OBSERVING PRIVACY, MODESTY AND HOSPITALITY IN THE HOME DOMAIN:
Three Case Studies of Muslim Homes in Brisbane, Australia

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Abstract
A home embodies a sensorial space that is layered with personal memories and traces of history. The success of a home in providing a strong sense of place depends on various factors such as geographical location, climatic conditions, and occupants’ world-views and perceptions. This paper explores Muslims’ perceptions of privacy, modesty and hospitality within their homes through their lived experiences. This case study focuses on three Muslim families living in Australian designed homes within the same suburb of Brisbane, Australia. The study provides prefatory insight into the ways in which these families perform their daily activities and entertain their guests without jeopardizing their privacy needs. The study examines the significance of modesty in the design of Muslim homes as a means by which family members are able to achieve optimum privacy while simultaneously extending hospitality to guests inside and outside their homes. The findings of this study provide opportunities too, for expanding research into culturally adaptable housing systems to help meet the changing needs of Australian multicultural society.

Keywords: Home; Islam; Privacy; Modesty; Hospitality.

INTRODUCTION
A home - or sakan (in Arabic) or rumah (in Malay) - is an unparalleled base for human settlement (Heathcote, 2012; Rybczynski, 1987) that conveys “a complex multi-layered conditions that integrates” symbolic expressions and messages (Shirazi, 2011; Malkawi and Al-Qudah, 2003). An individual’s arrangements and sense of interior spaces within a home are known to be affected by several factors such as religion and culture (Guzman, 2007; Rapoport, 2005; Theano, 1995). Religious and cultural values provide significant effects the structures of families and their domestic behaviors and the use of their interior spaces. Traditional Muslim families concentrate on adhering to Islamic religious teachings that vary considerably from those normally associated with Western society (Belk and Sobh, 2011). These teachings require that a home fulfills three essential needs, including: (a) privacy - a secure and private sanctuary for family, (b) modesty - spaces to perform religious and spiritual activities through frugality and design humility, and (c) hospitality - a place to strengthen relationship with neighbors and society.

a) Privacy
Privacy is regarded as being of paramount importance in the design of Muslim homes (Lockerbie, 2014) and is largely determined by Islamic teachings and traditions from two main sources: a) Al-Quran - the revelations of Allah (God) to Prophet Muhammad; and b) sunnah - the utterances and actions of Prophet Muhammad (Hamid, 2010; Mortada, 2005; Hallak, 2000). Bahammam (1987) suggests that privacy in traditional Muslim homes, especially in the Middle East, is explicitly followed according to these teachings and involves three distinct layers of privacy. These include: a) privacy between outsiders and neighbors, b) privacy between male and female, and c) privacy between family members and relatives inside a home (see Figure 1) (Bahammam, 1987). These layers of privacy are achieved through the visual, acoustical and olfactory privacies (Sobh and Belk, 2011; Mortada, 2005; Hallak, 2000).
In the Middle East, the use of lattice screens or mashrabiya and courtyards are considered to be the popular options in maintaining optimum visual privacy for the owners from outsiders (Belk and Sobh, 2011; Belk and Sobh, 2009; Bahammam, 1987). Thick walls and high windows in some parts of external and bedroom walls provide optimum acoustical privacy for the dwellers neighbours externally and from adjacent rooms internally (Mortada, 2005; Bahammam, 1987). These architectural designs and features not only satisfy Islamic privacy requirements, but are energy-efficient design features that create a comfortable home environment despite the extreme climate conditions outside (St. Clair, 2009). In addition, Sobh and Belk (2011) claim that non-visual privacy such as ‘good smell’ can play an important role in controlling the contamination of hospitality spaces by olfaction produced within the home. In consideration of these privacy patterns examples, Mortada (2005) argues that optimum privacy in an Islamic traditional home entails a gender segregation system that preserves women’s safety from any non-muhrim (not blood-related) males (Belk and Sobh, 2011). However, gendered space is interpreted differently in other Islamic countries of different cultural backgrounds such as Malaysia, Iran and Yemen, where most contemporary and affordable homes are in the form of terrace-housing and apartments (Hashim and Rahim, 2008).

b) Modesty
In Islam, the act of modesty (haya in Arabic), refers to a demeanor or an attitude of shyness, politeness, humility and moderation (Chen et al., 2009; Boulanouar, 2006) and is considered to be a part of one’s faith (Hussain, 2012). The first act of modesty in Islam is represented in the form of praying to Allah (Hussain, 2012). Humbly prostrating on the ground, it symbolizes Muslims’ recognition of Allah in seeking constant guidance and support (Hussain, 2012; Mohammad Akram, 2004). Five prayers are undertaken each day in order to remind Muslims on the importance of Islamic virtues such as modesty, and put them into practice (Mohammad Akram, 2004). Muslims are reminded to possess outer (physical) and inner modesty based on the teachings in Al-Quran and sunnahs (Boulanouar, 2006; Mortada, 2005). The need for being modest is common to many traditions, cultures and religions, but Western society in the 21st century mostly considers Islamic modesty in terms of physical dress codes alone (such as veiling) (Sobh et al., 2012). Physical Islamic modesty is concerned with the covering of intimate parts of a body or awrah (Boulanouar, 2006) to protect women and men from non-muhrims from
any indecent gestures that may lead to prohibited sexual encounters or abuses (Ali, 2013; Sayeed, 2013; Vahaji and Hadiyanni, 2009).

Another physical Islamic modesty can be represented in the form of design humility on buildings (Mortada, 2005). Mortada (2005) highlights the importance of humility in the appearance of the house and interior spaces of a Muslim home. Profligacy in home design is not recommended in Islam. However, a Muslim home can maintain its elegance and beauty through minimal design and fastidious furniture arrangements (Mortada, 2005). The traditional Malay houses in Malaysia are constructed using locally available materials (Lim, 1987). Coconut leaves or palm leaves (nipah) are excellent waterproofing materials for roof structure while floral engraved timber walls and panels as nomenclature of Islamic design motifs (Kamaruddin and Said, 2011; Lim, 1987). A Muslim’s home is also a place to perform and practice religious activities such as prayers, reciting of Quran or even families’ funeral services (Omer, 2010). The flexibility of performing the prayers at home individually, with families and friends highlights the importance of the provision of internal modesty spaces for these activities.

Possessing inner modesty in the form of positive internal perceptions such as self-improvement or self-motivation (Ahmad, 2009) is encouraged. Offering a helping hand to neighbors in need, avoiding negative thoughts such as jealousy, suspicious and distrust are some of the examples (Mortada, 2005). Modesty demonstrates a close connection between privacy and hospitality within Muslim home (Mortada, 2005), signifying that a person is moderate, humble and in control of his/her life while ensuring that he/she intact with the society and environment (Sobh et al., 2012; Fay, 2010).

c) Hospitality
Receiving guests is a significant domestic etiquette in Islamic hospitality teachings. Hospitality can be defined as a constitutional acceptance or receptiveness to the other (Derrida, 2005; Kuokkanen, 2003). It is conceived to be closely associated with acting compassionately towards strangers and sharing with others (Sobh and Belk, 2011; Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). Like privacy and modesty, hospitality too has a substantial impact upon the designs and layouts of Muslim home worldwide. In traditional Middle Eastern homes (Sobh and Belk, 2011), for example, men play an important role in entertaining guests in the public domain of the house, called majlis. This is the only section of the house that is accessible directly from the main entrance. The majlis represents the masculinity and honor of a Muslim host (Sobh and Belk, 2011). Another important purpose of majlis is the provision of a space where young male members can be introduced to guests and participate in discussion of current affairs and debates with adult men, while being carefully observed by their male parents (Lockerbie, 2014). Women, on the other hand, control most of the interior spaces (Sobh and Belk, 2011; Wynn, 2007) and socialize in the salon (female formal space), with all food preparation being done in the kitchen area (Wynn, 2007).

Contrary to traditional home-based hospitality in the Middle East, traditional Muslim homes in South East Asia such as Malaysia, embrace community intimacy (inter-relationship) over family privacy (intra-relationship) (Hashim et al., 2009; Vlatseas, 1990; Lim, 1987) despite having similar design patterns that enable hospitality to be extended to others within homes in the Middle East. It is common to find a spacious guest reception area (men’s area) or serambi at the front section of a traditional Malay house (Wan Hashim and Nasir, 2011; Hashim et al., 2009; Lim, 1987), which is similar in function to men’s majlis. Key social activities such as guest entertainment, meetings, discussions and salat jamaah (congregational prayers) take place in this area (Lim, 1987). Women socialise in a selang (transition space), located between the serambi and rumah tengah (middle room or dining area) while all food preparation is done in dapur (kitchen) (Wan Hashim and Nasir, 2011; Hashim et al., 2009). However, enforced segregation is not an absolute requirement in traditional Malay homes. Women assist in handing
out food to guests intermittently but retreat back to their own spaces and continue their activities (Lim, 1987).

Islamic teachings on privacy, modesty and hospitality have their own complex natures, which are often misconceived by non-Muslims (Sobh et al., 2012; Sobh and Belk, 2011; Hallak, 2000; Bahammam, 1987). These teachings strongly shape their activities, behaviors and the use of space. Furthermore, Muslims come from different parts of the world and have their own cultural traditions with regards to home privacy, modesty and hospitality. Muslims in Australia come from more than seventy countries and they bring along their cultural and religious traditions with them when they settle in the country. The complexity is further compounded by the circumstances that most homes built in Australia follow regional climatic conditions, Australian architectural styles, movements and building codes, not the traditional Islamic privacy, modesty and hospitality values. Houses in Queensland, especially, are designed to follow the extroverted lifestyle in a sub-tropical climate, in comparison to the introverted lifestyle of the typical traditional Middle East Muslim homes. The main purpose of this paper is to observe and examine the ways in which three Muslim families in Brisbane, the capital city of Queensland, perceive and achieve privacy, modesty and hospitality within their Australian-designed homes as well as the influence of their different Islamic cultural backgrounds on their use of interior spaces and domestic behaviors.

METHODOLOGY
The data were gathered from three case studies of Muslim households within a single suburb of Brisbane and derived from face-to-face semi-structured interviews (lasting between 90 to 120 minutes) using semi-structured questions, participant observation and photographs of their homes. Observation was also used to obtain data related to participants' behaviors within their daily domestic settings. Participants were recruited through Islamic organizations in Brisbane. All participants are married and aged between 40 and 60 years. Two of the participants are Australian citizens while one is an Australian born Muslim. Pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all information gathered from individuals.

CASE STUDIES
All individuals are currently owner occupiers or renters of detached homes. A summary of demographic characteristics of householders is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of the three case studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CASE STUDY</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>TENURE STATUS</th>
<th>HOUSE TYPE</th>
<th>NO. OF CHILDREN</th>
<th>NO. OF HOUSEHOLD AT HOME</th>
<th>ETHNIC BACKGROUND</th>
<th>YEARS IN AUSTRALIA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Detached 1-storey</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Indian/Pakistan</td>
<td>5th Generation Australian</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Detached 2-storey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Egyptian</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Renter</td>
<td>Detached 2-storey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Palestinian</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case Study 1
Description
Aishah is married and is a fifth-generation Australian Muslim. Aishah purchased and lives in a home built by an Australian builder. She purchased her new five-bedroom detached home because of work commitments and moved in without design changes except for new floor carpeting. Although Aishah and her husband, Aziz, do not have any children, they receive regular
visits from their relatives. Aishah is highly involved with Islamic organizations and often, some of the committee meetings of all of these organizations are held at her home. In consideration to this, Aishah converted her lounge into a meeting/discussion room as shown in Figure 2. Another room is dedicated to being a namaz (prayer) room where it is big enough to perform salat jamaah, if required. Other spaces include a double carport, a large patio, open living/dining concept and a swimming pool at the back of the house (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Floor plan of Aishah’s home (Source: Author).

Case Study 2
Description
The two-level corner lot brickwork detached home that Amina owns was built by an Australian builder. However, several changes were made to the floor plans during the early construction phase to suit her family’s privacy needs based on her wish to comply with Islamic teachings and to gain better views of the surroundings from the rooms. The six-bedroom home (Figure 3) was originally designed to accommodate Amina, her husband (Ali) and their children. However, only Amina and Ali currently live in their home because all their children are now married and live in their own homes.
**Case Study 3**

**Description**

Built by a Muslim architect/builder, the two-story detached home that Ahmet is currently renting was designed to meet some requirements of privacy according to Muslim teachings. Ahmet is married with Sofia and has a son Jalil, who is 15 years of age. There are two sets of staircases that lead up to two separate wings on the first floor and these two wings are separated by a balcony that spans across the width of the house (see Figure 4). A third staircase from the kitchen leads down to a granny flat on the lower split level of the house with its own kitchenette and ensuite (Figure 4). Ahmet is currently building his new home designed and to be built by a Muslim architect to suit his family’s privacy needs. This new home will allow for future expansion should he require more space.

![Floor plans of Amina's home](source: Author)
RESULTS
All participants perceived their participation in this research as a great contribution to Islamic domestic architectural design research and the use of the interior spaces, as well as part of cross-cultural social study in Australia. The following results discuss on the three main Islamic fundamental requirements (privacy, modesty and hospitality) from each case study through their lived experience within their homes:

Case Study 1
Privacy
Aishah perceives her home as a private and safe haven for herself and her family. She is content with the levels of privacy and security of her current home. The front fence (Figure 5) was already built by the previous owner and it provides Aishah and her family an optimum visual privacy while they are within their territorial boundary:

I like to think that my home is my castle. And it’s private and I can do whatever in my home and I have no problems with how I dress in my home or anything like that.

Aishah is grateful that most of the landscaping works, especially around the backyard and the pool area (Figure 5), were already complete when she moved in, ensuring visual and acoustic privacies are maintained while the pool is in use:

I like the fact that whole pool area is private. You can go for a swim and no neighbors are looking in.

The neighbors on the left are below us, so they can’t see in. The ones on right side are above and that’s their backyards.

Aishah however does not practice using traditional incense such as agarwood or agrabati as non-visual privacy device for her home but prefers using fresh flowers and plants instead:
I don’t like the smell of it. My brother brought it back once and he put it on and that can be a little overpowering. I’ll have flowers and all sorts of things to refresh my home instead.

![Figure 5: Aishah’s front fence and backyard pool area (Source: Author).](image)

**Modesty**
In response to dress code, Aishah perceives it as cultural traditions on how men and women cover themselves:

“I’m not into wearing abaya (a one-piece black loose robe-like garment). I don’t wanna own one. I understand the people that wear them because of cultural and climatic backgrounds but I also understand that some wear it because of convenience.

Aishah stresses that the dress code is a personal option and it is up one to what extent she/he would cover:

“...that's fine but don't tell me that I have to. That's what I have the problem with. I would wear the same clothes here at home as what they would see me in the shopping mall. I wouldn't overly cover and I wouldn't under cover.

Modesty is perceived by Aishah more than just physical dress code but through inner modesty quality and humble about the design of her home. Aishah believes on the importance of appreciating on all the things she has rather than wanting things that are unaffordable:

“I'm not jealous with what the neighbors have because I really don't. I lived in my previous home for nine years. It was a little wooden house and I thought it was the most beautiful thing in this world. And I loved it! I cried the day I left my house. We sold it as it was the right time to sell. I'm not one of those who want something that is beyond budget. I'm always thankful to Allah that we have a house. I'm contented with what I have and with the luck that gives me next time, I'll appreciate that too.

Aishah converted one of the rooms adjacent to the kitchen (Figure 2) into a dedicated prayer (namaz) room for any guests and families to perform both individual and small congregational (jamaah) prayers:

“Well, actually we have a separate room now for the namaz (prayer) room. All the Islamic items are in there; all guests’ caps and hijabs can be stored in there, and prayer mats too. I’ll get bookshelf to put all the Islamic books and Quran soon. I have a lot of Islamic books, so that’s my next mission.

**Hospitality**
Practicing gender segregation while receiving and entertaining guests has become a tradition in many Muslim homes across the globe. However, Aishah has a different opinion with regards to this. As a fifth generation of Australian born Muslim, Aishah does not believe on gender
segregation in her home or even in any functions. However, she highlights that men and women would naturally segregate according to the genders to discuss topics of similar interests:

>I don’t believe in segregation. I think it’s atrocious. Sometimes when we do have a function, I may sit with my husband but that does not mean the person sitting next to us have to be of same gender. We don’t have an issue with that. You know, if you go to some Australian functions or parties, you’ll sometimes see one corner with all the women and one corner, all the men. So they’ll just naturally progress to that segregation. I don’t have a problem with naturally progressing to segregation; I have a problem with enforced segregation.

![Figure 6: Aishah’s open living and dining (Source: Author)](image)

The open living and dining in Aishah’s home (Figure 6) allows all her family members and guests to socialize and naturally segregate to different spaces if required.

**Case Study 2**

**Privacy**

Amina is satisfied with the availability of both front and back yards that provide her with optimum setbacks as visual privacy for her family. However, she feels that more could have been utilized with the front yard to its full purpose:

>What I would like is having my front home with verandah. It reminds me with my home back home where every house has verandah. People will sit in the afternoon on the verandah. This house doesn't have front verandah, backyard patio. I’d love to sit outside to watch people pass by.

Amina repented changing the original floor plans of the house (Figure 3) in hope to gain more privacy and better views for living room and upper bedrooms. Some of the rooms from the original design were mirrored (e.g. kitchen and living/dining rooms) with the addition of bay windows during construction phase, while the staircase was rotated at 45° angle to achieve some visual privacy from the entrance lobby:

>I regret reversing the floor plan. I have this living room facing the road just to have the nice view because originally, we had this on the other side, looking at the retaining wall. But actually, it is very hot in here in the afternoon as well as my master bedroom upstairs. I didn’t consider that. We thought that it was going give us beautiful views of surroundings but most of the time, we close our windows because of the afternoon sun.

Amina uses incense inside her home prior to receiving guests as part of achieving non-visual privacy and ensuring the guests are comfortable during their time in her home:

>Yes we do use the incense. And normally, we make sure that the bed is covered and we will not allow someone to go to our bathroom unless we inspected it while we have guests. And make sure the house smells nice and if I have time to prepare some food.
Modesty
With regards to modesty behaviors upon entering her home, Amina is relaxed about the custom of removing off shoes among guests:

Some people take off their shoes before entering the house. Some people think it is offensive not to take their shoes off. We don't bother because we have pray mats and we put it on the floor before pray; so we are not too strict. So, people usually automatically just take their shoes off.

When asked about the effects of cross-culture between Australian culture and Islamic teachings to the attitudes on humility in design within her home, Amina responded that she leans towards her cultural and religious backgrounds although not eliminating the importance on Australian cultural and modesty values:

Well, I am more leaning towards Egyptian and Islamic teachings, then Australian culture, but you can see my house is more Australian.

Amina is also concerned with the uniformity of the neighborhood building facades and the choices of colors and materials used on buildings in Brisbane:

I like modern brick houses and I like the Queenslander home too but I don't like timber Colonial and bungalow homes with lattice screens; it looks like a cage. I like the idea of having the whole town of white houses. In Dubai, it's all of creamish color and in Oman, it's all white; I love it! I don't like people experimenting on colors and conflicting with other people's home. Back then, the whole suburb have all similar houses but here lately, there are orange and then green, it shocks the eye!

There is a dedicated prayer room for guests located adjacent to the front living area and the staircase (Figure 3). The researcher used this room to perform Dhuhr (midday) prayer after the interview session.

Hospitality
The back patio (Figure 3) of Amina’s home is used from time to time to entertain her family and guests especially during festive seasons such as Eid Al Fitri:

We have an outdoor space for barbecue and entertaining guests. My husband put this on when he was not sick. He assembled it himself. I didn’t like it but it works (laugh). It is very warm in winter and breezy in summer.

Amina explained that her family’s hospitality activities are not as frequent as compared to past years because of several family reasons. Although working full time, Amina nurses her husband, Ali, who recently undergone a medical procedure:

I used to entertain a lot when with my son was still alive; at least 5-6 families. We were rotating the place to come. My husband is now sick. He’s hardly able to move and at home all the time. He would have to go to the hospital three times a week to do the dialysis but other than that, he’s at home. He doesn’t drive anymore. I’ll drive him to the hospital and back.

The front office is now converted as Ali’s resting room (Figure 3) since he is incapable of walking up the stairs anymore. Their home is currently normally visited by her family and close friends only. Their children and grandchildren take turn looking after Ali and keep him entertained during his recovery.

Case Study 3
Privacy
Ahmet and his family are very satisfied with their current Australian designed home. However, he feels slightly introverted inside the home (Figure 4) and prefers an extroverted concept living while being able to control privacy:
One thing that I don’t like about this house is that I can’t see outside; it’s not open living. I love open living. This house is very much enclosed. However, I like the fact that it meets our requirements for privacy, especially in the case of the separation between male members and female members.

A safe environment and good neighbors was found to be a very important criteria when Ahmet chose a home to live in. He feels safe within his current home and the surrounding neighborhood. He maintains close relationship with his neighbors and often helps them when required:

"Family safety is very obviously important. The suburb itself is safe. We had one of our neighbours looking after our house and fed our cats when we were away. When they go overseas, we look after theirs, so there is a neighbourhood spirit. But safety is very important. Our children can go and play on the street outside safely."

Apart from visual and acoustical privacy, Ahmet practices the use of incense (oud or agarwood) or incense sticks (agrabati) as non-visual privacy to ensure that guests are maintained at comfortable level while Ahmet and his family are preparing food for them:

"We use the incense. In fact we had one this morning. There are two types of incense; one is the stick incense which is more intense and the other one is the oud. Obviously it is not used in every house simply because people have no access to purchase it. Since I go for Hajj in Mecca almost every year, I buy some and bring them home. We use it before the guests come, so they are comfortable; that sign of welcoming."

Modesty

Modesty is of high value in Ahmet’s home. For example, the act removing off shoes at the entrance door prior to entering his home is practiced. Removing off shoes is a cultural modesty tradition of many countries across the globe. Many cultures consider it as practical, polite and hygienic way of entering someone’s home while some cultures use it for spiritual reasons:

"There is at front a sign at front that says “Please take your shoes off”. And people usually do that. But we find even non-Muslims, workmen or whoever, they understand. Unless my father in law, who is unwell. It is difficult for him to take the shoes off, so there’s no issue there, he can walk in with his shoes."

Answering the door prior to receiving guests and strangers is the first act of modesty every home. It is an act of controlling visual exposure to any guests and strangers if family members need some extra time to get ready to receive them. In Islamic traditions, it can be a good gesture that female members of the family need to cover themselves prior to receiving guests:

"No, I won’t open the door straight away. If it’s a male visitor or handyman coming to fix the door, then I’ll inform my wife. She will go upstairs to put the hijab on. When strangers are not here, she can put the hijab back off. So yes, that’s how it works. But, in Islamic way too; Muslim ladies outside generally do not want to be received by a man (host). Then, I will call my wide; she will come and greet her, you know, instead of by me. Some of them are stricter than others, but to make them feel comfortable, my wife will answer it. But if she’s a non-Muslim lady then there is no problem of who answers the door."

With regards to design humility, Ahmet believes that his home should respect the Australian culture and Australian house styles externally but the internal layouts can fit to individual’s needs:

"Within our house, to an extent, Australian culture has an impact. Well, obviously it has a tremendous impact because the designs of houses here are meant to suit the typical Australian family and they are not particularly designed to suit any particular minority community. They are meant to suit the mainstream society. That is an aspect of Australian culture where you have no control unless you build your own house."
A guest prayer room is located on the first floor of Ahmet’s home, and this room also acts as the men’s area or majlis (Figure 4). The majlis is equipped with two toilets for convenience of ablution or cleansing prior to prayers, as seen in Figure 4.

**Hospitality**

Ahmet expressed the importance of having a spacious backyard patio for his family to entertain guests and engage in family activities (Figure 7). This is necessary to ensure that there is enough entertaining space for overflow guests, especially during festive seasons such as Eid Day or during fasting month of Ramadan:

*We do have a small backyard patio, not enough for play but for a barbecue. Usually, if a family turns up with children, the men and the children would sit outside; it is a nice area. The women have the freedom here to take their hijabs off and walk around without them.*

The concept of ummah (unity or brotherhood) has always been an important value in Ahmet’s life. Ahmet converted one of his the first floor rooms as majlis (Figures 4 and 8) and utilizes the majority of the ground floor area (kitchen and living) as women’s area (salon) when there are guests to entertain. However, when families and close relatives are visiting, they are free to socialize freely without any segregation of genders.

*Men, when they first arrive with female members of family, will go straight to the majlis upstairs. The ladies will go inside; they have the luxury of the house. I know a few houses use the garage as men’s majlis. Luckily we don’t have to do that. I have a dedicated men’s majlis upstairs.*

There is still an exception whereas some female members may still wear the hijab if there are male relatives who are not members of the immediate family.
Ahmet often receives visitors from overseas and uses his granny flat (Figure 4) as a place for them to stay during their period of time in Brisbane:

*I do have visitors from overseas, we’ll have 4-5 times a year. You want to make them comfortable, so they’ll stay here with their own ensuite, kitchen and living area in the granny flat.*

**DISCUSSION**

This study provides insight into commonalities, similarities and differences in observance of the three principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality within the home among the three Muslim families in Brisbane.

**Commonalities**

This study identifies some commonalities among the three homes with regards to observance of privacy, modesty, hospitality and the use of spaces within participants’ domestic domains. Despite coming from different ethnic backgrounds, all participants perceive their homes to be a safe haven for themselves and their families; a place to relax and unwind from the daily chores at work. All agree that privacy, in general, is a basic human right and is very important in a home regardless of their cultures, religions, socio-economic status or even the size and property value of the house in which they live.

Regarding modesty spaces, each case study highlights the importance of a transition space between public spaces and guest spaces to allow hosts to dress appropriately (not restricted to hijabs only) when answering the door, for guests to remove their shoes or umbrellas or even as a guest waiting space prior to guests being received into the home by the host. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of modesty spaces for religious activities such as a prayer room for families and guests, as well as availability of a room where female guests can hang or store their hijabs and veils (when removal of them is permitted). Every toilet in each home was observed to have a *shattaf*, an Islamic handheld bidet hose, in line with Islamic hygienical jurisprudence and toilet etiquette.

**Similarities**

Similarities were observed among the three homes with respect to adherence to the Islamic principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality. These include visual and acoustical privacies as well as family safety. All of the homes were built according to Australia’s National Construction Codes (Australian Building Codes Board, 2014 and Brisbane City Council’s House Code (Brisbane City Council, 2000). Building requirements according to these codes as well as other local guidelines enable visual and acoustical privacy requirements to be achieved. All participants expressed that their privacy is not violated and that they are able to engage with their daily activities and interact with their families, friends and neighbors.
Layers of privacy as described by Bahammam (1987) were found to be relevant to Amina’s and Ahmet’s homes. By contrast, these layers of privacy between genders are not strictly enforced in Aishah’s home. The findings from the three cases suggest the importance of the location of bedrooms, especially master bedrooms, to ensure that privacy is maintained while entertaining guests in the house. Ideally, bedrooms should be designed and located away from main living or dining areas for visual and acoustical privacy. In the case of Aishah, for example, the house was designed in a way that situated her master bedroom next to entrance lobby, giving Aishah minimal visual and acoustical privacy. Minor design modifications, such as changing the direction of door openings and the addition of partition walls, would greatly enhance visual privacy to this room. However, these modifications require due consideration of climatic factors. In the case of Amina, her own design changes produced some negative impacts to the usability of some rooms. These are some of the aspects that builders, architects and designers need to take into consideration in the future, when designing homes for Muslims (Briscoe, 2013). In order to fully understand the ways in which Muslims in Australia perceive and achieve privacy in their homes, further research attention needs to be directed to different forms of housing such as apartment units, terraced houses and council housing. These types of housing offer less control of privacy within the home domain and research of this kind has the potential to furnish a more comprehensive understanding of the methods used to achieve privacy within the home by Muslims living in Australia. Research that considers the perceptions of both home dwellers’ and designers’ points of view could enrich the findings by considering the perspectives of each of these groups.

In discussion about humility in design, all participants favored frugal home design approaches to avoid the squandering or resources on excessive decorations. Aishah is satisfied with her current home and appreciates simplicity in the façade areas of the home. Amina is in favor of uniformity of the façades within a neighborhood or suburb. In her opinion, this serves to convey a unique and strong character of a neighborhood or suburb.

Although all participants come from different cultural backgrounds, there are some similarities in hospitality patterns and zoned areas where hospitality takes place. Each case study shows a clear definition of public and private zones (as shown in Figures 2, 3 and 4). Aishah’s home clearly defines its entertaining zones at the back portion of the house (Figure 2). All public and semi-public spaces (living, dining, kitchen, prayer room and lounge) are located next to each other. The open kitchen to dining and living spaces reflect the contemporary Australian open living concept that has become popular in recent years. Aishah’s private spaces are located at the front façade of the building (Figure 2), which is contrary to traditional Islamic home designs. Amina’s double-storey home provides an opportunity to separate public and private spaces vertically (Figure 3). All of her hospitality spaces are carefully located at ground floor (living, dining and kitchen) with the exception of Ali’s new resting room. All bedrooms and family room are located at first floor and not visible to guests during their time at her home. Ahmet’s double-storey home, on the other hand, has clearly demarcated public and private domains, both vertically and horizontally (Figure 4). Public spaces are placed within the front zones while private spaces occupy the rear zones of the house. At ground floor, a split level to lower granny flat defines the public-private domains, while this demarcation is defined by a narrow balcony along the width of the building and separate staircases to the upper level (Figure 4) to allow both visual and acoustical privacy between the public and private spheres of the house. Unlike Aishah’s home, both Amina’s and Ahmet's homes follow similar public-private zoning and hierarchy principles (Figure 9) to those adhered to in traditional Muslim homes in the Middle East (Lockerbie, 2014; Belk and Sobh, 2011; Sobh and Belk, 2011; Belk and Sobh, 2009; Bahammam, 1987) and Malaysia (Wan Hashim & Nasir, 2011; Hashim et al., 2008; Vlatseas, 1990; Lim, 1987).
Differences

It is noteworthy that the use of incense (agarwood) or lighting incense sticks (agraabati) was used for the purpose of achieving olfactory privacy in both Amina’s and Ahmet’s homes. A good olfactory perception is important in Muslim’s home as a non-visual privacy device to fumigate guest spaces (Sobh and Belk, 2011). However, the use of incense may result in negative effects to some homeowners and guests. For example, Aishah is not in favor of using any incense within the house and prefers the use of natural scents from flowers or plant cuttings to refresh her home instead. The use of incense is a personal choice and independent from any cultural or religious teachings. The findings of this study support the view that different Muslim families interpret Islamic teachings and traditions and privacy requirements in different ways. This finding may raise awareness among architects and designers that they need to consider these differences in interpretation when designing homes for Muslim clients in the future.

Modesty was found to play an important role in all participants’ homes. Demonstrating modesty signifies that a person is moderate and humble, yet still capable of being in close contact with society (Ali, 2013; Sayeed, 2013; Sobh et al., 2012; Fay, 2010; Wynn, 2007; Boulanouar, 2006). Nevertheless, different Muslim cultures hold different perceptions about physical modesty as demonstrated by each case study. Veiling or hijab plays important roles in protecting female's body privacy and maintaining their modesty within their own domestic domains when they need to retreat to areas where there is no control of visual privacy (Vahaji and Hadjiyanni, 2009). Participants in this study regarded this form of modesty to be a personal decision. This study demonstrates that one’s choices about home design can be affected by cultural traditions, design inspirations and available budgetary resources. As a fifth generation Australian born Muslim, Aishah is not in favour of wearing abaya or hijab. Aishah wears a scarf instead to cover her hair in functions or meetings as part of maintaining her modesty in public. Both Amina and Ahmet perceive hijab as an important dress code to protect female’s awrah from any strangers in the house. Although both have settled in Australia for more than 25 years (Table 1), both Amina and Ahmet strictly follow Islamic teachings, especially the protection of female privacy.

With regards to hospitality, a number of differences in spatial patterns and hospitality behaviors were observed among the participants, which appear to be mainly related to difference in cultural background. Aishah disagrees with the conception of gendered spaces within her home. Aishah prefers the open living concept in her current home and she believes natural progression to gendered socialization rather than enforced segregation. Amina, on the other hand is neutral about gendered segregation. The interview with Amina was initially conducted with her as an individual, but Ali, her daughter and grand-daughter visited at times as the interview proceeded. Ahmet believes in gendered segregation, mainly to protect females’ visual privacy (Sofia and other female guests) when there are non-muhrim guests or strangers in his home. However, Ahmet does not have issues about socializing with his non-Muslim Australian neighbors because Ahmet and his family considers them as part of their extended family and they help each other in times of need.

Even though there is a minor difference in the socio-economic backgrounds and education levels among the three participants, their homes are of a similar type (detached homes) within the same suburb. All of them are directors and leaders of Islamic organizations in Brisbane. In addition to this, Ahmet is a well-educated individual with a Doctorate degree. Only Amina owns her home outright, while Ahmet is building his new dream home nearby that will suit all his privacy, modesty and hospitality requirements.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study illustrate that perceptions of home privacy are relatively similar, especially in relation to particular emphasis being placed on the visual protection of female members of the family. However, this does not mean that social exclusion of females is necessary for this is achieved.
Each of the case studies suggest the importance of modesty spaces for religious activities, humility in design and the functions on hijab in domestic spaces. The case studies indicate that neighborhood strength and sense of community are as important as family privacy (Moustafa, 2009) and one of the ways to maintain good relationships with the community is by extending their hospitality and introducing their Islamic cultural traditions to non-Muslim neighbors and friends. The study provides the first analysis on how principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality affect the social behaviors and the use of spaces among Muslims living in a western context.

Nevertheless, the findings of this research are based on just three case studies and thus cannot be extrapolated to other Muslim homes in Australia. The findings do provide valuable information that can be used by local Australian architects, builders and designers to guide them in designing homes for Muslim clients in the future. The study also focuses on participants’ domestic perceptions and behaviors based on the three principles within an Australian setting around Brisbane. Their perceptions and behaviors may be different in other jurisdictions or in countries where they were originally came from (Amina and Ahmet). Future research concentrating on the three principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality within Muslim homes across Queensland and nationwide would provide better understanding of the they ways in which these principles affect the overall design of a home and help to shape and control their social behaviors and use of domestic spaces within a predominantly non-Muslim environment.

**CONCLUSION**
Western-styled modern housing in Australia can be readily adapted by the Muslim population to achieve adherence to the principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality. Greater awareness from mainstream designers in the culture-related aspects of housing could improve adaptability designing interior spaces in ways that allow them to be easily reconfigured without major renovations. In each of the case studies, the participants agreed that both Islamic and Australian cultural traditions are major influences on their use their domestic spaces, while Islamic teachings guides them on both their domestic behaviors and perceptions. This supports Rapoport’s (2007) claim that culture plays a larger influence on housing design and domestic settings as conceptualized in his framework as culture-environment relations.

The findings from the three case studies also illustrate that the three principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality are interdependent and synergetic in creating a safe and practical home for a Muslim family. The conceptual approach of a home as: a) private and safe place for an individual and family; b) a practical base for personal and families’ religious activities using frugal design approaches and; c) a hospitable domestic environment to entertain extended families and guests, provides a tripartite model for architects and designers to consider when designing homes for their Muslim clients. The increasing number of Muslims in Australia necessarily means that more homes need to be provided for this segment of the population. Further studies in other non-Muslim countries with ongoing rapid growth in the Muslim population are also needed to determine the extent that established cultural norms in these host countries affect Muslims’ home environments and their use of spaces. While trying to adhere to the three principles of privacy, modesty and hospitality when residing in these countries, Muslim home dwellers and owners are subject to their respective local regulatory building codes. It is vital that they are able to apply these principles within the context of non-Muslim or western built homes. At the same time, greater awareness of Islamic and other ethnic minorities’ cultural traditions is needed within the broader community of host countries if cultural diversity is to be truly embraced and social inclusion of these groups is to be fostered.
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