Chapter 6

Deciphering 'Arab Hospitality':
Identifying Key Characteristics and Concerns

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Introduction

Hospitality is deeply embedded in the cultural, economic, historical, political, social, theological and traditional landscapes of people and populations of Arab civilizations and nations. These embodiments in hospitality are also perceived necessary to sustain the development of tourism in the Arab nations, service the tourist gaze, and fuel the hospitality industry in the Arab world. In fact, the omnipresent role of hospitality across this region is well documented, particularly in such countries as Iraq (Fernea Warnock 1989), Jordan (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud 2008; Shryock 2004), Morocco (Fernea Warnock 1975), Oman (Eickelman 1984) and Yemen (Meneley 1996).

Crucially, hospitality is seen as being synonymous with the Arab world because Arabs are 'famed' for the hospitality they show to their guests (Barnes 2013). Unfortunately, however, these perceptions have been increasingly confounded by socio-political constructions of the 'Arab other', agitated by the global phenomenon of Islamophobia (see Stephenson and Ali 2010). The spaces of hospitality where the (Arab) host comes into contact with the (Arab and non-Arab) guest to deliver the Arab hospitality experience in the private, commercial and social domains are examined within this chapter. Based upon Lashley's (2000: 4) conceptualization of such hospitality domains as the private realm, the assessment considers the role of the home in the Arab world because it often determines the primary socialization of hosts into conducting hospitable practices. This is in contrast to the commercial domain, which focusses on the provision of hospitality as a formalized service encounter and economic exchange. Therefore, the social focus is directed to dealing and communicating with strangers who are paying customers.

The work acknowledges critical aspects of (in)hospitality in the Arab world, associated with formal and informal practices and provisions. The formal dimension inspects how Arab hospitality is personified, symbolized and represented in the hospitality industries, and therefore examined in the context of the commercial (or commodified) domain. The informal

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aspect is examined by interpreting the roots of Arab hospitality in view of Bedouin rituals and cultures to comprehend how *karam* (hospitality) has been traditionally communicated to strangers within (and beyond) the private and social domains. Karam, however, is generally interpreted as 'generosity' or 'hospitality', though can denote 'nobility', 'grace' and 'refinement' (Shryock 2004: 36).

Therefore, the chapter begins by reviewing the roots of Arab hospitality, particularly in the context of pre-Islamic and Islamic societies and cultures. The Bedouin, prominent in the Abrahamic (e.g. Christian, Judaism, and Islamic) theological narrative, continue to exert an influence on Arab hospitality. The spaces of hospitality – the private, commercial and social domains—are observed to comprehend host-guest relationships in non-Western settings. Moreover, within the context of both the informal and formal provisions and practices of Arab hospitality, there is a paradox whereby the inhospitable and hostile climate towards Arabs and Muslims actually nullifies pre-modern perceptions of Arab (or Bedouin) hospitality. As the Arab world, including countries in the Middle East and North Africa, accommodates 93 per cent (approximately 341 million) of the world's Muslims (De Silver & Masci 2017), this paper draws upon the theology of Islam to analyze the commercial, private and social spaces of hospitality.

Arab hospitality: Pre-Islamic and Islamic attributes

The theology of hospitality in an Arab context can be located in the three Abrahamic (monotheistic) faiths - Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. Therefore, an 'Abrahamic legacy' can be interpreted as a 'shared and second language', that is an expression (and extension to others) of human kindness (Shryock 2012: 21). In theological teachings, Abraham's act of kindness and generosity is representational, where he invited three travelers into his tent, not knowing they were angels in the guise of humans, and provided them with food, rest and shelter. This narrative is a marker of the virtue of hospitality in monotheistic religions, indicating the role ethics plays in hospitality, particularly towards strangers. The socio-symbolic importance associated with greeting the guest (the traveler or stranger) in the Arab world and welcoming him/her into one's abode is rooted in pre-Islamic cultures and rituals associated with 'Bedouin Arab hospitality' (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud 2008; Barnes, 2013; Sobh *et al.* 2013). Consequently, Arab hospitality is symbolically associated with narratives that can be traced back to the pre-Islamic era, mythologized through such legendary characters as Hatim al-Tai, who was a poet from Ha'il in the north-west region of Saudi Arabia and who died in 578 AD. He has been

famed in the Arab world for his extreme generosity to others (see Stetkevych 2000). Arab hospitality has been popularized by historians and social analysts as having the ability to progressively influence the future status of the guest. According to Attar (2005: 19):

> For the ancient Arabs, hospitality, in its general and wider sense, also means that it was possible for a stranger to become part of the tribe. If one shared a meal with his hosts, or tasted a few drops of the host's blood he would become part of the family and the group.

However, Bravmann (1962) associated generosity of the pre-Islamic period with charity of the Islamic era, as expressed in the Qur'an (Chapter 57, Verse 7) in terms of spending one's wealth through focusing on charitable deeds, for instance:

> Believe in Allah and His Messenger and spend out of that in which He has made you successors. For those who have believed among you and spent there, will be a great reward.

Therefore, generosity continued to manifest itself in many ways in Islam. Informatively, the illustrious Moroccan traveler Ibn Battuta (2004: 4) travelled throughout parts of the Islamic world from Asia to West Africa from 1325 to 1354BC, noting ways in which hospitality was situated and presented. He thus observed that travelers were 'entertained' and 'hospitably welcomed' at resthouses and hospices, often maintained by 'generations of benefactors'. Siddiqui (2017) links the virtue of hospitality with the theology of Islam to highlight the ethical relationship between the host and guest/traveler, which suppresses the potential for hosts to experience inhospitable or hostile encounters with people viewed as strangers. Sobh *et al.* (2013: 446) note that there is a 'general consensus among Muslim scholars that hospitality and generosity toward guests are an integral part of faith in Islam'.

Charles Montagu Doughty, an English writer travelling through the Arabian Peninsula during the 1870s and living among Bedouin communities, often indicated how he was positively received by others in hospitable ways. These experiences encouraged him to view Arab hospitality in a genuine and organic way, despite disagreement from other fellow Europeans. Doughty (1921: 152, 257) states:

> In the hospitality of the Arabs is kinship and assurance, in their insecure countries. This is the piety of the Arab life, this is the sanctity of the Arabian religion, where we may not look for other. Returning one day, in Syria, from a journey, I enquired the way of a countryman in the road. It was noon; the young man, who went by eating bread and cheese, paused and cut a piece of his girdle-cake, with a pleasant look, and presented it to the stranger: when I shook the head, he cut a rasher of cheese and put it silently to my mouth; and only then he thought it a time to speak. Also if a stranger enter vine-

yard or orchard, he is a guest of that field; and, in the summer months, the goodman, if he be there, will bring some of his fruits to refresh him… I speak many times of the Arabian hospitality, since this I have been often questioned in Europe and for a memorial of worthy persons.

Nonetheless, there is a point at which it is necessary to acknowledge the persistence of 'regimes of hospitality' often determining the way in which hospitality is constructed, conveyed and negotiated. The commercial hospitality and tourism industries are arguably proactive in such a determination. Shyrock's (2004) ethnography of the Balga Bedouin living in the suburbs of Amman, Jordan, illustrates the application of regimes of hospitality in relation to gender dimensions. Opportunities for unmarried females to work in heritage sites socially compromise traditional values, as they are used as 'bait to attract tourists' (2004: 46), thus representing a social risk, especially if they play a direct role in commercial transactions and activities deemed to be culturally inappropriate (e.g., serving coffee to male tourists). Understandably, the spatial difference between the male guest and the Arab woman has also been a significant defining factor of Arab hospitality within private space. This has been influenced at varying degrees by socio-cultural notions of 'honor and shame', particularly within the context of the more traditional societies (Young 2007: 49). Accordingly, Young's (2007: 50) study concerning the Rashaayda Bedouin of eastern Sudan, indicated that it should not be always assumed that men are fundamentally the 'dispensers of generous hospitality' and women are the 'mere bystanders', as this would underestimate the crucial role of women in the 'exchange of food and shelter'. The modernization of gendered roles and responsibilities challenges the degree to which Arab hospitality can fully retain its conventional elements and customary features.

Indeed, the boundaries of the theology of Islam are being challenged, especially in the context of the impacts of modernity and globalization. Faith is often 'tested' through problematic ways in receiving others in modern times, especially in the context of economic migration and urban development. This is apparent by the ways in which guests, particularly Asian immigrant workers, do not always consistently receive hospitality and hospitable relations in Arab countries. As discussed later, this could thus indicate that conformity to Arab principles and legacies of hospitality are not always pervasive. Nonetheless, in terms of regimes of hospitality, one system of Arab hospitality concerns the fact that, in a non-particularistic way, hospitality is culturally and spatially determined. Accordingly, individuals across the Arab diaspora can share with one another through mobility and migration a discourse of hospitality based on pan-Arab notions of hospitality, induced by a common language and religion (though not entirely),

as well as similar cultural idiosyncrasies (Stephenson 2014). This may manifest in such activities as pan-Arab cultural and sporting events, or even at a micro-level of interaction in terms of mutual affinities with one another within the context of common places and spaces in everyday life.

Feghali (1997) observes that hospitality thus predates the third Pillar of Islam: *Zakat* (giving alms or charity). Arab societies place heavy weight on hospitality as a core value, which contains undertones of Bedouin traditions that have retained their importance in Islam. Nonetheless, in terms of Islamic doctrine the importance of karam (hospitality) persists. Shryock (2009: 34) emphasizes that 'it is a compliment to say of a man who forgets his prayers, but treats his guests well that 'hospitality is his religion''. There are several references in the Qur'an which emphasize the importance of looking after guests well and welcoming them in 'God's name' (Siddiqui 2017). In the Qur'an, *Surah Hud* (Chapter 11), states:

> Any certainly did Our messenger (i.e., angles) come to Abraham with good tidying; they said 'Peace'. He said, 'Peace', and did not delay in bringing (them) a roasted calf (Verse 69) … So fear Allah and do not disgrace me concerning my guests. It there not among you a man of reason (Verse 78).

Surah adh-Dhariyat (Chapter 51, Verse 24-27) indicates the theological narrative of hospitality:

> Has there reached you the story of the honoured guests of Abraham (Verse, 24). When they entered upon him and said, "[We greet you with] peace." He answered, "[And upon you] peace; [you are] a people unknown" (Verse, 25). Then he went to his family and came with a fat [roasted] calf (Verse 26). And placed it near them; he said, "Will you not eat?" (Verse 27)

The above quotations from the Qur'an underscore the prominence of hospitality, generosity and kindness towards guests. Islamic hospitality is thus entrenched within other forms of Islamic scripture. Vukonić (2010: 40) observes that the Prophet's Hadith (146) states that: 'There is no wellbeing in a family which does not welcome and treat guests well'. Subsequently, being hospitable to others is seen in the Hadith as a pathway to paradise ('Jannah') (2010: 40). These principles underpinning Arab hospitality further echo the theology of Islam, which promotes the importance of duty and obligations to others rather than self-indulgence. Hence, as noted in the Qur'an (Chapter 4, Verse 36):

> Worship Allah and associate nothing with Him, and to parents do good, and to relatives, orphans, the needy, the near neighbor, the neighbor farther away, the companion at your side, the traveler, and those whom your right hands possess. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are self-deluding and boastful.

Private spaces of Arab hospitality

The social and symbolic function and structure of the family home in Islamic communities are indicative of Arab hospitality and the Islamic elements of hospitality (Memarian *et al*., 2011; Othman *et al.* 2015; Sobh & Belk 2001). Hospitality can be operationalized in terms of family gatherings and events, but modesty is integral to the production of hospitable activities. As Othman (2015: 21) expresses:

> Maintaining physical modesty through dress code becomes an integral part of protecting the females' body privacy while allowing hospitable activities to continue within a home.

Although houses in the Arab world can be very welcoming to guests, they often serve to 'safeguard their own integrity, which is often described as *hurma*, as 'sacredness' or 'inviolability'' (Shryock 2004: 36). Therefore, the domestic area or the home of the host, represents private space that guests and extended kin, friends and strangers enter to receive basic hospitality provision of food, rest and shelter. The private space is an embodiment of theological and philosophical forces of duty, obligations to others, and ethical relations between hosts and guests. However, Siddiqui's (2017) interpretation of hospitality within the context of private domains in Islam and Christianity suggests that religion precedes philosophy, especially as hosts are aware of the presence of God. Therefore, it can be argued that hospitable relations are triadic (i.e., God-host-guest). As Siddiqui (2017: n.p.) suggests:

> We ourselves are all guests of God's hospitality and have an obligation to show hospitality to others. Thus, our hospitality to others is a sign of our love for God as God is always present when guests are present at the table.

From a young age, children in Arab homes are socialized into the importance of hospitality as both a personal quality and a symbol of status (Feghali 1997). There is a symbolic relationship between hospitality and status, which extends to honour, reputation and sovereignty (Young 2007; Shryock 2009, 2012; Sobh *et al.* 2013). Moreover, in terms of status it is clear that power relations surface in private spaces as hosts strive to preserve their honour, reputation and sovereignty. At the same time, however, guests 'judge' the quality of their Arab hospitality experience. Accordingly, one significant concern for the host is that if she/he fails to provide (or seen to provide) a hospitable encounter or experience, this could trigger the guest to later speak ill of the host to fellow kin. The host's character, honor and reputation could thus be tarnished and her/his sovereignty weakened (Shryock 2012).

The laws of hospitality are arguably meaningless without the symbolic performance of rituals, which are also central to the construction of Arab identities. Moreover, the hospitality rituals are symbolic of Bedouin pasts and continue to exert their influence over Arabs in the domestic sphere (Sobh *et al.* 2013). In private space, or what Sobh *et al.* (2013) refer to as 'home hospitality', the Arab host-guest relationship is secured through the ritualized drinking of Arabic coffee. The preparation, serving and drinking of Arabic coffee (*ghahwa*) in the Arab home helps the host to earn a reputation for generosity, or karam (Young 2007), thus shielding the host from being demonized and shamed by a guest. In Jordan, for instance, a cup of coffee is shared with guests to secure the status and sovereignty of the host (Shryock 2004, 2012). The coffee ritual is a sequential act and is essential in assimilating the guest as a stranger (in the home) into the private space of hospitality (Sobh *et al.* 2013). In addition to sharing coffee, the host and guest consume food together, which is a customary and ritualized act attached to Arab food culture. Food is symbolic in hospitality because it is perceived as an embodiment of God. In Islam and Christianity, when one is near food she/he is in God's presence (Siddiqui 2017). Sobh *et al.* (2013: 452) explain the gastronomic culture of Qataris:

> After serving coffee and dates, the host typically brings a range of local snacks and desserts called *fualah*. The variety and amount of *fualah* will vary based on the status of the guest, the occasion of the visit, and whether the guest is expected or the visit is improvised. *Fualah* is generally followed by a traditional dinner for men (rice and lamb) and increasingly a modern banquet for women. Display is very important and there should be more food than the party could possibly eat (authors' emphasis).

The challenges concerning such forms of hospitality relate to the social pressure for guests to conform to the consumption of generous offerings and not offend the host. In a lifestyle study of Qatari women, Donnelly *et al.* (2011) found that as social courtesy and hospitality were central features in the social interaction of women during social gatherings and home events, women would often feel obliged to eat types of food that were knowingly unhealthy food choices. Food is thus inextricably linked to conceptions of Arab hospitality, which was also a popular perceived attribute prior to the modernization of the Arab world. Doughty (1921) recalled the worthiness of the hospitality that he received in his Arabian Peninsula travels, especially in terms of being presented with a variety of food and beverage when he visited various camps and villages: a sacrificed yearling lamb (1921: 235), rice and steaming mutton (1921: 236), sacrificed bull (1921: 210), dates and coffee (1921: 60), buttermilk (1921: 309) and tamarind (1921: 358). The presentation of high quality food to guests is also characteristic of Arab hospitality in pre-Islamic times. According to Stetkevych (2000: 98):

> For hospitality in the quintessential Bedouin sense implies also offering the guest meat: the camel breeder slaughters a camel and the huntsman brings in the best of his kill. Within this ethos, generosity was thus held as the Bedouin's emblematic virtue.

Eating and drinking rituals associated with Arab hospitality have been subjected to Orientalist (visual and verbal) constructions, popularly portraying Arabs eating in an uncivilized manner. These textual images of Arabs performing hospitality in terms of sitting together and feasting, and eating large quantities of food with their hands are presented to the West as an uncivilized performance. Thus, the 'Othering' of Arab hospitality in the private space takes place through the 'Western' gaze as the Orient is Orientalised because gastronomic cultures are aligned to notions of the 'savage body', which contain undertones of animality (Steet 2000: 86). Steet argues that *National Geographic* photographs and captions in the 1930s and 1940s demonized representations of Arab hospitality in a non-Western, exotic and non-European context. The images captured Arabs as undertaking hospitality and thus contributing to the Orientalisation of Arab hospitality for the Western gaze. For instance, in response to a photographic caption: '*Bedouins of the Author's Escort Enjoy a Meal of Rice and Dried Shark' (October 1932),* Steet (2000: 86-87) infers that Arab hospitality was perceived to be undesirable and undomesticated, stating:

> The caption to a 1932 picture of Arabs sitting on the ground eating read: "Using no knife or fork, the Arab takes rice in his right hand, squeezes it into a ball, and bolts it. If fowl or mutton is served, the leader of the party tears it to pieces and tosses a portion to each diner, who deftly catches it in mid-air." [...] These were not pictures of men sitting in a huddle on the ground; these were pictures of non-Europeans eating, and more specifically, Arabs who ate like animals. This framing changed everything. Viewers looked for and at difference; the photographs, therefore, became interesting and could reveal much more than they did at first glance.

Said's (1978) work on Orientialism is pertinent in realizing how hospitality has historically been portrayed by the West, where art and literature have aided the construction of stereotypes of the Orient (the 'East') and in this case the Arab world (see also Kabbani 1986). Culture and daily life has been depicted as static, uncivilized and inferior – irrespective of the fact that Bedouin hospitality has been portrayed and characterized as 'legendary' (Withey 1998: 256). Nonetheless, hospitality is not something which is stationary in time and space. Fattah and Eddy-U (2017) examine ways in which Egyptian Bedouin are represented in English-language tourist brochures and how tour operators wish to preserve the traditional images of Bedouin life, irrespective of the fact that these communities have been socio-culturally and economically transformed through modernization. This is acknowledged by the way in which

'warm hospitality' and the willingness of hosts to respond to tourist activities are projected and constructed (Fattah & Eddy-U 2017: 201). However, in some Arab states (UAE and Qatar, for instance) there have been significant capital investments in the development of destinations that are highly sophisticated, technologically advanced and innovatively driven (see Scharfenort 2017; Stephenson 2014; Wakefield 2017). Subsequently, it could be argued that there is an attempt in parts of the Arab world (intentional or otherwise) to disassociate from traditional elements of social life and authentic representations of the past through a process of de-orientalisation. Indeed, the way in which hospitality has been artificialized and impersonalized represented key elements of the post-modernization of hospitality in parts of the Arab world.

Commercial spaces of Arab hospitality

The Bedouin desert has been transformed into an urban landscape where the 'old' has merged with the 'new' to deliver the Arab hospitality experience (Al-Oun & Al Homoud 2008). Commercial spaces of hospitality occupy a tangible and an intangible presence in Arab cities, where there is often no perceivable alternative than to develop the hospitality and tourism industries. The depletion of oil over the next century in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, for instance, indicates the crucial importance of these industries in strengthening economic buoyancy (Stephenson 2017). As Stephenson (2017: 6) reaffirmed: 'As the oil sector is not labour intensive, the need for states to diversify and create more labour-intensive industries is imperative'. Ironically, however, for members of the GCC region, notably UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, there have been challenges in terms of encouraging nationals to work in the tourism and hospitality industries (Sadi and Henderson 2005; Stephenson *et al.* 2010), which affect the extent to which Arab hospitality products are actually grounded by the geo-cultural idiosyncrasies and attributes of the region. Subsequently, limitations in the availability of cultural ambassadors of hospitality in parts of the Arab world could threaten the long-term survival of Arab forms of formal hospitality within a regional context.

Therefore, the non-Arab host is often a perpetual reality in terms of welcoming and servicing the new non-Arab guest, which proliferates as the hospitalities industries expand to respond to market demands resulting in 'the actual practice of non-Arab hospitality' (Sobh *et al.* 2013: 456). Moreover, the 'new' extends to the arrival of guests from non-Arab nations as these have been the target markets for businesses in Arab cities, despite the fact that such 'new' people and populations 'do not subscribe to the same culture of hospitality' (Barnes 2013: n.p.).

However, non-Arabs serving and servicing hospitality in commercial spaces could also potentially challenge Oriental discourses and representations, as well as romanticised imagery of the exotic 'Arab Other'. This reflects Sardar's (1998: 165) position that there has been a common movement or indeed an abandonment from the 'quest for cultural authenticity'. For instance, Dubai had to 'forfeit the true principles of Arabian/Bedouin hospitality' with its ambition to become a neo-global (tourism) city, consequently staging hospitality which is detached from the past in terms of location (e.g. desert) and oral narratives (e.g. stories) (Barnes 2013).

Despite the commercial spaces of hospitality, where economically driven exchanges or transactions take place between the host and guest in the Arab world, theological and philosophical principles and practices have not been eradicated all together. In fact, the religious obligation to take care of guests and the philosophical duty to offer hospitality are embedded within commercialised Arab hospitality products, services and experiences (Friese 2004; Siddiqui 2017; Zamani-Farahani and Henderson 2010). In some Arab countries, Islam retains its governance within hospitality-related commercial activities (e.g., tourism) and cannot necessarily be fully compromised. Saudi Arabia, for instance, already has the 'lslamic resources and infrastructure in place' to help develop Islamic forms of hospitality and tourism beyond the pilgrimage product (Ekiz *et al*. 2014: 133). Also, the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates has the potential to become a central hub in the region for Islamic tourism (Ashill, Williams and Chathoth 2017). These authors acknowledge that the destination has an abundance of services, activities and attractions that can cater for Muslim (and non-Muslim) travellers. Sharjah thus embodies a form of hospitality that is family oriented and associated with Islamic traditions.

Traditional Arab hospitality can still be found in many forms across the Arab nations. Kan Zaman at the Abu Jaber Estate in Amman, Jordan, for instance, is a tourist village home to a large restaurant and coffee shop, souk, and array of shops selling glassware, jewellery and ceramics (Teller 2013). For Shryock (2004: 43), the Kan Zaman is a place where Orientalist images of 'traditional hospitality' thrive as karam retains its symbolic and spiritual value in the ritual of preparing and serving coffee. This form of hospitality can also publically represent heritage. The 'traditional village of al-Saha', located in a southern suburb of Beirut, is an illustration of how hospitality can be a touristic event though based on inherent elements of Islamic and cultural forms of hospitality. Alcohol is not available to visitors and Islamic

principles underpin entertainment, along with the demonstration of Islamic and Arabic architecture, art, music and poetry. The profit accrued from this enterprise is donated to the Al-Mabarrat, a philanthropic body administering charities for people in need (Mona 2006).

One of the significant challenge relates to the extent to which it is really possible to differentiate between authentic and inauthentic forms of Arab hospitality, and also between traditional and non-traditional forms of hospitality. To contextualize commercialized notions of Arab hospitality within a more contemporary post-Bedu context would indeed be historically misplaced. The traditional trade routes themselves fueled commercial hospitality across the Middle East region, where caravanserais, teahouses, guesthouses and wakalahs fostered capitalist development (Rodinson 2007). Arab cities and towns are as global and cosmopolitan as those in the West, witnessing the mass immigration of people and populations from both developed and developing worlds. As a result, Arab nationals have often found themselves to be the minority population, whereas migrants are the majority. In the UAE, for instance, 11.5 per cent of the total population represents Arab nationals, which means that 88.5 percent are foreign nationals. In Qatar, 10.1 percent represents Arab nationals, while 89.9 per cent are foreign nationals (Gulf Labour Markets and Migration 2016). Labour-led migration from developed and developing countries to the Gulf Corporation Council (GCC) states played a major role in changing the demographic landscape of particular Arab nations.

Hospitality experiences of (labour) migrants (as non-Arabs) differ from that of the hosts (Arabs), which could be seen to undermine the theological virtues and philosophical morals embedded in Arab hospitality. The extension of private forms of Arab hospitality to migrant 'guests' (considered as foreigners by their Arab hosts) is not always forthcoming, though commercial Arab hospitality may well extend to the wealthy migrants (e.g. from Western countries). In Qatar, for instance, such hospitality is provided by a non-Arab (e.g. non-Qataris) labour force (Sobh *et al.* 2013), which is not uncommon in such states as Kuwait and the UAE.

Nonetheless, given that Islam is the dominant religion in the region, Arab hospitality is inextricably tied to Islamic forms of hospitality. This form of hospitality is becoming increasingly visible. Stephenson (2014) argues that Islamic hotels and Shari'a-compliant products and services have significant scope for future development. However, he observes that given the movement towards establishing ultra-modernized places and destinations, Islamic traditions could be endangered. He states:

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 (2014: 159).

Indeed, there are forms of pubic and commercial hospitality based on various gradations and perceptions of Islamic purity, which would always need to be contextualized in relation to both liberal and conservative interpretations of Islamic forms of hospitality across Arab states.

Hospitality and inhospitality in social spaces

Nonetheless, if migrant workers from low socio-economic backgrounds confront inhospitable and hostile climates in the host destination, where they have little access to spaces of hospitality, then this could indicate that elements of Arab hospitality have profoundly changed. Accordingly, there may well be a dialectical relationship between inhospitality and hostility manifested in particular ways. A critical issue in the discussion of hospitality is hostility, as Derrida (2000: 45) raises in his essay on the *Foreigner Question*: 'the foreigner (*hostis*) welcomed as guest or as enemy. Hospitality, hostility, *hospitality'*. Although the kafala (sponsorship) system, established to meet labour demands in particular nations such as those on the Arabian Peninsula, welcomed low-skilled migrant workers, they too faced socio-economic inequalities (Coates Ulrichsen 2016).

The long-term challenges faced by unpretentious forms of hospitality, whether linked to Islamic teachings or cultural idiosyncrasies, concern the extent to which perceptions of Islamic hospitality are overshadowed by socio-political constructions of hostility, imbued by Islamophobia. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre, the international Muslim (and Arab) community has become susceptible to public distrust and anti-Muslim sentiment. Islamophobia compromises the perception of Islamic communities as being hospitable, civilized and safe (Stephenson 2014: 162). Therefore, this fear can affect hospitable exchanges, relations and experiences. Said (1997: iv) notes how Islam is incriminated on a number of conjectures, stating:

> Yet there is a consensus on 'Islam' as a kind of scapegoat for everything we do not happen to like about the world's new political, social and economic patters. For the right, Islam represents barbarism; for the left, medieval theocracy; for the centre, a kind of distasteful exoticism.

Contemporary representational concerns over popularized perceptions of Arabs as being hostile to others, or outsiders, challenges traditional and Islamic conceptions of hospitality and hospitableness. Such persistence in the long-term will no doubt counteract the positive attributes of Arab hospitality that have prevailed, though in various forms, since the pre-Islamic era.

Conclusion and research implications

The role that Arab hospitality plays in private, commercial and social spaces is inherently complex, especially as Arab nations transcend from the pre-modern to modern and post-modern times: in this transition deconstructions of hospitality are often caught up in the trajectories of Orientalism and de-Orientalism. Despite contextualizing Arab hospitality, it should be noted that the social space of hospitality does not exist in isolation but is located within private and commercial spaces and domains.

It is clear that pre-Islamic values and virtues of hospitable relations are still prevalent in the Islamic era. The 'old' Arab hospitality is a tourist attraction and there are attempts to stage the authentic 'old' hospitality in the commercial domain, but by non-Arabs working in the hospitality industry. The stranger (e.g. tourist and/or immigrant) as a guest cannot always successfully reach the 'back stage', or the private space where the laws of hospitality stemming from pre-Islamic and Islamic theologies authenticate Arab hospitality – or gaze upon the fantasized visuals of Orientalist representations of Arab Bedouin hospitality.

Future theoretical and conceptual interpretations of Arab hospitality should persist in examining the role of the guest in view of private, commercial and social spaces of hospitality. Future research agendas could aim to investigate the contribution women make to hosting and staging the Arab hospitality experience. This would advance our understanding of patriarchal ideologies underlying the preservation of male honour, reputation and sovereignty in Arab homes and in public spaces too. There is potential to pursue a case study approach on how socio-economic power across the Arab world, social class and strata-based inequalities characterize and determine Arab hospitality. This could therefore be contrasted to looking at cases concerning how hospitality intersects with, and is defined by, excessive wealth and conspicuous consumption.

Although there is a need to be aware of the boundaries of Arab hospitality based on disposable income and economic power, it would also be crucial to distinguish how this form of hospitality interconnects with religious groups beyond Islam, most notably among the Arab Christians. Such positioning would encourage a more multi-dimensional approach to deciphering Arab hospitality to develop. Moreover, as this paper inspected hospitality in the Arab world there is potential to research the Arab diaspora in non-Arab nations (e.g. Argentina, Brazil, France and the US), especially to comprehend the transitionary nature of Arab hospitality in the context of migration studies. In view of the above, future researchers deconstructing the theories, philosophies and theologies of Arab hospitality could thus look in more depth in relation to national boundaries, rural and urban distinctions, deeper cultural idiosyncrasies and gender differentials.

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