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## Interpretation of hospitality across religions



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### ABSTRACT

Given the inter-religious locus of modern tourism and importance of host–guest interaction, current study explores how religion is involved in constructing hosts' understanding of hospitality and hospitable behavior in private, public, and commercial settings. Utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological framework, we resorted to in-depth interviews with 30 participants representing Buddhist, Christian and Muslim faiths and did document analysis of respective holy texts. Regardless of religious beliefs, hosts in this study understand hospitality first as their relations to their own communities and only then as associations with outsiders. This communal understanding of hospitality is supported by religious teachings. Findings reveal that interpretation of hospitality and hospitable behavior in private and public domains vary according to religious values while commercial hospitality, somewhat influenced by religion, is mostly understood as a money-making venture. The results are discussed in respect to definitional characteristics of hospitality, the host–guest paradigm, and global processes.

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### 1. Introduction

Modern tourism has encompassed all the continents and the majority of countries in the world with developing countries gaining the lead in tourism growth (World Tourism Organization, 2013). The internationalization of tourism has brought attention not only to the cross-cultural peculiarities that arise from traveling internationally, but also to the inter-religious locus of modern tourism. Tourists from predominantly Christian countries visit Buddhist or Muslim countries and vice versa. Moreover, people from secular countries travel to countries where government is ruled by religious law, like in Saudi Arabia or Vatican. Holding particular religion's beliefs influences travel behavior and tourists–local people interactions (e.g. Cohen, 1998). Poria et al. (2003) recognize two main sources of such influence. First, taboos and obligations affect individuals' behavior and understanding of the world. Another source of religious influence is related to the fact that religion “contributes to the formation of culture, attitudes, and values in society” (Poria et al., 2003, p. 340; McClain, 1979), affecting even those who do not practice any particular religion or do not believe in the existence of god. Therefore, the specificities of a religion could also influence the interactions between tourists (guests) and the local community (hosts).

In a tourism setting, hospitality, conceptualized through interaction between hosts and guests (Smith, 1978), implies that local people welcome tourists and “make them feel at home.” While in some forms of tourism this interactional exchange might not be a goal (e.g. business travel) or be subtle (e.g. enclave resort setting), in others, it plays a significant role in both tourists' experience and residents' well-being (e.g. volunteer tourism, ethnic tourism). Some scholars, however, find this definition of hospitality too narrow, and suggest that hospitality is perceived differently in cases when people travel to not feel at home and where tourists seek to experience novel situations and see new places (Brotherton, 1999). Surprisingly, there is no agreed-upon definition of hospitality in hospitality and tourism research. Moreover, the very understanding of this notion have been rarely explored (Lashay, 2000).

Hospitality on the part of hosts leads to the feeling of welcome on the guest side and acts as a fundamental prerequisite for an enjoyable vacation (Mill and Morrison, 2009). For this reason tourism research has largely focused on tourists' experience of hospitality while the perspectives of the host communities were left in periphery. Additionally, if the scholarship identifies the differences in tourism experience based on various tourists' characteristics including religious beliefs (Poria et al., 2003), the other perspective of host–guest relationships, that of hosts, is missing. With a few exceptions (e.g. Maoz, 2006; Mufakkir and Reisinger, 2013), there is a lack of analysis of hosts' gaze on tourism experience, their behavior, understanding and engaging with the human world during these interactions. Understanding of hosts' perspectives

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could help locate the aspects of host–guest relationships that contribute to locals' quality of life and overall well-being. Analysis of hosts' perspectives can also shed light on the origins of host–guest relationships and explain a number of factors that create favorable conditions for successful tourism experience on both sides of the dyad. This understanding is especially critical in the inter-religious context as people from different religious backgrounds may understand and interpret hospitality differently, which can hinder or facilitate cross-religious interaction and thus, influence the host–guest relationship. Hence, the purpose of this research is to explore how religion informs the constructed meaning of hospitality and its enactment by various religious groups.

A hospitality industry focus is not the goal of this study; rather, we aim to explore hosts' organic interpretations of hospitality as affixed to various religions and not influenced by professional exposure to commercial hospitality. The decision to emphasize the perspective of non-professional hosts was based on two considerations. First, the significance of host population to the ultimate success of tourism cannot be over-estimated as the way travelers are treated by local residents largely determines pleasure and enjoyment in travel (Easterling, 2005). The organic understanding of hospitality on the part of hosts could also serve as a foundation from which commercial hospitality is derived. Second, existing research reports that hosts who rely on tourism for economic benefits tend to perceive the presence of tourists in the area more favorably than other residents (e.g. Látková and Vogt, 2012; Madrigal, 1995; McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Snaith and Haley, 1999). Therefore, authentic interpretations of hospitality as influenced by one's religion rather than professional hospitality experience were of interest in this research. Utilizing hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological framework, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: What does hospitality mean to people from three religions – Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam? How is hospitality enacted by these people? How do the meanings and enactment of hospitality differ among the representatives of these religions? It should be noted that the study focuses on hosts' individual interpretation of hospitality and hospitable behavior rather than enactment of hospitality and actual attitudes. Three religions (Buddhist, Christianity, and Islam) are selected for the analysis because they represent the largest religions that are not limited to a particular nation or an ethnic group (Flier, 1998).

## 2. Background literature

### 2.1. Hospitality in tourism

The host–guest paradigm, first developed in the renowned seminal collection edited by Smith (1978), is one of the fundamental theoretical accomplishments in tourism studies (McNaughton, 2006). Although not unproblematic (McNaughton, 2006; Aramberri, 2001), the host–guest framework generates valuable insights into heterogeneous social interactions in a tourism setting, which allows for systematic examination of these phenomena. For instance, Doxey (1975) attempts to explain host–guest interactions by constructing the irritation index (irridex) that includes four stages: euphoria, apathy, irritation, and antagonism. Within the host–guest paradigm, it is generally acknowledged that hosts as well as guests are not homogeneous populations and their distinct characteristics influence their attitudes; and thus, the way they carry out the interactions (Zhang et al., 2006). While originally the host–guest framework considered mainly Western guests and non-Western hosts, recent studies extended it to the interactions between both Western guests and Western hosts (Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007) and non-Western

guests and non-Western hosts (Chan, 2006; Shani and Uriely, 2012), reflecting the modern patterns of international tourism.

The English word *hospitality* derived from the Latin *hospes*, which is a compound word made of *hostis*, which is either a guest or a host, and *pet-* or *pot-*, which is a master (McNaulty, 2006). *Hospes* later evolved into *hospitale* to mean a guest house or inn. Modern *hospitality* as well as *hospital* are the results of further etymological development as they both imply the notion of care of a host for a stranger, or a guest. Hospitality conceptualized as a fairly vague and yet monolithic concept by the existing literature, does not seem to be fully capable of encompassing the nuances of host and guest relationships found in cross-cultural interactional setting (Reisinger and Turner, 1998). Despite the fact that hospitality is an underlying dimension of host–guest interactions in the tourism context (Heuman, 2005), neither tourism nor hospitality studies have a definite answer to what is meant by hospitality (Brotherton, 1999). Consulting the most primary source of definitions – a dictionary – one will find that hospitality is defined as “kindness in welcoming strangers or guests” (Collins English Dictionary, 2013) and “cordial and generous disposition toward guests” (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). Brotherton (1999) argues, however, that the notions of kindness and generosity imply a narrow and one-way process. Furthermore, these dictionary definitions of hospitality “tend to be relatively loose and unstructured in nature, and consequently too imprecise” for research purposes; therefore, he calls for further research in this area (Brotherton, 1999, p. 166). The lack of consensus among scholars might create a number of difficulties, including but not limited to the differential (mis)use of the term, confusion among readers, and undefined conceptual boundaries that might bias the scope, depth, and breadth of some studies (Harvey, 1989). In an attempt to address these needs while acknowledging the issues present at defining any term, one of the aims of the paper is to shed light on some prevalent features of the definition of hospitality.

Given the fact that definitional distinctions of hospitality are tendencies and not iron clad absolutes, the notion of hospitality should not be confused with hospitable behavior, which could be conceptualized as enacted hospitality. Burgess' (1982) and Lashay (2000) look at hospitable behavior in three realms – private, public (social), and institutional (commercial) – and the interactions between hosts and tourists occur on all the three dimensions of hospitable behavior. Taking into consideration Di Domenico and Lynch's (2007) claim on the blurriness of these rigid boundaries, this study adopts Lashay's (2000) framework and defines private hospitality as provision of hospitality in one's home as well as highly personalized mode of host–guest interactions. The public domain of hospitality implies dealing with strangers in one's enactment of hospitality, attesting to more generic tourist and host gazes (Urry, 2002; Moufakkir and Reisinger, 2013). Commercial hospitable behavior is based on money exchange and limited to giving pleasure to guests without further reciprocity (Lashay, 2000).

Despite the differences in conceptualization of hospitable behavior across domains, they exhibit certain commonalities under the host–guest paradigm. Aramberri (2001) suggests three underlying characteristics of hospitable behavior under this paradigm, which are protection of the guest by the host, reciprocity, and a batch of “duties for both sides.” The provision of protection is “extended by the host to the guests on the grounds of their common humanity” as soon as a stranger enters the host's dwelling (Aramberri, 2001, p. 741). Reciprocity involves the guest's return of host's protection during future encounters when the roles are reversed. Lastly, a batch of “duties for both sides” prescribes the host to exercise care not only over the guest's well being but also his or her material possession while the guest becomes a temporal member of the host family. In exchange, the guest must respect the rules of the household and endure whatever he or she is asked

to do. According to Heuman (2005), these elements of traditional hospitality are paramount and not culture-specific although some cultural variations do exist. As religion is involved in the formation of cultural values, the study will dwell on how the three principles of hospitality are related to the religions under study. Noteworthy is the fact that humaneness, that is underlying the provision of protection by the host to the guest, has historic origins in many religions (Auffarth, 1992).

## 2.2. Tourism and religion

It has been suggested that religious differences between hosts and guests do not only influence the interactions but could also threaten the very existence of hospitality in a region. Din (1989) shows that in some Muslim countries, tourism is discouraged because of its potential negative impacts on host communities. In fact, tourism is often seen as a potential threat to local traditions, lifestyle, and religious habits (Joseph and Kavoori, 2001). Lee and Gretzel (2013) found diverse complexities in interactions between Christian missionaries and non-Christian locals in the context of short-term mission trips to Thailand and Cambodia. Specifically, refraining from engaging in meaningful relationships with guests, non-Christian hosts took advantage of the missionaries by “exploiting them as cultural resources and deliverers of desirable material goods” (Lee and Gretzel, 2013, p. 158). In his ethnographic work on the understanding of hospitality by Muslim Balga Bedouins in Jordan, Shryock (2004) commonly refers to *karam*, an Arabic word usually translated as “generosity” or “hospitality” that also signifies “nobility” and “grace.” He writes that the “acts of *karam* are meant to create an ambiance of privileged inclusion and a feeling (...) of precise containment” (Shryock, 2004, p. 37). In further exploration of how this meaning of hospitality is exploited by the government and private sector investment in attempts to develop tourism in the area, Shryock (2004) finds that *karam* has become associated with the notion of greed and inauthenticity. Worse, because, in their understanding, hospitality is the virtue given “freely, without design or calculation”, the Balga Bedouins often equal commercial hospitality to “dirty” work similar to prostitution (Shryock, 2004, p. 49). Therefore, religious and traditional values complicate tourism discourses such as in many cases of well-meaning tourism development projects.

Religion is an important factor in the host–guest relationships even when both tourists and the local people are of the same religious backgrounds as illustrated in Terzidou et al. (2008) study, where differences in perceptions of tourists in the Greek island of Tinos were found to be based on resident’ level of religiosity. In another instance, Wong (2011) reported that Buddhist monks’ perceptions of Buddhists tourists were influenced by the tourists’ motivations and the strengths of their religious belief. Sobh et al. (2013) offer an insightful account of Arab hospitality. In the context of Qatar and United Arab Emirates, they found that the meaning and enactment of hospitality depended on who hosts and guests are. While home hospitality is directed inward and involves sharing with close same-sex friends and family, hospitality toward foreigners, often of the same religion, is mostly either nonexistent or outsourced to other foreigners. Overall, research to date illustrates that not only tourists’ characteristics such as religious backgrounds play roles in tourism encounters but also local people’s perspectives of tourism phenomena could impact the outcome of these encounters for both parties.

## 2.3. Host and guests in Holy Books

The references to hosts and guests in the Holy Books also reveal a special status of each party. Christianity and Islam view hospitality

as important characteristics of being pious. In Islam, host’s enactment of hospitality reveals their strength of faith. In the Hadith, narrated by Abu Huraira, the prophet used to say “Anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should entertain guests generously, and anybody who believes in Allah and the Last Day should serve his guest generously by giving him his reward” (Al-Bukhari, 1987, 8:48). In the Christian tradition, hosts are encouraged to share what they have with the people in need, and treat neighbors and foreigners with kindness and generosity. In Matthew 25:37–40, Jesus said that inasmuch as people provide food and drink to people who are hungry and thirsty and visit the sick and prisoners, they have done it to him. Also, not to provide such things to people who need them is equivalent to not providing them to Jesus. When it comes to the guests, the word is used to refer to Angels visiting the house, as in the case of Christianity (Version 1, para. 4; <http://st-takla.org/books/en/ecf/009/0090083.html>). In Islam, orphans, travelers, neighbors and guests should be treated with care and even an enemy at the door should be regarded as a guest. In Buddhism, the word hospitality per se is not explicitly mentioned, yet is practiced widely in the society; therefore, the notion of hosts is assumed at all times, and the guests are understood as friends, relatives, neighbors and wanderers (Rāhula, 1974).

## 3. Methodology

Unlike commonly used methods in tourism research to date, informed by post-positivism (Pritchard et al., 2011), the current study takes a constructivist approach. Phenomenology is not a scientific research approach; rather it is a philosophical method whose merit in human research lies in the distinction between natural and human sciences. Unlike pure phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology intends not only to understand the human “lived” experience but also to interpret it (Heidegger, 1927/2008). This philosophical framework rests on the convergence point of ontological and epistemological assumptions as it considers human conscious to be the only access human beings have to the world, and thus the conscious is both the world to a particular individual and the way for human scientists to study this “lifeworld”. Because human beings live life not by knowing but by experiencing it (Annells, 1996), hermeneutic phenomenological research attempts to understand “what it means to be a human” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 12).

Hermeneutic phenomenology is not concerned with finding the truth; more so, its very existence is questioned. Every person, has his/her truth, and, this is why hermeneutic “phenomenology is the theory of unique” (Van Manen, 1990). Additionally, since personal historicity (individual’s life background) contributes to this pluralism of truths, the objective truth is not possible. Then, interpretation, context, and language become the means of co-constructing interpretations of “lived experiences” by both a researcher and a participant since these individuals are self-interpreting beings and thus play important roles in the process of arriving at the interpretation. As researcher’s bias cannot be eliminated, according to this paradigm, it should be disclosed and discussed in a reflexive manner (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology is a rigorous research methodology if a researcher stays true to its philosophical roots (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010).

## 4. Method

Participant interviews and document analysis were employed in this research. Philosophical foundations of hermeneutic phenomenology postulate that every person’s interpretations of

hospitality are unique and cannot be generalized (Van Manen, 1990). Although the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology is rarely used in tourism research (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010), it provided a basis for a number of studies in other social science disciplines. For example, in social work, Wilcke (2006) explored the experience of refugee women from former Yugoslavia through interviews with ten female participants. In nursing research, six problem drinkers were interviewed in-depth to understand their interpretations of the experience of suffering (Smith, 1998). By means of recruiting ten participants from each religious background, the generated data provides rich insights into their understandings of lived experience and the role of religion in formation of these interpretations. Such a non-representational (Xiao et al., 2013) approach to data collection is in accordance with the philosophical foundations of the hermeneutic phenomenological method.

A purposeful selection method was employed to choose respondents for this study (Patton, 2002). Snowballing technique was further utilized as the researchers requested participants to identify a friend fitting the criteria for inclusion. The starting point of data collection was the interviews with the participants residing in a Midwestern town surrounding a large university. Two criteria were used to select participants for the interviews: first, their view of themselves as religious; second, no professional experience in hospitality and tourism. Although authors were personally familiar with some participants, they had no prior experience with the majority of the sample. All the participants were adults, self-identified as religious, who have acted as hosts in various situations including commercial establishments (e.g. when entertaining guests) but never worked in the hospitality industry. Interviews, conducted by the first and second authors, lasted from 25 to 55 min, were recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

Built on the theory of hermeneutic phenomenology, co-construction of meaning occurred in dialogical and interpretive interaction between the participant and researcher; as a result, the interview questions were modified to account for unique lived experiences and understandings of each participant. The first set of questions in the generic interview protocol aimed at tapping into the meaning of hospitality: What does “hospitality” mean to you? What it is like to host a guest in your family? In your religion? How is it different if you do not know that person? What does it mean to host a guest in a commercial setting, e.g. restaurant or a hotel? The second set encouraged participants to reflect on the meaning of hospitable behavior in the three domains (private, public, and commercial): What do you do when you host a guest in your house? How, in your opinion, does your religion give you guidelines about how to treat a foreigner when he/she is in the street of your town? If you were a restaurant or a hotel owner, how would you treat your guests? Why? Throughout the interview process, the participants were probed for their understanding of the nature of hospitality and hospitable behavior in the situations where a guest is of different gender, racial, or religious background than a respondent. All questions elicited open-ended answers.

As the focus of the study was to explore how religion influences the construction of the meaning of hospitality and its enactment by various religious groups, the analysis of documents – Tripitaka, Bible, Quran, and other supporting religious texts – was also included in data analysis. The document analysis was not intended to explore theological foundations of each religion; rather, specific extracts related to hospitality and hospitable behavior were of interest. Experts from each religion (religious scholars, religious leaders, and devout followers) were consulted to ensure that the versions of translated religious documents are valid and that they are the most cited sources of information.

#### 4.1. Data analysis

Consistent with epistemological assumptions of employed theoretical framework, researchers' bias must be disclosed. The first and second researchers are both females, born and raised in Russia but each lived the last 8 years in the USA where they are currently graduate students in the same university. One considers herself Muslim and the other, although not ascribing to any religious group, acknowledges being brought up in the Russian Orthodox tradition. The former has experience in multicultural education and the latter is informed by her professional and academic knowledge in hospitality and tourism. The third researcher is a female professor in the school of hospitality and tourism management of a university located in Midwestern United States. She was raised in China, has lived in the US for 18 years, and sees herself as not affiliated with any religious group.

Reflection upon the agency of the researcher, the ‘politics of articulation’ or ‘ethics of representation’ (Feighery, 2006, p. 273), and the situated positions of investigators (Hertz, 1997) allow uncovering “new angles, insights or a fresh direction that may be effecting in ‘maturing tourism research’ and take our research of its ‘safe boundaries’” (McIntosh, 2010, p. 214). The following questions were considered when appropriating reflective approach in this study: “How do we capture subjectivities through the methods we employ in our research? Do we know where misunderstandings or differences may occur? Do we seek to learn the religious language of our co-researchers or those whom we study? Do we respect a co-researched process that is beneficial to our participants?” (McIntosh, 2010, p. 216).

For the purpose of this research, the approach to disassemble data without coding was employed, as it helps the researchers focus on ideas rather than the analytical procedure, thus spurring creativity and allowing engaging in the analysis of unique ideas that come out into view (Yin, 2011). During data analysis, researchers engaged in self-reflexivity, individual interpretation of each interview transcript, and then came together to discuss and achieve consensus in their interpretation of the findings. A set of substantive notes (Smagorinsky, 2008) was created, modified, developed through the circular interaction between notes and data out of which the patterns come forth. This multilayered method of meaning making is consistent with the theory as it weaves data collection, analysis, results, and conclusions into a meaningful whole. As these new understandings emerged in the middle of the research process, member checking was used to ensure that findings accurately represented the realities the participants constructed (McIntosh, 2010).

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Document analysis

#### 5.1.1. Tripitaka

With respect to the layman's life, his family and social relations, certain references to hospitality can be found in the teachings of Buddha. According to his ‘noble discipline’ one should worship in six directions, which are east (parents), south (teachers), west (wife and children), north (friends, relatives and neighbors), nadir (servants, workers, and employees), and zenith (religious man). Hospitality is not openly mentioned in the worship of parents, teachers, or nadir; references to hospitality and hospitable behavior appear most forthrightly in relation to friends, relatives and neighbors as well as in descriptions of monks. In *What the Buddha Taught* the relationship between the former “should be hospitable and charitable to one another, should speak pleasantly, and agreeably, should work for each other's welfare, should be on equal terms with one another; should not quarrel among themselves; should help

each other in need, and should not forsake each other in difficulty” (Rāhula, 1974, p. 79). According to the Sutras, guests, travelers and the sick should be treated with hospitality and due consideration (de Silva, 2013): “*sakkara* is that which should be *done properly* and means firstly, *honor* and *hospitality* given to guests and so by extension, to a symbol of one’s Teacher (Khantipalo, 2013). One of the seven qualities that are important for a skilled monk is hospitality, and a monk endowed with these qualities is deserving of hospitality as well (Appamada Sutta: Heedfulness).

### 5.1.2. Bible

According to the Bible, hospitality could be perceived as a subset of love: to love God with everything one has by obeying him and to love other people as oneself: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew, 22:34–40). Direct references to hospitality in the New Testament reveal that the Greek word *philoxenos*, which means *philo* (meaning ‘love as a friend), and *xenos* (meaning ‘foreigner’ or ‘stranger’), suggest that to show hospitality in a broad sense is to act as a friend to strangers, foreigners: “Now the overseer [that is, the pastor of a church] is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,” (1 Timothy 3:2). The meaning of another Greek word *philonexia*, is also attributable to hospitality as its translation means ‘hospitable-ness’; this word appears in Romans 12:13: “Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.” The enactment of hospitality in Christianity in the New Testament is regarded as not mistreating or oppressing foreigners (Exodus 22: 21); treating foreigners residing in your land as native born (Leviticus 19:33–34); loving foreigners as oneself (Deuteronomy 10:19). The examples of enactment of hospitality can also be found in the Old Testament, for instance, Genesis 18:1, which talks about Abraham’s hospitality toward three visitors.

### 5.1.3. Quran

The term “hospitality” in Quran is rendered through related words, such as honoring guests, serving them generously. For example, the word “*Ikram* (إكرام)” appears in the verses 55:27 and 55:78 with the meaning of honor. A similar idea of honoring the guests (فليكرم جلته), is also found in hadiths, for example, Bukhari, 73:48. Interestingly, the word “*Al-Kareem* (الكرم)”, the Generous, is considered one of the 99 names of Allah, which reinforces the importance of this quality in Islam. Another term associated with the term hospitality is lodging, as is in the case of “*Firdausi nuzulan* (العوددوس نزل), lodging of paradise. “*Daifi* (ضيفي)”, my guest, is also used in Quran (11:78; 15:68) to refer to the contexts of hospitality. In the holy book of Quran, hospitality is described as taking good care of orphans, travelers, neighbors, and guests: “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.” (Quran, 4:36). Belief in Allah, and the Last Day (the Day of Judgment) make it obligatory for a Muslim to be generous to guests and to give them what they need. More specifically, the Prophet Muhammad said in relation to hosting a guest: “He is to be entertained for three days. Whatever is beyond that is an act of charity” (Al-Bukhari; Muslim). Adhering to the tenets of Islam, Muslims should also enact hospitable behavior related to inviting and responding to invitation and at the gathering. Invitations should extend to both the rich and poor, and be made with good intentions (Al-Jaza’iri, 2001). Invited guests should

respond positively to the invitation regardless of whether it is close by or not, whether he/she is observing the fast and being invited by the rich or poor. Enactment of hospitable behavior in the confines of one’s home requires modest, respectful and considerate behavior on behalf of the guest. Hosts’ responsibility is to provide enough food, company, bedding.

## 5.2. Interview analysis

Thirty participants, whose baseline information is presented in Table 1, were interviewed in this research. The epistemological assumption of hermeneutic phenomenology of non-generalizability, however, requires a unique analysis of each participant’s lived experience. Due to the space limitation, in this paper we present and discuss only three most illustrative cases (one from each religion), using the remainder of the data for background elaboration, as depicted in the other sentiments subsection.

### 5.2.1. Buddhism

The participant, Suresh (pseudonym) is a male PhD student at a large Midwestern university. He is 26 years old and has stayed in the US for four years. His home country is Sri Lanka, where he was brought up in a Sinhalese middle class family. His active engagement in Buddha’s teachings started “a few years ago” and his approach is analytical compared to more tacit worshiping practices that are common in his community. Suresh’s understanding of hospitality and hospitable behavior evolves as the interview progressed. His somewhat static understanding of hospitality in the beginning of the interview as an “attitude about others”, “interaction with others”, “me and other” has developed into a more complex interpretation of hospitality at the end of the conversation. Upon the end of the interview reflection on communal, cultural, historical and religious factors, co-construction of meaning with the researcher, and conscious integration of the role of religion in the process of the interview make him realize that “If the person is less attached to the idea of self, he is more, is a better candidate to deal with others”. He premises this definition of hospitality by claiming that Buddhism supports one to be less attached to the idea of ‘self’ and to not recognize the difference, be it religious, socio-economic or otherwise distinct from the ‘self’. Thus, he understands hospitality as something that should be inherently present in interaction among people, but if it is named as such, it implies the presence of a dividing line between “self” and “other,” which will come in the way of treating others.

Hospitality, he further claims, does not exist within families, but only in between families and nations. He argues that religion, through the call for compassion, loving kindness, empathic joy, and equanimity (four essential qualities in Buddhism) can minimize differences and help treat one another as the same. Actual enactment of hospitality in home, public, and commercial places in relation to Buddhism in Suresh’s understanding cannot be traced in an obvious manner. While he posits that “feeding, feeling, touching, talking” to the guests as well as showing them around are not dictated by religion, the religious concepts of compassion and equanimity can facilitate the success of host–guest interactions. The participant states that commercial hospitality is different from the private and public, as it is considered a business where “no matter what religion you are in, like, that means you need to feel the others.” One unique example of the role of religion in community’s understanding of hospitality is demonstrated through the analysis of pop-singer Akon’s music video in which “the girls are dancing in front of the Buddha statues.” This behavior was noted by some organizations and considered as an insult. As a result, his concert was canceled and “Akon didn’t get to see Sri Lankan hospitality. Because people now recognize themselves as Buddhism, and they become

**Table 1**  
Respondents' characteristics.

Participant	Gender	Age	Education	Home country	Relation to religion
<b>Buddhism</b>					
1	Male	26	B.S.	Sri-Lanka	Raised in religious traditions; now is a "scholar" of Buddhism
2	Female	25	B.S.	Thailand	Raised in religious traditions
3	Female	28	B.S.	Thailand	Raised in religious traditions
4	Male	46	Ph.D.	China	Raised in religious traditions
5	Female	33	M.S.	Sri-Lanka	Raised in religious traditions but has been exposed to other religions in childhood as well
6	Female	35	M.S.	USA	Studied theology, converted to Buddhism as an adult
7	Female	32	M.S.	Thailand	Raised in religious traditions
8	Male	33	M.S.	Thailand	Raised in religious traditions, lived in a monastery
9	Male	35	M.S.	Japan	Became religious as a young adult
10	Male	21	High school	China	Raised as a Buddhist, yet fully embraced a more comprehensive understanding, learning and practicing of Buddhism a few years ago
<b>Christianity</b>					
1	Female	25	B.S.	USA	Raised as a Protestant; converted into Catholicism
2	Female	65	M.S.	USA	Raised in Protestant traditions; teaches Sunday school
3	Male	23	B.S.	USA	Raised in religious traditions (non-denominational)
4	Male	32	M.S.	USA	Raised in Catholic traditions
5	Female	33	M.S.	Russia	Raised in Russian Orthodox tradition, converted to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
6	Male	29	B.S.	USA	Raised in religious traditions (non-denominational)
7	Female	29	M.S.	USA	Raised in the traditions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints
8	Female	28	M.S.	USA	Raised in religious traditions (non-denominational)
9	Female	34	Ph.D.	USA	Raised in Catholic traditions, wants to dedicate her life to writing about religion
10	Female	25	M.S.	USA	Raised in Catholic tradition, considers herself religious
<b>Islam</b>					
1	Male	25	B.S.	Egypt	Raised in religious traditions
2	Male	25	B.S.	Egypt	Raised in religious traditions
3	Male	32	M.S.	Syria	Raised in religious traditions
4	Male	22	High school	Kazakhstan	Considers religion as a guide in his life
5	Female	43	M.S.	Morocco	Behaves in ethical manners in line with Islam, supports children's Islamic education and upbringing, yet is not particularly religious in terms of the outward sign (e.g. scarf)
6	Female	21	High school	Malaysia	Raised in religious tradition
7	Female	28	M.S.	Iran	Raised in religious tradition, believes in fundamental religious philosophy of Islam, considers herself a practicing Muslim
8	Female	45	B.S.	Syria	Raised in religious tradition
9	Female	32	M.S.	Turkey	Raised in religious tradition
10	Female	40	M.S.	Bangladesh	Raised in religious tradition

fundamental with this idea". Suresh does not welcome such "fundamental Buddhist principles" as he considers that, according to Buddha, it is important to forgive, not to get angry or hate. This interpretation of hospitality from religious lenses reveals how religion and more specifically identification with a religion, can hinder enactment of hospitality.

### 5.2.2. Christianity

Sara (pseudonym), a 65-year old female, grew up on a farm in the Midwestern U.S. in a Protestant family. Having earned a Master degree, she now lives in an adjacent town, where she has been attending a United Church of Christ for 35 years and teaching Sunday school for 31 years. Sara interprets hospitality in a much broader sense than hosting and being nice to a guest. She thinks of it as being welcoming to all people but especially to those in her community: "[I]f people have illness, death in a family, new mothers, you take them food, help run errands". She is disappointed to see that many people in her community tend to extend this type of hospitality to only individuals with similar backgrounds: "I think probably most people want to socialize, entertain (...) similar people." However, in her interpretation, hospitality should be offered to anyone without consideration of a person's social status, educational background, and sexual orientation. Sara also contemplates on hospitality as giving people hope. In her narrative, Sara frequently mentions children from unprivileged families whom she teaches in Sunday school and for whom she feels the need to show the world full of possibilities to "give them hope."

Sara further interprets hospitality as sharing. According to Sara, a Christian is not required to do good deeds (e.g. to be hospitable) to earn salvation. Rather, a true Christian does good to share the salvation with other people. Therefore, talking about her church, Sara considers being friendly and welcoming to be the acts of sharing one's hospitality: "friendship, friendship. I guess. Hospitality is a welcoming thing. Well, people are not gonna go to church somewhere where they do not feel welcome." Because Christianity "helps you to be comfortable with yourself" and not to worry about salvation in the future, she thinks it allows people to be more giving and willing to share this assurance of salvation through hospitality. Reflecting on hospitable behavior throughout her life, Sara thinks that it has evolved from striving to be a perfect host for her guests to just "being comfortable" with herself when hosting guests: "we have lot of company coming through and it doesn't really bother me too much to worry about whether my house is clean (...) when a guest is comfortable too."

When hosting a guest in her home, Sara's priority is to serve the guest and cater to his/her needs to offer "any comfort he needed" while all she expects from the guest is to "go with the flow". Sara strongly believes that public behavior represents an individual's personal and religious beliefs: "I think this is a lot of you representing yourself, you representing your family and also representing your church. So, I think not only when people come to your church but when you go out to the world, you know, you show hospitality." Thus, a true Christian, according to Sara, helps people and makes them comfortable regardless of their background: "because

we were secure in our own entity, we never thought about not ever making other people comfortable.” Sara’s interpretation of hospitable behavior in a commercial setting is drastically different: “Well, if you are owning a restaurant, it is a money-making venture, you know. You are not there to welcome everybody. Somebody comes in and they are not able to afford it, you are not there to. . . You are there to make a living.” This monetary aspect of commercial hospitality seems to be the borderline for Sara and does not coincide with Sara’s understanding of hospitable behavior in private and public settings.

### 5.2.3. Islam

Amir (pseudonym) is a 26-year old male, born and raised in Alexandria, Egypt, in Islamic traditions. He considers himself religious and follows teachings of Islam in his daily life. Amir is the second year Ph.D. student in industrial engineering at a Midwestern university and has lived in the U.S. for two years. Amir reiterates that hospitality is a much broader concept than people usually think. Hospitality is not only hosting a guest in one’s house, it is: “not only about having drinks, or food, or dinner, it’s not the case. Hospitality is also making sure that members of the community or wherever you live. . . if he has some problems like moving in or moving out, you should be helping him as you are helping yourself moving in or moving out, like accommodate him with your house for some time”. Amir further interprets hospitality as a duty and charity. This notion is derived primarily from Islam, where charity is considered one of the duties of true Muslims, “so we have a duty. (. . .) One of them is people who are traveling, passing by your city (. . .). This is legal way to give money, so you can give it to him, and keep his travel regardless what his religion or his beliefs”. Amir also views hospitality as “being nice” to guests and strangers regardless of their religious affiliation or other background, the perspective is informed by Islam since extending hospitality to friends and strangers is an important aspect of being a good Muslim. Finally, Amir interprets hospitality as a universal moral norm, “Treat others as you would like to be treated.” He believes that treating friends (in the case of private hospitality) and strangers (in cases of public and commercial hospitality) well is simply common sense, because any person would like to be treated likewise in similar situations.

Amir informed us that Islam provides its followers with guidelines on how to enact hospitality, and Amir tries to follow them: “[if] it is someone that I know who is coming, for example, I have some cousins in another city and they have something to do in my city, there is no way, no way, I can accept them living, staying in a hotel in my city. That would be like absolutely bad. . . it’s like if he was insulting you: ‘I don’t like you’.” In his insistence to host a guest in his home rather than a hotel, Amir wants to assume full responsibility for the guest’s well-being while he or she is in his city. Offering this protection, Amir also expects the guest to “go with the flow” and respect traditions and routines of his house. When asked about public hospitality, unprompted, Amir mostly speaks of numerous tourists in his city. He sees hospitable behavior as helping tourists navigate the city, offering help in translation, and making them feel comfortable by carrying out a small conversation. According to Amir, doing a good deed and ultimately getting a reward for it, for example, in a form of a smile, is another reason for accommodating tourists in any way possible.

Amir despises a common Egyptian practice to price-discriminate foreign tourists, requiring them to pay more for a hotel room and often misleading in retail shops. Amir’s attitude seems to correspond with the Islamic idea that a host should not discriminate on the base of religion or any other background. When asked how he would treat his guests if he owned a restaurant or a hotel, Amir responds that, although he would like to host everyone free of charge, Amir understands that this is a business and “it is about being professional.” Unlike his fellow Egyptians, he would

charge all customers the same price regardless their citizenship and even consider giving foreigners a free beverage as a welcoming gesture. It appears that Amir perceives foreigners as having more of guest qualities than fellow Egyptians in a commercial hospitality setting and wants to extend this extra service to them.

### 5.2.4. Other sentiments

Table 2 presents additional typical sentiments that were expressed by other participants. It should be noted that with various examples, participants reinforced the idea that hospitality is not confined to a host’s house. Buddhists illustrated this point with the tradition of giving food to monks as manifestation of hospitality, while Christians often resorted to the parable of the Good Samaritan to show that being hospitable extends to helping others outside one’s house and even a geographical locale. Muslims emphasized the importance of being hospitable and charitable to one’s capacity – “being poor and giving half a date is better than being rich and giving 100 horses” – which is also not restricted to one’s home and should be universally applied across the life contexts by true Muslims.

## 6. Discussion

This study uncovers three research participants’ understanding of what constitutes hospitality. The findings reveal that hospitality, in the participants’ views, is not limited to the definitions as posited in hospitality and tourism research. The findings seem to corroborate with Brotherton’s (1999) argument that the currently available explanations are overly narrow and imprecise. It appears that hospitality entails a much broader conceptual interpretation and is not confined to the idea of host–guest interactions. The Muslim and Christian participants in this study interpret hospitality as more than hosting a guest at one’s home, helping a stranger, or serving a customer; for them it first extends to the members of their own communities, people who are not viewed as strangers but neighbors or church goers. As the Buddhist participant further explicated, hospitality in a commonly accepted sense is present only when someone is perceived as the “other.” In this sense, family, friends, and other members of one’s community are thought of as in-group while those coming from outside of one’s proximate social group are considered as the “other.” Since community members are thought of as insiders, hospitality is first understood as a communal phenomenon.

This fundamental understanding of a collective aspect of hospitality was a springboard for all participants to reflect on what hospitality and hospitable behavior mean in other domains (private, public, and commercial). This interpretation could be related to the teachings of their respected religions: “love your neighbor as yourself” in Christianity, if one believes in Allah and the Day of Judgment, one “should be generously hospitable to [their] neighbor” in Islam, and relations between friends, relatives, and neighbors “should be hospitable and charitable” in Buddhism. Alternatively, the self-categorization theory claims that when people perceive their social groups in terms of prototypes, they tend to see themselves less as individuals and more as interchangeable of group prototypes with a prescribed set of attitudes, emotions, and behaviors (Hornsey, 2008). Therefore, it is possible that the participants’ cognition of a reference point closer to themselves as a proxy context is activated first followed by a more distant context interpreted as the “Other.” Noteworthy is that, as supported by the document analysis, the participants from different religious backgrounds were found to share similar viewpoints when it comes to who is “in-group” and who is “out-group.”

Hospitality means different things to participants as they shared their understandings of this phenomenon. In the Buddhist case, the

**Table 2**  
Typical sentiments.

	Buddhists	Christians	Muslims
Hospitality as an idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– moderation in everything</li> <li>– giving food to monks</li> <li>– harmony</li> <li>– kinship</li> <li>– treating people well</li> </ul> <p>“Hospitality is like humanity, helping others” (Buddhist participant 8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– generosity</li> <li>– support</li> <li>– kindness</li> <li>– taking care of a guest: their needs, food, shelter, anything they need</li> </ul> <p>“It [hospitality] is a chance to show somebody else how your family feels about them” (Christian participant 3)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– being kind, generous to others</li> <li>– making guests comfortable</li> <li>– considering what would make guests comfortable</li> <li>– differs based on the relationship one has to the guest (family, friend, colleague)</li> <li>– treating a guest well</li> <li>– being polite</li> <li>– opening one’s heart and house</li> <li>– creating a memory</li> <li>– showing respect</li> </ul> <p>“It’s [hospitality] like sharing whatever you have. . . it’s like an offer of friendship, something like that. . .” (Muslim participant 2)</p>
Private hospitable behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– ensuring harmony among guests</li> <li>– assisting with anything but in moderation</li> <li>– giving blessings to others</li> <li>– offering drinks, meals</li> <li>– making guests comfortable</li> </ul> <p>“It’s about creating good environment, providing excellent food. . . I try to match their interests so that can mingle. . . some sort of balance.” (Buddhist participant 5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– guests as representation of Jesus</li> <li>– cleaning a house</li> <li>– catering to guests’ needs</li> <li>– cooking guests’ favorite food</li> <li>– creating an environment where guests feel comfortable asking if they need something</li> </ul> <p>“It’s like receiving Jesus. . . and, if you think about it, receiving Jesus is a big deal!” (Christian participant 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– guest as a friend of God</li> <li>– making lots of food, drinks</li> <li>– cleaning the house</li> <li>– paying attention to small and big details</li> <li>– accepting all guests nicely regardless of their background</li> <li>– the more one offers, the more the guest eats, the closer a host to God</li> </ul> <p>“We have a lot of sayings from our prophet that a guest that comes into your house is the friend of God, so you should be open and receiving to them. . . We have a saying that if the worst enemy comes to your house you should be open to them and host them as if you would host your closest relative, so there is a lot of value in hosting.” Muslim participant 6)</p>
Public hospitable behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– assisting strangers in need of help</li> <li>– inviting to one’s house when necessary</li> <li>– in a temple, offering food to Buddha</li> <li>– feeding a monk is an honor</li> </ul> <p>“I try to see a person as a person rather than specifically affiliated with a particular culture. . . to see this person as an individual. . .” (Buddhist participant 9)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– actions are more important than status when treating a guest</li> <li>– offering help when needed without imposing</li> </ul> <p>“Treat another person as you would treat. . . a sibling. If you go off this cliché this idea that we are all God’s children, it makes us feel like.” (Christian participant 8)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– being kind and friendly to others</li> <li>– delivering good message</li> <li>– being a good image of Islam</li> <li>– depends on the religious background: if Muslim-follow formulaic greeting, if non-Muslim -be more formal</li> </ul> <p>“We believe that we are responsible for every person we meet in our lives, we are responsible for the image we deliver for our religion and it is also, not only because of the image but it is more like love, God love our prophet, he taught us to be kind to people.” (Muslim participant 10)</p>
Commercial hospitable behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– although it implies monetary exchange, it should be no different than private hospitality</li> <li>– donating money and give blessings to others</li> <li>– considering dietary restrictions, particularly offering vegetarian food</li> </ul> <p>“Before we get to the business, we tend to establish the feel that we like each other. It can be through conversation or small talk.” (Buddhist participant 7)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– being pleasant, welcoming</li> <li>– genuinely greeting people</li> <li>– teaching staff to be hospitable</li> <li>– being and acting with sincerity</li> <li>– treating everyone equally</li> </ul> <p>“In Christianity we say. . . like. . . each person has an unlimited dignity because God’s in that person. So, you have to find a way to see that person as a dignified individual.” (Christian participant 4)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– less genuine than other domains</li> <li>– as a business, donating to local community</li> <li>– treating everyone equally</li> <li>– it is standardized, not personal</li> <li>– hard to balance: give back to the community yet still make a living</li> <li>– interaction is important</li> <li>– being mindful of dietary needs</li> <li>– not expecting warmth, but good service</li> <li>– providing place for prayer to allow guests to fulfill their religious duties</li> </ul> <p>“Clean and warm atmosphere. We should provide attention. Not to bother people but attention.” (Muslim participant 3)</p>

idea of hospitality is inherently present in all interactions where an individual is recognized as the “other,” supporting the idea of “selflessness” that stems from the global teachings of Buddha. One should be less attached to the idea of “self” in relations with others; then hospitality is not needed. Possessing the four essential qualities helps achieve “selflessness” and hence unity between “self” and “other” without a need for hospitality. In the case with the Christian participant, she views hospitality as embracing, loving, and serving others. Specifically, sharing is related to the Christian notion of sharing one’s assurance of salvation through hospitality. If no guidelines exist for the Buddhist and subtle religious

suggestions inform the Christian’s understanding of hospitality, the Muslim participant sees hospitality as something that he is obliged and compelled to do. In interpreting hospitality as a universal moral value, the Muslim attests to the basic human need to treat others with respect. It is evident from this research, that the Buddhist sees no need in hospitality if one stays true to the teachings of Buddha while the Christian mainly interprets it as embracing others and the Muslim as “something we have to do.”

When it comes to private hospitable behavior, the Buddhist sees it as crossing boundaries within one’s personal space, which arises from recognizing a guest as the “other,” demonstrating the link to

Buddha's teachings. When guests are considered parts of "selves," however, cultural, religious, and communal values become more crucial than actual hospitable behavior. Unlike the Buddhist participant, the Christian and the Muslim think that to host guests in their houses means to make them feel comfortable. In terms of the three principles of traditional hospitality summarized in Aramberri's (2001) work, only a few of these characteristics appear in participants' narratives. Specifically, there were no traces of these principles in the way the Buddhist makes sense of hospitable behavior, which could be attested to the nature of Buddhism as a "non-prescriptive" religion (Dunnivant and Roberts, 2013). He sees the role of religion not in providing rigid rules but in offering core life values, which are compassion, empathetic joy, loving kindness, and equanimity. It appears that these values replace the traditional principles of hospitality in Buddhism. The Christian participant, on the other hand, mentions the batch of "duties for both sides" as she expects her guest "to go with the flow" in her attempts to make the guest comfortable. Notably, she does not emphasize the two other principles of hospitality: protection and reciprocity. It appears that Sara sees her role in serving rather than protecting guests and expects no reciprocal actions in the future. As the Bible encourages sharing love with strangers and giving it to the needy, Sara also considers extending hospitality and serving all people regardless of their background and ability to return the favor.

Two notions of Aramberri's (2001) framework seem to be applicable to the Muslims's interpretation of hospitable behavior. The idea of protection could be deduced from Amir's willingness to take charge of guests during their visits. Quran supports such an attitude according to which doing good and addressing all the needs of the guest is considered right for a pious Muslim who expects good deeds to bring him closer to God. Similar to the Christian's understanding but to a greater extent, the Muslim participant expects his guests to respect the rules of his house in exchange for his hospitality. Such attitude could be explained by the batch of "duties for both sides" (Aramberri, 2001). Noteworthy, during his discussion of his hospitable behavior, Amir never mentioned the principles of reciprocity as proposed by Aramberri (2001) and Heuman (2005). This analysis shows that the focus on religious backgrounds of the participants reveals a more nuanced understanding of hospitable behavior in a private domain than suggested by Aramberri (2001). New themes emerged in the process of interpreting hospitable behavior; hospitable behavior could be associated with core values for a Buddhist, sharing and giving hope for a Christian, and importance of full care and hopes for rewards for a Muslim.

In the public context, the Buddhist sees religion as a deterrent of hospitality. The stronger one identifies with religion and feeds into the idea of "self," the bigger the gap becomes between him/herself and the "other," thus endangering the very existence of hospitable behavior, as described with the example of Akon. The Christian equals public hospitable behavior to how one represents themselves, their family, community and religion in public. For her, public hospitable behavior means to attend to people in need. Although both the Muslim and Christian participants emphasized importance of good deeds in treating strangers, the Christian understands them as a manifestation of public hospitality to serve others while the Muslim sees doing good deeds as a requirement of his religion. Informed by their respective faiths, all three participants stressed the importance of treating strangers nicely regardless of their religious or other background; however, this argument is particularly salient in the Muslim's narrative. He insists that in any context of hospitable behavior, people from any country and any religions must receive fair treatment. Interestingly, the Buddhist and the Muslim participants make conscious efforts to be especially "nice" to foreigners and people of different faiths. This zealous enactment of hospitality in public is aimed to change some stereotypes and/or to compensate for hostility of other members of their

respective communities. Since neither Buddhism nor Islam directly guide them in these behaviors, it could be attributed to cultural, political, and historical contexts in their countries, attesting to Poria et al.'s (2003) argument that religion indirectly informs formation of cultural and thus behavioral norms. The finding also seems to contradict the Sobh et al.'s (2013) results where public as well as commercial hospitality were outsourced to foreigners, suggesting that, although individuals internalize the idea of hospitality, in some instances they choose to not directly engage in it.

The commercial setting was the only domain where the participants' understandings of hospitable behavior converged along the patterns of being professional, treating it as a business transaction, and a money-making venture rather than a genuine provision of hospitality, like in other domains. Informed by his religion, the Buddhist participant, however, also sees commercial hospitable behavior as equanimity and compassion because these are the qualities that will allow an owner to sustain a successful business. The Christian's and the Muslim's understanding and enactment of commercial hospitality strictly as a business transaction coincide with Aramberri's (2001) criticism of the host-guest paradigm that in modern mass tourism roles of host and guests are reduced to service providers and customers. It appears that, in the hosts' view, the monetary aspect of commercial hospitality compromises the authenticity of hosts' intentions to care for others, allowing guests to demand rather than simply receive hospitality. Although not directly elaborated by the participants in this research, the economic value ascribed to these acts of hospitality could potentially transform hosts' view of themselves as being in charge of guests to becoming their servants. However, as the narratives illustrate, such critique seems to be limited to only commercial domain of hospitality.

At the same time, we see that the idea of commercial hospitality and its enactment are still influenced by religion. In addition to the Buddhist's interpretation of commercial hospitable behavior as a need to possess compassion and equanimity, the Muslim participant solves the dilemma "greater profit verses fair prices" by opting for equal treatment of all customers and thus not merely reducing the essence of a guest to a paying customer. Therefore, these findings act as both support for and argument against Aramberri's (2001) critique of the host-guest paradigm. While this study's participants' understandings of hospitality and its enactment in a commercial setting, in fact, do differ from interpretations of more traditional domains (private and public), they are still somewhat informed by fundamental principles of their religions. Thus, the host-guest paradigm cannot be completely reduced to relationships between customers and service providers and should not be discarded just yet.

## 7. Conclusion

The inter-religious locus of modern tourism implies interactions among members of different religious affiliations, who, informed by their respective religions, have distinct interpretations of host-guest relationships. This study attempted to explore how religion impacts the constructed meaning of hospitality and its enactment by members of Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim faiths. The interpretation of participants' understanding of hospitality is analyzed through the lenses of hermeneutic phenomenology whose ontological, epistemological, experiential, and methodological apparatuses provide specific tools to investigate the phenomenon as being-in-the-world, the relationship between self and other, co-construction of meaning by both the interviewee and researchers while leaving the ultimate interpretation of the meanings in this context to the reader. This research methodology as well as the nature of this study does not enable the researchers to

draw managerial implications and provide answers to many practical inquiries. Instead, it allows to gain new conceptual insights, unveil hidden meaning, and pose additional questions, which opens up thoughts on new possibilities and ultimately pushes the boundaries of knowledge. Additionally, by introducing hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodological approach in the area of hospitality and tourism management, the current study enriches the methodological arsenal of this scholarly field.

Three major conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, it appears that the idea of hospitality is not limited to host–guest relationships as it is commonly conceptualized in existing hospitality research (Di Domenico and Lynch, 2007; Lashay, 2000; Smith, 1978). Regardless of their religious beliefs, hosts in this study understand hospitality first as their relations to their own communities and only then as associations with outsiders (guests). Since the guest's presence is not necessary for hospitable behavior to occur, the notion of “guest” in the host–guest framework is worth revisiting. In its conventional sense, a guest, being on the receiving end of hospitality provision, is the outsider who comes into the contact with hosts' understanding of hospitality and its provisions in various realms. As this study showed, the guest could be also viewed as an insider to whom hospitality is extended simply based on his/her belongingness to the community rather than exclusion from it.

Second, religion was shown to influence how hosts interpret and enact hospitality. Although the enactment of hospitality could be manifested similarly across the studied religions, the meanings ascribed to these acts do differ substantially, which problematizes the very existence of the accurate definition of hospitality. Since religion cannot be assumed to be the only factor affecting individuals' understanding of hospitality, it could be either defined broadly to account for all possible variations in meaning or very specifically to limit the description to a particular context. While the former would produce a definition that is too imprecise for research purposes (Brotherton, 1999), the latter could reduce scholarly inquiries to non-representational settings, jeopardizing further research in the area. Nonetheless, as this research demonstrated, understanding of hospitality across religions and the contexts involves various degrees of care of one person for another, which could serve as a definitional foundation. Because contextual differences also determine how people understand hospitality, researchers should define hospitality in a way that is appropriate to their study settings, considering such factors as hosts' and guests' religion and culture.

Finally, even though hospitality in a commercial setting is understood drastically differently from the other two domains (private and public), supporting Aramberry's (2001) criticism, its interpretation is still influenced by religious affiliations and not merely reduced to the relationship between a customer and a service provider. Despite the fact that commercial hospitality is recognized as a money-making endeavor, religion and possibly other factors influence why hosts choose to treat guests the way they do in their hospitality establishments. Therefore, instead of abandoning the host–guest paradigm altogether, there is a need to further develop this framework to account for a more complex understandings of the concepts of a guest, hospitality, and hospitable behavior, for instance, by members of different religious groups.

### 7.1. Global perspective

In this the following discussion, the authors attempt to interpret and contextualize the findings within more global processes. Tourism introduces various contexts into the host–guest relationships, which can dictate how hospitality is being given and potentially received. Regardless of the context, like many other factors, religion influences hosts' interpretation and a manner of giving hospitality, but it may also affect how recipients react and ascribe

the meanings to these acts. Thus, in addition to cultural, linguistic, and situational differences, complexity of interactions between hosts and guests is further contextualized by religious dissimilarities. For example, this intricacy could be reflected in the situations when tourists from secular countries do not follow the rules of communication with women in countries ruled by Islamic law. Mutually respectful interactions are likely to facilitate tourism experience for both hosts and guests due to an improved understanding of each other's intentions. This understanding is especially critical in the situations when tourism experiences involve places that are considered sacred by members of two or more religions (e.g. Western Wall in Jerusalem). Therefore, there is a need for educational training to increase cross-religious awareness and sensitivity among tourists as well as hosts. Tourism and hospitality education practice can contribute its share by enhancing educators' understanding of religious connotations in tourism and enabling them to more meaningfully teach the issues surrounding host–guest relationships in diverse religious contexts. Due to internalization of global education, many tourism educators work in multi-religious classrooms, and thus they must be cognizant and sensitive to the pre-conceived notions of hospitality that students bring into a class in order to cultivate religious sensitivity in future tourism leaders.

Given international and inter-religious modes of contemporary tourism with its nearly omniscient reach, the topic of host–guest relationships is more relevant today than ever before. In the age of global standardization and commodification for the sake of sanitized tourism experiences and customer satisfaction, people remain sincere in their intentions to be kind and hospitable to others. While representation of hospitality may not be exactly the same across religious contexts, the meanings ascribed to the acts of hospitality are all variations of care of one person for another. However, as colorfully described by Shryock (2004), even well-meaning tourism development plans tend to exploit local hospitality in hopes to capitalize on its authentic nature by packaging it as a tourism product. A genuine concern for others becomes a selling point, and, although in some instances commodified hospitality is desired (e.g. in business travel), one could only ponder how long it will take until true hospitality is replaced by contrived smiles and engineered conversations. In some sense, such tourism development and marketing schemes can be largely responsible for whether tourism fosters peace and mutual understanding or creates further complexities. Although tourism is an intricate system involving global economic, political, and cultural processes that are beyond the scope of tourism management, understanding of the religious aspect of hospitality can contribute to our knowledge about this larger structure.

### 7.2. Limitations and future research

Like any research, the study is not free of limitations. Since religion plays a crucial role in the formation of cultural values, it is not possible to separate cleanly cultural influences from religious influences on the participants' interpretations. Furthermore, although every attempt was made to ensure that participants were in fact religious, their religiosity cannot be assured. Given their background, the majority of the participants can be classified as intellectuals whose ability to reflect on their experiences simultaneously benefited and limited this research. Future research should not only address this study's limitations but also encompass greater variations in religiosity and intellectual backgrounds of participants. Future studies are also encouraged to focus on the perspectives of the hospitality industry employees as such insights can assist in interpreting hotel employees' gaze as well as can reveal factors that have an impact on employees' quality of life.

The scope of this research was limited to exploring the topic from perspectives of only three religions leaving the vast

majority of religious teachings out of context. Additionally, this study focused on analyzing understandings of hospitable behavior in three domains, but did not consider the overlaps when two or more domains coincide. It is possible that the meaning in these mixed scenarios differ from their independent interpretations. Thus, future studies are encouraged to engage in more in-depth interviews reflecting on various intersecting realms of host–guest behavior in the contexts of other religions. The study also did not explicitly investigate hosts' perceptions of "Other" beyond guests' socio-demographic and religious backgrounds with such issues as non-conventional lifestyles and sexuality left on the periphery. The current study did not consider situations in which hosts and guests may be in explicit political and/or religious opposition to one another. A systematic inquiry into the dynamics of these relationships is of high importance to the hospitality practice and should not be overlooked in future research. Future research should not ignore the tension that may arise from hosting people whom hosts do not like or even hate. The role of religions as a factor facilitating host–guest interactions can be further explored in search of more nuanced understandings of its impact on hospitality. Additionally, it would be of interest to explore where the interpretations of hospitality differ based on a specific type of tourism at a destination: for example, cultural tourism, religious tourism, rural tourism, and seaside mass tourism.

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