

Islamic Cultural Influence on Characters' Interaction in Khaled Hosseini's "And the Mountain Echoed"

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Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing the Islamic culture and its influence on the characters in the novel. The novel's main background story takes place in Afghanistan, where Islam is deeply rooted in the society. The rooted belief in Islam shaped the culture of the Afghans. Through the lens of Clifford Geertz's theory of "Religion as Cultural System," he observes that the practice of a culture often follows the teachings of a religion in the area. This analysis also draws on the opinions of some Islamic figures as a supporting theory to define the Islamic culture portrayed in the novel. This study found that Islamic cultures are portrayed in some chapters of the novel. Moreover, the results of this analysis provide evidence that Islam in Afghanistan significantly influences the country's culture. Since the religion is rooted in Afghanistan, some cultural values follow the belief of Islam found in the characters' daily interactions. They demonstrate how women should wear hijab, how Muslims perform their worship prayers, how a family stays connected, and how younger people should interact with older individuals.

Keywords: *Characters' Interaction, Islamic Culture, Khaled Hosseini, Novel*

INTRODUCTION

Culture is a broad, multifaceted term that encompasses the social behaviours, norms, beliefs, arts, laws, capabilities, and habits of individuals within a society. A philosophical perspective is that the definition of culture is simply as learned and shared behaviour of a community (Ibodullayeva, 2025). In certain areas, the culture can be observed through the social surroundings, how people treat, interact, and behave with someone older, younger, or a relative. People's habits can influence these actions in showcasing their culture. As culture can be observed in the habits of people, it also has the potential to be influenced by religion. The influence of religion is evident when it becomes deeply rooted in society and manifests in various forms tied to local culture within specific communities. For example, in Indonesia, there is a local puppet that is used to spread Islamic teaching. The puppet is called '*wayang golek*' and it is originally from Cirebon, West Java (Lisdawati, 2017). Furthermore, understanding the culture enables one to put religious teachings into practice, as explained in the book of *fiqh* regarding the implementation of the Quran and Hadiths (Bauto, 2016). For example, fashion practices, social norms, and interactions within society have been explained in the context of religion.

The novel "*And the Mountains Echoed*" is written by Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini. The novel's background story mostly takes place in Afghanistan, where the population is mostly Muslim. As Islam is the primary background of the country, the attitude

toward Islam is of great importance. The rooted religion of Islam is often prioritized over local concerns, making it a strong linking influence in shaping the cultures that follow Islamic beliefs (Rofii, 2020).

According to Ratna (2007), literature serves as an educational tool by conveying social, cultural, moral, and religious values (Jayaputri, 2022). The novel presented stories from various characters and locations. As Afghanistan is a country with an Islamic culture, the characters within the novel represent people who lived in Afghanistan. The beginnings of the Islamic faith in Afghanistan began when the Arabs invaded and conquered the country. Since then, Islamic culture and influence have grown; Afghanistan became the heart of various powerful Islamic rulers, and Sunni Muslims became the major population (Runion, 2007). The influence of Islam shapes their culture as God tells His believers through the Qur'an and Hadith, which explain the benefits of praying, fasting during Ramadan and Muslims' celebration days. Furthermore, the novel illustrates how Islam shapes the lives of the people of Afghanistan, influencing their interactions with society, decision-making, and even their concerns. Although the novel does not directly state much about Islam, it portrays values that are taught by Islam, which instructs its believers on basic and simple aspects of life.

Religion can influence a culture in certain areas due to the majority of its believers. The majority of religious believers can shape people's behaviour and social values in daily life. According to Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist, in his work "Religion as A Cultural System," he defines religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations (Munson, 1986). From his statement, he views religion as consisting of two elements: worldview and ethos. The worldview encompasses the conception of society, reality, and ethos, where actions are based on religious values and beliefs (Budhianto et al., 2023a).

There are numerous definitions of Islamic culture. A study in the "Bulletin of Islamic Research" once stated that Islamic culture is a culture rooted in Islam, encompassing traditions and practices that have spread across centuries in many different regions (Mahmudulhassan, 2024). This definition provides a broad and general overview of Islamic culture. From this definition, it can be inferred that all traditions and practices derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad are considered integral to Islamic culture.

Various researchers have analyzed the novel in different themes, topics, and theories. These are aimed at comparing research with other research to identify gaps or topics that need to be analyzed. Previous research has used Greenblatt's new historicism theory to analyze the transcultural narrative, transnational movement, and cultural phenomenon. The research emphasizes that transnational movements and cultural phenomena should not be viewed as complete identities if they have not interacted with other cultures in different areas (Ali et al., 2022). Another study by Hasby and Nafisah analyzed four types of love actions as characters' interactions with others. Those four love actions are affection, friendship, eros, and charity (Hasby & Nafisah, 2018). Another study conducted by Agustina utilized psychological theory to analyze the characters in the novel, which are linked to guilt and desperation. This is due to the novel depicting the story of human personality problems caused by past struggles that have become a burden for each other. The research also stated that this kind of condition commonly happens in a country at war (Agustina, 2016).

The topic of this study focuses on Islamic culture as it influences the characters in the novel *And the Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini. Islamic culture, according to Amer Al-Roubai, indeed fosters a culture and a civilization. What he means here is that a civilization based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Nawawi et al., 2025a). Additionally, this research aims to provide an understanding of Islam and its cultures, highlighting the purity of the religion. The study's results can be considered a valuable reference or an insightful idea for those seeking to learn about Islam and its culture. Furthermore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how Islam influences people in their daily lives and surroundings.

METHODS

Research Design

This study is a criticism of literary work which is purposed to analyse a novel, *And The Mountains Echoed* by Khaled Hosseini, using a related approach in literary criticism. This study will use a cultural studies approach in examining the novel. This approach offers tools to examine and interpret culture critically. It encourages an open-minded analysis of all cultural forms without bias. As a multicultural approach, it embraces a broad range of social customs and traditions that are deeply rooted in everyday life (Patil, 2021). According to Paula Sakko (2003), Cultural Studies focuses on topics in everyday experiences, language, texts, and social settings. Its method involves analysing how these elements interact with aspects of life such as religion, ethnicity, gender, media, economics, and politics nowadays (Purnomo, 2017).

The method that is going to be used in this study is a qualitative method. Qualitative research methods are research approaches that employ nonstatistical and nonnumerical methods of data collecting, analysis, and evidence generation. Qualitative research methods provide a lens that allows researchers to learn about non-material phenomena such as people's experiences, languages, histories, and cultures (Bhangu et al., 2023). Furthermore, this method will be more into relational content analysis, which focuses on the content of the object of study, which is the novel. This method also helps the researcher to identify words, phrases, or sentences that are relevant to the study (Sekito, 2019).

Data Collection

The source of the data is taken from the novel *And the Mountains Echoed*, written by Khaled Hosseini. The form of the data is taken from the narrative, utterances of the characters, characters' actions and interactions, which show the Islamic teaching and culture portrayed within the novel. For example, there are some sentences that show the culture of women in Afghanistan wearing a scarf. On page 43 of the novel, it is mentioned, "They wore black uniforms with white scarves tied under their chins". This scarf is commonly known as a hijab. Another example is also a scene that shows the teaching of Islam, as in the scene where people gathered to have *iftar* after fasting in Ramadan. This example is mentioned on page 56 of the novel, "...the family gathered at Saboor's family home for an early evening *iftar* to break the fast after Ramadan".

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study is through identifying Islamic culture portrayed in the novel. The analysis will use the concept of Islamic culture by Sidi Gazalba and Amer Al Roubai. According to Sidi Gazalba, it is a way of life that shows a pious self in daily life by stopping doing what is prohibited and doing what is told by *Shariah*. *Shariah* is a law whose rules are made based on the Quran and Sunnah (Hadith) (Nawawi et al., 2025a). According to Amer Al-Roubai, Islam is not a result, but Islam builds a culture and civilisation based on the Quran and Sunnah (Hadith) (Nawawi et al., 2025b). From the concept of two Islamic figures, the Islamic culture can be identified from characters' utterances, actions, and quotations from the novel, which shows the context of Islamic culture. After identifying the Islamic culture, the data about Islamic influence on the culture can be identified from the characters' interaction with others as a representation of the Afghan people.

As for analysing the influence of religion on the culture, this study will use the theory of Clifford Geertz's "Religion as Cultural System". In this theory, Clifford defines religion as a system of symbols which acts to establish strong, deep, and long-lasting moods and motivation (Budhianto et al., 2023b).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following data is the result of novel analysis. From the results excerpted, this novel does portray the Islamic culture and its influence on characters' interactions. Culture components include a wide range of social life. It can include people's beliefs, artwork, language, fashion style, politics, habits, behaviour, and economic systems (Mahmudulhassan, 2024). According to Clifford Geertz, he defines culture as a pattern of meaning that spreads historically, expressed through symbols, that people use to share, preserve, and shape their understanding of life and their outlook on it (Hutkovska, 2017). The Islamic culture also shows that Islam exists in Afghanistan and is rooted within the people. Though this novel did not focus on religious culture, the way the author describes and portrays Afghanistan's situation and condition at a certain time. The roots of Islam in Afghanistan trace back to the time when Arab forces invaded and took control of the region. Since that period, Islamic culture and its influence grew; Afghanistan became the heart for various powerful Islamic rulers, and Sunni Muslims became the major population (Runion, 2007).

Since this study focuses on how the novel portrays the Islamic culture and its influence towards the characters' interaction, it needs deeper and further explanation of the results to prove that the results found in the novel are connected to the teaching of Islam. This study also uses additional theory from Clifford Geertz about religion as a cultural system. He said that religion is a system of symbols that develops a strong, deep, and long-lasting mood and motivation in humans (Geertz, 1993). The result will be categorised into two: from the concept of Islamic culture, and the influence of Islamic culture on the characters' interaction. The results of the analysis will be explained further in the following subsections.

Islamic Culture in the Novel

The Islamic cultures that portrayed in the novel are variative. The culture can be in form of the fashion, the utterance from the characters, the setting of places, the obedience of Muslims

to follow what Islam had taught them. Here are the results of novel analysis on identifying the Islamic cultures:

1. Afghan Woman Wearing Scarf or Veil

It is found in the novel that one of Islamic cultures in Afghanistan is the women are wearing scarf or veil, or in Islam it is called as hijab. According to Clifford Geertz, culture is something that is passed through generations and it expressed in symbol. The definition of symbol can be referred to any objects, quality, events, or relation that has meaning (Geertz, 1993). For example, taken from the excerpts of the novel:

His mother had been delicate, both stature and nature, a wispy, slim waisted woman with a puff of hair always slipping from under her scarf. (page 23)

Her face was shielded from a view with a soiled veil. She held a knotted clump of it under her chin. (page 39)

They drove past a trio of schoolgirls skipping down the sidewalk. They wore black uniforms with white scarves tied under their chins. (page 43)

The excerpts above mentioned that women in Afghanistan wearing hijab. Though the hijab is mentioned differently, veil and scarf, those words mean something that are used to cover their head parts. The connection with the theory of Clifford is that the characters in the novel follow the belief of Islam and hijab as a symbol to show their faith to obey the religion obligation. The spread and rooted of Islam made the believers follow the teaching of Islam, based on the Quran and Hadith, and passed it through generations.

In Islam, women are ordered to wear *hijab* (scarf or veil). Hijab is a word derived from Arabic that means “cover,” referring to the covering of the female body except the hands and face (Sohail et al., 2023). The obligation to wear the hijab by Muslim women is always connected with QS. An-Nur (24): 31 and Al-Ahzab (33): 59. This verse explains the command to cover the *awrah* by extending the veil over the chest (Robikah, 2020). According to Nashiruddin Al-Albani, quoted the opinion of Ibnu Katsir, in QS. Al-Nur (24): 31,

And tell the believing women to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates, and not display their beauty except what is apparent thereof, and to draw their coverings over their breasts, and not expose their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, what their right hands possess, their male attendants who have no sexual desires, or children who are not yet aware of the nakedness of women. And they should not strike their feet to draw attention to their hidden beauty. And repent to Allah, all of you believers, so that you may succeed. (QS An-Nur (24):31)

this verse emphasizes the obligation to cover all jewelry and not show it to anyone other than the mahram, except what is permitted to be visible from it. Mahram is a word that is rooted from the word “*Haram*”, which means something that is prohibited and must be rejected. *Mahram* for woman is categorized into three conditions: the kinship (family), marriage

(husband), and breastfeeding (breast-related sibling) (Ilma, 2021). From those three conditions, it can be concluded that *mahram* is someone who has a strong blood tie or brotherhood with a woman so that they are forbidden to marry (Chaliddin, 2019). Meanwhile in QS. Al-Ahzab (33): 59,

O Prophet! Tell your wives, and your daughters, and the women of the believers, to lengthen their garments. That is more proper, so they will be recognized and not harassed. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful. (Quran 33:59)

contains the commands and how to wear a headscarf for a believing woman, the same as the way to wear the headscarf of the Prophet's wives, because the basis of the command is only one and applies to all believing women until the end of the world (Muthalib & Novianda, 2022).

From the findings and the discussion explained, it can be seen that the characters, who are wearing hijab (veil or scarf), are representing the culture of Afghan woman that influenced by the teaching of Islam. It is related with Sidi Gazalba's statement about Islamic culture is a way of life that shows religious individual following the Islamic teaching. The hijab is the symbol of Muslim woman to show their faith and obey the religion's order.

2. Muslim Worship Practices

The worship practices can be done daily, monthly, or even annually. Focusing on this novel, the worship practices that are portrayed are those done repeated daily and annually. For instance, the five-times prayer, fasting during Ramadan, and remembering God (*dhikr*). These worship practices are also related to Clifford's definition of culture. As culture is something that historically passed in generations through symbols, these worship practices are parts of the symbols of Islam. The believers of Islam practice the prayers and other worship as their form of faith and fear of God. The worship practices examples as mentioned below:

When the girls were nine years old, the family gathered at Saboor's family home for an early-evening iftar to break the fast after Ramadan. (page 56)

This excerpt indirectly mentioned that the characters in the novel do the Ramadan fasting. The excerpt shows the *iftar* part, which is a part of the break time of fasting. This point shows that the character at the scene portrays the symbol of Islam, fasting during Ramadan. This excerpt also portrays that the characters are showing their faith in Islam by obeying the obligation of fasting from the Quran. The obligation to fast during Ramadan refers to the religious instruction stated in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 183. Most of Islamic scholars are agreed on this matter of Ramadan fasting obligation instruction (Robingun Suyud El Syam et al., 2023). The Quran verse, Al-Baqarah (2):183, as below:

O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become righteous. (QS Al-Baqarah (2):183)

Another example shows the different worship practices; the last sentence of the excerpt below shows that old men fingered their prayer beads.

The adults sat on a cushion around the perimeter of the room, and the chatter was noisy. Tea, good wishes, and gossip were passed around in equal measure. Old men fingered their prayer beads. (page 57)

It is a portrayal of prayer beads are used to do the *dhikr* (remembering God). *Dhikr* is part of worshipping God outside of the five-times prayers. This worship practice is also a symbol of Islam that historically passed along with the spread of Islam. It is historically passed since the obligation is mentioned in the Quran and its meaning is to worship the only God and show the faith in Islam. Muslim can do the *dhikr* wherever and whenever they want. Prayer beads is a tool that help to count the *dhikr*, the repetition of the *dhikr*. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, *dhikr* is one of Islamic practice which its purpose to remember Allah and to purify the soul. Usually, the sentences that are uttered are tasbih (*Subhanallah*, meaning Glory be to Allah), tahlil (*La Ilaha illa Allah*), tahmid (*Alhamdulillah*, meaning all praise be to Allah), and takbir (*Allahu Akbar*, meaning Allah is Great) (Sari & Marhaban, 2023). There are more sentences, but those are the most uttered and common by Muslims daily. *Dhikr* is a religious practice which have no bound in time. This means that Muslim can perform *dhikr* anytime in a day. This worship practice also stated in the Quran, Al-Ahzab (33): 41,

O you who believe, remember Allah with frequent remembrance. (QS Al-Ahzab (33):41)

Another example, with different worship practice, the five-times prayer, as excerpt from the novel mentioned below.

At the gardens of Babur, he had lifted Masooma from the front seat of the car and carried her in his arm to the Mughal emperor's tomb. They had prayed there, the three of them, at Shah Jahan Mosque, and then, at the edge of a blue-tiled pool, they had eaten the meal Nabi had packed for them. (page 61-62)

From the excerpt above, the characters do the prayer as their form of faith in Islam. Muslims have to pray five times in a day. These prayers are also a symbol of Islam which the meaning is to show the faith and obey God. The moment when this five-times prayer obligation exists is the moment of Isra' Mi'raj (Nurhuda et al., 2023). It is the historical moment of the prayer's obligation and still being practiced till nowadays. This prayer obligation is stated in the Quran and explained more detail in Hadith. Allah says in the QS. Taha (20):14,

I—I am Allah. There is no God but I. So serve Me, and practice the prayer for My remembrance. (QS. Taha (20):14)

The verse from the Qur'an above, is one the verses in the Qur'an that order Muslims to pray and worship Allah. A hadith narrated Umar Bin Khatab once narrated the words of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that Islam is built on five pillars.

"From Abu Abdirrohman Umar bin Khattab said, that I heard Rasulullah SAW say that Islam is built on five things, namely: testifying that there is no god who has the right to be worshiped other than Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, establishing prayers, paying zakat, carrying out the pilgrimage to

Baitullah and fasting in the month of Ramadan”. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim) (Nurhuda et al., 2023)

From the Quran verse above, it is stated clearly that those who believe and follow Islam are told to remember Allah frequently. These examples of worship practices related with the concept of Islamic culture based on Sidi Gazalba’s statement which said that Islamic culture is a way of religious life based on Islamic teaching. As Muslims told to remember Allah frequently in daily life activities, the old men mentioned in the novel are surely performing this worship practice.

3. Social Norms

The teaching of Islam in Afghan is rooted and shared from generation to generation. This can shape the norms based on Islamic teaching. The norms can be in the form of how the society in the area interacts, treats or behave with each other. As in this case, the example that portrayed in the novel is that men and women should not be in the same room and interact freely. The first example is at the scene where Nila (Mrs. Wahdati) holds a party at her house. This scene is from Nabi’s point of view in a letter he wrote for Mr. Markos, a volunteer. He is comparing the difference between the party he had back then at Shadbagh and now at Kabul. He said that party at Shadbagh usually at wedding or to celebrate circumcision took two separate houses for men and women.

You must understand, Mr. Markos, that when we had parties in Shadbagh, be it for a wedding or to celebrate a circumcision, the proceeding took place at two separate houses, one for women, the other for us men. At Nila’s parties, men and women are mingled with one another. Most of the women dressed as Nila did, in dresses that showed the entire lengths of their arm and a good deal of their leg as well. They smoke, and they drank too, their glasses half filled with colorless or red – or copper-colored liquor, and they told jokes and laughed and freely touched the arms of men I knew to be married to someone else in the room.
(page 97)

According to Clifford’s culture theory, the symbols portrayed in the excerpt are faith and obey the religion’s rules. This symbol is shown in the context of social norm. The norm shows from the characters thought about the party situation that is opposing the teaching of Islam. According to Amer Al-Roubai, Islam built the Islamic civilization. In this context, Afghan’s norm puts high on following the teaching of Islam based on Quran and Hadith. It means that norms in society are basically derived from the teaching of religion which portrayed in the novel that men and women are not supposed to be mixed in one place.

Social norms that are applied in Afghanistan are based on Islam teaching. This is due to the rooted belief of Islam in Afghan society (Rofii, 2020). This norm is taught in Islam, and it is called *ikhtilat*. According to Ibnu Al-Qayyim, he defines that *ikhtilat* is the mixing of men and women who are not *mahram* in one place that allows them to see each other and interact directly without any restrictions (Ramli, 2016). This matter of *ikhtilat* also mentioned in the Quran, An-Nur (24): 30-31.

(30) Tell the believing men to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates. That is purer for them. Allah is cognizant of what they do. (31) And tell the believing women to restrain their looks, and to guard their privates, and not display their beauty except what is apparent thereof, and to draw their coverings over their breasts, and not expose their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, their brothers' sons, their sisters' sons, their women, what their right hands possess, their male attendants who have no sexual desires, or children who are not yet aware of the nakedness of women. And they should not strike their feet to draw attention to their hidden beauty. And repent to Allah, all of you believers, so that you may succeed. (QS An-Nur (24): 30-31)

In those verses, Allah told to His believers, both men and women, to lower their gaze from looking at anything that is forbidden and to guard their private parts from forbidden things or acts (Ramli, 2016).

Another example, similar with the previous case, from a scene where Afghanistan is at the recovery after war. A lot of volunteers come to help the country. Mentioned in the novel there is a girl patient at Wazir Akbar Khan Hospital is taken care by a Bosnian volunteer named Amra. The girl only has her uncle that sometimes visits the girl. The girl is placed at the end of the hallway of men wing of the hospital, because woman is not supposed to be in the men's room.

Amra said the only relative the girl had left – or the only one who visited – was her uncle, and if she'd been placed in the women's wing he would not be permitted to visit her. So the staff had placed her in the men's wing, not in a room – it would be indecent for the girl to room with men who are not relatives – but here, at the end of the hallway, a no-man's-and no-woman's-land. (page 133)

From the excerpt, the norm in the area is not allowing both genders mixing in the same room. It is also a symbol of the faith within the Afghans which it is meant to protect each other or prevent from unwanted things or acts between men and women as what Islam had taught its believers.

4. Islamic Word Expression

The word expressions that Muslim use to show their grateful, promise to someone, seeing the beauty of something are derived from Arabic. In the novel there are some expressions that the character uses while talking with others. For example, at the scene where Nabi takes his sisters to Kabul, in the second chapter, his sisters seem happy when they see places in Kabul. Then one of her sisters asked if he would take them to see Kabul again one day. And Nabi says “*Soon, Inshallah*” (page 62). According to Clifford's theory, this word expression is a symbol of faith in Islam. It is a word that used usually when making promises but not directly stated due to the limitation of knowing possible time in the future.

In Islam, breaking promise can be considered as a lie if it has intention not to fulfill it. Whereas if previously someone intended to fulfill the promise, then when the time comes, they

cannot fulfill their promise, then it is not considered as a lie. Therefore, because no one can predict what will happen in the future, then he should have included the sentence *Inshallah* (Utami & Akib, 2022). This matter also stated in the Quran, Al-Kahf (18): 23-24,

(23) And never say about anything, "I will do that tomorrow." (24) Without saying, "If Allah wills." And re-member your Lord if you forget, and say, "Perhaps my Lord will guide me to nearer than this in integrity." (QS Al-Kahf (18): 23-24)

According to Al-Munir's interpretation (*tafsir*) about those verses, when someone wants to do something tomorrow, they should rely first on Allah by saying *Inshallah* (God's willing). And if they forget to rely on Allah, then they should turn immediately to remember Allah (Utami & Akib, 2022). So, to minimize breaking the promise, Nabi instead using the word "*Inshallah*" as his form of showing faith and relying on God for what will happen in the future.

Another example, similar to the previous example, the scene when a character named Roshi was writing a letter for Idris. The letter was sent by Amra by her email.

Salaam, Kaka Idris,
Inshallah, you have arrived safely in America. I am sure that your family is very happy to see you. Every day I think about you. Every day I am watching the films you bought for me. I like them all. It all make me sad that you are not here to watch with me. I am feeling so good and Amra jan is taking good care of me. Please say Salaam to your family for me. Inshallah, we will see each other soon in California (page 165).

From this example, a scene about the letter which Roshi wrote for Idris, she also uses the word "*Inshallah*" when she heard that she would meet Idris in the States. Though that chance did not come, but at least she rise the hope and rely that on God. This word is part of showing the faith which its believers hope and rely everything on God's will as Sidi Gazalba has stated about Islamic culture is a way of religious life based on the Quran and Sunnah.

Characters' Interaction Influenced by Culture

The characters' interaction here is still in broad meaning. It is because every interaction shows different values based on Islamic teachings. According to Clifford, in his theory "Religion as a Cultural System", he defines religion as symbolic system that built a powerful, deep, and long-lasting moods and motivation in humans. Motivation is meaningful when someone look at the outcome they're trying to achieve, while moods are meaningful when someone looks at the situations that cause them (Geertz, 1993). The characters' interaction will be discussed in some values below.

1. Kindness and Sincerity

The characters's interaction is influenced by the teaching of religion. According to Clifford, religion is a system of symbol that built powerful, deep, and long-lasting moods and motivation in humans. By the existence of moods and motivation, the symbol of religion will grow and become meaningful. For example, Nabi, who has been working with Mr. Wahdati

for years, is doing his best to serve his employer. By the time his employer got sick, he will not leave and decide to stay and take care of his employer. Nabi's sincere heart shows whenever his employer, Mr. Wahdati is sick. He was asked to leave and quit his job with Mr. Wahdati, but Nabi refused to leave. Also, Nabi once asked to get the salary whatever he needs, but he politely answers that Mr. Wahdati doesn't have to think about that. A single sentence comes out to show his sincere about everything he did to take care of Mr. Wahdati is "I'm happy to do it" (page 111).

From the example, the moods interpret by the act of Nabi which he decided to help and take care of his employer happily. He did not ask for extra payment though his employer offered him. This Nabi's action shows his sincerity and kindness in helping people. The motivation for Nabi doing this act is mentioned in the Quran.

Sincerity is an element in character foundation. It is a moral and spiritual foundation which shaped humans to be more honest, sincere, and not looking to be praised back from people (Rofi et al., n.d.). Sincerity itself is part of an action, mostly good actions. In Islam, when someone do a good action, they will get rewards from God. So, most of the Muslims love to do a lot of good actions. Doing good action is mentioned and explained in both Quran, Al-Zalzalah (99):7-8.

(7) Whoever has done an atom's weight of good will see it. (8) And whoever has done an atom's weight of evil will see it. (QS. Al-Zalzalah (99):7-8)

These verses shows that every good and bad actions have their own rewards and consequences. This verse also be a motivation for Muslim to do more in good actions.

Another example, Nabi gives free stay for the volunteers. One if the volunteers name is Mr. Markos, a surgeon from Greece. Mr. Markos and his colleagues were looking for a guesthouse to stay in while at Kabul. They meet Nabi, the owner of the house that Mr. Markos had knocked on. Nabi, who is the owner of the house, gives free charge for staying at his house. Mr. Markos and his translator at the time were at an unbelievable moment. But still Nabi give the same answer. In addition, Nabi also gives the reason why he gives no charge for staying.

"You have left behind your country," I said, "your friends, your family, and you have come here to this godforsaken city to help my homeland and my countrymen. How could I profit off you?" (page 129)

From the excerpt, the character, Nabi, shows kindness when he was faced with people that are in need. That condition strongly shaped Nabi's mood and motivation. The mood that Nabi helps by providing a place to stay for the volunteers and not charging any fees while they are staying. The motivation is that God promised His believers that all actions have their reward and consequences as explained in the Quran verse previously. From those two examples, the character named Nabi does have a strong good character which shows the kindness and sincerity as Islam taught its believers.

2. The Strong Family Bond

The mood and motivation in this value, strong bond in a family, are shown in the novel. An example is when Nabi visits his sister and her family once a month. Nabi lives in Kabul, where he works for a wealthy couple, and his family lives in Shadbagh.

Uncle Nabi as Parwana's older brother and so he was really Abdullah's stepuncle. Uncle Nabi was a cook and a chauffeur in Kabul. Once a month, he drove from Kabul to visit them in Shadbagh. (page 26)

This matter of family bond shows that though Nabi lives far away from his family, he would spare his time to visit them once a month. According to Clifford's theory of religion as a cultural system, powerful moods and motivations shaped by religion. The mood that is interpreted from the example is Nabi's decision to visit his family once a month. The motivation that influences the mood is explained well in Hadith. In Islam, this kind of act is called *silaturahmi*. A hadith narrated by Bukhori, from Prophet Muhammad SAW,

"Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day, should unite the bond of kinship"
(Narrated by Bukhari: 6138).

From the hadith above, *silaturahmi* also indicates that a person has faith, this is because anyone who has faith will definitely obey what God commands (Diyanna et al., 2023). *Silaturrahmi* can be described as the act of reconnecting and strengthening bonds with others after a period of distance (Ghoni & Busro, 2022). From the same researcher also once stated that this kind of act explained in a Hadith narrated by Bukhari, number 5527, Prophet Muhammad SAW said,

"Whoever wants to expand his sustenance and delay or prolong his life, then let him fear Allah and connect the ties of love with his family" (Narrated by Bukhari:5527)

This hadith shows that family bond, *silaturahmi*, or acts that keep someone able to reconnect the relationship with their family, is taught by Islam. God promised for those who keep their kinship connected will gain fortunes and longevity in their life. As Islam is rooted in the most people of Afghanistan, Nabi, who is the character found in the novel, is motivated to visit his family because God had promised His believers a good reward as mentioned in Hadith previously.

3. Obeying the Elders

Pari, Abdullah's daughter, obeys her father's rule. Pari is a daughter that grown up with Islam which shown how Abdullah, her father, teach her to read bismillah before going to bed when she was a kid. And for the moment of Pari obeying her father's words is when one of Pari's friends asks her to join the swimming team. Pari refused to join. She even explained the reason why she cannot join the swimming team because she knows her parents will feel embarrassed if they see their daughter wearing a swimming suit in public.

The girl who sat behind me in Spanish, pale-skinned with freckles, was going out for the swim team, and she casually suggested one day, as we were clearing

our desk just after the bell, that I give it a shot too. She didn't understand. My parents would have been mortified if I wore a bathing suit in public. (page 361)

According to Clifford theory about religion, strong moods and motivations are shaped deeply by a system of symbols, which is religion. From the excerpt above, the mood interpreted is Pari's refusal to her friend's suggestion and choose to obey her parents. The motivation of her act is the obligation of obeying parents mentioned in the Quran.

In Islam, behavior towards someone older or parents are explained in the Quran and Hadith. Good behavior and treatment toward someone older or parents are called *Birru Walidain*. The word "*Birru*" in the Al-Munawwir dictionary it means obedient, well-behave, polite, and doing many good deeds. While the word "*al-Walidain*" means parents, mother and father (Astuti, 2021). When those two words are combined, it means doing all good deeds and obeying both parents, father and mother. A lot of Quran verses explain the urgency of *birru walidain*. For example, mentioned in Quran, Al-Isra (17): 23-24.

(23) Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him, and that you be good to your parents. If either of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, nor scold them, but say to them kind words. (24) And lower to them the wing of humility, out of mercy, and say, "My Lord, have mercy on them, as they raised me when I was a child."

From the verses above, the verses emphasize treating our parents nicely. Also not to disobey them nor saying "ah" (raising our voice) to our parents (Nurhidayah et al., 2023).

And for another example, is when Pari is taken to join the Farsi lesson. She begged to end the class, but her father refused. So, nothing that Pari can do except continuing the Farsi class.

Every Tuesday afternoon. After regular school, I sat in Farsi class and, like a fish made to swim upstream, tried to guide the pen, against my hand's own nature, from right to left. I begged Baba to end the Farsi classes, but he refused. He said I would appreciate later the gift he was giving me. (page 362)

From the excerpt, Pari's mood is to obey her father to learn Farsi. Her father told her that it is a good start to know the culture where he grown up back in Afghanistan. The motivation of Pari obeying her father is that in Islam had taught its believers to be good to their parents as mentioned in previous Quran verse. From the explanation about how Islam teach its believers to treat and obey their parents nicely, Pari who is the daughter of Abdullah shows her faith in Islam by obeying her parents.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study examines the Islamic culture and its impact on the characters' interactions in Khaled Hosseini's novel, *And the Mountains Echoed*. By applying Clifford Geertz's theory and drawing on Islamic figures, this novel effectively portrays Islamic cultures and their influence on the characters, particularly in Afghanistan, which serves as the novel's

backdrop. Islamic culture is a shared aspect of society that is closely tied to Islamic values and beliefs. The Islamic cultures depicted in the novel include Afghan women wearing hijabs, Islamic practices such as prayers and fasting, social norms, and certain expressions used by the characters in conversation. This Islamic culture strengthens the proof that Islam is rooted in Afghanistan. This impacted the characters' interactions with others, as they followed the teachings of Islam. This religious influence is evident in how the characters are kind and genuinely help those in need, maintain family connections despite being separated, and how they respect and obey their elders in daily life.

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