566), it is notable that the quality and capacity of such spaces, and the possibility of prompt burial, varies widely. For example, in one of the towns studied, the Muslim community were offered additional burial space in a part of the cemetery that was known to be waterlogged; such graves would be universally deemed to be substandard, but in the context of Muslim beliefs would be seen to be a cause of actual harm to the deceased. This offer of substandard land for minority burials reflects the frequent marginalisation of migrants and minorities to substandard housing and environments in life (see Anderson (1991) on Vancouver’s Chinatown).

The presence of Chinese, Jewish, Baha’i, Muslim, Christian, and secular burial spaces within a cemetery may give the appearance of ideal inclusive provision, but even the provision of diverse dedicated space does not necessarily represent equality of access. In one case, the Baha’i community successfully liaised with local authority providers to secure ample burial space for future needs, but were aware, as one British Baha’i woman explained, that other minorities’ burial plot allocation within the same cemetery was inadequate:

We wanted to make provision for the Baha’is of [X] to be buried at the cemetery. It was easily arranged, because of the lady that was there then. She was very sympathetic. I think we have been very fortunate actually. Because cemetery space is in quite short supply. Not far from ours, there is the Chinese space, and a Jewish one, and an Islamic one. But some of them are struggling [with insufficient burial space]. For the size of the town, we have been very fortunate.

This highlights the importance of communication and collaboration between local communities and those managing cemeteries and crematoria, as well as the role of individual gatekeepers and faith group representatives. It is also a reminder not only that racialized power is operated in and through bodies, but that these mechanisms include hierarchies of power between subgroups (Brah, 1996). Thus, for minorities, there are different kinds of ‘borders’ and movement across those borders constitutes different sorts of challenges for different groups i.e., between and within particular minorities (Brah, 1996).

Evidently, not all needs that are perceived as different from the existing norm are treated in the same way. Some specific minority needs can be Othered through a neocolonial discourse (McClymont, 2018) and the everyday experience of the reproduction of colonial power relations is manifest in and through bodies as well through land-centric expressions of territoriality (de Leeuw, 2016).

Appropriate care for the dead is defined and mediated by culture and religion. In the context of multicultural societies, a majority population – or indeed other minorities – may struggle to comprehend both the significance of unfamiliar religious obligations for the dead and/or the processes of marginalisation that a particular minority group may experience as a result of cemeteries and crematoria services that do not meet their needs. Understanding of local minorities’ prerequisites is an imperative training need for those responsible for delivering those services. The following quote from a participant in a mixed gender Shia Muslim focus group sheds light on their religious imperatives to care for the dead:

Even when we are bathing the dead body. We repeat over and over again that [...] this is not a dead body. The spirit of the dead body is right next to there ... is standing by there, is watching every one of you. And while this is happening, it is wrongful for us to talk about matters of other bits and pieces of life, because he is watching you. So at that time, those standing must be reciting some verses of the Holy Quran, so at least

they benefit the deceased. Even the dead body, you should treat it with gentle care. Every time you treat it rough, it will feel the pain. This is all through the teachings of the Prophet and his descendants.

Another participant stressed that as a Muslim, they believe the grave to be “heaven and hell until the day of judgement,” indicating what is understood to be at stake for the deceased. Thus, spiritual care of the deceased requires appropriate rituals, body care for the corpse, and the material organisation of the grave. These religious obligations are believed to be necessary to the peace of the deceased, and therefore are necessary for the ontological security of the dying and mourners. As a man from another Muslim focus group explained (continuing from the quote that opened this paper), “The peace of the dead is only achieved once the deceased is buried properly.” This highlights the personal and political importance of intimate and tender embodied geographies (de Leeuw, 2016), and underscores Jennifer Hyndman’s argument that freedom from fear is part of wider human security and a matter of public concern (Hyndman, 2004, p. 317). Here, embodied-religious-ontological security is part of a wider sense of corporeal security and sovereignty for the dead and their community. An appreciation of religious beliefs as the foundation of ontological security for faith adherents, such as the participants cited here, necessitates a broadening of the concept of security to include the afterlife.

The framing of a Monday–Friday as the normal working week, which constructs weekend death certification and funerals as “out of hours,” is also problematic for those faith communities who require prompt disposition. This is a reminder of the ways in which majority culture shapes access to infrastructural services, and how the practices and processes of territoriality are cultural as well as spatial strategies, which can be highly gendered or racialised. As Wastl-Walter & Staeheli note: “Critically, territoriality relies on notions of identity and difference – of belonging to a territory or of being different from those who belong” (2004, p. 143) and it is transgression of such cultural boundaries by those who are not deemed to “belong” that often makes such meanings and processes and territoriality visible. The space of the cemetery and its spatial-temporal governance can therefore represent and reinforce cultural-territorial privileges and inequalities and, in so doing, can enact (infra)structural violence to the ontological security of certain residents and communities.

Austerity measures have had a significant impact on local government infrastructure and services. In the ten years of public-funding austerity measures following the 2008 financial crisis, many local governments in England and Wales have experienced near 50% cuts in real-term funding from central government, forcing them, in turn, to cut services. As a consequence, many local authorities have been brought to financial breaking point (Chu, 2018), including Northamptonshire County Council, which effectively declared insolvency in 2018 (Butler, 2018). Prolonged austerity measures as a form of governance constitute a form of what Nixon describes as slow violence (Nixon 2011) and these austerity measures have impacted on cemeteries-crematoria governance, and consequently on both employees and service users. Crucial to the interests of this paper, municipal cemeteries service provider interviewees highlighted austerity-driven budget cuts as a key barrier to providing the culturally sensitive services they would ideally offer. Austerity has therefore contributed to ethnic divides, undermining what McIvor (2016) describes as the (supposed) democratic politics of mourning.

In terms of minority service provision, austerity measures had a direct impact on pre-existing arrangements to facilitate the prompt disposition of the dead, because of staff cuts or outsourcing of grave digging. One cemetery manager reported: “We get a phone call on Monday morning saying, we need a Muslim funeral, dug and ready by the afternoon. And often we can say, okay, no problem. But there are times we got to refuse them. With the staff we got it is just impossible. Years ago, we could do it because we had plenty of men. Now we haven’t.” Budget cuts have also led to a reduction in cemetery staff on site, which affects mourners’ sense of personal safety in the cemetery, impacting on their ability to fulfil both ritual and emotional needs, as reported by a Christian woman of Mauritian origin. Likewise, cuts to public transport services limit the participation of the poor or elderly who do not have access to personal transport, as reported by a Ghurkha men’s focus group. In these cases, age, class, and limited public services intersect to disenfranchise these minority (and some majority) mourners from ritual and community obligations. This echoes the wider impact of austerity governance that exacerbates inequalities experienced by both minority and majority marginalised communities.

Cemetery and crematorium charges also have their own politics. Burial costs are typically higher than those for cremation due to the cost of land and long-term management. Burial costs in England and Wales have increased significantly in recent years, which imposes a particular financial burden on those whose faith requires the burial of the dead, including Jews, Muslims, and Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians. These costs can cause funeral poverty (see Woodthorpe, 2014) and exacerbate debt and financial insecurity as a result of bereavement. Further religious requirements can incur additional costs, for example where Muslim graves have special kerbs or occupy double grave plots to allow for regional preferences for body positioning within the grave. One participant of Pakistani origin explained: “As you might need a different coffin to lay the deceased on his/her side, and need double burial space, the price goes up extensively.”

Cost became a flashpoint in the Huddersfield case study in late 2017, when Kirklees council proposed an 84% price increase for burial services over the following five years. They also proposed an additional fee of £477 for “out-of-hours” Saturday burials, and a £99 premium for Friday afternoon burials, a time favoured by Muslims. Given the requirement in Islam for prompt burial, which makes access to weekend burials a necessity, the Huddersfield Muslim Burial Council (HMBC) saw this change as having disproportionate impact on the Muslim community, who make up approximately 10% of local residents, as well as the small local Jewish community who also require prompt burial.

Despite previous successful liaison between the council and the HMBC, there was, at best, an apparent oversight, a failure on the part of policy makers to recognise that this change in policy would cause disproportionate economic cost to certain religious groups. This oversight highlights an institutional blindness to minority requirements and the uneven and discriminatory impact of policy change, as well as the uncritical perpetuation of infrastructure governance based on majority norms, such as preference for cremation rather than burial and what constitutes the “working week.” In contrast to the principles of good governance, which require openness, transparency, and collaboration, the failure to consult with the HMBC underscored the marginalisation of a key service user group with vested interests in the matter. However, the threat of exacerbated inequalities through the punitive proposed price increase prompted community resistance led by the HMBC (see Figure 1). Collective action in response to structural violence can catalyse the agency of marginalised groups and in this case the HMBC embodied participatory “lived citizenship” (Nyhagen, 2015) in the community through mobilising its existing network and galvanising other religious groups to come together to challenge the increased costs. Ultimately, due to this cross-community campaign, the council withdrew its proposed near doubling of charges for burial services. Despite this success, the example demonstrates the necropolitical power manifest in the governance of cemeteries and crematoria, which can administer uneven infrastructural and financial harm to specific subsets of residents.

Shortcomings in service provision were also identified across the case study towns by minorities using crematoria. Participants reported varying *ad hoc* arrangements for Hindus and Sikhs to actively charge (or at least witness the charging) of



**FIGURE 1** A flyer publicising a public meeting regarding increased burial costs in Huddersfield.

the cremator, in order to fulfil their obligation to pay spiritual debts and release the soul of the deceased (see Elmore, 2006). Hindus also reported a lack of awareness on the part of funeral service and crematoria providers of their religious requirement for same-day cremation. Appropriate sites for the dispersal of cremated remains over moving water was also a substantive issue, especially in the light of reduced repatriation to the Ganges. A successful liaison between the local Hindu and Sikh communities with the Environment Agency led to the designation of the River Soar in Leicestershire for the scattering of cremated remains (see Maddrell, 2011), but provision elsewhere in England and Wales has been slow to follow. A Sikh man of East African origin described the emotional and financial burden of this long-term infrastructural marginalisation:

We said: 'Look, you provide all these graveyards and everything, for the Christians, the Muslims and anybody else. What have you done for the Sikhs or the Hindus?' We have been dealing with this for the last four years now. I've been attending meetings with the [local] government and everything, and we are trying to get a location where we can build a place to scatter [cremated remains]. Because at the moment, you have to hire a boat. And obviously, that is an extra expense.

Persistent resistance to or failure to facilitate such needs can be perceived and experienced as a form of slow violence through longstanding and repeated rejection of applications for planning permission for religious ritual sites and buildings (also see Beebejuan 2012; Gale & Naylor, 2002). The concept of slow violence, with its emphasis on temporality, was developed in relation to the impact of environmental violence on local populations, notably as a result of toxic pollution (e.g., Davies, 2018; Nixon, 2011), but this analytical frame also offers insight for other prolonged damaging contexts, such as the restricted lives of asylum seekers, whereby state agencies meet their human rights commitments but severely constrain refugees' movements and autonomy during lengthy review processes (Mayblin et al., 2020). Protracted struggles for appropriate cemeteries, crematoria, and related ritual sites and services cause harm to minority religious and ethnic communities, including emotional and religious anxiety and a sense of being excluded from the full rights other citizens might take for granted.

The toxicity associated with slow violence (Nixon, 2011) is evident in the case of a more than 20-year process to establish a Hindu temple in one case study town. As one Hindu resident involved with the process explained: "Their [Council Town Planners] first question was "why do you need it?" Nobody understood why we needed it. Hindus have 16 rituals between birth and death, each one requires a Temple." Here, addressing the lack of religious infrastructure (i.e., the temple) was blocked by the local government's planning system's structural failure to recognise the necessity of the temple for local Hindu rituals. Interviewees reported that the repeated rejection of proposals resulted in feelings of being excluded and misunderstood, exemplifying Nixon's (2011) characterisation of slow and long-lasting damage being done just "out of sight." Such reiterated experience of marginalisation inscribes and reinforces a sense of social hierarchy, "of who matters and who does not" (Mayblin et al., 2020, p. 111). As Davies argues of pollution: "temporality and toxics have a dialectical link ... the longer an individual is exposed to a toxic substance, the more likely he or she is to be harmed" (Davies, 2018, p. 1538). In a similar sense, it can be argued that the longer it took for the Hindu community to gain planning permission for their temple, the more harmful this feeling of exclusion and misunderstanding became. Rather than chemically toxic, as in Davies' example, the protracted duration of the planning process, coupled with repeated rejections for siting the temple, can be identified as a culturally toxic environment for the Hindu community.

Recently, the Hindu community found a home for their temple, aided by a degree of pragmatism by the local authority planning officers who gave approval for its location. But a planning system tasked with oversight, in the sense of wider responsibility, needs to do significant work to better understand and accommodate minorities' privately funded religious infrastructure needs. In addition to an implicit power structure that maintains a system of inequality, structural violence can be identified as processual and unfolding rather than a single "act" or "outcome" (Springer & Le Billon, 2016), meaning that even after the temple was opened, the legacy of the 20-year process was an engrained sense of community marginalisation and of being overlooked. From the perspective of the Hindu community, the local authority were guilty of oversight in failing to recognise their longstanding need for a temple and inaction in failing to update their consultation processes, thereby sustaining the status quo of majority residents, whereby the local systems and mechanisms of territoriality unintentionally inflicted reiterative harm.

## 5 | CONCLUSION: NECROPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Understanding encounters, engagements, negotiations, and resonances are vital to understanding the processes that make and unmake boundaries and territories (Dixon, 2015). Moreover, understanding such nuanced social relations offers opportunities to create more radical and progressive spaces and strategies, including expressions of agency and everyday lived citizenship, claiming space for the marginalised, and problem-solving in the face of little or no institutional power (Wastl-Walter & Staeheli, 2004). In the context of multicultural societies, “each group has a right to be part of the civic whole and to speak up for itself and for its vision of the whole. Hence citizenship is a continuous dialogue” (Modood, 2010, p. 53). These rights of citizenship apply to cemeteries, crematoria, and related services provision, whereby diversity-inclusive spaces and services represent an important part of full citizenship in a multicultural society. However, while municipal cemeteries and crematoria policies generally recognise the basic needs of key local minority faiths, and many staff strive to respectfully meet these needs, this study has evidenced numerous ways in which certain forms and mechanisms of governance hinder the practice of inclusive governance.

Across the four case studies discussed here, inadequate space, a lack of appropriate and/or timely funerary provision, austerity-driven cuts to services, planning processes that are insensitive to minorities’ needs, and majority-framed services have been identified as forms of everyday harm. These are evident in avoidable inequalities and injustice, such as sudden inflated burial charges, and in the persistent politics of micro-exclusions as a result of conscious and unconscious normative discourses and practices, such as an insistence on a Monday to Friday “working week,” whereby repeated exclusion through infrastructural systems and governance practices embody implicit territoriality and accumulate as a form of slow violence. These shortcomings impact on end-of-life experience, and individual and collective grief, rendering harm to the bereaved and, crucially, to the deceased. In turn, these experiences intersect with and can re-inscribe previous embodied life histories and geographies of other forms of social inclusion/exclusion and an associated sense of belonging, being at home/not at home. Therefore, particular forms of cemeteries-crematoria governance can be understood as harmful, whereby harm is conceptualised in terms of inadequate structural and infrastructural governance.

Deficits in cemetery and crematoria provision for minorities in medium-sized urban settlements might be rationalised as an inevitable consequence of scale or a complex map of diverse needs, but to do so would exemplify both oversight and failure of oversight (McKittrick, 2013), in the sense of failure to see the significance of these matters for many of those affected, and a failure to take responsibility for the impacts of inadequate provision for minorities. This re-inscribes the minority subject as constituted in the interface of formulations and negotiations of “difference” and “commonality” (Brah, 1996, p. 247), as well as subject to the domesticating impulse of governance shaped by majority culture (Hunter, 2016). This intersectional experience has explicit as well as implicit political connotations, especially where state agencies (or their nominated representatives) are key service providers, as in the case of cemeteries and crematoria where functional, majority-minorities, emotional-affective, and secular-religious geographies intersect.

Diversity within minority communities represents a significant additional dimension to governance needs. Meeting basic minority requirements, such as Muslim graves that allow the deceased to be oriented towards Mecca, is vital, but may not meet all the needs of diverse Muslim communities. Qualified inclusion that compromises religious obligations or family-community practices may still be experienced as an additional cause of spiritual and political grief in a time-space that is already burdened with the emotional-affective weight of bereavement and mourning. Such processes of Othering and related structural, spatial, or discursive marginalisation make visible the normative limits to pluralism and unseen/implicit processes of majority territorialisation in and through the space of a cemetery or crematorium.

Providing some aspects of diversity-inclusive services has been shown to be a particular challenge for cemeteries service providers operating under central government austerity-driven budget cuts. Austerity governance has added to the financial, emotional, and/or spiritual strain experienced by mourners when ritual requirements for the dead are not fulfilled, causing fear for the eternal wellbeing of their deceased kith and kin. This highlights the harm arising from infrastructural shortcomings, and the role of central government austerity measures (as elsewhere in cuts to healthcare and social housing provision, for example) as a form of necropolitics that impacts on the bereaved and their responsibility for the wellbeing of the dead. These challenges are likely to increase in the context of further predicted cuts to public service funding as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic-induced economic contraction making these issues more pressing. However, these challenges must be set against the cost of the multifaceted emotional, psychological, spiritual, financial, and political harms identified here. Failure to fulfil obligations on behalf of the dead can cause long-term spiritual and biopsychosocial harm to already emotionally vulnerable mourners. It also does political harm when minorities experience a sense of less than full citizenship when state agencies fail to acknowledge, or dismiss as “foreign,” sacred religious requirements for the disposition of their

dead. In such cases, inadequate cemetery and crematorium services can perpetuate lifelong “diasporic inscriptions” (Brah, 1996) of marginalisation beyond death and into the afterlife. Where services are inadequate, they reflect processes of implicit territoriality through the everyday Othering of migrants and minorities, structural colonial discourses, and processes of implicit assimilation through avoidable infrastructural norms.

In conclusion, intersectional lived experience of governance has embodied, emotional, spiritual, political, social, and economic impacts. Eschatological narratives regarding the fate of the deceased, which are important to many, are too easily ignored by the secular framing of contemporary governance. Inadequate funerary spaces and practices can cause emotional and ontological anxiety to the dying and their kith and kin. The remains of the dead are thus inherently relational, representing an intersection of the material-corporeal and the more-than-representational; the personal, familial, and communal; and are a focal point for an assemblage of identities, meanings, beliefs, emotions, expectations, and rights. This paper therefore contends that both episodic and slow processual structural and infrastructural harm can be inflicted on the dead as well as the living through non-inclusive cemeteries-crematoria governance, and that this is particularly pertinent when state and other public cemetery and crematoria provision fails to meet the embodied-ontological-security needs of minority religious-cultural groups that differ from majority norms. It also highlights the avoidable nature of the structural and infrastructural harms identified here, as well as the possibilities of inclusive governance that can constitute structural and infrastructural benefits that serve the interests of full citizenship. Understanding the varied forms of harm that can be inflicted on living mourners and their dead provides new insights for the scholarship of corporeal sovereignty and embodied geopolitics, with implications for the necessity of a wider conceptual framing of necropolitics and citizenship. The identification of both structural and infrastructural harms and the benefits of inclusive services should also inform and strengthen inclusive approaches to the applied governance, management, and future planning of cemeteries and crematoria, especially those overseen by state agencies. The rights of all citizens extend from “cradle to grave.”

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are not currently publicly available due to time-sensitive embargo. They will be uploaded to a public repository in 2021.

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