Deciphering ‘Islamic hospitality’: Developments, challenges and opportunities

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Abstract

This paper examines the principles and practices of Islamic hospitality, outlining the diverse ways in which Islam intersects with ‘hospitality’ and the ‘hospitality industry’. The intangible elements of Islamic hospitality are initially discussed, particularly the importance of the host–guest relationship and differing cultural interpretations. The discussion then evaluates the tangible aspects of Islamic hospitality through identifying trends, developments and challenges within the hotel sector, the food production and service sector, and the festivals and events sector. The work adopts a global perspective, examining Islamic hospitality with reference to both OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) countries and non-OIC countries. The paper also considers new sector opportunities and acknowledges the social difficulties associated with the development of Islamic hospitality within the Western world, notably Islamophobia. Finally, the paper indicates ways forward for future research.

Keywords:
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Muslims
Hotels
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Halal

1. Introduction

In the summer of 2011, a prestigious UK hospitality and tourism management school hosted an international conference focusing on the social scientific study of tourism. Although the event was successful, the scheduling of a ‘hog roast’ dinner for conference delegates, including Muslim participants, seemingly illustrates the prevailing lack of sensitivity concerning the delivery of international forms of hospitality. Such situations could discourage individuals from feeling welcome and being part of the collective experience. The crucial function of the mealtime in signifying social order and expressing friendship, has indeed been identified by Mary Douglas (1972) in her seminal work: ‘Deciphering a Meal’. Crucially, those inhospitable experiences that affront one’s religious values expose the cosmopolitan complexities embodied within the host–guest relationship.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the social relevance of the Islamization of public space, particularly in the context of the contemporary world of mobility. Informatively, van Nieuwkerk (2008, p. 174) draws reference to the popularity of Islamic art, cinema, music and tourism to exemplify the growing importance of the “Muslim cultural sphere”. Therefore, this assessment implies skepticism towards reductionist analyses for largely focusing on understanding the secularization of the public sphere, and for assuming that these spaces are fully influenced by notions and practices of religious neutrality and material rationality (see for instance, Habermas, 1992).

In understanding ways in which places and products are becoming predisposed to Islamic influence, it is imperative to acknowledge the demographic position of the Muslim population. According to the Pew Research Centre, the Muslim population totaled around 1.6 billion in 2010 and was predicted to rise to 2.2 billion by 2030, i.e., from 23.4% to 26.4% of the global population.
During this period, Europe’s Muslim population is expected to increase from 6% to 8% (Economist, 2011). Accordingly, 60% of Muslims originate from Asia and one fifth from the Middle East and North Africa. Also, 400–600 million Muslims live as minorities in other regions: 38.1 million in Europe, 8 million in the US and 1 million in Canada, for instance (Asif, 2011a). According to the Office for National Statistics, the Muslim population in the UK increased from 1.55 million in 2001 to 2.7 million in 2011 (Booth, 2012).

Muslim consumers are one of the fastest growing market segments. Market research conducted in early 2010, concluded that one important target group for businesses and global marketers is the ‘under 30’s’ segment, representing 42% of the Muslim population (Khan & Jannmohamed, 2011). The global revenue from Muslim tourists for 2011 was estimated at US$126bn, constituting 12.3% of the total global outbound tourism revenue, which is almost twice that of China’s global revenue and forecasted to rise by 4.79% annually for the following eight years. It was also estimated that tourists from the Middle East and North Africa account for around 60% of total global Muslim outbound expenditure for 2011. For the same year, Saudi Arabia is considered the largest outbound tourism source country, with an estimated tourist expenditure of US$23.8 billion, followed by Iran, UAE, Indonesia and Kuwait (Dinar Standard and Crescentrating LLC., 2012).

The Islamic community is traditionally guided by Shari'a law, which is derived primarily from the Qur’an. Other important sources of Islamic law include the statements of Prophet Mohammad, which are included in the al-Sunnah or customs emphasizing the prophetic tradition of Islam, and the sanctions of jurists representing the Muslim community. Sanad, Kassem, and Scott (2010, p. 20) note that, “… Shari’a is a mercy and is intended for the interests of people in both life and the hereafter. It is neither harsh nor strangling”. Shari’a thus establishes a social structure for Muslim communities and acts as a moral guideline for daily life. It places emphasis on human conduct and instructs behavior associated with many aspects of the social environment: food, drink, dress, entertainment, hygiene, etiquette and communication. Clear regulations enshrined within Shari’a law concern what is ‘permissible’ or ‘lawful’ (translated as ‘halal’ in Arabic) and what is ‘forbidden’ or ‘unlawful’ (translated as ‘haram’). Importantly, this paper will demonstrate how hospitality can be interpreted through Islam, whether in terms of its tangible or intangible elements, thereby shedding light on both the philosophical elements and corporeal functions of hospitality.

Tourism’s relationship with Islam has generated significant academic interest (Al-Hamarneh, & Steiner, 2004; Aziz, 2001; Battour, Ismail, & Battor, 2010a, 2010b; Din, 1989; Sanad et al., 2010; Timothy & Iverson, 2006; Zamani-Farahani & Henderson, 2010). However, understanding the relationship between hospitality and Islam has attracted far less attention, despite the existence of several enquiries dealing with specific elements of that relationship: the attributes of Shari’a-compliant hotels and their commercial interest (Henderson, 2010); halal food and its influence on the tourism industry and destination choice (Bon & Hussain, 2010), and Islamic hospitality as a regional strategy for indigenous tourism development in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (Stephenson, Russell & Edgar, 2010). Given that the tourism and hospitality industries are co-dependent, and that hospitality is often a fundamental component of the tourism experience, there is a need to appreciate how Islamic principles and practices are manifest within the context of hospitality and its development.

Although hospitality is popularly associated with the commercial provision of accommodation, food, and beverage, one crucial dimension concerns aspects of conviviality and hospitality. Indeed, social scientists recognize the social dynamics of hospitality (Derrida, 2000a, 2000b; Friese, 2004). Therefore, this paper initially examines ways in which aspects of conviviality intersect with Islamic principles. The work then indicates how Islam is represented and formalized within the commercial provision of hospitality, particularly within the hotel, food and event sectors, acknowledging also the challenges and potential developments that the Islamic hospitality sector faces. The discussion finally comments on the wider societal concerns that threaten the constructive advancement of an Islamic hospitality industry.

2. Intangible elements of Islamic hospitality

2.1. Traditional interpretations

In terms of its intangible dimensions, Islamic hospitality traditionally concerns aspects of congeniality and reverence. O’Gorman (2007) acknowledges the historic role that caravanserais served in the Muslim world, providing free short-term hospitality for in-transit travelers and pilgrims. The travel narratives of the Muslim explorer, Ibn Battuta (2004, p. 4), who traveled throughout parts of Asia, North and West Africa, and Eastern and Southern Europe from 1325 to 1354, testify to the way in which hospitality was enacted in the Muslim world. Travelers were “hospitably welcomed” and “entertained” at hospices and rest houses, which were sustained by “generations of benefactors”. Despite the dangers associated with the lawlessness of travel, caravans fostered “kindliness” and “generosity” that underpinned “mutual relations” between fellow Muslims. According to Vukonić (2010, p. 40–41):

The attitude of Islam toward hospitality arises from the Hajj, which is one of the basic obligations for an Islamic follower. One of the ways for a Muslim to reach Jannah (paradise) is “by showing hospitality (to a traveler or a guest)” (Selection of the Prophet’s Hadith, hadith 146). Hadith 146 explicitly states: “There is no wellbeing in a family which does not welcome and treat guests well”. It is understandable that special care should be provided to people on the Hajj, but Islam is categorical here: “Hospitality extends for three days. What is beyond that is charity” (Selection of the Prophet’s Hadith, hadith 1000).

Hospitality does not significantly surpass social boundaries. Derrida’s (2000a; 2000b) work on the sociological meaning of hospitality identifies a conceptual distinction between ‘absolute’ and ‘conditional’ forms of hospitality. He suggests that hospitality is normally conditional as the mere existence of a ‘host-guest’ relationship in some way implies impermanence, instruction, modus operandi and obligation. Importantly, the laws and teachings of Islam serve to instruct and condition how such people should be approached and received, and how adherents of Islam should mediate various places and situational contexts.

Contemporary forms of Islamic hospitality are inextricably associated with the obligatory nature of travel, including pilgrimage (e.g., Hajj and Umrah). Other religiously motivated journeys are known as ‘Ziyara’, associated with visiting auspicious places and sites of religiosity (shrines and mosques), and traveling to places to meet religious scholars or participate in religious events and festivals. There are also spiritual journeys associated with ‘Rihla’, involving quests for knowledge, business, health and research (Haq & Wong, 2010). Here, perceptions of hospitality are traditionally embedded within the relationship between travel and education, where there is an important emphasis on the accumulation of wisdom through travel. This perspective stands in marked contrast to more modernistic forms of tourism motivation, especially the desire for pseudo experiences (Boorstin, 1977), ego-enhancement (Dann, 1977) and hedonism (Turner & Ash, 1975). Accordingly, commercially contrived
forms of Western hospitality encourage self-centric tourism experiences, and these experiences often signify conspicuous consumption and self-indulgence (see Turner & Ash, 1975).

Din (1989), however, suggests that Islamic forms of travel can endeavor to promote cross-cultural communication and mutual understanding, attempting to endorse a sense of unity among the Ummah (Muslim community). His description of Islamic travel is compelling:

In sanctioning compassionate treatment for the traveler and in placing a high premium in travel, Islam enjoins a system of reciprocal hospitality which would promote fraternal affinities among the Ummah, and would enable even the poor and the less fit to travel (1989, p. 552–553).

author's original emphasis

2.2. Cultural interpretations of Islamic hospitality

Islamic hospitality can also be interpreted in relation to social context and culture. Ali’s (2008) ethnographic study, for instance, which focuses on the tourism practices of a UK Pakistani community, indicates how journeys to the ancestral homeland of Pakistan are culturally appropriate activities involving the visiting of friends, immediate relatives and extended family members located in numerous towns and villages. Pakistani visitors were expected to furnish relatives with gifts and accompany relatives when visiting other kinsfolk and attending ceremonial occasions (such as births, deaths and weddings). Visiting homes of kin to offer condolences for deceased members of the family or community, and visiting their graves, would often involve reciting prayers from the Qur’an. Such conventions of hospitality and forms of travel serve the cultural purpose of helping to secure familial relations, sustain kinship membership and enable individuals to reaffirm their religious responsibilities.

There are thus differing ethnic, regional and national interpretations and attributes of Islamic hospitality. In Iran, for instance, there is a system of deference to others characterized by the concept ‘ta’arof’, a mechanism of politeness articulated both verbally and non-verbally (Asdjodi, 2001, p. 91). Ta’arof is exemplified through expressions of respect (‘ehteraaam’), shyness or ceremoniousness (‘tudarbaayest’i), humility (‘tavaazoo’), hospitality (‘mehmaan-navaaazi’), and guest-friendship (‘mehmaan-dusti’). Hospitality encounters not only signify good conduct from hosts but also their desire to be accepted by guests. As an act of politeness and social responsibility, ta’arof continues to be expressed despite the fact that there may be occasions when the host does not want to act in such a way (Behnam & Amizadeh, 2011). The elaborate offering of food is an integral element of such encounters (see Simpson-Herbert, 1987).

Pan-Arab notions of hospitality also shed light on the heterogeneous nature of Islamic hospitality. Mason (2011, p. 356) claims:

While it is important not to fall prey to Orientalist romanticizations of the Arab world, notions of hospitality (dhaifa) and generosity (karam) are of central importance within Arab culture. Given the importance of hospitality within Arab culture, and the continuing sense of the wider Arab ‘nation’ transcending state boundaries, it is not surprising that the migration and reception of fellow Arabs is constructed within a discourse of hospitality.

author's original emphasis

Mason further acknowledges that, although “hospitality patterns and regimes in the Middle East have attracted surprising little academic attention” (2011, p. 356), some scholarly insights have focused on the hospitality traditions of Arab culture (see for instance, Barakat, 1993) and specific locales where Arab hospitality is enacted: from a street in Marakech (see Fernea Warnock, 1975) to a village in Iraq (see Fernea Warnock, 1989).

As hospitality has become more structured, systematic and formal, especially due to the globalization of tourism and mobility, it is informative to examine ways in which the hospitality industry manifests Islamic principles and practices.

3. Tangible elements of hospitality

3.1. The Islamic hotel sector: principles and practices

In examining ways in which Islamic principles and instructions can be integral to the hospitality industry, it is essential to acknowledge how specific forms of religiosity are expressed and how tangible forms of hospitality are produced and consumed. Therefore, Islamic philosophy can play a potent role in the hotel sector, though this would depend on the extent to which Shari’a law applies.

Consequently, for a hotel to be classified as Shari’a-compliant it would normally have to contain the following features associated with five key components:

1. Human Resources: traditional uniforms for hotel staff; dress code for female staff; prayer time provision for Muslim employees; restricted working hours for Muslim staff during Ramadan; staff (and guest) adherence to moral codes of conduct; and guest-centric strategies underpinning service delivery.
2. Private Rooms (bedrooms and bathrooms): separate floors with rooms allocated to women and families; markers (i.e., Qibla stickers) indicating the direction of Mecca; prayer mats and copies of the Qur’an; conservative television channels; geometric and non-figurative patterns of decoration (e.g., calligraphy); beds and toilets positioned away from facing Mecca; toilets fitted with a bidet shower or health faucet; and halal-friendly complementary toiletries.
3. Dining and Banqueting Facilities: halal food with no pork; soft beverages only (i.e., no provision or consumption of alcohol); dining quarter provision for women and families, in addition to communal area provision; art that does not depict human and animal form; and no music expressing seductive and controversial messages.
4. Other Public Facilities: no casino or gambling machines; separate leisure facilities (including swimming pools and spas) for both sexes; female and male prayer rooms equipped with the Qur’an (also available at the front desk); built-in wudu facilities located outside prayer rooms; toilets facing away from Mecca; and art that does not depict human and animal form.
5. Business Operation: ethical marketing and promotion; corporate social responsibility strategies (linked to Islamic values) and philanthropic donations; and transactions and investments in accordance to principles and practices associated with Islamic banking, accounting and finance.

Shari’a compliance indicates that the funding used to operate hotels needs to be based on Islamic financial principles, where the hotel company must contribute a proportion of the revenue to chartable acts (known as ‘zakat’). Zakat stresses the importance of sharing equal benefits and helping others, particularly those in need. Also, financial transactions should not involve the charging of ‘predetermined interest’ (known as ‘riba’) (Maysami & Kwon, 1999).

Given that Islamic banks are risk averse and prone to less speculative forms of financial investment, they can be perceived as an opportunity to provide long-term benefits.
Islamic principles interpret how specific business processes such as marketing and advertising should operate. Promotional strategies must be based on honest information, which is institutionally challenging for the hospitality industry as it is often vulnerable to false advertising. A UK study, for instance, inferred that it is not uncommon for hotel brochures to produce false claims concerning hotel facilities (Caterer and Hotelkeeper, 2005). A US-based enquiry noted that hotel photographs and marketing descriptions of various classifications of hotels were misleading, because they were not consistently realistic and were prone to exaggeration (Stoller, 2011). Kavoossi and Frank’s (1990) comparative observations indicated that advertising campaigns in the West (notably US) often overstated matters in contrast to the marketing activities of Persian Gulf states, which traditionally focus on the genuineness of the product. However, in instances where deception does occur in Islamic states, such cases are often taken seriously. In Qatar, for instance, it was reported that eight seafood restaurants were closed down by the authorities because they misled customers with the wrong information, such as the type of fish consumed (Toumi, 2012).

If a hotel intends to reflect Shari’a principles then it would have to seriously address its service delivery and product offerings. Hotels catering for spas and beauty care treatment, for example, would need to ensure that cosmetics and toiletries consist of halal products free from animal extracts. Some mainstream companies are developing products sensitive to a Muslim market. Colgate-Palmolive, for instance, produces halal-certified toothpaste and non-alcoholic mouthwash. One other potential development concerns gender segregation within hotels, or even the evolution of gender-specific hotels. There is an anticipated trend for ‘women-only-hotels’ in the Middle East, popularized by the 2008 opening of the Luthan Hotel and Spa in Saudi Arabia, claiming to be the first of its kind in the Middle East (Hammond, 2008). However, segregated accommodation is not a new concept within the hospitality industry. There are a range of hotels in the West that offer ‘women-only-floors’, responding to the need for security and privacy (e.g., Hamilton Crowne Plaza in Washington DC, Hotel Bella Sky in Copenhagen and the Georgian Court Hotel in Vancouver).

The full likelihood of hotels currently pursuing all the necessary Shari’a-compliance criteria is doubtful. Nonetheless, there are likely to be various gradations of compliance. Henderson (2010) indicates that, although there are no formally accepted or agency officiated stipulations testifying to an archetypal Shari’a-compliant hotel, some Islamic states have existing legal frameworks indicating ways in which hotels must operate. Hotels in Iran and Saudi Arabia, for instance, normally request couples who are intending to stay at the hotel to produce documentary evidence proving that they are married. As no formal certification framework for Shari’a hotels commonly exists, it would be prudent in the medium-term for professional practice and academic study to utilize the concept, ‘Islamic hotel’. Such terminology implies conceptual flexibility and symbolizes the diversity of the Islamic world. However, any serious movement towards the development of Shari’a-compliant hotels could progressively change the way in which Islamic hospitality is structured, operated and managed. For the moment, however, and as noted below, the hotel sector is starting to awaken to opportunities to develop Islamic hospitality.

3.2. Current developments and challenges within the hotel sector

Along with the support of a joint venture between Kempinski Hotels and Guidance Hotel Investment Company, Shaza Hotels, a Parisian-based operator, is focusing on developing and managing a range of alcohol-free hotels in the Middle East and North Africa. It opened its first hotel in Madinah in Saudi Arabia in December 2010 (Bundhun, 2010a), and is thus strategically targeting religious sites to establish adjacent hotel businesses. Also, along with the UAE-based hotel developer, Range Hospitality, Shaza Hotels is working to establish hotels around pilgrimage sites in Iraq (Gulf News, 2010). One hotel company that indicates that it is Shari’a-compliant is the De Palma Group of Hotels in Malaysia, which operates hotels located in Ampang, Kuala Selangor, Kuching and Shah Alam. The hotels have a range of Islamic features and services (e.g., dress code, rooms equipped with prayer items and halal certified food). The De Palma Hotel Ampang has been granted a license to conduct Friday prayers together with a full time Imam (http://www.depalmahotel.com). It attracts congregations of around 1200–2000 for Friday prayer, and conducts religious classes on Al-Quran recital and Islamic reflection and remembrance (Sahida, Rahman, Awang, & Man, 2011).

The potential to develop Islamic hospitality on a concentrated scale within specific Islamic societies is considerable. In Dubai, for instance, five of its top ten markets for 2011 originate from the Islamic countries of Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Oman and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia, for instance, was the largest market of around 873,152 guests, and the combined guest total for the five countries was 2,068,480 guests (Khaleej Times, 2012). One notable Islamic hotel that already exists is the Atria Kalaidhu Investment Private Ltd. The hotel, operated by Lootah Hotel Management Company, around 60% of its clientele are apparently non-Muslim, encouraged by a friendly atmosphere and family environment (Asif, 2011b).

Stephenson et al. (2010) note that the development of Islamic hotels could also attract those Western tourists whose motivations focus on well-being and cultural appreciation, and a health conscious lifestyle. Health, wellness and spiritual forms of tourism have become popular over the past two decades. There has been an increased interest in ‘lifestyles of health and sustainability’, known as the ‘Lohas’ segment (see IPK International, 2010). This trend is reflected in the Islamic hospitality market. In Indonesia, for example, ‘halal spas’ are increasingly popular, offering unique Islamic-friendly services (e.g., headscarf styling) and utilizing a range of halal-friendly cosmetics which are free from pork derivatives, such as collagen, glycerin, keratin and tallow (Woo, 2011).

Singapore has started to offer halal-friendly accommodation, where 366 hotels and resorts have been awarded Malaysian halal certificates, 289 of these have been issued directly by the State Islamic Religious Department and include such established hotel brands as Pullman and Thistle Hotels (Halal Focus, 2011a). The hospitality-based group, Retaj Marketing and Project Management, which is located in Qatar, plans to develop 20 Islamic hotels in Turkey (Sambidge, 2011). Some countries are planning to develop Islamic resorts. Lootah Hotel Management, for instance, announced plans to establish a Shari’a-compliant resort in the Maldives, partnering with the Maldives’ Kalaidhu Investment Private Ltd. The resort has a projected cost of around $85 million, involving the construction of 50 luxury villas within a private enclave incorporating dining, recreational and yachting facilities (Zawya, 2011).

For many moderate Muslim countries (e.g., Turkey, Oman, Qatar and the UAE) substantial development is required before an Islamic hotel sector is fully conceived as a key feature of the tourism destination landscape. Oman recently announced its first alcohol-free five-star hotel, which in itself is an interesting development (Kola, 2010). Although Islamic hotels have not been fully developed in the West, their evolution could be viewed as a direct response to latent market demand. In 2009, visitors to the UK from the Middle East spent more than $1.3 billion (Halal Focus, 2010), indicating the potential development of Islamic-friendly hotels in key locations in Europe and other countries frequented by Muslim tourists (e.g., China, Russia and Thailand). In order for Muslim travelers to feel comfortable, however, studies infer that they could appreciate
3.3. Halal food production and consumption: trends and developments

Islamic law emphasizes that food should be pure in form and content, declaring the following forms of consumption ‘haram’: blood, carrion or dead animals, swine and all its related by-products, animals that kill prey (including predatory birds), and all amphibious animals. It is also deemed haram if animals are slaughtered without religious pronouncements. The Qur’anic perspective on intoxicants is unequivocal: Satan’s plan is (but) to excite enmity and hatred between you, with intoxicants and gambling, and hinder you from the remembrance of Allah, and from prayer: will you not then abstain? Qur’an, Surah 5, section 91

Halal food production is no longer a regional practice but an international requirement, and one of the most crucial components of the Islamic hospitality sector. In early 2010, the halal food market had an estimated value of around US$635 billion, representing 16% of the global food industry, and the halal market value in America was estimated at US$17.6 billion (Asif, 2011a). Together with locally adapted culinary practices, halal food can be re-authenticated into a distinguished cuisine servicing a broader market segment of tourists and made available at various outlets (e.g., hotels, restaurants, take-away outlets, food courts, aircraft dining and cafes). Information released in 2009 estimated that nearly 85% of halal food is produced in non-Muslim countries. Australia, for instance, has been the leading supplier and exporter of halal meat since 2003 (Halal Focus, 2009).

Offering halal dining experiences to Muslims living in Western countries could create a competitive edge for some companies. As part of their regional agenda concerning local market adaptation, the McDonalds Corporation introduced halal dishes in some of its restaurants in such cosmopolitan cities as London (UK), Michigan (US) and Sydney (Australia) (IOS Minaret, 2008). In 2009, Kentucky Fried Chicken offered halal menus in 8 of its UK restaurants (BBC News Magazine, 2009). Nonetheless, some large companies in the West are moving towards a more comprehensive halal food agenda, not just in terms of adopting an Islamic-friendly approach (i.e., halal menu options) but in terms of Sharia-compliance (i.e., halal restaurants). The opening of Domino Pizza in 2010, a halal-only outlet in Hall Green, Birmingham (UK), signifies a significant step forward in this direction (Cooper, 2009).

Therefore, it is myopic to assume that the transition towards the development of halal products is simply an altruistic response by the industry to recognize the religious needs of consumers. Halal food products may well have a wider appeal to non-Muslims because of safety and sanitation issues, where cross-contamination is less likely (Asif, 2011b). Marhaba, a Dutch company that sells halal biscuits and chocolates, managed to attract a quarter of its customers from the non-Muslim segment (Power, 2009). The fast food restaurant chain, Chicken Cottage, which originally opened its halal restaurant in 1994 in London (UK), uses the word ‘halal’ as part of its logo but does not blatantly advertise this association. It now has 140 restaurants worldwide, including Canada, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Slovakia (Marketing Weekly, 2010). The Saffron Road brand of halal meat products also targets a wider market of consumers, especially as it is retailed through one of the largest premium natural food chains, Austin Whole Foods Market (Amanullah, 2011). The retail of halal products through supermarkets and hypermarkets represents a shift in the supply chains of halal products, which were traditionally available in small specialist ethnic stores.

One emerging trend is the development and expansion of Muslim-centric produce, illustrated in the production of the Evoca Cola drink. This product utilizes natural ingredients including extracts from black seeds. This seed literally translates as ‘seed of blessing’ because it is noted in the hadiths of Prophet Muhammad to have healing benefits (Wilson and Liu, 2010). The Evoca Cola drink currently sells in Algeria and France and is also being sold at major UK stores (e.g., Asda). Mecca Cola, which bears the slogan: “Shake your Conscience”, also sells internationally and pledges 10% of its profits to charities operating in the Palestinian territories, and 10% to charities located in countries where the drink is sold (Ozkanc and Foster, 2005). Another related trend concerns the production of ‘eco-halal food’, which is based on organic farming, non-mechanical slaughter and production, and stringent cleansing methods. This approach is perceived to be more holistic than the halal certified method of mechanical slaughter, which became popular due to high demand. Eco-halal food reflects the social value of ‘tayib’ (Amanullah, 2011), a term that is conceptually grounded in the Qur’an to imply wholesome (i.e., good) properties:

“O you people! Eat of what is on earth, lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the Evil One, for he is to you an avowed enemy”.

Qur’an, Surah 2, section 168

The wholesome element has its roots in medieval Islamic society in the Middle East. One of the oldest Arabic cookbooks, written in 10th century Iraq by Ibn Sayyar al-Warraq, who produced dishes consumed by caliphs and other members of high society, provides recipes based on food associated with natural healing practices and information highlighting the humoral properties of food (Nasrallah, 2007).

3.4. Islamic legitimization of halal products and services: unified systems and practices

There are a range of organizations involved in the Islamic legitimization (i.e., authentication and verification) of halal products and services. The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA), for instance, is a non-profit organization responsible for certifying halal food production in various food industries in over 20 (OIC and non-OIC) countries worldwide. It supervises services for hand-slaughtered and machine-slaughtered meat and poultry, and also certifies halal cosmetics (http://www.ifanca.org/index.php). Another body is the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC), responsible for overseeing the slaughter and certification of meat and non-meat products. AFIC also monitors the cleansing of slaughter houses, chillers, freezers, packing and loading areas, and also inspects the logistical aspects associated with the movement and shipping of products. It is also responsible for overseeing halal slaughter and certification for Hajji and Umrah (http://www.afic.com.au/). There is also the European Institute of Halal Certification, which inspects the food, medical and cosmetic

hotels being located near to Mosques (see Mohsin, 2005; Weidenfield, 2006), and public bathrooms with separate water facilities to allow for ablution prior to formal prayers (Battour et al., 2010a).

Nevertheless, grandiose plans that place significant emphasis on extravagance and luxury could be counterproductive to the expansion of self-effacing forms of hospitality pertinent to Islamic hotel sector development. Consequently, the fundamental objective would be to produce moderate developments, which focus more on the essence of Islam and at the same time reflect a sense of community pride and value.
industries as well as recommends certification (see www.eurohalal.de/en/about-us.html).

Nonetheless, there are numerous organizations dealing with Islamic monitoring, including at least 20 different certification bodies in the UK alone (Bon & Hussain, 2010). These authors thus state:

In fact, due to a lack of an integrated global supply chain and also a lack of global awareness of its importance for Muslims, the food services sector at large finds it difficult to comply with halal standards. There is no unique global trademark for halal food available and no common standard or a global institution to issue and regulate the certificates (2010, p. 55).

authors’ original emphasis

This situation encourages different opinions concerning what constitutes halal, including conflicting views on animal feed, slaughtering method, packaging and logistics. However, the lack of a comprehensive approach to the halal monitoring process has considerable implications. Although the Malaysian government, for instance, is aware of the need to encourage producers to be more halal-oriented, the production of some non-halal products persists. Gelatine, for instance, an extract from the skin and bones of pigs, is utilized for the production of various desserts (Nasaruddin, Fuad, Mel, Jaswir, & Hamid, 2012). Nonetheless, Malaysia is pushing for certification and a single halal logo across all states with amendments made to the 1972 Trade Description Act (the Star, 2010). The need for more coherence in terms of certification would reassure consumers of the legitimacy of the products, particularly important in the context of halal fraud, which is escalating due to the rise in demand for halal products. Companies operating in a range of countries such as South Africa (Halal Focus, 2011b), US (George, 2010) and the UK (Hickman, 2009), have been accused of trading in false halal produce.

Nevertheless, halal-certified dining can positively claim public repute. Kuala Lumpur International Airport (Malaysia), for instance, is rated formally as the most Islamic-friendly airport of all OIC countries, especially as it caters for a broad choice of halal-certified dining options (see http://www.crescentrating.com). This case further implies that hospitality venues in OIC countries can also find benefit from halal certification, which dispels the assumption that halal certification is simply associated with non-OICs.

Given the complexities concerning the legitimization of halal products, it is essential that halal producers and suppliers consistently encourage consumers to be aware of which products are authentically halal and which services are Islamic-friendly. Wanhassan and Awang’s (2009) New Zealand study, for instance, suggests that despite the fact that the government is conscious of the potential of halal food in encouraging a vibrant Muslim tourism market, restaurants can be apathetic in communicating their halal products to tourists. Nevertheless, specific knowledge management systems have slowly emerged to address this imbalance, providing Muslims with information on a range of halal-friendly products and services available within the hospitality and tourism industries.

Crescentrating.com is an information-based website established in 2006 to notify business tourists of halal-friendly environments. It has grown significantly in both scope and content, containing global information on a variety of topics: halal-friendly accommodation, resorts, restaurants, caterers, food and beverage manufacturers, shopping destinations, airports, Islamic art and cultural sites. The company also rates hotels in accordance to detailed Islamic-friendly criteria (http://www.crescentrating.com/). A range of halal food information websites also exist, notable examples are ‘Eat Halal’, ‘Green Zabiba’, ‘Halal Healthy’ and ‘Halal Focus.com’. There are also numerous user-friendly interface applications for mobile devices (see, for instance, ‘HalalTrip’ and ‘Muslim Pro’), which deal with halal-friendly hospitality products and services, such as hotels, holiday packages, destination guides, airport guides and restaurants.

3.5. Islamic festivals and events sector

The academic study of the festivals and events sector has not fully considered the Islamic dimension, despite the fact that the Islamic sector expresses attributes that typify central features of events: uniqueness, ritual or ceremony, ambience and service, and interaction (Shone & Parry, 2004). In his detailed conceptual review of event tourism, Getz (2008) misses an opportunity to acknowledge the Islamic component, which is indeed noteworthy given its scope and potential, and the fact that Muslim consumers are an increasingly important market with particularistic-based needs, interests and requirements.

Islamic festivals express varying levels of religiosity and social hospitality, and are often resource-dependent on the hospitality industry. They are thus diverse, often associated with family celebration (e.g., weddings) or have high religious significance (e.g., the end of Hajj, Prophet Muhammad’s birthday and Ramadan). The holy month of Ramadan, which takes place in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and usually lasts for 29 or 30 days, is a period when families and social groups have the option of utilizing hotels and restaurants for the fast-breaking meal, iftar. This meal, which starts at sunset, has grown into a banqueting-type festival with significant revenue generation implications for the hospitality industry. In Dubai, for example, during the 2010 Ramadan, the Dubai hotel sector mounted a promotional campaign, especially important as this period represented the low tourist season and a time when members of the expatriate community traveled overseas for their summer vacation. The Grand Millennium Dubai, for instance, established specially designed air-conditioned Ramadan tents for families and commercial groups. The Kempinski Hotel Mall of Emirates encouraged potential guests to stay in the hotel and purchase an inclusive package including iftar or suhoor – a meal consumed early morning before the start of fast (Bundhun, 2010b). Furthermore, it is claimed that the AKMC Al Shohada Hotel in Makkah generates more business from its food and beverage division in Ramadan than any other month of the year (Osman, 2011).

The role of the hotel sector in the production of feasts and lavish buffets during Ramadan has raised some ethical concerns. These events potentially impact the long-term social ethos and cultural perception of Islamic hospitality, especially if they are not closely monitored. Luxury iftars, served in five star hotels, can naturally produce high levels of food waste (Arabian Business, 2011). Therefore, as Qur’anic principles emphasize appreciation and respect for food conservation, high wastage can work against the spirit of Ramadan and the notion of fasting.

The end of Ramadan, Eid ul-Fitr, is also a popular festival throughout the Muslim world and can take place from one to four days (or more), depending on the country celebrating the event. In Indonesia, Muslims engage in Mudik, which is a cultural expression of Eid ul-Fitr (known locally as Lebaran), and involves individuals traveling nationally and from overseas to visit their relatives and family homes. However, the opportunity to stay in local hotels encourages some individuals and families to fully recuperate after a month of fasting. Such destinations as Bali, especially its southern region, are popular with domestic tourists who stay in accommodation ranging from budget hotels in Kuta and Tumban to luxury hotels in Jimbaran and Nusa Dua (Jakarta Post, 2009). Up-market hotels in Jakarta offer special packages to high-income city dwellers, with the belief that they will prefer to stay in hotels to continue to be provided with special treatment, especially as their
housemaids and drivers leave for Mudik activities (Jakarta Post, 2010).

Many other inimitable forms of festivity during this period exist in the Muslim world, undoubtedly having a direct effect on local hospitality industries, such as the mass performance of Takhteem (complete recital of the Qur’an) by various inhabitants of the southeastern province of Hadramount in Yemen (Al Batati, 2012). In Oman, Eid ul-Fitr is celebrated through increased domestic tourism and day visits to cattle auctions and traditional souks (Vaidya, 2012).

Islamic festivals are increasing being celebrated in non-OIC countries, especially in such cosmopolitan cities as Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, attracting Muslim and non-Muslim communities and providing opportunities to collectively appreciate Islamic culture and hospitality. The annual Multicultural Eid Festival and Fair in Sydney, for instance, which was established in 1985 by the Islamic Foundation of Education and Welfare, attracts around 30,000 Muslim and non-Muslim visitors annually (http://www.melf.fiwew.com).

In addition to the Islamic festival component, there are also trade shows dedicated to the promotion of Islamic hospitality, such as the Bmitra Islamic Tourism Expo (Malaysia) and the annual International Halal Product Expo (Brunei). The ‘Islamic’ concept is also becoming fashionable in the academic world. National, regional and international conferences are being produced and reproduced in relation to a host of themes involving the wider field of Islamic studies, for example: ‘Islamic banking, finance, marketing and accounting’, ‘Islamic law’, ‘Islamic political systems’, ‘Islamic civilization’, ‘Islamophobia’, ‘Islamic education and culture’, ‘Islamic tourism’, and ‘Islamic bioethics’. Islamic exhibitions also maintain cosmopolitan interest, and are popularized through art exhibitions focusing on the esthetic diversity of the Islamic world (e.g., ceramics, textiles and calligraphy) and photography exhibitions focusing on such features as Hajj and Ramadan, and Muslim life in Europe (see http://islamicartsmagazine.com/). There are also Islamic fashion shows and musical events, which also utilize hospitality resources. The ‘Islamic fashion week’ concept, for instance, is escalating in many OIC and non-OIC countries and is becoming a popularized urban event; often requiring the use of hotel space and other ancillary hospitality services.

There are other distinct types of events, notably Islamic conventions, dedicated to the promotion of Muslim values and beliefs. One high profile event is the Reviving the Islamic Spirit (RIS) conference. It was estimated that the 10th RIS conference in 2011 attracted over 20,000 attendees at Toronto’s Metro Convention Centre (Global Muslim Brotherhood Daily Report, 2011). The themes of the conference vary annually and include such topics as the life of Prophet Muhammad, Islamic civilization and Canadian-Muslim identity. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), which has established large-scale conferences since the early 1980s, holds an annual national convention heralded as the largest conference of Muslim delegates in the US. The 47th ISNA Annual Convention in 2010, held at the Rosemont Convention Centre (Chicago), received an estimated total turnout of around 30,000 attendees (Bortot, 2010). The annual convention normally comprises of Islamic lectures, discussions, debates, nasheeds, and comedy shows (see: http://www.isna.net). The oldest Islamic convention in the US, operating since the early 1970s, is the Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) and the Muslim American Society (MAS) Annual Convention. The 36th Annual ICNA-MAS Convention in 2011 was attended by an estimated 14,000 guests and hosted in Connecticut’s Greater Hartford and Convention Visitors Bureau (Mahbubur, 2011).

A fuller examination of these types of events should illustrate how the hospitality industry intersects with Islamic institutions, and how event experiences encourage social interaction and learning experiences to develop, thereby demonstrating how ‘Rihla’ actually functions. Moreover, given the level of annual participation for some of these events, there will be a cyclical demand for hotels and restaurants.

Representatives of the Muslim community will have significant though variable roles to play in the production and consumption of Islamic festivals and events. Therefore, Islamic principles and practices of hospitality should have a deterministic influence.

4. Future development opportunities

4.1. Halal airlines

The World Travel Market Global Trends Report (2007) acknowledged the potential for the future development of ‘halal airlines’, especially as global travel for the Muslim community is significantly increasing (cited in the Halal Digest, 2007). Similar to the Shari’a-compliant hotel prototype, discussed earlier, halal airlines would need specially designed aircraft facilities, such as gender-specific prayer space provision with washing facilities, gender and family segregated seating, and in-flight religious entertainment. Airline services would thus solely cater for the flight needs of Muslim travelers, including halal dietary provision and soft beverages. The airline’s business model should be based on philanthropic directives and ethical marketing practices, as well as Islamic forms of finance and investment. Although Shari’a airlines are not fully developed, some Islamic-friendly airlines do exist, most notably: Air Arabia (Sharjah, UAE), Kuwait Airways and Saudi Arabian Airlines. These airlines prohibit alcohol and announce pre-recorded prayers during takeoff (Husain, 2007). British Airlines is also becoming more Islamic-friendly, where its in-flight caterer Gate Gourmet utilizes halal production practices for most meals, especially for long-haul flights from London Heathrow Airport, including the preparation, storage and the transportation of halal food (Haq, 2010).

Given that alcoholic options are already purchased by passengers as part of the pre-ticket arrangement for the majority of airlines, the opportunity to travel on a halal airline could foster customer loyalty. Accordingly, Muslim travelers can be secure in the knowledge that they do not have to purchase non-consumptive items, especially alcoholic beverages, and thus be associated with products considered haram.

4.2. Islamic village tourism

Islamic hospitality can be developed on a larger scale. One such example is the ‘traditional village of al-Saha’, located in a southern suburb of Beirut. No alcohol is served to visitors and entertainment adheres to Islamic principles. The village represents Islamic and Arabic architecture, music, poetry and varied art forms. The profit that is received from this initiative is directed to the management body, al-Mabarrat, which is a philanthropic organization administering charities for people in need (Mona, 2006). Hazbun (2008, p. 228) believes that other destinations in the Middle East could benefit from initiatives of this kind as they produce “meaningful experiences” and involve the “local community”, as well as amalgamate the cultural and economic components of the tourism project. In some cases, Islamic village initiatives could combine with the ‘heritage village’ concept. This trend is widely established and has also evolved through tourism initiatives based on specific religious communities, such as the Anabaptists in the US (Luthy, 1994).

The main objective of Islamic village tourism would be to develop hospitality beyond closed institutions and within the context of the tourism destination itself. The scope of such an initiative is germane given the geographic expanse of the Muslim
world. Projects developed in Islamic regions in Asia, North Africa and the Middle East could demonstrate the diversity of Islamic village life. Nonetheless, they would need to be planned carefully and strategically, and be based on a collective consensus concerning the interpretation and application of Islamic principles.

4.3. Islamic cruises

One other potential development is the Islamic cruise, though this has not yet evolved as a distinct industry-based concept. However, cruise ship holidays have appealed to other religious communities. Kosherica, for instance, is a company that deals significantly with cruise ship holidays for the Jewish community (http://www.kosherica.com/). Also, Christian Cruise.Net offers a range of holidays for different segments of its community (http://www.christiancruises.net/).

One noteworthy project, developed by representatives of the Muslim community in Atlanta (US) in 2012, is the ‘Salaam Cruise’ initiative. Although the long-term intention is to hire and manage a cruise ship for mainly Muslim passengers, and also establish Muslim-centric activities and applicable services as part of the Islamic cruise experience, the organization is currently focused on managing group trips on established cruise liners (http://www.salaamcruise.com/).

5. Wider social-political threats: Islamophobia and inhospitality

In order for Islamic hospitality to flourish globally, the wider social environment needs to be receptive and hospitable to Muslim communities and cultures. Derrida’s (2000a, 2000b) social assessment of hospitality acknowledges a paradox, whereby hostility actually underlies discourses and practices of hospitality. Hospitality can transgress into hostility, especially in the context of modernity and as hostility is often a social derivative of the nation and state.

Following the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, the places, spaces and movements of members of the international Muslim community have become more vulnerable to public scrutiny, suspicion and discrimination. Stephenson and Ali’s (2010) enquiry provides a wealth of case examples where Muslims living and travelling in Western states have encountered significant levels of hostility. The situation is exacerbated as a consequence of the increasing significance of Islamophobia, which denotes anti-Muslim sentiment, irrational fear of Muslims and hatred of Islam. Accordingly, Islamophobia compromises the perception of Islamic communities as being safe and hospitable, affecting the extent to which the Islamic hospitality sector can actually expand and develop, especially in the West.

Hasan (2012) documents ways in which ‘halal hysteria’ has significantly emerged throughout Europe, spurred on by populist media sources and nationalist politicians misleadingly claiming that Islamic slaughtering methods are inhumane and that the public unknowingly consume halal products. Consequently, Islamophobia can affect social relations and interaction, representing a challenge to cosmopolitan exchanges and multicultural experiences. These situational contexts are integral to international forms of hospitality.

6. Conclusion and research implications

The increase in demand for halal products and services, together with demographic changes within the Muslim community, have encouraged new opportunities for the expansion of hospitality provision. Importantly, this paper asserts that Islamic products and services do not need to be developed and promoted just for the Muslim market. There are some spheres of hospitality where non-Muslims can be viewed as potential market segments. There are positive indications that these consumers are likely to be interested in halal forms of hospitality because of issues of product safety, social civility and lifestyle. Accordingly, future research ought to consider the perceptions and experiences of non-Muslims, especially those segments seeking health-conscious lifestyles and those who are socially aware and appreciative of other cultures and societies. The objective would be to investigate the actual extent to which these consumers are willing to embrace the Islamic hospitality experience, or at least purchase certain types of halal products and services.

In many ways, Islamic hospitality is complex and diverse, in the same way that the Muslim population is by no means a monolithic group. In order to avoid reductionist thinking it would be appropriate to consider the tangible and intangible dimensions of Islamic hospitality in relation to variables of age, gender, ethnicity and nationality; especially within the context of specific countries and regions. This endeavour would also help to highlight the religious multiplicities and gradations of Islamic hospitality. Enquiries need to unearth various Muslim perceptions of the Islamic (and non-Islamic) nature and content of hospitality experiences, resources and initiatives, both within the context of OIC and non-OIC countries. Therefore, studies ought to seriously address the multifarious nature of the Muslim community in terms of people’s social and behavioral expectations, and types of hospitality consumption and use. Subsequently, market research data is necessary to ascertain the extent to which specific segments of the Muslim population prefer hotels to accommodate certain Islamic features, for instance. Furthermore, it would be purposeful to explore development opportunities for niche forms of Islamic hospitality, including alternative forms of holiday lodging. This would include Islamic cruises, Muslim camps and campsites, and Islamic motels and hostels. Nonetheless, it would be purposeful, however, to initially examine various Muslim segments to gauge opinions and attitudes towards the expansion of the halal market in the hospitality industry, and to understand variations in terms of needs and preferences.

The development of case study appraisals of specific festivals and events which target Muslim communities would enable academic study and professional practice to understand this field more. The focus would be to examine ways in which Islamic occasions effectively utilize hospitality-based resources, and ways in which they are structured, organized, managed, operated and consumed, with the ultimate objective of identifying commonalities and distinguishing features.

Nonetheless, as this paper illustrates, the relationship between Islam and hospitality manifests a range of ethical challenges concerning product and service delivery issues. Importantly, Muslim consumers require reassurance from suppliers of the genuineness of the purchased product or the specific service. The hospitality industry needs to play a proactive role in working with designated international bodies to develop criteria for global certification. Accordingly, action-based research, utilizing information gained from stakeholder collaboration and consultation, could help to develop a transparent and unified policy framework appropriate for the Islamic legitimation of the industry, especially for each sector and inclusive of OIC countries. The objective would be to work towards an agenda of global governance.

Consequently, there is a need to construct alternative models of development and professional practice beyond Western perspectives of hospitality, especially in designing appropriate and practical approaches for the development and management of Islamic hospitality. The objective, however, is to present forms of hospitality that are compatible to Islamic lifestyles rather than tourist-centric lifestyles and lifestyles of pure consumption. Nonetheless,
if Islamic hospitality developed as global entity then the current climate of Islamophobia would have to diminish. Despite this situation, however, there are clear signs that Islamic hospitality has evolved with formal characteristics and institutional properties. Therefore, it would be pertinent to envisage the emergence of an Islamic hospitality industry’. 

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