

Hancock (2005:06) .

## **ISLAMIC CULTURES IN PAULO COELHO'S "THE ALCHEMIST" BASED ON CULTURAL STUDIES**

**Bambang Irawan**

### **Abstract:**

*The objective of this study is to find out Islamic cultures presented in the novel The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho. Qualitative method was used in analyzing the data. The data is collected from a novel entitled "The Alchemist". The data is taken from narration which is narrated by the author, setting narrated by the author and the dialogues of the characters. So, the data is in essay forms. Then, the data is classified to find cultures presented in the novel by using the theory of cultural study. As the results, there are four categories of Islamic cultures. They are shepherd, caravan, broker and commission, and falconry.*

Keywords: novel, cultural studies, Islamic cultures

### **INTRODUCTION**

Novel is really interesting to be read. Most people prefer to read novel because novel is easy to understand. Novel is a new kinds of literature, because compared to other kinds of literature such as poetry or drama, novel is a relative newcomer. One of differences between novel and other kinds of literature can be seen from the length of literary works. Eagleton (2005: 1) states that novel is a piece of prose fiction of a reasonable length. It means that novel is a kind of prose fiction which tells its story in narrative form and has reasonable length. According to Spurgin (2006: 3), "Novels are works of fiction, they are written in prose and they are usually at least 150 to 200 pages long." From the statement above, it can be concluded that length of the novel is at least 150 to 200 pages long. Novel is not only long but also complex and deals especially with human experiences through an usually connected sequence events. Novel is written not only to entertain readers but also to understand more about life, culture, etc because novel is usually influenced by culture around the author. There are a lot of cultures provided in a novel. One of them is Islamic culture.

Islamic culture becomes one of the most popular cultures in the world. Islamic culture has already spread around the world. Even, Islamic culture can be easily found in some literary works such as novel. One of the novels that provides Islamic culture is *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho.

Paulo Coelho is a Brazilian author who lives in Sao Paulo, Brazil. He has written many famous novels, such as *The Pilgrimage*, *By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept* and *Veronica Decides to Die*. All of those novels have been international bestsellers. Because of his works, Paulo Coelho recently became a member of the prestigious Brazilian Academy of Letters and won the Planetary Arts Award. He also has received numerous awards, including Chevalier de L'Orde national de la Legion d'Honneur in France. Besides, he has twice been a finalist for the International Impact Literary Award.

*The Alchemist* is his most beloved book. It has sold more than 21 million copies worldwide and has been the first bestseller in 39 countries. This is really wise and inspiring novel. Coelho shares a lot of messages in this novel that is easy to be digested by readers. So many cultures shown perfectly those readers can take benefit or values easily from them. It shows not only European cultures especially Spanish but also Arabic culture that contains a lot of Islamic values.

The writer is interested to analyze Islamic values in the novel *The Alchemist* for some reasons. Firstly, there are so many different cultures presented in this novel such as Spanish culture and Arabic culture. Culture is really interesting to be discussed especially the cultures that come from other countries.

Secondly, a lot of different cultures presented in this novel contain a lot of values especially Islamic values. Values are very important for the people to improve their morality. With this reason as a basis, the writer intends to reveal Islamic values in the novel *The Alchemist*.

Based on the reasons above, the writer of this study is interested to analyze *The Alchemist* focusing on Islamic cultures in it.

There are some studies about culture that have already been done. One of them was conducted by Puspani. In her thesis entitled "The semantic features of the terms related to Balinese Culture in the novel *Sukreni Gadis Bali* and their translation in *The Rape of Sukreni*", Puspani discusses about the terms related to Balines culture and their semantic component analysis.

There is also another study that was conducted by Utami. In her thesis entitled "Semantic Features of Balinese Culture Terms Equivalence in the short story *Tukang Gambar*

translated into *Painter*, Utami used the theories from Newmark (1988) about cultural aspect and Lasson (1977) about semantic features of cultural terms.

The other study was done by Parthama who discusses about Balinese cultural terms in his thesis entitled “ The translation of Balinese religious terms in the article series *Mengapa Bali Disebut Pulau Dewata* into *The Island of Thousand Temple*”

Similar to this study, those studies above also explained about culture. However, this study is a bit different from these studies because this study focuses on Islamic culture while those studies above focus on Balinese culture especially terms related to Balinese culture.

## **METHOD**

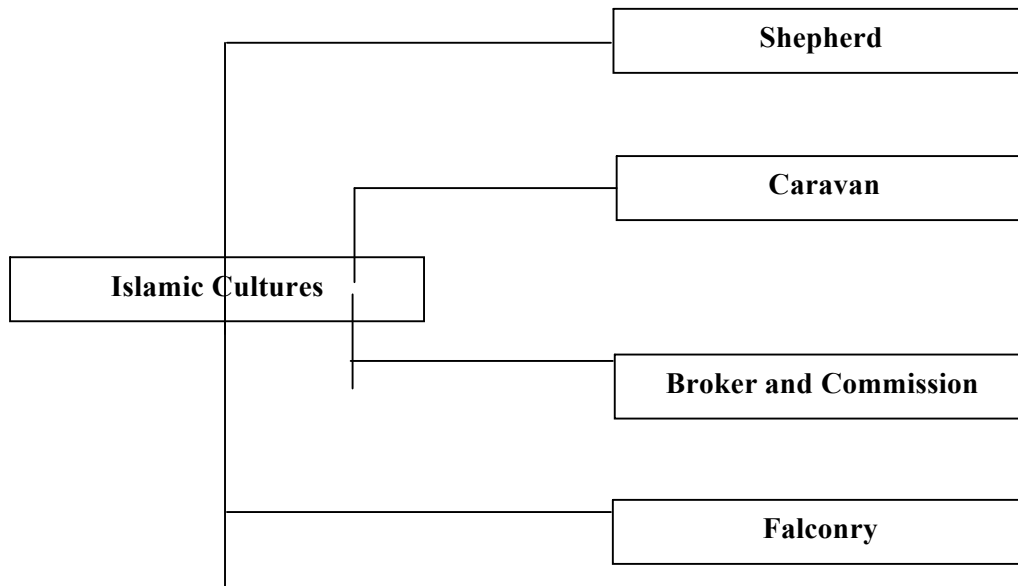
In this study, a theory about cultural study from During (2005) is applied because this theory related to cultures which are going to analyze in this study. During (2003: 1) states that cultural study is an academic field that we can define, without messing about, as the engaged analysis of contemporary cultures. Based on those three statements above, it can be concluded that cultural study concerns with culture, humanities and social sciences. During’s theory is used to find out cultures presented in the novel entitled “*The Alchemist*”.

While, theory from Yahya (2009) is also applied to find, analyze and categorize Islamic cultures in the novel. Yahya (2009: 26) states that some cultures practices are considered acceptable simply because they do not contradict any Islamic principles. It means that Islam has a distinct culture. Islamic cultures are not Arabic or Eastern or Middle Eastern but it has varieties and rich diversities. There are elements in Islamic culture that are constant and universally accepted by all Moslem but there are also elements that are different from country to country and people to people. The universals are based on the Quran and Sunnah while the variables are based on local customs of various people. Thus, Islamic cultures actually exist in every culture in the world such as in Indonesia that can be called as Indonesian Islamic Culture.

There are several steps in analyzing data in this study. First is collecting data. The data is collected from a novel entitled “*The Alchemist*”. The data is taken from narration which is narrated by the author, setting narrated by the author and the dialogues of the characters. So, the data is in essay forms. Then, the data is classified to find cultures presented in the novel by using the theory of cultural study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Islamic Cultures Presented in *The Alchemist*



**Chart 1: Categories of Islamic Cultures in *The Alchemist***

As can be seen in the overview charts, Islamic cultures presented in the novel entitled *The Alchemist* consist of four categories. They are shepherd, caravan, Islamic trading and falconry. The discussion of each category is given below.

#### **Shepherd**

In *The Alchemist*, the main character named Santiago works as a shepherd who lives together with his sheep and take cares his sheep.

*He decided to spend the night there. He saw to it that all the sheep entered through the ruined gate, and then laid some planks across it to prevent the flock from wandering away during the night. There were no wolves in the region, but once an animal had strayed during the night, and the boy had had to spend the entire next day searching for it (p.5).*

*"I need to sell some wool," the boy told the merchant.*

*The shop was busy and the man asked the shepherd to wait until the afternoon. So the boy sat on the steps of the shop and took a book from his bag (p.7).*

Shepherd is considered as one of the oldest occupations in the world that has been existed since six thousands years ago. Shepherd itself means one who tends and rears sheep. According to Oxford Dictionary, shepherd is person who take care sheep (2011: 406). The

shepherd usually breeds sheep to take its meat, milk and fur. The small number of sheep is usually bred in family husbandry while the big number is pastured in pasture.

Shepherd has existed because of the need to protect sheep from the attack of wolves. Shepherds wander from one pasture to others to find the best grass as feed of their sheep and also to find the save place. The best place for the shepherd is the place where there are not wolves or other carnivores that have possibility to slay their sheep. For the shepherd, sheep is more than cattle. Sheep is friends for them that they must protect well. So, protecting the sheep is the main duty of shepherd.

Santiago is really careful in protecting his sheep. He always searches the best place not only for himself but also his sheep. He always chooses a place where there are not wolves and a place which provides good grass for his sheep. It is narrated as follows.

*He decided to spend the night there. He saw to it that all the sheep entered through the ruined gate, and then laid some planks across it to prevent the flock from wandering away during the night. There were no wolves in the region, but once an animal had strayed during the night, and the boy had had to spend the entire next day searching for it (p.5).*

Besides protecting the sheep from the attack of wolves or other carnivores, shepherd also has some duties. Selling wool is one of them. Shepherds usually shear his sheep once a year to take wool and sell it. Wool is one of the products that give money to the shepherd besides milk and meat. A good shepherd knows the best time to shear his sheep and come to the merchant to sell wool every year.

Santiago also does the same. He knows the best time when he has to come to the merchant who wants to buy his wool. He usually comes to the merchant at least once a year. It is narrated as follows.

*But finally the merchant appeared, and asked the boy to shear four sheep. He paid for the wool and asked the shepherd to come back the following year (p.8).*

Shepherd is also required to be able to recognize all of his sheep. It is really important for the shepherd to find his sheep if his sheep is being lost. Shepherd must be able to recognize not only physical appearance of his sheep but also their behaviors. It helps the shepherd to be more thoughtful in taking care of his sheep. Shepherd will also easily understand the needs and condition of his sheep whether his sheep is getting sick or not. So, relationship between shepherd and his sheep is more than just relationship between human and animals.

Santiago as a good shepherd has already fulfilled the requirements to recognize his sheep. Even, he names all his sheep. He usually talks with his sheep and believes that his sheep are able to understand what he says. About this, it is narrated as follows.

*The boy prodded them, one by one, with his crook, calling each by name. He had always believed that the sheep were able to understand what he said (p.6).*

To be a shepherd is not easy. It needs high consequences such as living as a nomad. Shepherd has to be a nomad to find good pasture or field. In finding new pasture, shepherd also has to face many risks such as the attack of wolves. Because of those high consequences, Santiago's father tries to prohibit his son to be a shepherd and asks him to be a priest.

*One afternoon, on a visit to his family, he had summoned up the courage to tell his father that he didn't want to become a priest. That he want to travel (p.10).*

*"Well, then I'll be a shepherd!"*

*His father said no more. The next day, he gave his son a pouch that held three ancient Spanish gold coins.*

*"I found these one day in the fields. I wanted them to be a part of your inheritance. But use them to buy your flock. Take to the fields, and some day you'll learn that our country side is the best, and our women the most beautiful (p. 11)."*

However, because of his determination, Santiago decides to be a shepherd and starts leaving his house and living as a nomad. He lives among his sheep and wanders from one pasture to other pastures to find grass and water.

In Islam, shepherd is also considered as one of the oldest occupations. Even, one of Adam's sons named Habil was a shepherd. The Great Prophet Muhammad SAW was also a shepherd but he did not breed his own sheep. Our Prophet Muhammad SAW had become a shepherd because he wanted to help his uncle who had taken care of him. He chose shepherd to his job because Mecca at the time was a desert. There were not many occupations provided at the time and being a shepherd was the best choice because it didn't require particular skill.

In Prophet Muhammad's era, shepherd was not considered as a prestigious job. Shepherds did not pasture their own sheep but they pasture someone's sheep and they would be given fee. So, shepherd was not considered as a prestigious job and even shepherd was considered equal with labors.

Although shepherd was considered as a prestigious job, Islam considers shepherd as a noble job. Shepherd does not contradict the two main Islamic principles, Quran and Hadith. Moreover, shepherd is an occupation which had been done by Prophets.

Shepherd is considered as part of culture because it is related to human life. The relationship between shepherd and human life can be seen clearly in role of shepherd toward human life such as in economy. Shepherd gives a lot of contributions in economy especially in producing some commodities such as wool, meat and milk. The commodities produced by shepherd are absolutely involved in trading which is one of economic activities. Shepherd is also considered as an Islamic culture because it does not contradict the two main Islamic principles, Quran and Hadith.

### **Caravan**

After deciding to wander to find his treasure in Egypt, Santiago joins caravan to go to Egypt and he gets a lot of new experiences.

*"You're in luck, you two," the fat Arab said, "There's a caravan leaving today for Al-Fayoum."*

*"But I'm going to Egypt," the boy said.*

*"Al-Fayoum is in Egypt," said the Arab (p. 72).*

Caravan itself means a group of people, especially traders or pilgrims, traveling together across a desert. Oxford Dictionary (2011: 60) states that caravan is group of people and animals traveling across a desert. Caravan which involves hundreds people and hundreds animals such as camel and horse has been existed especially in desert as main transportation to reach other areas.

Caravan is led by a leader who has all controls and responsibilities over the caravan he leads. The leader is helped by a guide who has responsibility to guide caravan to reach its destination. There are usually more than one guide in caravan. If the main guide is getting sick or die, the leader will draw lots to appoint a new one. The leader is also helped by camel drivers who have been trained martial art to protect all members of caravan because desert is really wild and unpredictable. There so many robbers and hijackers which have possibilities to threaten caravan.

Caravan always travels in the morning and halts when the sun is at its strongest, and resumes late in the afternoon. In the evening, caravan is stop to take a rest. Some of camel drivers stay up late to guard the members who are taking a bed. The guide usually uses compass or sighting on a star to indicate the location of oasis. Caravan must stop by every oasis to fulfill water and other daily needs. Caravan stays for a couple days in oasis before continuing its travel.

For traders, caravan is really important to carry their merchandises from one market to other ones. It means, the existence of caravan gives contribution in economic because

caravan is able to distribute some commodities from one area to others ones. Without caravan, it will be more difficult for people who live in a desert to get their needs. Besides, caravan also gives a chance for people whose area is stopped by caravan to earn money by trading.

Nowadays, caravan is used not only for transportation but also tourism. In some countries such as Union of Arab Emirates which have deserts as part of their territory, use caravan as one of their tourism attraction. Even, caravan becomes popular in those countries and most of tourists who come to those countries intend to watch caravan. Tourists will be offered not only to watch caravan but also experience as members of caravan. They will be offered to take journey across a desert by using caravan to give experience of being members of caravan.

Caravan is considered as a culture because it relates to human life. Caravan gives contribution in some aspects of human life such as transportation, economy and also tourism. Besides, caravan is also considered as one of Islamic cultures because it does not contradict Quran and Hadith. Moreover, caravan was usually used by Rasulullah SAW in running his trading. In the beginning of Rasullulah era, caravan also gave contribution in economy. At the time, caravan was able to give profit almost 250 thousands dinar a year. Ustman bin Affan, one of Rasulullah's best friends also had caravan which gave profit almost 50 thousands dinar. So, caravan is considered as an Islamic culture because it doesn't contradict Quran and Hadith and it was also used by Rasulullah SAW in trading.

### **Commission and Broker**

In pursuit his treasure, Santiago gets a trouble in an area named Tangier. He does not know where he should go. He also does not have money anymore. In his desperation, Santiago is finally hired by a crystal merchant. He gets commission for every piece crystal he sells.

*But he stayed with the job because the merchant, although he was an old grouch, treated him fairly; the boy received a good commission for each piece he sold, and already been able to put some money aside (p. 53).*

Commission itself means an amount of money, typically a set percentage of the value involved, paid to an agent in commercial transaction. According to Oxford Dictionary (2011: 84), commission is amount of money paid to somebody who sells goods for making a sale. Commission is given to someone who sells someone's goods and usually called as a broker.



Broker is usually hired to help a merchant to sell his goods. It means, there is a relationship between two persons or more in trade. Besides, broker is usually asked to be a mediator between the merchant and buyer. A broker gives information about goods which are going to be sold to buyer. After selling goods, a broker will receive commission as compensation for making sale.

Broker and commission are parts of culture which are related to human life especially in trade. The existence of broker is really important in making relationship among people in trade. Broker and commission are also considered as Islamic cultures because they do not contradict the main principles of Islam, Quran and Hadith.

In Islam, helping someone to sell his/her goods in order to get commission is called as “*samarah*” and broker or a person who does *samarah* is called “*simsaar*”. Broker and commission are allowed in Islam because they give benefit not only for broker but also merchant and buyer. Broker can help people who are not able to negotiate well in trade and people who are not able to find customers.

### **Falconry**

When Santiago is in a journey to reach Pyramid in Egypt with the Alchemist, the tribesmen stop them.

*On the following day, the first clear sign of danger appeared. Three armed tribesmen approached, and asked what the boy and the alchemist were doing there.*

*“I’m hunting with my falcon,” the alchemist answered.*

Hunting by using a falcon is one of cultures in Middle East which has been existed since 8<sup>th</sup> B.C. Hunting by using a falcon is called as Falconry. Falconry is considered as one of the oldest sports in the world. Long time ago, falconry was played by all people especially who live in Middle East or in a desert. The kinds of falcon that was used for falconry determined social class of people. So, each falcon showed different social class. For example, The King usually used *gyrfalcon* while a slaver used *goshawk*.

Those who do falconry are called as falconers. Falconers have to catch falcon in the jungle and train it to be able to cooperate with human. Although all kinds of falcon can be trained, falconers usually choose particular falcons to train. They choose a falcon which has good ability in hunting and good adaptation in every environment.

In the beginning, falconry was done purely to get food, but nowadays falconry is done as sport. Although falconry now is not as popular as it was, it still exists even in tropic country which does not have desert such as Indonesia. In some countries such as Union of

Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, falconry is taught from generation to generation. Falconers usually take their children to a desert and teach them how to be a falconer. To prevent falconry from extinction, some countries in Middle East and Europe proposed it as a world cultural heritage to UNESCO in 2010. UNESCO finally admitted falconry as world cultural heritage in the same year.

However, in its development, falconry always gets pressure and critics from activists of international animal protection. The activists criticize falconry as an activity which exploits scarce animals because falcon which is used in falconry is considered as a scarce animal. Although falconry always gets pressure and critics, it remains as an amazing culture that has to be protected from extinction.

Falconry as a culture of Arabic is considered as Islamic culture too. Falconry does not contradict two main Islamic principles, Quran and Hadith. In Islam, hunting by using an animal is permitted as long as it is done with the name of Allah and the falconers take the advantages of hunting results like to eat.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

There are Islamic cultures found in *The Alchemist* novel, based on theories of During (2005) and Yahya (2009), they are: shepherd, caravan, broker and commission, and falconry. Shepherd is considered as a culture because it involves in human life. Shepherd is an occupation which has ever been done by most prophets in Islam. As it does not contradict the two main principles of Islam, it is also considered as Islamic culture. Caravan is also considered as a culture as its contribution to human life especially in economy and transportation. So Rasulullah SAW also used caravan in running his business that caravan is considered as Islamic culture. Then, broker and commission are also considered as cultures as they give contributions to human life especially in trade and business. As Islam allows broker and commission to be done, they are considered as Islamic cultures. The last culture presented in *The Alchemist* is falconry. Falconry is considered as one of the oldest sports in the world. Falconry is hunting by using falcon to kill a prey. Hunting by using an animal to kill the prey is not prohibited in Islam.

This study is regarded as a contribution to the teaching of English literature, especially in relation to discuss its content and how to apply cultural perspective in analyzing a novel. The results of the study are expected to be able to improve not only knowledge about cultures over the world but also morality in society.

The first suggestion is addressed to readers especially the students of literature to read The Alchemist novel as it provides many cultures especially Islamic cultures and also Islamic values which can be applied in daily life. The second suggestion is The Alchemist novel is recommended to be used as one of the selected novels in teaching material of English literature as it is good in relation to the content. The last suggestion is addressed to other English Department students who are interested in analyzing novel to cultures found in other novels by using the latest theory.

## REFERENCES

- Abrams. (1999). *A glossary of literary terms* (7th Ed). USA: Heinle & Heinle
- Berg, L Burg. (2001). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. California: California State University Press.
- Coelho, Paulo. (1993). *the alchemist*. New York: Collins Publisher
- During, Simon. (2005). *Cultural studies: a critical introduction*. New York: Routledge
- Eagleton, Terry. (2005). *The English novel: an introduction*. Oxford: Black Well Publishing
- Oxford. (2011). *Oxford learner's pocket dictionary* (4th Ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Parthama. (2009). *the translation of Balinese religious terms in the article series Mengapa Bali Disebut Pulau Dewata into The Island of Thousand Temple*. Unpublished under graduate thesis. Bali: Udayana University
- Puspani. (2009). *The semantic features of the terms related to Balinese Culture in the novel Sukreni Gadis Bali and their translation in The Rape of Sukreni*. Unpublished under graduate thesis. Bali: Udayana University
- Utami. (2007). "Semantic Features of Balinese Culture Terms Equivalence in the short story *Tukang Gambar translated into Painter*". Unpublished undergraduate thesis. Bali: Udayana University
- Yahya, Ibrahim. (2009). *what is Islamic culture?* Nigeria: Da'wah Institute of Nigeria