

## **Body Massage in the Context of Hospitality: A Critical Analysis from Islamic Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Body massage is a service-oriented business that offers amenities to tourists to satisfy their particular desires. It is one of the attractive segments in tourism industry in the modern world even in Islamic countries which provide facilities for Muslim travellers. The massage is given by using a specific technique on body by following a unique culture. It brings a kind of natural healing and care for some injuries. However, it is associated with feelings of pleasure, wellbeing and luxury with natural sensory experiences. The professional masseurs have demanded that they are confused about the basic features of the Shari'ah compliant massage as the concept has yet to be developed. There are also many unanswered questions from the customers and the operators. This paper aims to identify the functions of body massage and key factors to enrich the Islamic hospitality in the contemporary world. The qualitative approach has been chosen to answer the research question of this study and observation approach has been applied to find the data. This study has found that the professional massage can be opened to achieve the business objectives and the commercial values if it complies with the principles of Shari'ah. Traditional masseur services conflict with local decency and Islamic doctrines as they carry not only sensual enjoyment, but also sexual pleasure which leads to homosexuality. Thus, it becomes ethically ambiguous character. Finally, in the realistic perspective, this paper helps to find out the potential business improvement of Islamic hospitality services mainly in utilizing the functions of body massage.

**Keywords:** Body massage; relaxation; treatment; homosexuality; Islamic morality.

### **Introduction**

Tourism plays a significant role to the economic schemes all over the world. Many states generate immense revenue streams from tourism as service industry. On other words, it can be considered the largest foreign exchange earnings than any other services of a particular country. For the economic purpose, most countries are

contesting each other to persuade tourists to travel to their own countries as well as certain places inside there. Therefore, every tourism industry must need to create new services to snatch tourists and to survive in competition with its rival countries (Chanin, 2016). Tourism in Shari'ah rules is a new concept which basically focuses on Muslim tourists from all over the world. Islamic hospitality as a type of service industry is developed according to the values of Islam (Battour and Ismail, 2016). This is because Islamic law is having strict rules that it cannot be changed according to the need of people (Coulson, 2011). Typically, Islamic hospitality provides services and benefits which are in line with Muslim practices. It must also have some improvements on products and services to generate advance facilities for Muslim visitors. For instance, hotel, swimming pool, prayer room, rest house and other products should be separated for male and female (Halabase, 2011). In addition, among other facilities, it may arrange for massage facilities for treatment as well as relaxation to attract Muslim tourists.

The Muslims are the second largest population that is 1.8 billion and 24% over the world (Lipka, 2015). Specifically 31% Muslims of the globe are living in South Asia (Pechilis, 2012). Okhovat (2010) said that the consumption of halal products are in demands in the modern world and halal tourism can also take the opportunity in the market if it offers amenities according to needs of Muslim travellers. Sheller and Urry (2004) mentioned that in connection to the number of Muslim population, the service industries must be enhanced to supply the necessities of Muslim visitors. Hence, it is obligatory on all Muslim countries regardless Muslim majority or Muslim minority country to create the essential segments of tourism for Muslims. Shafaei and Mohamed (2015) also illustrated that Islamic tourism service markets must be improved by understanding the vacationers' natures, needs and interests or demands. Thus, halal massage industry can be developed in Islamic tourism as long it does not violate the religious practices of Muslims.

The massage is a service-oriented business which provides facilities for pleasure along with treatment. According to Frembgen (2008), "Massage is a multifaceted social practice with a strong experiential component that can be viewed as an apotheosis of the body; in particular culture, it is even tantamount to a veneration of the individual, corporal body". On other words, massage is an exercise which is designed based on a particular culture and feature. It is aimed not only confirm natural healing but also ensure a healthy and sexually powerful body. Nowadays, it is more related with pleasure, relax and feelings of wellbeing. Furthermore, it is constituted as a cultural practice and an entertaining activity in a certain society (Goffman, 1963). Moreover, massage provides a unique sensual feeling to the body and mind. It is also a pleasure provided by an expert person of the physical body. Typically, it can deliver a sexual pleasure and desire depending on the needs of the clients. Therefore, this method of relaxation or treatment is ambiguous in Islam as it may transgress the Islamic morality and reputation (Frembgen, 2008).

The massage can be one of the interesting and beneficial tools in Islamic friendly tourism, but the process of giving massage services must be according to Islamic rules and regulations. With this background, this study attempts to present a clear concept of Islamic hospitality along with massage services to guide Islamic tourism management. As a result, the management will be able to offer halal massage services which will assist them to snatch visitors from other countries to travel to their own countries.

### **The Understanding of Islamic Tourism**

Islamic tourism is a new concept but it is very standard to Muslim tourists as this concept is emerged from the growth of halal service industries (Zakiah, 2014). Nor Azlina, Nadiatul and Manisah (n.d) defined that Islamic hospitality is a character or manner involving affiliation with mankind that is highlighted by Prophet Muhammad SAW with the guidance of Allah Ta'la. It is also familiar as a warm greeting and treating visitors. The term Islamic tourism is usually used to recount travelling by Muslims from home to away in compliance with religious observances for a necessary consideration (Straits times, 2017). Duman (2011) stated that tourism in Islam is called travel ventures of Muslims outside of their usual dwellings. Therefore, Islamic tourism refers to activities, events, experiences and services served in a tourism State complied with Shari'ah. The purpose of it is to strengthen the faith and achieve rewards from Allah Ta'la. Nor Azlina, Nadiatul and Manisah (n.d) assumed that there are mainly three lumps in Islamic tourism namely spreading of Islamic values and cultures; providing financial benefits for Islamic countries; and strengthening Islamic self-confidence, uniqueness and theory in comparison to other philosophies and regimes. Thus, Islamic resorting industries must address facilities, products (Lee and Trimi, 2016) and infrastructures in compliance with Islamic standard to attract especially Muslim travellers. Hence, these services will cater all needs of tourists by observing Shariah rulings as well as guidelines.

There are some vital variations between Islamic and conservative hospitality industries. The notion of Islamic hospitality industries concern the pleasure of Allah Ta'la and offer services by following the His guidelines. Thus, it gets profits by providing services but not implementing high price based on high demands. On the other hand, conventional hospitality industries concern only earning the profits, travellers' pleasure and sometimes demand high prices (Weidenfeld, 2006). Furthermore, Abdullah, Hamali, & Abdullah (2013) mentioned that Islamic tourism and conventional tourism seems to be similar but there are differences in terms of practices, implementations and behavior. Therefore, Islamic hospitality affords all services as long as they are parallel with Islamic guidelines. Out of many services I will discuss only the development of massage industry and its benefits in Islamic hospitality.

### **The Traditional Framework of Massage**

The massage is a body oriented work of everyday life represented by males and females in different places in numerous situations. Frembgen (2008) stated that massage is plural and open to different aspects of connotation, presenting conflicting private and public meanings, from devices of natural healing, body care and pleasure definitely rooted in family tradition to wider social arenas marked by admiration, respect, submission and hierarchy, as well as informed by Islamic notions of pureness. Turner (1984) marked that it is essential ‘. . . to recognize fully that personal experience of embodiment is highly mediated by social training, language and social context’.

Customarily massage is given to members of a family to release from tiredness and pressure. It simply brings relax and pleasure from anxiety. In some families it becomes habit for some people. Therefore, it adapts like a general rule in the family that the child massages his parents and mother also massages her child. Furthermore, wife massages her husband but it is rear to find that husband massages his wife. Moreover, servants massage their masters and women also perform massages among themselves. They are used to do it without any demand but for pleasure or sometimes for healing. In addition, massage can be seen as local norms of hospitality to guests in some societies. They provide massage to respect invitees. Sometimes, the powerful person asks his fellows to massage him. Additionally, massage also can be found as gesture of devotion in some countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. People serve massage to religious personalities as honor and respect because they believe that it could be their religious dedication. Thus, it is seen that massage is not only matter of body care but also matter of religion and power (Frembgen, 2008).

Therefore, traditional massage is an ordinary means of relieve from exhaustion, tiredness, agony and other mental anxiety. It brings pleasure, wellbeing and happiness in daily life. It is also a casual treatment to relief from psychological problems as well as physical illness. The necessity of massage is depends on the person who requests it. Normally it does not have negative feature or meaning in the society. However, it may persuade a person to lead luxurious life when he becomes used to experience it continuously. Typically, it may connect a person to fulfill his sensual desires which goes against the Islamic laws, norms and ethics.

### **The Concept of Massage Industry**

In modern globe, people are much different than the past as they must need to become more competitive to achieve their daily needs. They must need to work harder and more time comparing to the earlier people. Thus, they get more sufferings and sorrows. Conversely they need more products and facilities to release themselves from all kinds of distresses and exhaustion to pleasant life. Then, people started to think how to retrieve freshness in the easiest way and finally they formed

the massage industry to please their needs. Yaman, Alias and Ishak (2012) said that people are using lots of cash by going to nearest salon and spa every month to massage their body, style their hair and get also beauty treatment.

The modern concept of massage industry was firstly initiated by four women in 1894 with the name of “The Society of Trained Masseuses” in the United Kingdom. Later in 1944, it was renamed as “The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy” (Barclay, (1994). This society was found to raise professional profile by promoting high quality of health care to patients and creating awareness of the benefits of physiotherapy. During that time the massage was comprehensively used by Doctors. This massage was mechanically used for healing on joints as well as muscles. Day by day it was formed as physiotherapy by using hands to massage on patients. It was a respectful profession and there was no connection with prostitution. There was rigid rules that no sexual activity was allowed in therapy to protect client’s modesty. Rubbing was not permitted at erogenous zones and female clients’ chests. However, Western society did not have any strong massage tradition of its own. Unfortunately, they associated sensuality and sexuality with physiotherapy (Rankin, 2012). Therefore, the ideology of massage had died in Western world. As a result, currently people even don’t know that they have lost very precious clinical concept of massage.

Today, it is hoped by physiotherapists that the western rubbing therapies will recover their earlier glories. Thus, now it should be their challenge to change the mentality of public as it is believed in the society that massage carries possible sensuous contacts. On the other hand, the chances of regaining of western massage is very little as currently people are extra distress about sexual harassment, more rape, more fear, more violence, more misery and more grief because the massage may increase the measure of sensual enjoyment. In addition to that there is also a possibility to encourage people to involve with the concept of homosexuality which is known as fulfilling sexual desires with the person of same sex (Yacoub, 2015). Many western countries legalized it but many people believe that it is morally and even ethically illegal. Furthermore, there are some countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania, Yemen, Northern Nigeria, and Sudan are providing death penalty for having sexual relationship with similar sex. Thus, it becomes very difficult to enlighten to public about the necessity of massage even clinical massage can release exhaustion which is connected with health, mental and social worries as a natural healing.

### **Islamic Framework of body Massage**

Body massage is a service-oriented business provided by male or female. This business is mostly neglected in Islamic perspective as there is a possibility of exposing ‘Awrah’ which is binding on all believers to maintain. In Islamic point of view, the act of bodywork is classified as ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ in nature. The Islamic ethics and morality provide the guidelines to identify the ‘pure’ and ‘impure’

activities of Muslims. For instance, putting oil or massaging the feet, armpits and any other parts of body which is not part of nakedness is conditionally permissible but a discouraging work. The word ‘Awrah’ is an Arabic terminology which means a hidden and secret place. It denotes something that causes indignity when exposed. Therefore, ‘Awrah’ is a zone of body which causes shame if exposed (Ibn Manzur, Lisan al-Arab). For example, the ‘Awrah’ for man is the zone between the navel and just below the knees. There are several Quranic verses and hadiths which provide the rulings of Awrah such as Allah Ta’la says in the Holy Quran (24:30-31) that;

“Tell the believing men to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and (sincerely) protect their private parts or modesty (from illegal sexual acts). That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their gaze (from looking at forbidden things), and (sincerely) guard their private parts or modesty (from illegal sexual acts).”

It is clearly seen from the verses that Allah Ta’la commends mankind to lower the gaze and protect their private parts or modesty. The same rulings can be found from the hadiths where it was narrated by Mu’aawiyah ibn Haydah al-Qushayri (R) that;

He said that I said, O Messenger of Allah, with regard to our ‘Awrah’, what may we uncover of it and what must we conceal? He said: “Cover your ‘Awrah’ except from your wife and those whom your right hand possesses (i.e., concubines).” I said, O Messenger of Allah, what if a man is with another man? He said, “If you can make sure that no one sees it, then do not let anyone see it.” I said, O Messenger of Allah, what if one of us is alone? He said, “Allah is more deserving that you should feel shy before Him than people.”

In another hadith, the Prophet (SWS) explicitly banned male to look at the ‘Awrah’ of another male and female or one woman to look at the ‘Awrah’ of another woman and man. Such as Abu Sa’eed al-Khudri (R) narrated that the Messenger of Allah (SWS) said that “No man should look at the ‘Awrah’ of another man, and no woman should look at the ‘Awrah’ of another woman”. According to Sheikh Muhammed Saalih Al-Munajjid, it is undoubtedly seen from the quranic verses and hadiths that Islam has closed all doors which may lead to temptation and provocation. Rubbing contains uncovering some parts of the body and direct touching. Thus, it opens a severe risk of temptation and the provocation of desires. It is recommended to do massage by loco parentis if necessary. If the massage is not a medical treatment, it should not be openly allowed as it may lead to provoke desires which may lead to evil. It may also guide people to become superior to others and lead to luxurious life.



The medical massage or physiotherapy is the exception of general role. However, it should not be done in a secret place as there is a provability of evil and temptation. This is also instructed by Prophet Muhammad (SWS) in a hadith which is narrated by Umar ibn al-Khattab that The Prophet (SWS) said, “Whenever a man is alone with a (non-muhram) woman, the Shaytaan makes the third”. The Prophet (SWS) also educated all men and women to become modesty as he said, “Modesty is from faith,” and that, “Modesty brings only good.” Imam Zayn Ibn al-Nujaym said covering one’s nakedness in front of other people is mandatory with the scholarly unanimity (ijma) and when alone, based on correct opinion is wajib (necessary) unless there is a valid reason. Ibn Abidin in Radd al-Muhtar and Imam al-Haskafi in Durr al-Mukhtar both said similar opinion but Imam al-Haskafi added that covering one’s ‘Awrah’ is a general obligation (Rabban, 2011).

However, it is generally permitted for a Muslim woman to see other Muslim women’s body and a Muslim man to see other Muslim man’s body except ‘Awrah’ because they may not have such desires of being same sex. If there is any risk to have desires, it becomes forbidden which is correct opinion by Islamic scholars. In addition, if it is among cross gender such as man to woman or woman to man, it is mostly prohibited except they are loco parentis or medical necessity. The medical necessary is a way that a doctor prescribed that without massage or therapy the person would be disabled and no one is found from the same gender who can give the services. Then cross gender may perform the treatment but they need to wear gloves just to make sure that there is no skin to skin contact’.

### **Islamic Approach on Contemporary Massage Industries**

Nowadays, massage is widely provided in tourism industries to release tiredness and exhaustion of visitors. This rubbing facility can be called as pleasure and luxury because most of the tourists come to massage rooms for happiness and not for physical treatment. These massage amenities must be supplied by same sex even though they rub on some other parts of the body which are not the zone of ‘Awrah’. However, it is considered as ‘impure’ and neglected facilities. According to Frembgen (2008), applying oil on uncovered body, the participation of sex activities and even treating inside the zone of Awrah are considered ‘impure’ or pollution. Therefore, it is clear that the general feature of massage industry is a questionable work and can be considered as a dirty act in Islamic morality. In addition, typically it is a dangerous performance which can be assisted to an Islamic criminal act. Frembgen (2008) stated by referring Imam al-Ghazzali (1111) where he directed that;

. . . he [the bather] should not allow the bath attendant, who rubs the backs of bathers and massages their body, to touch either his thigh or the part of the body which lies between navel and the pubes. Some permit the touching of any part of the body with the exception of the genitals but the best rule is not to permit the touching of the parts already mentioned, since the rule

which prohibits looking at the private parts has been extended to include the prohibition of touching them as well.

The characteristics of massage can be identified as a passive sexual activity. The masseur meets the physical contact of person's 'Aurah', exposes his body odour and touches him for services which are transgressing the moral boundary of Islam. Massage also commodifies the body like a prostitute does. Sometimes, the occupation of masseur becomes disrespectful in the eyes community as it deals with body. However, the medical massage business should not be allowed in open but with exceptional situations such as;

- a) It is permissible to open massage services by a Muslim or non-Muslim if the massage of hands, feet or body for the purpose of treatment, physiotherapy or other medical causes. It is reminded that opening 'Aurah' (the zone which must need to be covered) is a Sin but can be exposed to any male or female medical practitioner for medication only. It is also recommended to take treatment from same sex medical consultants if possible.
- b) Massage can be served for pleasure by a Muslim or non-Muslim female or male except at the zone of 'Aurah'. It must be in conducive environment, and male and female are separated. In addition, non-Muslim female employees may provide the service to a Muslim woman by opening hijab in a condition that there is no threat to explore it to other non-Muhram man. However, this massage is allowed but contradictory with Islamic decency.
- c) It is prohibited to massage by opposite sex for relaxation even massage of hands, feet and other parts of body.
- d) The spouse can massage but in a domain and should not be in public.
- e) The massage by loco parentis is permitted even for pleasure.

Islamic concept of morality treats the body as a source of shame. It condemns the person who is giving facilities of massage to other people's body to remove waste products which gives the person a sexual pleasure. According to Frembgen (2008), it is the key of moral ambiguity of massage services in the modern world. Thus, massage should be served by looking to the Islamic ethics and morality to abandon the evil of fulfilling sensual desires.

Furthermore, the massage industry can be designed to release exhaustion from all Muslim customers according to their religious practices if recommended by a medical doctor. This business may support relaxation by serving other halal facilities to enjoy the travelling in a calm and Islamic atmosphere. It is just to make sure that all clients are having cheerful and good time. This industry may also offer some other additional products to assist their customers such as halal salon, halal food and Islamic hotel services. However, the massage industry must not have any illicit and prohibited facility which disrespects the Islamic cognitive rules. Such as;



- a) Exposing 'Awrah' by employees and clients
- b) Mixing with cross gender as men and women
- c) Providing products from non-halal sources
- d) Using same staffs for male and female
- e) Providing false treatment
- f) Neglecting the obligatory prayers
- g) Involving any illegal business

Therefore, the massage business can give advantages to compete with conventional hospitality industries if it delivers facilities according to demands of tourists in conjunction with Islamic practice. It gives unique services for male and female separately on different floors and most preferably in different places. By applying this massage business, it can be shown to Muslim tourists that it is a comfortable place to relax and to release exhaustion in necessary. Furthermore, there is no danger of disclosing 'Awrah'. It may also give an absolute privacy which a conservative Muslim is looking for.

### **Connecting Factors in Developing Massage Industry**

The massage amenity must be industrialized for the purpose of providing benefits to the Muslim tourists according to the Shari'ah. Therefore, the administration must set up business policies and facilities in harmony with Islamic standard. There are some additional factors that must be taken into consideration. Such as;

#### **a. The Location of the Massage Center**

The massage industry must be situated at a good location where tourists can be able to find easily. It should be developed in a safe, clean and conducive environment which is free from any pollution and all anti-Islamic activities. On other words, it could be industrialized in a place which is known as an Islamic holistic area. For better business purposes, it should be located in the beach areas or in the geographically good adventure zones where tourists are used to come for relaxation and pleasure.

In the premises, the management must put location signs accurately to indicate male and female rest areas, prayer halls and specially massage rooms separately. Furthermore, they also should provide all necessary toiletries in toilets. In addition, they should not face the beds for massage and rest rooms in the direction of Qiblah (Chanin, 2016). Moreover, it is also illegal to hang in massage area inappropriate images like pets, animals and also unsuitable body images.

### **b. The Quality of Employees and Effective Management**

Human capitals can take the vital role to develop the halal massage industries in Islamic hospitality. It is not only making the suitable Islamic regulations but also providing extra ordinary Islamic facilities. So that the staffs of massage industries must have good knowledge of Islamic principles, wear proper uniform, be healthy and free from any infectious diseases as well as have proper training related with Islamic massage procedures. It is also obligatory that the staffs must be Muslims. It is recommended that most of them should be multilingual to be able to communicate with foreign tourists (Chanin, 2016). According to Atoyan (2015), the qualified employees and active management can bring the success of the hospitality and tourism industries. Snell and Bohlander (2013) also highlighted that the success of an industry mainly depends on the management's capacity to manage talents and employees. They referred human capital as economic value of employees' skill, knowledge and abilities. This business should be free from all illegal employments such as child labour, low wages and so on. Therefore, Mello A. (2015) suggested that government should take appropriate policies and invest money to develop the values of human capitals. Then the management may give high salary to the qualified employees but it will survive them in the competition with other conventional industries.

The management can open websites to advertise their services. In addition, they also can link up with Islamic hotels and travel agencies to speed up their business. In the today's technological world, it very common to see that people purchase service packages by internet or by phone calls and later come to take the facility. Thus, it is advised to the authorities that they should use all the modern means of communication in halal ways to sell their services to customers easily.

### **c. Using Halal Tools**

The massage industry should be developed to afford beneficial services to Muslim tourists and to assist to their necessities. It must not use things which have non-halal ingredients that emerged from prohibited animals of Islam. It shall not use any medicine which may change the mental state of the clients. For instance, the materials must not hold poisons that may cause fatal injury. Furthermore, any alcoholic products shall not be used except for medical treatment which is an exceptional case. In order to adapt a trustful Islamic industry to all tourists, it should serve all certified, eco-friendly and halal sign used products in all facilities. In addition, it must not accept any sexual activity if offered by customers (Chanin, 2016). It must be free from all ambiguous products as well as all undertakings.

#### **d. Achieving Dignity, Honor And Public Relationship**

A halal massage industry must have its own pride to success in business. It is essential to build a good connection with local community by providing Islamic services and contributing in social activities. Furthermore, it should have some policies to guide people to produce halal products for all people and especially for tourists. It also can create worthy relationship with local people by employing them in the business. Moreover, the industry shall display to the people that the massage has a significant effect in the human body but it must be in correct ways and in correct manners. Hence, local people as well as tourists will understand the necessity of halal massage to protect the Islamic morality and ethics.

#### **e. Price Specification**

Islamic hospitality amenities must not demand high prices from the clients as high price may discourage tourists to take its services. The entrepreneurs must openly present the rates for all kinds of massage services so that all tourists, especially Muslim travellers will make the choice to use it for benefits. If they need any change in price rates, they must notice properly. Therefore, customers will not be burdened in payment.

Nowadays, promotion plays an important role in business. It may influence customers to take halal massage facilities. Therefore, the management must use social media, travel magazines, internet and other public places to promote halal massage amenities to people in general.

#### **Conclusion**

It can be concluded that the concept of Islamic hospitality is to highlight the halal services to the clients. This study has explained the guidelines of the Islamic friendly facilities and massage industry to ensure that these amenities will not create any ambiguity to the Islamic principles and Muslim practices. Additionally, the strategies of management should aim to support all Muslim visitors to generate an optimistic impression which will snatch other tourists as well to visit there to get halal services.

Traditional massage can be accepted as pleasurable relaxation if it is delivered by loco parentis because it contains a possibility of having sensual experience which may lead to sexual pleasure (cf. Marriott, 1989) and physical contact of nakedness. This is in the context that Islam does not against the sensual happiness in general, but safeguards the moral and ethical environments. In addition, body is considered as a part of disciplines of Muslim societies as well as Islamic morality. However, when it is discussed as a business amenity, it must be for the purpose of medication only. Thus, for the purpose of business benefits Islamic hospitality should not allow massage facilities for relaxation and pleasure

but for medical healing as it may attract many tourists to visit the place. Consequently, the country will earn more halal commercial revenue.

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