

READING IRAQ FROM INDONESIA: DIALOGUES BETWEEN IRAQI LITERATURE AND INDONESIAN SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses a critical gap in global literary discourse, the near absence of Southeast Asian perspectives in interpreting Arab post-secular fiction. While Iraqi literature is often analyzed within Middle Eastern frameworks, this study argues for a necessary transregional approach. Focusing on Inaam Kachachi's Tashari, it examines how the Christian-Iraqi protagonist, Wardiyah Iskandar, whose narrative embodies sacred agency, ritual memory, and moral dislocation, resonates ethically and affectively within Indonesia's pluralistic, post-authoritarian, and culturally contested context. The study aims to: (1) analyze the reinterpretation of Iraqi post-secular narratives through Indonesia's sociocultural and religious context; (2) reveal ethical and spiritual rearticulations emerging from transregional encounters; and (3) reframe Arab trauma fiction through Southeast Asian hermeneutics. Methodologically, it adopts an interdisciplinary qualitative approach combining post-secular literary theory, sociocultural analysis, and comparative hermeneutics. A close reading of Tashari is conducted alongside Indonesia's discourses on interfaith pluralism, spiritual fragmentation, and moral reformulation. The dialogic mapping reveals interpretive pathways neglected by dominant paradigms. The findings show that Tashari functions as a transregional ethical archive, a literary space where theological boundaries blur, interfaith solidarities form, and sacred dissent emerges. Indonesian readers, shaped by histories of colonialism, authoritarianism, and religious negotiation, actively reconstruct the novel's moral and spiritual meanings, transforming Iraqi suffering into a shared space of ethical reflection and collective mourning. This study proposes a new model of transregional literary ethics, demonstrating how post-secular fiction mediates cross-cultural understanding, rehumanizes the other, and generates transformative moral and spiritual resistance across contested geographies.

Keywords: Iraqi Literature, Literary Voice, Tashari, Transregional Ethic

INTRODUCTION

This study argues that contemporary Arabic literature, particularly from conflict zones such as Iraq, transcends its role as a chronicle of historical trauma to become a transformative space redefining ethical and spiritual subjectivities (Dash & Hazarika, 2025; al Shaykh, 2022; Mamoud, 2021). Iraqi works such as Inaam Kachachi's *Tashari* engage metaphorically with Indonesia's complex socio-religious context, exploring faith, identity, and

memory beyond the limits of conflict (Podis, 2020; Toman, 2023).

This study also examines lesser-known texts that challenge colonial binaries and represent marginalized bodies through dominant aesthetic forms (Aslami, 2020; Jane Hu, 2020). It addresses two major gaps: the lack of Southeast Asian perspectives in the reception and interpretation of Arab post-secular literature, and the absence of a transregional framework connecting Arab and Southeast Asian epistemologies to explore shared yet differently articulated

experiences of faith, trauma, and moral dislocation.

By examining how Inaam Kachachi's *Tashari* (2013) exemplifies this evolving literary shift, interweaving national trauma with personal faith, rooted in the post-2003 Iraqi context yet resonating beyond Iraq's borders (Pozzoli, 2023; Zeidel, 2020); Kadhim, 2023), this study investigates how Indonesian readers interpret themes such as sacred agency and moral dislocation. It contributes to the revision of literary and cultural paradigms from a postcolonial perspective (Brugioni, 2021), uncovering new ethical and spiritual dialogues amid ongoing religion-state tensions (Giling, 2025).

For Indonesia, a Muslim-majority, post-authoritarian society actively grappling with religious plurality, *Tashari* mirrors shared human experiences and provokes a critical re-evaluation of faith, collective memory, and moral imagination (Hefner, 2020; Subekti, 2024). Despite its potential relevance, few studies have engaged with the novel in Southeast Asian contexts or applied frameworks that capture its spiritual and ethical complexities beyond trauma discourse (Al Jubouri, 2019; Ghanim, 2022). This oversight creates a critical gap in literary criticism and interdisciplinary studies, hindering deeper understanding of how literary imagination transcends geographical and theological boundaries to illuminate universal struggles (Wood, 2021).

This research explores how Iraqi post-secular literary narratives are interpreted within Indonesia's pluralistic and post-authoritarian sociocultural context, one marked by social violence and crises unresolved by international politics (Peterson, 2021). It examines how *Tashari*'s themes resonate with Indonesian readers navigating religious plurality, political reform, and spiritual fragmentation, emphasizing the importance of religious liberty for democratic life (Audi, 2020).

Grounded in post-secular theory and transnational literary ethics, the study challenges the secularization thesis that marginalizes religion (Habermas, 2008; Asad, 2003; Taylor, 2007) and conceptualizes spiritual discourse as moral resistance. Transnational ethics underscores literature's capacity to foster moral engagement across cultures (Mustonen, 2024). Through narrative imagination, literature cultivates empathy and cosmopolitan ethical responsibility (Nussbaum, 1997; Appiah, 2006; Robbins, 2018), contributing to global ethical citizenship and postcolonial resistance (Gallien, 2020; Yacoubi, 2020).

Although Arabic literature circulates globally in translation, the ethical and spiritual dimensions of Iraqi fiction remain underexplored, particularly through a Global South comparative lens that differentiates between belief and action (McBraide, 2022). While Cooke (2014) calls for a global feminist reading of Arab women's war literature, and Al Aqeedi (2021) highlights the erasure of Iraq's intellectual class in *Tashari*, few studies have examined its reception in non-Arab Muslim societies such as Indonesia, contexts defined by religious pluralism and colonial histories (Purwanto, 2023; Goswami, 2022).

This study bridges that gap by examining the dialogue between Iraqi fiction and Indonesia's socio-religious discourse, emphasizing the mediation of faith, identity, and collective memory (Choudhary, 2024). In Indonesia's unique context, where religious pluralism intersects with Islamic principles and post-authoritarian democracy, *Tashari*'s aesthetics of scattered faith resonate profoundly. Despite cultural and linguistic distance, the novel provokes reflection on Indonesia's moral negotiations surrounding religious difference, spiritual memory, and ethical identity formation (Effendy, 2023; Nurkholis, 2024).

This study asks how Kachachi's *Tashari* articulates a post-secular ethics of

exile and how it resonates with Indonesia's socio-religious discourse through transnational literary imagination. It contributes to scholarship in world literature, comparative ethics, and Islamic postcolonial thought (Khan, 2024), arguing that fiction such as *Tashari* shapes ethical imagination and spiritual solidarity across borders.

By addressing the overlooked absence of Southeast Asian interpretive frameworks in the reception of Arab post-secular fiction, this research makes a significant contribution to comparative and transnational literary studies (Zhao, 2020). Through a reading of *Tashari* within Indonesia's plural context, it demonstrates how Indonesian readers produce transformative interpretations that challenge established paradigms. By foregrounding Indonesian perspectives, this study disrupts geopolitical hierarchies of knowledge and asserts Southeast Asia's intellectual agency in global literary discourse. Ultimately, it affirms literature's power to reshape ethical imaginaries, transcend theological boundaries, and build solidarities across divided regions.

Literature Review

Scholarship on *Tashari* has largely centered on war, memory, exile, and gender but rarely theorized its post-secular dimensions beyond singular religious narratives (Sobhani, 2021). This review identifies gaps in examining the novel's ethical resonance across non-Arab Muslim contexts, especially within Indonesia's complex socio-religious discourse.

1. National Fragmentation, Ethical Subjectivity, and Post-2003 Iraqi Fiction

Pozzoli (2023) situates *Tashari* within post-Saddam Iraqi fiction, emphasizing its narrative authority and dialogic engagement with multiple audiences. However, his analysis overlooks the novel's religious and ethical

aesthetics and their relation to post-secularism. Likewise, Zeidel (2020) explores how Iraqi fiction reconstructs pluralistic national identity after 2003, highlighting literature's resistance to politicized identity but without theorizing faith as an ethical or aesthetic mode or considering its reception beyond Arab contexts. This study addresses these gaps by foregrounding *Tashari*'s post-secular dimensions and its ethical resonance in Indonesia's socio-religious milieu.

2. Secularism, Gender, and Exilic Readings of *Tashari*

Rasha Al Aqeedi (2021) offers an important feminist reading of *Tashari*, focusing on how Wardiyah Iskandar embodies the tragic erasure of Iraq's educated, pluralist elite. Al Aqeedi interprets the novel as an elegy for Iraq's cosmopolitan past, especially for its religious minorities. Although her analysis is sociologically rich, it does not theorize the sacred or post-secular dimensions inherent in Wardiyah's narrative voice, nor does it explore how the novel constructs religious ethics beyond sectarian boundaries.

Miriam Cooke (2014), while not writing specifically on *Tashari*, advocates for reading Arab women's war literature as sites of global ethical engagement. In *Dancing in Damascus*, she argues that narratives by women from conflict zones serve as creative acts of resilience, producing alternative archives of moral and spiritual survival (Cooke, 2014). Cooke's framework provides valuable insights for interpreting fragmented storytelling as a ritualized form of ethical narration. However, her focus remains largely confined to the Middle East and does not extend to transnational Muslim-majority contexts such as Indonesia. This study extends Cooke's theoretical lens by situating *Tashari* within Indonesia's plural socio-religious context, revealing how its ethical and spiritual reverberations engage

with local experiences of faith, moral rupture, and cultural resilience.

3. Post-secularism and Literary Ethics in Fiction

On the theoretical level, Habermas (2008) proposes that post-secular societies must integrate religious and secular reasoning within a shared civic space, emphasizing the importance of translation and ethical coexistence. Complementing this view, Taylor (2007) observes that even within secularized contexts, individuals continue to seek transcendence within immanent frameworks, leading to the emergence of hybrid spiritual subjectivities. These perspectives are essential for understanding *Tashari* as a post-secular literary aesthetic in which exile does not mark the death of faith but its ethical reconstruction.

Asad (2003) complicates secular narratives by demonstrating how state and colonial power shape the very terms through which religion becomes visible and intelligible. His analysis is crucial for understanding Wardiyah's multifaceted religious subjectivity, which resists both Western humanitarian discourse and Iraqi sectarianism (Asad, 2003). As Ihsan (2025,) notes, Western epistemology operates within a rationalist paradigm that often excludes embodied spirituality.

In terms of literary ethics, Nussbaum (1997) and Appiah (2006) offer foundational arguments that literature cultivates a cosmopolitan moral imagination. Nussbaum emphasizes fiction's capacity to humanize distant others, while Appiah stresses the dialogical nature of narrative ethics, which fosters cross-cultural moral responsibility. However, neither directly addresses non-Western to non-Western literary encounters, such as the reading of Iraqi fiction within Indonesian contexts.

This study bridges two critical gaps in both *Tashari* scholarship and transnational literary studies. First, while existing research recognizes *Tashari*'s

significance in articulating pluralistic and feminist memory, it has not examined the novel as a post-secular text that mobilizes religious aesthetics and spiritual discourse as forms of ethical resistance. Second, no current study theorizes how *Tashari* circulates within the Global South, particularly in Muslim-majority, post-authoritarian contexts such as Indonesia, where readers encounter the text through shared matrices of religious plurality, moral rupture, and cultural resilience. This reception activates moral recognition and deepens understandings of religious pluralism in the Indonesian context.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon two intersecting paradigms, including post-secular literary theory and transnational literary ethics, to analyze *Tashari*'s narrative of dispersed faith and moral subjectivity within and beyond the Iraqi context.

1. Post-secular Literary Theory: Sacred Meaning Beyond Institutional Religion

Post-secular theory challenges the secularization thesis that modernity inevitably marginalizes religion (Lopez, 2021). It examines how religious imaginaries persist and re-emerge as moral, political, and aesthetic forces in modern life (Bennett, 2024). Habermas (2008) defines the post-secular condition as mutual recognition between religious and secular perspectives, while Taylor (2007) describes the tension between immanent life and the longing for transcendence. These ideas illuminate *Tashari*'s engagement with faith, ethics, and identity in a globalized world.

Asad (2003) views secularism as a normative power regulating religious expression and ethics. His focus on embodied religiosity informs the reading of Wardiyah Iskandar, whose Christian identity becomes a mobile ethical commitment within exile (Farouki, 2024). Her resistance to sectarian binaries and

ritual remembrance reflect what Scott (2017) calls “sacred defiance”, a moral stance against political violence and secular normalization. Thus, *Tashari* enacts a post-secular aesthetic where prayer, memory, and displacement function as ethical acts of survival and resistance.

2. Transnational Literary Ethics: Fiction as Moral Imagination Across Borders

While post-secular theory reveals *Tashari*’s spiritual discourse, transnational literary ethics foregrounds its cross-cultural moral imagination. Nussbaum (1997) argues that fiction cultivates empathy toward ethical frameworks different from one’s own, while Appiah (2006) defines cosmopolitan reading as ethical dialogue fostering openness to others (see also Patel, 2024). This framework underpins Global South solidarities grounded in shared histories of imperialism and pluralism (Gallien, 2020). Ridgeon, as cited in Al Hassan (2023), adds that spiritual narratives embed moral instruction within mystical discourse, clarifying *Tashari*’s ethical and spiritual reach across cultures.

Drawing on reader-response theory (Fish, 1980) and contextual hermeneutics (Ricœur, 1981), this study examines how Indonesian readers reinterpret Wardiyah’s exile, memory, and faith. Fish’s notion of meaning as community-based (1980) and Ricœur’s concept of narrative identity (1981; Chen, 2024) together frame Wardiyah’s endurance as relational and ethical rather than purely theological. Within Indonesia’s post-Reformation pluralism, *Tashari* resonates with social dynamics of faith and coexistence, showing how readers ethically reconstruct a Christian-Iraqi experience.

By integrating post-secular and transnational literary ethics, this study positions *Tashari*, an Iraqi novel, as a shared moral space that invites Indonesian readers into acts of world-making. Wardiyah’s religious ambivalence, ethical

mourning, and sacred voice evoke transnational identification among Indonesians negotiating Islam, modernity, and pluralism. Thus, *Tashari* emerges as a post-secular archive of sacred endurance, and its Indonesian reception demonstrates literature’s ethical power to bridge cultural and moral boundaries across the Global South.

RESEARCH METHOD

This This qualitative study employs close reading and transregional literary analysis, integrating post-secular literary criticism, transnational ethics, and reader-contextual hermeneutics. It examines how Kachachi’s fiction reconfigures spiritual identity, memory, and ethical belonging across geopolitical and religious boundaries, particularly within Indonesia’s socio-religious context (Sharma, 2024). Through interpretive literary criticism, it challenges dominant epistemologies of literary analysis (Anderson, 2020), focusing not on thematic summaries but on key passages that reveal sacred agency, ritualized memory, and moral dislocation.

Using an Indonesian hermeneutic lens, the analysis interprets *Tashari* through the nation’s sociocultural, religious, and historical complexities. By situating the Iraqi narrative within Indonesia’s pluralistic, post-authoritarian context, it explores how Indonesian interpretive frameworks offer alternative readings of Arab post-secular trauma fiction. The method emphasizes situated reading, where Indonesian cultural and historical sensibilities act as interlocutors in meaning-making, promoting a dialogic rather than purely comparative engagement between two resonant sociocultural worlds.

As a conceptual study, it does not employ empirical data but instead examines the interplay among text, theory, and reader-context. First, it investigates intersections between contemporary Arab exile fiction and Southeast Asian religious

discourse, opening new comparative avenues (al Hamad, 2023). Second, it interprets the novel's semantic, symbolic, and spiritual dimensions. Third, it traverses regional, linguistic, and theological boundaries through comparative readings informed by Indonesian discourses on pluralism, postcolonial identity, and moral reform. This approach challenges Middle Eastern-centric frameworks and demonstrates how Southeast Asian perspectives generate new ethical vocabularies and cross-cultural solidarities.

The primary source is Inaam Kachachi's *Tashari*, focusing on its treatment of trauma, religious language, ritual, ethical reflection, and the character of Wardiyah Iskandar. Secondary sources include post-secular theory (Habermas, 2008; Asad, 2003; Taylor, 2007; Scott, 2017), transnational literary ethics (Nussbaum, 1997; Appiah, 2006; Ridgeon, 2010), reader-response and postcolonial theory (Fish, 1980; Moretti, 2000; Damrosch, 2003), and Indonesian socio-religious scholarship (Hefner, 2011; Azra, 2020; Heryanto, 2018). Analysis proceeds through thematic and narrative mapping and comparative discourse analysis linking Iraqi exile motifs with Indonesian pluralism (Cao, 2020), culminating in theoretical synthesis.

DISCUSSION

Post-secular Faith and Sacred Agency in *Tashari*

Inaam Kachachi's *Tashari* rearticulates faith and identity through Wardiyah's sacred voice, shaped by minority status and exile, which resists both religious essentialism and secular erasure. This study argues that *Tashari* enacts a post-secular ethical aesthetic in which belief emerges as sacred agency embedded in memory, displacement, and compassionate care. Wardiyah embodies Scott's gendered paradox of secularism (2017), which silences non-normative

religious expressions by regulating religion through gendered boundaries (Scott, 2017). Her religious identity is actively chosen, lived, and politically meaningful. She reflects:

"I never left Iraq with God in my pocket. I left Him scattered in my footsteps, in every room where I healed a wound, in every death I wrote down" (Kachachi, 2013)

This passage encapsulates dispersed spirituality and embodied sacred memory, both central to post-secular literary theory. Post-secularism challenges secular frameworks that privatize religion, revealing how spirituality and sacred agency shape human experience and narrative ethics. The protagonist's "scattered God" disrupts the sacred-secular binary by embedding divinity within care, memory, and ethical responsibility. This decentralization represents a post-secular rupture in religious authority, illustrating how trauma literature negotiates the sacred amid fractured social realities. Wardiyah's spirituality is fragmented yet embodied, grounded in trauma, healing, mourning, and communal engagement, emphasizing lived theology over abstract belief.

This notion resonates deeply within Indonesia's sociocultural context, which embodies a lived post-secular condition. The dispersed conception of God aligns with Indonesia's pluralistic religious ethos, shaped by colonialism, authoritarianism, and enduring pluralism. Within this context, secular nationalism coexists uneasily with resilient spiritual traditions and interfaith tensions. Wardiyah's "scattered God" mirrors how Indonesian communities embed sacred meaning in social healing and remembrance amid faith-state tensions. Religion in Indonesia is neither fully privatized nor homogenized but actively shapes moral discourse. Reflecting the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), Indonesian spirituality manifests through everyday practices, rituals, and communal faith that transcend doctrinal boundaries.

The “scattered God” in *Tashari* parallels Indonesia’s lived experiences, where sacredness is found in social interactions, rituals, and collective memory of trauma, such as those stemming from colonialism, authoritarianism, and religious conflict. The phrase “every room where I healed a wound, in every death I wrote down” highlights ethical responsibility through remembrance. In Indonesia, this echoes post-authoritarian reconciliation efforts addressing religious and ethnic tensions through collective mourning and interfaith dialogue. Wardiyah’s scattered God thus embodies an ethical archive of pain and resilience, mirroring Indonesia’s spiritual rearticulation of justice. *Tashari* transcends geography, enabling Indonesian readers to engage with Iraqi trauma as shared moral ground that fosters healing and resistance.

From a comparative hermeneutic perspective, this motif invites interregional dialogue between Iraqi post-secular trauma fiction and Indonesian socio-religious imaginaries. Indonesian readers, familiar with religious coexistence and memory politics, interpret *Tashari*’s dispersed sacredness as resonant with their own forms of sacred dissent and ethical mourning. This dialogic hermeneutic transform meaning, as Indonesian sensibilities rearticulate Iraqi trauma through spiritual vocabularies, generating a transregional literary ethics that rehumanizes suffering and imagines interfaith solidarity. In this way, *Tashari* becomes a liminal space where theological boundaries blur and post-secular narratives mediate cross-cultural understanding between distinct postcolonial realities.

This statement articulates a distributed faith embodied in action, aligning with Ricœur’s concept of narrative identity (1981), in which the self is formed through memory and ethical response. Central to the novel’s redefinition of faith and its transnational literary ethic, it illustrates Wardiyah’s

active spirituality that rejects compartmentalized religion. Her faith manifests through healing, witnessing, and bearing responsibility. Wardiyah’s “scattered God” challenges the secular privatization of religion, presenting faith as a public and ethical force. Healing and witnessing become sacred acts that transcend national and religious boundaries. Her counter-memory transforms documentation into a sacred duty that resists the erasure of suffering caused by war.

Wardiyah’s invocation of God is performative, linking healing, witnessing, and testimony. This disrupts both Western secular humanism and sectarian religiosity, positioning faith as an ethical presence within a fractured world. *Tashari* constructs a post-secular literary space in which faith drives ethical engagement beyond geographic and religious divisions, reflecting a transnational ethic of shared vulnerability. Wardiyah’s rejection of a “portable God” mirrors Indonesian debates that resist religious essentialism and its marginalization of pluralism. The novel critiques reductive forms of religious identity imposed during political violence. As Asad (2003) notes, secular modernity often misrecognizes religion as either irrational or private. Wardiyah resists this misrecognition by blending medical care with spiritual memory, embodying political and existential defiance. She declares:

“They want me to be a refugee, I am not, I am a keeper of my people’s salt. And salt, you know, never disappears”

This passage affirms resistance to imposed identities and asserts the endurance of cultural memory. Wardiyah rejects the reductive refugee label, claiming instead the role of “keeper of my people’s salt,” a theological metaphor for preservation and sacred continuity. Despite displacement, her spiritual agency defies both Western pity and sectarian exclusion. For Indonesian readers navigating post-authoritarian pluralism,

Wardiyah embodies a transnational ethical faith echoing Habermas's post-secular ethos (2008), where religious reasoning returns as moral testimony. Her gendered faith calls for ethical responsibility, resonating profoundly amid Indonesia's plural tensions.

From a post-secular literary perspective, the salt metaphor extends beyond cultural symbolism to encompass sacred and ethical dimensions. Salt signifies covenant, purity, and preservation in many traditions. Wardiyah's role as "keeper" asserts sacred agency, rejecting secular-nationalist views of refugees as stateless or identity-less, and emphasizing the protection of personal and collective life (Wolff, 2020). This dispersal of sacredness reflects post-secularism's recognition of religion's persistence amid trauma. Resonating with Indonesia's pluralism and collective memory, this motif parallels Indonesian communities as custodians of intergenerational faith and cultural continuity amid political transformation.

This theme deeply resonates with Indonesia's post-authoritarian pluralism, where religious and ethnic minorities often face pressure to conform or are displaced by conflict or state policy. Wardiyah's refusal to be defined by vulnerability mirrors Indonesian communities resisting reduction to passive aid recipients. Her role as "keeper" reflects efforts to preserve local traditions (*adat*) and syncretic spiritualities such as *Islam Nusantara*. Like salt's essential role in preservation, these cultural and spiritual elements sustain Indonesia's resilience. Wardiyah's assurance that "salt never disappears" symbolizes the enduring presence of faith and identity amid interfaith tension.

Sectarian Displacement and Moral Refusal

Kachachi's *Tashari* profoundly engages with the devastation of sectarian violence, portraying its impact not merely as physical displacement but as the erosion

of moral belonging. This section argues that the novel frames displacement not as a geographical or political condition, but as a moral rupture and a deliberate refusal to submit to sectarian binaries that define human identity through rigid religious or ethnic categories. Through Wardiyah's lived experience, Kachachi constructs a character whose refusal to align with imposed sectarian identities constitutes both an ethical stance and a form of resistance to epistemic violence inherent in conventional histories (Anderson, 2020). Wardiyah's displacement from Iraq is therefore symbolic of a deeper rejection of ethno-religious polarization. She asserts:

"They wanted to make me choose a side, but I chose medicine. I chose pain over politics"

Wardiyah's statement embodies the ethical core of *Tashari*, privileging healing over factionalism. Her medical practice rejects ideological binaries by centering shared human suffering. Through the lens of post-secular theory, medicine emerges as sacred labor, an ethical act that transcends both institutional religion and state politics. Wardiyah's choice challenges the privatization of the sacred, integrating spirituality into narratives of trauma. This mirrors Indonesia's sociocultural context, where interfaith pluralism and post-authoritarian reconciliation emphasize social healing over sectarian division. Her vocation reflects Indonesian values such as *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation), underscoring communal responsibility amid social fracture and transforming pain into moral reflection and sacred dissent.

This moment resonates as a form of moral refusal, a deliberate rejection of the reductive logic that collapses complex citizenship into simplistic sectarian affiliation. It directly corresponds to Asad's critique that modern nation-states exploit religious difference as a means of governance, reducing identities to instruments of control (Asad, 2003). Wardiyah's resistance is therefore not neutral; it is ethically charged, rooted in

her commitment to life, care, and memory rather than ideological loyalty. Theologically and politically, her defiance aligns with Gilroy's theory of agonistic humanism (2004), which opposes racially or religiously essentialist categories through a cosmopolitan ethics grounded in shared vulnerability and affective solidarity.

Through the lens of comparative hermeneutics, Wardiyah's declaration creates a transregional dialogue by juxtaposing the Iraqi post-secular trauma narrative with Indonesian interpretive frameworks of suffering and care. Indonesian readers, accustomed to navigating complex religious and political identities, reinterpret the protagonist's refusal to choose sides as an expression of ethical solidarity that resonates within their own postcolonial, pluralistic condition. This hermeneutic encounter redefines pain not as passive endurance but as an active ethical stance that fosters interfaith understanding and communal healing. *Tashari* thus transcends its Middle Eastern context to engage Indonesian sociopolitical realities, offering a shared vocabulary of moral resistance grounded in embodied care and sacred witnessing rather than political polarization. Wardiyah embodies this ethic most clearly when she tells her Muslim patient during the war:

"Your God and mine speak different tongues but understand the same suffering"

Tashari encapsulates an ethical and spiritual response to sectarian displacement and the politics of identity accompanying conflict. The acknowledgment of religious difference through *different tongues* foregrounds sectarian diversity, while the shared understanding of suffering gestures toward a moral refusal of sectarian violence and exclusion. This refusal resists the divisive narratives that often accompany forced displacement, narratives that seek to segregate, define, and isolate communities along rigid sectarian lines. Instead, the

passage presents an ethical and post-secular stance that transcends sectarian boundaries by privileging shared human vulnerability and collective trauma.

From the perspective of post-secular theory, this statement challenges secular nationalist discourses that often frame sectarian identities as mutually exclusive and politically antagonistic. It reveals how religious language and spirituality persist as vital sites of ethical negotiation and resistance in contexts of displacement. By recognizing *different tongues* yet affirming *the same suffering*, the narrative engages a post-secular mode that destabilizes both secular and sectarian binaries, enabling a form of moral refusal that privileges compassionate witnessing and solidarity. This reflects the post-secular understanding of trauma literature as a space where sacred dissent contests sectarian fragmentation and affirms shared ethical commitments.

Indonesia's history of sectarian displacement and moral refusal provides a compelling parallel. The country has faced interreligious and ethnic conflicts, such as those in Ambon and Poso, where sectarian violence led to displacement and profound social rupture. Yet Indonesian civil society and religious leaders have demonstrated moral refusals of sectarian hatred through interfaith dialogue, reconciliation initiatives, and shared rituals of mourning that emphasize common suffering over sectarian identity. This passage mirrors such Indonesian experiences, where recognition of religious difference becomes a foundation for solidarity and ethical coexistence rather than division, particularly in the post-authoritarian period characterized by efforts to rebuild pluralistic harmony. This moment destabilizes the sectarian logic that pits religious communities against one another and instead foregrounds a shared human pain that defies doctrinal boundaries. The refusal articulated here is not a rejection of faith itself but of its weaponization.

The statement fosters a dialogic encounter between Iraqi post-secular trauma and Indonesian pluralism. Indonesian readers, situated within a context of negotiated interfaith coexistence, reinterpret the shared suffering not merely as a universal human experience but as an active moral stance against sectarian violence and displacement. This reframing generates a transregional literary ethic grounded in spiritual difference. The phrase embodies a refusal to be confined by sectarian identities, affirming instead that shared pain can serve as a site of interreligious understanding and collective moral resistance. In this way, *Tashari* becomes a literary vehicle through which both Iraqi and Indonesian contexts confront the legacies of sectarian displacement and imagine new ethical solidarities across fractured geographies.

Moreover, Wardiyah's displacement is presented through what Said (2000) describes as *the condition of exile as a state of terminal loss*. Yet *Tashari* complicates this loss by asserting ethical agency in the face of political dispossession. Wardiyah's archive of memory, which includes old letters, journals, and her father's manuscripts, becomes a repository of ethical refusal and a counter-memory to dominant historical narratives of sectarianism. As she laments:

'We did not flee Iraq. Iraq fled us, shed us like a skin it no longer recognized'

This line subverts the narrative of victimhood. Rather than internalizing exile as weakness, Wardiyah reconfigures it as a form of critical detachment, a liminal space from which to critique both the violent past and the future imagined through enforced communal identity. In the context of Indonesian pluralism, where interfaith tension and identity politics often produce similar modes of religious essentialism, Wardiyah's refusal to be reduced to a sectarian symbol offers transnational moral insight. It echoes Hefner's (2011) call for civic pluralism in

post-authoritarian Indonesia, in which citizens are bound not by religious sameness but by shared ethical commitment to coexistence. Through Wardiyah's acts of moral agency, literary narratives such as *Tashari* can foster cross-cultural solidarity and resilience against sectarian fragmentation.

The evocative passage above poignantly captures forced displacement as a process not merely of physical uprooting but of estrangement from the homeland's sociopolitical and sectarian transformations. The metaphor of Iraq *shedding its people like a discarded skin* conveys rupture, a moral and existential severance in which the nation itself actively rejects parts of its populace. This portrayal highlights displacement as an act of exclusion imposed by the socio-political realities of sectarianism, violence, and ethno-religious cleansing, rather than as voluntary exile. It frames displacement as a moral refusal enacted by the nation-state or dominant sectarian forces that no longer recognize certain identities as belonging to the body politic.

The passage also underscores how trauma narratives expose the intimate entanglement of sacred identity and political power in post-secular contexts. The act of being *shed* signifies not only political rejection but also a spiritual and communal severance, implicating the sacred geographies and collective memories that bind people to their homeland. Post-secularism emphasizes how religious and ethical imaginaries continue to shape experiences of trauma and displacement, contesting the secular assumption that such identities are merely political or ethnic categories. Here, the text reveals the sacred dimension of sectarian displacement as both spiritual loss and a contested site of belonging and alienation.

This reading resonates with Indonesia's experiences of sectarian displacement and moral refusal. Indonesia's history includes episodes of religious violence, particularly in Ambon

and Poso, where entire communities were forcibly displaced because of sectarian conflict. As in Iraq, these displacements involved a rupture between the state or dominant groups and minority communities, which were effectively *shed* from the national body. Yet Indonesia also offers examples of moral refusal to this sectarian logic through grassroots interfaith reconciliation, restorative justice efforts, and official pluralist ideologies such as *Pancasila*. When read through Indonesia's sociocultural lens, the passage illuminates how displaced communities maintain a moral and spiritual claim to belonging even after political rejection, insisting on remembrance and ethical recognition amid social fracture.

The text thus encourages a dialogic reading between Iraqi and Indonesian contexts, where displacement is interpreted not merely as loss but as a contested ethical terrain. Indonesian readers bring their own cultural practices of remembrance, reconciliation, and interfaith solidarity to bear on the Iraqi narrative, transforming the experience of being *shed* into a call for moral refusal against sectarian exclusion. The hermeneutic encounter reimagines displacement as a space for ethical resistance and spiritual resilience, where both contexts engage in reclaiming fractured identities and nurturing transregional solidarities. This shared interpretive framework enriches the understanding of *Tashari* as a post-secular text that transcends regional specificity to articulate universal challenges of sectarianism, exile, and the quest for moral belonging.

Transnational Literary Ethic in *Tashari*: Forging Global Solidarity from Fragmented Selves

In *Tashari*, Kachachi constructs a transnational literary ethic that transcends national, religious, and linguistic boundaries, centering on individual suffering and moral agency. Wardiyah

emerges as a transnational figure, not merely as a refugee but as a subject whose fragmented identity challenges the boundaries of state, sect, and home. Her narrative invites a global audience into shared ethical vulnerability, reflecting Appiah's cosmopolitanism and Nussbaum's concept of narrative imagination. This ethic refuses to reduce exile to victimhood. *Tashari* exemplifies Damrosch's notion of world literature as "a mode of circulation and of reading" (2003), making local suffering both legible and ethically compelling across cultures. An illustration of this occurs when Wardiyah declares:

"I am not loyal to any earth that betrays its children. My loyalty is to memory, to the blood of the innocent, not to the border"

This declaration reconfigures belonging beyond national borders, expressing disillusionment with nation-states that betray their people through violence and exclusion amid sectarian conflict and displacement. By prioritizing memory and innocent blood over territorial loyalty, Wardiyah embodies a transnational literary ethic rooted in shared suffering and collective memory as the foundation of solidarity. *Tashari* transcends secular nationalism by emphasizing ethical and spiritual allegiances grounded in memory and sacred loss. This sacred archive preserves trauma through witnessing, challenging the state's monopoly on belonging. The rejection of borders aligns with post-secular critiques of political division, affirming a cosmopolitan morality based on vulnerability and shared suffering.

This ethic resonates within Indonesia's pluralistic yet contested landscape, shaped by postcolonial struggles and ongoing tensions over ethnicity, religion, and territory. Indonesia's diverse communities continue to negotiate identity beyond territorial or sectarian divisions. Prioritizing memory and innocent suffering over territorial loyalty parallels Indonesia's post-

authoritarian ethos, which promotes inclusive solidarity beyond ethnic or religious boundaries. This mirrors discourses surrounding *Pancasila* and civil society's advocacy for human rights. The passage therefore opens a transregional dialogue that bridges Iraqi and Indonesian experiences of trauma and fractured identity. Indonesian readers reinterpret the rejection of borders as a call for global ethical solidarity grounded in memory, dignity, and justice, forging connections through shared suffering.

The rejection of state-defined belonging in *Tashari* is ethical, expressing loyalty to shared humanity over geography and reflecting Butler's politics of mourning (2004), which resists hierarchies of whose lives matter. Reader-response theory (Fish, 1980) suggests that *Tashari* gains new ethical significance when read in Indonesia's plural, syncretic context. Indonesian readers, navigating interfaith coexistence, post-authoritarian memory, and global Islam, interpret Wardiyah's narrative as a reflection of their own moral anxieties. This interpretive act fosters ethical encounter and what Attridge (2004) calls literary hospitality. The novel's multilingual and diasporic texture resists essentialist readings of identity. In one poignant scene, Wardiyah confesses:

"My tongue is a migrant too, Arabic at birth, French by profession, Aramaic by faith, silence by exile"

Language in *Tashari* becomes an ethical site of multiplicity, embodying the tension between belonging and alienation. Kachachi dramatizes Bhabha's concept of the "in-between space" (1994) as a creative and ethical locus where identities and solidarities take form. Wardiyah resists both Western voyeurism and Arab nationalist nostalgia, enacting a narrative ethics that urges accountability beyond empathy (Phelan, 2007). The phrase "my tongue is a migrant too" reflects post-secular subjectivity that resists secular erasure. Silence, in this context, becomes a sacred absence that preserves space for

ethical reflection while challenging fixed linguistic or national categories of identity.

This linguistic and existential complexity resonates with Indonesia, where multilingualism and cultural hybridity have long shaped identity amid histories of colonialism and religious pluralism. Indonesia's archipelagic diversity and historical legacies have produced multiple tongues and complex spiritual identities within communities. Like the narrator's "migrant tongue," Indonesians navigate linguistic and spiritual plurality amid displacement caused by migration, conflict, or diaspora. This passage therefore fosters a transnational ethical dialogue, as Indonesian readers interpret the *migrant tongue* as a metaphor for fragmented yet enduring identity that reflects postcolonial and post-authoritarian realities. It promotes a literary ethic that forges solidarity through the recognition of complex histories, faiths, and embodied memories across borders.

Implication: Fiction as a Sacred Transnational Archive

Kachachi's *Tashari* functions not only as a diasporic narrative but also as a cultural archive that preserves memory, faith, trauma, and displacement across generations and borders (Assmann, 2011). Within post-secular theory (Casanova, 2013; Santner, 2011) and Ricœur's hermeneutics of memory and testimony (2004), *Tashari* becomes a sacred transnational archive, sacralizing personal suffering through literary form. Fiction, in this sense, transcends narrative by performing memory of exile and faith across frontiers. Wardiyah's plea (Kachachi, 2013) embodies testimonial duty and connective memory, linking the personal and the collective (Assmann, 2011).

Within Indonesia's plural and contested socio-religious terrain, *Tashari's* literary sacred function gains renewed significance. Indonesia's history of

communal religious violence, anti-minority discourse, and post-authoritarian reconciliation creates a hermeneutic horizon in which *Tashari* can be read as an allegorical text with domestic resonance. Wardiyah's anguish over lost coexistence, "The call to prayer no longer meets the church bell" (Kachachi, 2013), mirrors Indonesian anxieties regarding threats to pluralism posed by conservative homogenization (Hefner, 2011; Azra, 2020). This liturgical fiction performs memory of exile and faith across frontiers within this interpretive context. Indonesian readers, navigating contested interfaith coexistence and syncretic traditions, engage Wardiyah's voice as a form of sacred listening to marginalized experience. This affiliative reading (Said, 2000) ethically links Iraqi religiosity with Indonesia's debates on pluralism, state power, and historical violence. *Tashari* thus becomes a site of witnessing, spiritual responsibility, and cross-border ethical understanding within a shared Global South framework.

In this interpretive context, *Tashari* functions as both mirror and mnemonic device, enabling Indonesian readers to engage in Fish's "interpretive communion" (1980), where reading itself becomes ethical, situated, and dialogical. Fiction acts as a form of transnational sacred listening that amplifies voices marginalized by war and sectarianism across religious and national frameworks. *Tashari* archives trauma with linguistic depth, creating a post-secular repository that enacts Said's affiliative reading (2000), ethically connecting disparate narratives and geographies. It invites Indonesian readers, amid ongoing debates on pluralism, state power, and violence, to ritualize remembrance and transform reading into an act of witnessing and spiritual responsibility.

CLOSING

This study underscores the importance of Southeast Asian perspectives in interpreting Arab post-secular fiction, focusing particularly on Inaam Kachachi's *Tashari*. It challenges the dominance of Middle Eastern frameworks by fostering a transregional dialogue that enriches global literary discourse. The Christian-Iraqi narrative resonates within Indonesia's pluralistic and contested sociocultural context, shaped by religious diversity and historical legacies. Indonesian readers actively reconstruct meaning, linking Iraqi trauma with their own histories of colonialism and interfaith tension. Through this process, *Tashari* becomes a shared space for moral reflection and solidarity. The study proposes a transregional literary ethics framework that encourages cross-cultural understanding and spiritual resistance.

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