IRAQI FICTION AND THE (RE)EMERGENCE OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS IDENTITIES: MUḤSIN AL-RAMLĪ'S STRATEGIES IN *TAMR AL-AṢĀBIʿ* AND *ḤADĀʾIQ AL-RAʾĪS*

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In his essay on pluralism and Iraqi fiction, Ronen Zeidel included Muḥsin al-Ramlī in a group of Iraqi authors who started writing fiction to counter the discourse associating the Sunni identity with the Baath. Yet this scholar only devoted a few pages to the author's literature, taking a quantitative approach to his texts that did not consider the multiple effects of refraction (or retranslation) potentially affecting them in the literary field. This article thus examines Zeidel's argument and al-Ramlī's strategies with respect to ethno-religious identities, drawing on field theory as developed by literary scholars and sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova. The article looks at the writer's trajectory as well as the symbolic capital he acquired inside and outside the Iraqi field, focusing in particular on two of his most renowned novels, Tamr al-aṣābiʿ *and* Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, in the light of Fanar Haddad's theoretical insights on sectarianism.*

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, ethno-religious identities were taboo in Iraq. There was a widespread perception that these would represent an «antagonistic other» or a constant threat to the Iraqi nation[1]; a perception held not only by the country's political elites but a considerable part of its literary field, concerned above all with establishing a unified country and an educated urban class. This perception could also be observed later in the century during the uninterrupted rule of Iraq by the Baathist regime from 1968 to 2003. Concerning this period, Ronen Zeidel notes that at the field's most heteronomous pole, writers considered ethno-religious identities an obstacle to achieving the Pan-Arabist nation advocated by the state, while at its most autonomous pole, writers either refrained from dealing with ethno-religious identities or referred to them in pejorative terms, deeming any element connected with ethnicity or religion a source of underdevelopment and social division[2].

This situation started to change from the 1990s onward. As a result of events such as the March 1991 political uprisings, the imposition of economic sanctions (1991-2003) and the profound crisis experienced by the Baathist regime during that decade, the main ideas in state propaganda about "Iraqiness" and "national identity" began to implode[3]. While these events produced well-documented historical consequences for the Iraqi populace, they also had more specific implications for the country's literary field. In particular, they seemed to affirm new heteronomous principles that no longer seemed to be connected with politics but also with other cleavages, to such an extent that some writers saw the phase following the US invasion and the fall of the Baathist regime (2003) as a sort of Pandora's box that released all the evils connected with ethno-religious identities, even in literature[4]. These events affected writers' relationship with identity issues and generated new debates among them. Moreover, Iraqi authors who had spent the previous two or three decades abroad were among the first to reenact some of these identities through fiction, despite the fact that they did not consider themselves as belonging to any specific community or even argued against sectarianism in the literary field and in society[5].

This article is part of ongoing research examining these debates and the possibility of explicitly dealing with ethno-religious identities in Iraqi literature after 2003. Here, the aim is to look at two key novels by the prominent Iraqi writer Muḥsin al-Ramlī, exploring his symbolic strategies to represent

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of the last century, one of the most significant heteronomous forces and one of the main obstacles to the autonomy of the literary field was related in Iraq to the country's political authorities. On the opposition existing between the internal poles mentioned above in any literary field, see P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Seuil, Paris 1992. On these poles, see also G. Sapiro, *La Sociologie de la littérature*, La Découverte, Paris 2014.

3   According to Eric Davis, one of the most crucial features of the Baath Party in this phase, even compared to prior Pan-Arabist regimes, was «its penchant for integrating Pan-Arabism with an Iraqi-centered nationalism». E. Davis, *Memories of State. Politics, History, and Collective Identity in Modern Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-London 2005, p. 150. See also Amatzia Baram, *Culture and Ideology in the Formation of Baathist Iraq, 1968-1989*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1991.

4   This is a recurring element in the interviews I have conducted with numerous Iraqi writers and poets between 2020 and 2023. This shock is also associated with an earthquake (or *zilzāl* in Arabic) whose repercussions are still evident in the literary field. One of the writers who has most openly spoken out about this is the prominent novelist Inʿām Kaǧah Ǧī (or Inaam Kachachi, b. 1952). Personal interview, 08/12/2021 (unpublished).

5   Yasmeen Hanoosh, *In Search of the Iraqi Other: Iraqi Fiction in Diaspora and the Discursive Reenactment of Ethno-Religious Identities*, in "Humanities", 8, 4, 157 (2019), available at: https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0787/8/4/157/htm (last accessed 12 January 2023).

these identities in fiction[6]. According to Zeidel, al-Ramlī is one of the few Iraqi writers with a Sunni background to overtly address this issue, especially in *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* (Dates on My Finger, 2009)[7] and *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs* (The President's Gardens, 2012)[8]. Zeidel includes him in a group of authors who «started publishing novels with the purpose of countering the hegemonic discourse associating the Sunnis with the Baʿth»[9]. Yet in this essay, Zeidel only devotes a few pages to al-Ramlī's literature. At the same time, he takes a quantitative approach that does not consider the symbolic strategies the author adopts nor the multiple effects of refraction or retranslation potentially affecting them in the literary field[10].

To investigate al-Ramlī's works from a perspective that considers all these elements, this article primarily draws on field theory as developed by literary scholars and sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova. Their theoretical insights will allow an examination of the writer's trajectory and the symbolic capital he acquired inside and outside the Iraqi field[11]. The article also explores al-Ramlī's position-takings in light

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[6] On al-Ramlī's literarature, see also Hazam Kamal Abd Al-Janabi, *Postcolonial Nationalism and Contemporary Literary Theory: Algerian and Iraqi Novels from 1962 to the Present*, PhD Thesis, University of Leicester, 2018, pp. 39-50; E. Diana, *Letteratura irachena d'esilio: la scrittura di Muḥsin al-Ramlī*, in M. Avino; A. Barbaro; M. Ruocco (eds.), Qamariyyāt: *oltre ogni frontiera tra letteratura e traduzione. Studi in onore di Isabella Camera D'Afflitto*, Istituto per l'Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Roma 2019; Saad Zaty Shamkhy; Lagiman Bin Janoory, *The Exploration of Resistance in Al-Ramli's Dates on my Fingers and Scattered Crumbs*, in "International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences", 5, 4 (July-August 2020), available at: https://ijels.com/upload_document/issue_files/27IJELS-107202042-TheExploration.pdf (last accessed 12 January 2023).

[7] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, al-Dār al-ʿarabiyyah li ʾl-ʿulūm nāširūn, Bayrūt 2009. For the English translation, see Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Dates on My Fingers: An Iraqi Novel*, translated by L. Leafgren, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo-New York 2014.

[8] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs,* Dār al-Ṯaqāfah, Abū Ẓabī-Bayrūt 2012. For the English translation, see Muhsin Al-Ramli, *The President's Gardens*, translated by L. Leafgren, MacLehose Press, London 2012.

[9] R. Zeidel, *Pluralism in the Iraqi Novel After 2003: Literature and the Recovery of National Identity*, cit., pp. 71-75.

[10] On the effect of "refraction" potentially affecting the actors of the literary field and their symbolic goods, see P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, cit. On the specific approach taken by Zeidel, self-described as "quantitative", see R. Zeidel, *Pluralism in the Iraqi Novel After 2003*, cit., p. 15.

[11] On the concepts of "trajectory", "symbolic capital" and "position-takings", see P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art : genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, cit. On the importance of taking into account the writer's trajectory and the differences between this and his/her biography, see Id., *L'illusion biographique*, in "Actes de la

of Fanar Haddad's approach to sectarianism, which posits that this notion has always been a «polarised and polarising subject» that tends to «on the one hand, inflate the importance of sectarian identity in all things – in effect reducing Iraqi-society to its sect-based element – or, at the other extreme, to reduce the relevance of sectarian identity in Iraq to an unhistorical side-note or, far more detrimentally to objective analysis, to explain 'sectarianism' as the result of nefarious foreign plots»[12]. For Haddad, «sectarian identities are neither a defining feature nor an irrelevancy in Iraqi society; rather, they are a variable sociological element whose relevance and centrality advances and recedes according to context and by extension salience […]»[13]. Moreover, the scholar argues that ethno-religious or ethno-sectarian identities can manifest in the Iraqi social space as much as in the symbolic goods produced within it through different forms that may represent no threat or danger to the Iraqi state, as in the case of «banal sectarianism» that is «devoid of any active dynamism and restricts itself to the background of a person's conception of self»[14].

A recognised writer from Iraq's "1990s generation"

Muḥsin al-Ramlī, pen name of Muḥsin Muṭlak Rūḍān, was born in Sudayrah, a small village in the Governorate of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn in northern Iraq, on 7 March 1967. His brother was the famous Iraqi poet and prose writer Ḥasan Muṭlak (1961-1990)[15]. They grew up in a Sunni family from the same governorate. In 1989, al-Ramlī received a BA in Spanish Language and Literature from the University of Baghdad. After the death of his brother, who was hanged at the age of 29 for his involvement in an attempted coup against Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (Saddam Hussein, 1937-2006), al-Ramlī decided to leave Iraq. He moved initially to Jordan in 1993 and later to Spain in 1995, where he still resides.

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recherche en sciences sociales", 62-63 (1986), pp. 69-72.

[12] On this, see Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, cit., pp. 1-2. It is worth noting that, according to Haddad, this polarisation existing in Western academic literature mirrors official and elite Iraqi discourse on sectarianism and its manifestations.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 27. I have opted for the term "ethno-religious" in this study, but these terms can be equivalent in Haddad's theoretical perspective. On the different forms of ethno-religious or ethno-sectarian manifestations identified by this scholar, see *Ibid.*, pp. 25-29.

[15] For some works by this writer, see: Ḥasan Muṭlak, *Dābādā*, al-Dār al-ʿarabiyyah li ʾl-mawsūʿāt, Bayrūt 1988; Id., *al-Aʿmāl al-qiṣaṣiyyah*, al-Dār al-ʿarabiyyah li ʾl-ʿulūm nāširūn, Bayrūt 2006; Id., *Kitāb al-ḥubb. Ẓilāluhunna ʿalà al-arḍ*, al-Dār al-ʿarabiyyah li ʾl-ʿulūm nāširūn, Bayrūt 2006; Id., al-*ʿAyn ilà al-dāḫil*, Muʾassasat al-Dawsarī li ʾl-ṯaqāfah wa ʾl-ibdāʿ, al-Baḥrayn 2011.

In terms of his literary trajectory, al-Ramlī published his first short story in the Iraqi University journal "Maǧallat al-ṭalabah wa ʾl-šabāb" ("The Students' and Youth's Journal") in 1985. Since then, he has worked as an editor and cultural journalist, publishing dozens of articles in the Arab, Spanish and Latin American press. In 1995, he wrote his first collection of short stories, *Hadiyyat al-qarn al-qādim* (A Gift of the Next Century)[16], while his first play, *al-Baḥṯ ʿan qalb ḥayy* (Searching for a Living Heart)[17], was published in Spain in 1997. During the 1980s and 1990s, al-Ramlī received a number of literary prizes, including the Best Short Story Award he received from the Arabic international newspaper "al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ" (1996). In Spain, he co-founded, with the help of another writer of Iraqi origins, ʿAbd al-Hādī Saʿdūn (or Abdul Hadi Sadoun, b. 1968), the country's first Arabic publishing house and a literary journal bearing the same name, "Alwāḥ" (Tablets)[18]. This project lasted until 2007 and contributed to the diffusion of Arabic literature in Europe. Additionally, it reinforced al-Ramlī's position in both the Iraqi field and the international literary space. In other words, through this, the novelist also acquired more symbolic capital at home as well as in Western countries.

In 1998, al-Ramlī wrote another collection of short stories, *Awrāq baʿīdah ʿan Diǧlah* (Notes Far from the Tigris)[19]. His first novel, *al-Fatīt al-mubaʿṯar* (Scattered Crumbs), was published in Cairo in 2000[20]. Subsequently, al-Ramlī started a career as a translator, publishing the first Arabic version of a collection of plays by the great Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes. He also began to be associated with some of the most prominent prose writers of the "1990s Generation" in the Iraqi field[21]. In 2003, he earned a PhD in Philosophy and Literature from the University of Madrid and became an academic at Saint Louis University, where he currently teaches. In the same year, he published *Layālī al-qaṣf al-saʿīdah* (The Happy Nights of Bombing)[22] together with his first poetry collection, *Kullunā arāmil al-aǧwibah* (We Are All Widows of Answers)[23], written in both Arabic and Spanish, like many other texts he wrote after the fall of the Baathist regime.

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[16] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Hadiyyat al-qarn al-qādim*, Dār Azminah, ʿAmmān 1998.
[17] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *al-Baḥṯ ʿan qalb ḥayy*, Dār Alwāḥ, Mādrīd 1997.
[18] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Taǧribat maǧallat (Alwāḥ) al-ʿarabiyyah fī Isbānyā*, in "al-Ṯaqāfah al-ʿirāqiyyah", 4 (2018), pp. 58-65.
[19] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Awrāq baʿīdah ʿan Diǧlah*, Dār Azminah, ʿAmmān 1998.
[20] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *al-Fatīt al-mubaʿṯar*, Dār al-Ḥaḍārah al-ʿarabiyyah, al-Qāhirah 2000. For the English translation of the book, see Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Scattered Crumbs*, translated by Y. Hanoosh, University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville 2003.
[21] This is the generation of writers who are currently dominating the Iraqi field. Despite being arbitrary and not absolute, the notion of "generation" is helpful for illustrative purposes.
[22] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Layālī al-qaṣf al-saʿīdah*, Dār al-sanābil, Isṭanbūl 2003.
[23] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Kullunā arāmil al-aǧwibah*, Alfālfā, Mādrīd 2003.

From 2003, al-Ramlī began to see himself as an «Iraqi-Spanish writer» and not merely as an Iraqi writer[24]. This mutation in his posture revealed more profound changes that again involved his position in both the Iraqi field and the international literary space[25]. Indeed, in her groundbreaking work *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999), Casanova identifies two internal poles for any peripheral field like the Iraqi one: a pole typically oriented more towards a local or national dimension of the production and consumption of literature, and another oriented more towards a denationalised or universal reach[26]. In this perspective, the way al-Ramlī began defining himself, along with other elements such as his role as a literary mediator between two fields, the supranational prizes he received or the languages he began to employ[27], clearly points to the fact that he tried to position himself in the second pole, in addition to proving a «multipositional writer» capable of playing multiple roles, as sociologist Luc Boltansky puts it[28]. As further evidence of this, in 2008, al-Ramlī wrote his first novel entirely in Spanish, *Dedos de dátiles*[29], published one year later in Arabic as *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*. In 2010, this work was longlisted for the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF), as was his third novel, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, in 2013.

Through these works and, more importantly, the literary success they brought, al-Ramlī was finally established as one of the most recognised or consecrated writers of the field's most denationalised pole[30], although he never acquired the same quantity of symbolic capital as other authors of this

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[24] On this, see the writer's electronic page on the International Prize for Arabic Fiction (IPAF) website, available at: https://www.arabicfiction.org/en/node/1457 (last accessed 12 January 2023).

[25] The existence of a specific authorial posture in al-Ramlī's case can also be seen in his intensive use of a pseudonym, instead of his real name. On the use of pen names and, more generally, the notion of "posture", see J. Meizoz, *Postures littéraires : mises en scène modernes de l'auteur*, Slatkine Érudition, Genève 2007; Id., *La fabrique des singularités : postures littéraires II*, Slatkine Érudition, Genève 2011.

[26] P. Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, Seuil, Paris 1999, pp. 163-172.

[27] According to Casanova, the language a writer chooses to write in, as well as the languages into which his or her texts are translated, may be evidence of his or her positioning in one of these poles. *Ibid.*, pp. 38-46, 198-203. On translation as unequal exchange and accumulation of literary capital, see also P. Casanova, *Consécration et accumulation de capital littéraire : la traduction comme échange inégal*, in "Actes de la recherche en Sciences Sociales", 144 (2002), pp. 7-20.

[28] L. Boltanski, *L'espace positionnel : multiplicité des positions institutionnelles et habitus de classe*, in "Revue française de sociologie", 14, 1 (1973). pp. 3-26.

[29] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Dedos de dátiles*, El Tercer Nombre, Madrid 2008.

[30] The notion of "consecration" or recognition is another key concept of field theory. On this concept, see P. Bourdieu, *Les Règles de l'art*, cit; P. Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, cit.

generation, such as Sinān Anṭūn (or Sinan Antoon, b. 1967), ʿAlī Badr (or Ali Bader, b. 1964?), Ḥasan Balāsim (or Hassan Blasim, b. 1973) or Aḥmad Saʿdāwī (or Ahmed Saadawi, b. 1973)[31]. In 2013 and 2014, al-Ramlī published two more texts also written in Spanish: the poetry collection *Pérdida ganadora* (A Winning Loss)[32] and the novel *Adiós, primos* (Bye, Cousins), dedicated to his family[33]. In the following years, he wrote a collection of short stories in Spanish, *Naranjas y cuchillas en Bagdad* (Oranges and Knives in Baghdad, 2017), and two novels written in Arabic: *Ḏiʾbat al-ḥubb wa ʾl-kutub* (The Wolf of Love and Books, 2015)[34] and *Abnāʾ wa aḥḏiyah* (Children and Shoes, 2018)[35] for which he was nominated for another prestigious prize, the Sheikh Zayed Book Award. In 2019, he published *Daughter of The Tigris*[36], which came out in English even before being published in Spanish or his native language, Arabic[37].

In the most recent phase of his literary trajectory, al-Ramlī has also become an active member of many European literary organisations, such as the Spanish Writers and Artists Association and the Spanish Professional Writers and Translators Organisation. He has participated in many international projects and attended literary events worldwide, including the festival organised by the Casa Fundación de Poesía in Costa Rica since 2001 and *Voix Vives*, an international poetry festival held each year in a different Mediterranean country, where the writer has also played an advisory role[38]. Moreover, his works continue to be translated into various European languages, including English, Italian and Portuguese, even though, at least until now, none of his major works has been translated into a legitimising and consecrating language such as French within the international literary field[39].

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[31] The main reasons for this are related to the impact of the international literary space on his trajectory. Indeed, although being supranational, the prizes al-Ramlī received seem far more connected to specific Arabic institutions (like the IPAF, for instance) than the prizes received by other writers quoted above. Even al-Ramlī's role as a mediator between different fields seems mainly related to the Arabic field and the literary field of his hosting country. Moreover, al-Ramlī's connections with Paris and the French-speaking area, which still represents one of the centres of «The World Republic of Letters» mentioned by Casanova in her essay, are pretty weak, as will be briefly discussed later vis-à-vis the translations of his works.

[32] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Pérdida ganadora*, Fundación Casa de Poesía, Costa Rica 2013.

[33] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Adiós, primos*, Alfalfa, Madrid 2014.

[34] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḏiʾbat al-ḥubb wa ʾl-kutub*, Dār al-Madà, Arbīl-Baġdād-Bayrūt 2015.

[35] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Abnāʾ wa aḥḏiyyah*, Dār al-Madà, Arbīl-Baġdād-Bayrūt 2018.

[36] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Daughter of The Tigris*, Maclehose Press, London 2019.

[37] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Bint Diǧlah,* Dār al-Madà, Arbīl-Baġdād-Bayrūt 2020.

[38] *Ibid.* See also the website of *Voix Vives*, available at: https://www.sete.voixvives mediterranee.com/ (last accessed 1 November 2023).

Tamr al-aṣābiʿ *and* Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs

Two of al-Ramlī's literary works, in particular, reflect this trajectory toward denationalisation while at the same time making references to Iraqi ethno-religious identities: *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* and *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*. Indeed, these novels are among the writer's most successful works, as shown by their inclusion in the IPAF long list. Both novels also circulated in multiple literary spaces, contributing to al-Ramlī's growing reputation and the consolidation of his position beyond the Iraqi field. Moreover, these works also share other features in common. In order to detect them, one can look at their plots as well as at their narrative and thematic elements. A closer look at these can help reveal the literary devices through which the writer refers to or represents Iraqi ethno-religious identities in his texts more explicitly.

The protagonist of the novel *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, Salīm, is a young Iraqi living in Spain. Like al-Ramlī, Salīm is a writer and poet who published some of his first works with the help of the Iraqi political opposition in London[40]. At the beginning of the story, Salīm narrates that he wants to write a novel about his family, the Muṭlaq[41], who live in a village located in the Iraqi Governorate of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, as is Sudayrah, where al-Ramlī was born. A brutal feud involving Salīm's family set his grandfather, father and other relatives against several unknown inhabitants of Tikrit, whom the government and the police protected[42]. This feud followed a dishonourable event involving Istabraq, Salīm's sister, and forced the Muṭlaq to leave their village. This also caused severe problems for Salīm's grandfather's mental health, as well as for his father Nuwah, who started feeling a pervasive desire for revenge.

Through the novel's first-person narrative, Salīm also recalls the story of his first love and sexual experiences with ʿĀliyah, a young girl he met during

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[39] On the translations of the writer's works, see, for instance, Muhsin al-Ramli, *Laranjas e giletes em Bagdà*, tradução de F.R. Hinojosa, in "(n.t.) Revista Nota do Tradutor", 1,1 (September 2010), pp. 187-207; Id., *Dita di datteri*, traduzione di F. Pistono, Cicorivolta, Villafranca Lunigiana 2014; S. Shimon (ed.), *Baghdad Noir*, Akashic Books, Brooklyn 2018; Muhsin Al-Ramli, *I Giardini del presidente*, traduzione di F. Pistono, Atmosphere, Roma 2019; Id., *Os Jardins do Presidente*, tradução de J. João Leiria, TopSeller, Amadora 2019; Id., *Daughter of the Tigris*, translated by L. Leafgren, MacLehose Press, London 2019.

[40] Even al-Ramlī's published a short story at the beginning of his literary trajectory through the Arabic newspaper "al-Šarq al-Awsaṭ", which is based in London. On this, see Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, cit., p. 23.

[41] This name is similar to the writer's real name.

[42] It is not difficult to see a reference here to the harsh conflict between part of the community of the so-called "Sunni Triangle" to the "Tikritis". We will explore this element later in the article.

his childhood in Iraq[43]. He narrates the difficulties he has experienced as a migrant in Spain[44]. Additionally, he describes in detail the various conflicts between immigrants like him and the local inhabitants of the city of Madrid, which deepens his sentiments of longing and estrangement whenever he thinks of his homeland from his hosting country[45].

Returning to the novel's main story, Salīm recalls all the details of how his father went missing after the feud between his family and the unknown inhabitants of Tikrit. He relates the terrible torture his father experienced before leaving Iraq, telling the reader how he suddenly found him again, after many years, in Spain's capital city. In Madrid, Salīm finds not only his father but also Fāṭimah, another immigrant like him, with whom he falls in love[46]. He also discovers that his father is still obsessed with the desire to kill one of his enemies, who has become a diplomat in Germany[47]. At the end of the novel, Salīm attempts to convince his father to abandon his plan for revenge and enjoy life with his new partner, Rūsā; an attempt that fails, as Salīm's father leaves for Berlin to kill the diplomat[48].

In *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, the events are initially related through a third-person narrator. This novel shares the same Iraqi location as its predecessor, taking place in the Governorate of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn[49]. The novel opens with its characters finding nine severed heads in some banana baskets left at the edge of the village, as in the case of a real-life tragedy that involved several members of the writer's family in 2006[50]. Two of the book's main characters, ʿAbdullāh and Ṭāriq, find the head of their best friend, Ibrāhīm, who was killed for a

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[43] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, cit., pp. 24-25.

[44] In *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, these difficulties mostly arise from the distorted views of Madrid's local inhabitants towards Salīm and his homeland. On the relationship between this character and the author's personal experiences and feelings concerning this topic, see S. McLemee, *An Undistorted View of Iraqi Misery; Recalling the Golden Age of Arabic Intellectual Life*, in "The Chronicle of Higher Education", 8/08/2003, available at: https://www.chronicle.com/article/an-undistorted-view-of-iraqi-misery-recalling-the-golden-age-of-arabic-intellectual-life/ (last accessed 21 September 2023).

[45] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, cit., pp. 36-38. Significantly, even al-Ramlī's novels, as well as the texts analysed by Hanoosh in her article (see footnote 5), are about the diasporic condition of the Iraqi populace. However, my conclusions differ considerably from those presented by this scholar.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

[47] *Ibid.*, p. 148-151.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[49] Like Salīm in *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, the narrator of *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs* is very explicit about specific places in the novel, mentioning cities such as Balad and Bayǧī. See, for instance, Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, cit., p. 239.

[50] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8. On this traumatic event involving the writer's family, see also the dedication at p. 6.

reason that remains unknown to the reader until the end of the novel. From this point on, we discover Ibrāhīm's story as well as the stories of his two best friends. In the first part of the novel, we also read of Qismah, Ibrāhīm's daughter, who is the only one who opposes Ṭāriq's decision to bury her father's head without his body. We are told about Ibrāhīm's childhood in the village and his military service that he partly served, at least at the beginning, with ʿAbdallāh, while Ṭāriq devoted himself to studying[51].

At a certain point in the narration, it suddenly becomes clear to the reader that Qismah has taken on the narrator's role since she needs to remember what her father said in life to understand what happened to him. Through this literary device, we read of ʿAbdallāh's captivity in Iran after the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988)[52], and find out that Ibrāhīm suffered an awful accident during the 1990s, which led to the amputation of one of his feet. Indeed, after returning from the Iranian front, Ibrāhīm was recalled to active duty again due to the outbreak of the Second Gulf War (1990-1991). He found himself stuck under the airstrikes of the international coalition led by the United States in southern Iraq, although a young man called Aḥmad saved him, brought him to his house and took care of him[53].

In the following sections of the novel, Qismah recalls ʿAbdallāh's return from Iran[54], and the moment he discovers the identity of his birth parents[55]. She also narrates her father's difficulties in helping her mother, who was seriously ill. She tells the reader how Ibrāhīm got a job as a gardener in the president's palace to pay for her treatment. Moreover, she narrates that, once there, her father gained the confidence of his immediate superior, Saʿd[56], although, after some months, he is informed that there will be a change in his job in the presidential palace and that he will have to work mostly at night[57]. Qismah also recounts how Ibrāhīm learned that his new job would consist of burying people tortured at the hands of the regime, and how he secretly archived the characteristics of the mutilated bodies he was forced to bury to counter oblivion and the abuses of power[58].

In the last section of *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, Qismah tells us the story of her marriage with an army officer[59], who disappears soon after she is raped by the president, and of her pregnancy following this trauma[60]. She narrates

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[51] *Ibid*., p. 32.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 42.
[53] *Ibid*., pp. 59-67.
[54] *Ibid*., pp. 79-92
[55] *Ibid*., pp. 111-121.
[56] *Ibid*., pp. 162-171.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 210.
[58] *Ibid*., pp. 214-218.
[59] *Ibid*., pp. 224-225.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 245.

how Ibrāhīm told her about his secret activity just months after the US inva-sion of Iraq[61], and how he revealed to her that he had long known that her husband was one of the regime's victims. Qismah also explains that she asked him to employ his archives to help the relatives of other victims, and that this decision caused him to be hated both by those who were against the Baathist regime and those who supported it[62]. Furthermore, Qismah informs the reader that, to regain the confidence of the former, Ibrāhīm decided to help all the relatives of the regime's victims[63], travelling to and from Bagh-dad until his severed head was found at the edge of their village. In a sort of circular narrative, the novel closes with its opening scene, in which Qismah, ʿAbdallāh and Ṭāriq embark on a trip to Baghdad to discover the truth about Ibrāhīm's death[64].

Ethno-religious Identities in the Novels

Based on this short analysis conducted from a textual perspective, one can quickly identify other significant features shared by *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* and *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, in spite of their diverging narrative structures and dif-ferent aesthetic devices. For instance, one can note that both novels make references to the writer's biography, such as his place of birth, his literary trajectory or the tragic events that affected his family in 2006. Moreover, an in-depth look at their recurring themes reveals other elements that refer to the specific places and the (hi)story of the community where the writer was born[65], which, for an Iraqi reader, has a distinct ethno-religious identity[66]. From this point of view, one might expect al-Ramlī to explicitly mention this in his novels. However, the narrators of *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* and *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs,* while directly mentioning the identity of other ethno-religious communities, deliberately avoid relating this information.

While autobiographical materials are so crucial in the construction of these novels, al-Ramlī thus seems to distinguish between different ethno-religious identities, such as the Kurds, the Christians or the Yezidis, and that of the community in which he was born. In this regard, one can note that the

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[61] *Ibid*., p. 247.

[62] Again, it does not seem farfetched to see this as a reference to the problematic po-sition of part of the community of the so-called "Sunni Triangle" that did not sup-port the Baathist regime. As much as other elements highlighted here, this refer-ence will be analysed in more detail.

[63] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, cit., pp. 250-251.

[64] *Ibid*., pp. 262-271.

[65] On the notion of (hi)story, see S. Mehrez, *Egyptian Writers between History and Fiction: Essays on Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim and Gamal Al-Ghitani*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo-New York 1994, pp. 8-9.

[66] Indeed, in Iraq, it is often possible to identify someone's ethno-religious identity from the family name or other elements, such as the place where they come from.

narrator of *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* does not hesitate to explicitly mention the Kurds, Turkmen and Shabak when describing Salīm's grandfather's decision to fight back against the "Tikritis" and their allies. In this passage narrated by Salīm, his grandfather is also described as a man who has known the elders of those communities for a long time:

> I immediately visited Grandfather and had never seen him stronger or more angry. He was thinking of getting in touch with his friends among the elders of the other tribes and villages, men who had learned the Qur'an with him from Mullah Abd al-Hamid. He was also thinking about contacting his friends among the elders of the Kurdish tribes in Makhmur and Arbil, and the Turkish tribes in Kirkuk, and the Shabak people in al-Guwayr, and his Yazidi friends in Sinjar, who were tied to him by a long-lasting relationship of trust from his days as an onion merchant. Likewise, old friends among the Christians in Qarqush and Talkayf, who fought with him during the days of the British occupation[67].

Likewise, in *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, the narrator explicitly mentions the Kurdish and Christian communities when Ibrāhīm and ʿAbdallāh remember the so-called "War of the North" that blew up in the country in the mid-Sixties[68], as well as in some passages recounting the story of ʿAbdallāh's captivity in Iran[69]. Yet, in contrast to these symbolic strategies and despite the references we mentioned above, the narrators of both novels rarely use the terms "Sunni" or "Sunna". The same is true of "Shiite", with the exception of a passage that explicitly mentions both ethno-religious identities with other Iraqi communities at the end of *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, where the tone, however, is quite sarcastic and pejorative[70].

Of course, this symbolic strategy by the writer is not surprising. In recent decades, scholars such as Haddad have shown how the conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites has evolved into a particularly sharp divide in contemporary Iraq, which has shaped and continues to shape the cultural, social and political dimensions of its nation-building process[71]. This conflict was also among the main factors that pushed the previous regime to insist on "Iraqiness" and "national identity" to avoid any form of awareness on the part

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[67] All the text extracts have been taken from the English translations of the novels. Muhsin Al-Ramli, *Dates on My Fingers*, cit., p. 10.

[68] Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, cit., p. 39.

[69] *Ibid*., pp. 95, 98.

[70] *Ibid*., p. 241.

[71] Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, cit.; Id., *Sectarian Relations in Arab Iraq: Contextualizing the Civil War of 2006-2007*, in "British Journal of Middle East Studies", 40, 2 (2013), pp. 115-138; Id., *Shia-Centric State-Building and Sunni Rejection in Post-2003 Iraq*, in F. Wehrey (ed.), *Beyond Sunni and Shia: Sectarianism in a Changing Middle East*, Hurst, London 2017, pp. 115-135.

of the Shiite majority, at least until the 1990s[72]. As a historian interested in literature and other symbolic goods, Zeidel also points out how the Sunni-Shiite divide still represents one of the most sensitive issues in the country's literary field[73]. Moreover, a considerable segment of this field, especially writers living abroad in the Iraqi diaspora, associates it as the principle governing its most heteronomous pole today[74].

Nevertheless, al-Ramlī's novels also have several implicit references to a specific (Sunni) community and the Shiite ethno-religious identity. As for the former, one can observe, for instance, that the narratives in both texts take place in the Governorate of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, an area that is immediately linked to the Sunni ethno-religious identity in the Iraqi national imagination. Together with the western regions of Iraq, this province is home to the country's most prominent Sunni population. Indeed, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn is part of the so-called "Sunni Triangle", which was both a centre of solid support for the former regime and the location of some wide revolts originating in the Sunni community itself during the 1990s. Additionally, after the US invasion, this area became a focus of armed Sunni opposition to Coalition Provisional Authority rule, making its ethno-religious identity clear for any Iraqi citizen.

Another implicit reference to the Sunni ethno-religious identity can be found in the conflict between the Muṭlaq family and the "Tikritis" in *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ*, directly evoking the battle that part of this community fought, especially after the 1968 coup that brought the Baathists to power. Following this event and up to the purges of 1979, the Tikriti wing of the Baath Party consolidated its power at the expense of the members of non-Sunni and other Sunni communities to such a degree that the American historian Phebe Marr observed that «three of the five members of the Revolutionary Command Council were [from this moment on] 'Tikritis'»[75]. And another authority on modern Iraqi history, Hanna Batatu, stated: «Their [the Tikritis] role continues to be so critical that it would not be going too far to say that the Tikritis rule through the Ba'ath party, rather than the Ba'ath party through the Tikritis»[76].

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[72] See Amatzia Baram, *Culture and Ideology in the Formation of Baathist Iraq*, cit.; E. Davis, *Memories of State*, cit.

[73] R. Zeidel, *Pluralism in the Iraqi Novel After 2003*, cit., pp. 56-100.

[74] I would argue that some of the reasons for this are related to the centrality that this divide acquired in the Iraqi nation-building process after 2003 and its prominent religious dimension, which makes it much more sensitive than cleavages based solely on ethnic distinctions. However, this statement is mostly based again on ethnographic research that I have conducted since 2020 with the literary actors involved in the Iraqi field.

[75] Ph. Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, Westview Press, Boulder 2012 (3rd ed.), p. 88.

[76] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and The Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1978, p. 1088, as cited in Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, cit., p. 95.

As for implicit references to the Shiite ethno-religious identity, al-Ramlī devoted many pages of his *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs* to the topic of the March 1991 political uprisings through the story of Aḥmad, the man who brought Ibrāhīm to his house and took care of him. Although the instigators of these protests had a diverse mix of ethnic, religious and political affiliations, they mainly came from the Shiite and Kurdish communities. Moreover, these protests spread from the southern and northern areas of the country, regions where a large majority of the inhabitants are Shiite (south) or Kurds (north). These regions experienced the most brutal consequences of the campaign conducted by the loyalist forces of the Republican Guard, and suffered the highest number of losses caused by the former regime during the Second Gulf War[77].

Regarding this latter element, it is worth mentioning that al-Ramlī not only recalls these traumatic events, but also leaves room for a favourable judgment of the March 1991 political uprisings, as Zeidel remarks. For example, in *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, Aḥmad refers to them as «genuine» protests and to its instigators as the «downtrodden», despite several ambivalent and contradictory ideas expressed by calling some of them «opportunists» as in the following:

> It is a genuine uprising of the downtrodden, and I'm playing my part. But unfortunately, various opportunists are diverting it from its course and corrupting it. Many people, Arabs and non-Arabs, are vying to control the movement. The Americans have withdrawn from the south, abandoning all the people who rose up to their fate. By retreating just when the government was about to fall for the final time, the Americans gave a green light to the regime to crush the people, and now they've gathered up what remains of the army and the Republican Guard to launch devastating raids against all the cities and villages that revolted. They're bombing schools, houses, mosques and mausoleums, killing without mercy. […] The regime and the Americans – they're no different in what they do to the people[78]!

In this passage, the reference to these political uprisings includes a sharp critique of the former regime as well as the Americans, who are equally criticised by Aḥmad. Similar ideas appear in a previous section of the novel where, in a dialogue with Ibrāhīm, Aḥmad refers to these events as proper «revolutions» carried out by «the common people and the truly oppressed» despite some «infiltrators» from other countries:

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[77] On these uprisings, see Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, cit., pp. 65-86; Dina Rizk Khoury, *Iraq in Wartime: Soldiering, Martyrdom, and Remembrance*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2013, pp. 133-145; L. Blaydes, *Rebuilding the Baʾthist State: Party, Tribe, and Administrative Control in Authoritarian Iraq, 1991–1996*, in "Comparative Politics", 53, 1 (October 2020), pp. 93-115.

[78] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *The President's Gardens*, cit., pp. 61-62.

Ibrahim tried to picture the scope of the devastation, even though in reality it was far greater than he could imagine. "How awful!" he murmured. "What are you saying, brother? This means the country is finished." "A tragedy," the young man remarked with fervour, choosing his words deliberately. "But take comfort! The people are suffering, but they will never submit. These are the birth pangs of revolution." "Revolution!" "Yes. But unfortunately it lacks direction. The uprising by the common people and the truly oppressed was lost amid the havoc wreaked by infiltrators. With my own two eyes, I saw armed foreigners in the streets. They were with Iraqis jabbering away in some foreign language. As you know, Iraq didn't leave any significant forces to secure the rest of its borders, and at a few places on the border with Iran, as soon as the guards retreated or were killed, well..."[79].

In other words, not only are there implicit references to Shiite communities in *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, but these can also be sympathetic to some of their causes.

Readers can also find explicit references to the Shiite identity associated with more negative characters, as is the case of Ṭāriq, who is sometimes represented as a shady and insincere man[80]. This character explicitly mentions Ḥusayn (626-680), the son of ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (600-661) and grandson of Muḥammad (570-632), murdered on the 10th of the Islamic month of *muḥarram* for refusing to recognise the political legitimacy of the caliph Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah. According to Haddad, Ḥusayn and the 7th-century Battle of Karbala (680 CE) are two of the symbolic elements most related in Iraqi culture to the Shiite community, encapsulating the sense of victimhood that is so crucial to its identity[81]. On an ethnic level, Ḥusayn embodies some tribal customs shared by many Arab Iraqis, such as manliness, courage, chivalry and even vengeance. From a religious perspective, instead, Ḥusayn is venerated as a saint amongst the Shiites. Moreover, it is notable that ʿĀšūrāʾ, the rich array of rituals associated with the commemoration of Ḥusayn's death taking place every year in Iraq, was banned and repressed under the Baathist regime precisely because of its strong connection with the Shiite community[82].

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[79] *Ibid*., p. 60.

[80] See, for instance, Muḥsin al-Ramlī, *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, cit., p. 41.

[81] Shiites often refer to Ḥusayn as the "oppressed" (or *maẓlūm* in Arabic). On the sense of victimhood that is so crucial to Iraqi Shiites, see Fanar Haddad, *Sectarianism in Iraq*, cit., pp. 17-18.

[82] On the importance of heroes and their values in Islamic cultures in general, see J. Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Art*, Mercer University Press, Macon 1999. For a study of Ḥusayn's figure in contemporary Arabic literature beyond the Iraqi context, see A. Tondi, *L'altro al-Ḥusayn: l'eroe di Karbalāʾ nella letteratura egiziana contemporanea*, in "Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale", 58 (2022), pp. 113-150. While observing that Ḥusayn's death is a major theme in Shiite literature, Tondi shows that the martyr has also become a symbol of resistance and struggle in other segments of the Arabic literary

In *Tamr al-aṣābiʿ* as well, specifically in the passage in which Salīm's grandfather decides to fight back against the "Tikritis", al-Ramlī makes some Shiite references. In this passage, the narrator mentions several unknown rulers of the cities of Karbala and Najaf who fought alongside Salīm's grandfather during the British occupation. Along with Samarra, Kadhimiya and Kufa, Karbala and Najaf make up the five cities of great importance for Iraqi Shiites for reasons that involve, once again, the historic and heroic figure of Ḥusayn, who fought there his last battle against the caliph's army.

Last but not least, another element that implicitly alludes to the Shiite identity in both novels involves the descriptions of certain characters' way of shaving and dressing. For instance, in *Ḥadāʾiq al-raʾīs*, the narrator repeatedly describes Ṭāriq as a man with a long beard and a turban. His character is even compared by his best friends to people of Iranian descent, as in the following passage, where ʿAbdallāh, while narrating his captivity in Iran with his Christian friend Bihnām and his strange imprisoner Abū Zulfà, makes a joke comparing Ṭāriq with the latter:

> "Abu Zulfa visited us most often, and one evening, after we returned to the hall from one of his lectures, Behnam whispered a grumbled complaint in my ear. 'My God, brother! They are killing us with this... this glorified dickhead.' That made me laugh, and I somehow managed a riposte. 'With his beard and turban, he actually looks like your uncircumcised penis!' We burst out laughing until everyone in the hall turned to look at us. That was the first laughter to escape any of our lips since we had become prisoners. "After that, we began to see more smiles and hear more laughter, more sarcastic comments. That first laugh was like a revelation – it spread an air of relaxation and eased the weight of our oppression. We – Behnam and I, that is – would look at each other and smile every time Abu Zulfa was mentioned. Don't be offended, Tariq! We were referring specifically to this Abu Zulfa and not any other bearded man wearing a turban[83].

Concluding Remarks

Taking an approach that considered the symbolic strategies adopted by al-Ramlī in these two novels, I showed that the writer explicitly mentions only some ethno-religious identities through the voices of their narrators and characters while alluding to others implicitly, by references and oblique representations that echo past communal conflicts or significant places, objects and symbolic figures of Iraqi ethno-religious imagination. Indeed, despite including some elements that could be associated with a specific (Sunni) group and the con-

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space, allowing, for instance, many Egyptian writers of the 20th and 21st centuries to deal with the political events that upset their country.
[83] Muhsin Al-Ramli, *The President's Gardens*, cit., p. 94.

siderable amount of autobiographical material that draws on the (hi)story of the community where he was born, al-Ramlī never explicitly mentions the identity of this group. He also adopts a similar strategy for the Shiite community, thus showing more complex and ambiguous position-takings about the possibility of clearly identifying both in post-2003 Iraqi fiction. Of course, the fact that the writer makes reference to his community could be motivated by his personal trajectory as the brother of Ḥasan Muṭlak, an opponent of the regime, and his membership of a group that was pretty marginalised compared to the "Tikritis". However, one cannot avoid considering that he adopts specific strategies to refer to this and does not mention the Sunni ethno-religious identity. Therefore, as I have attempted to show, Zeidel's suggestion that this writer «started publishing novels with the purpose of countering the hegemonic discourse associating the *Sunnis* with the Baʿth»[84] is questionable, especially when looking at this community from an ethno-religious point of view.

One may also wonder why al-Ramlī adopts such complex and ambiguous position-takings, using specific strategies only for some of these identities. In this regard, I would argue that the distinction that the writer makes between the Sunnis and the Shiites on one side, and all the other identities, such as the Kurds, the Christians or the Yezidis on the other side, is related to the specificity that the divide involving the former acquired in the Iraqi context, as also stressed above. Moreover, applying Bourdieu's analytical approach, one could posit that al-Ramlī's specific position in the Iraqi field as a recognised writer belonging to its most denationalised pole may also prevent him from overtly dealing with this topic. Incidentally, in her work, Casanova identifies a structural homology between the internal configuration of each national field and that of the international space, which leads writers who experiment with the rules of the global literary field to claim (more) autonomous positions[85]. This hypothesis is corroborated by a previous study I carried out on ethno-religious identities in Iraqi fiction, exploring the case of the literary trilogy written between 2008 and 2017 by the Iraqi writer ʿAbdallāh Ṣaḫī. In this study, I showed that Ṣaḫī, who occupies a marginal position in

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[84] R. Zeidel, *Pluralism in the Iraqi Novel After 2003*, cit., pp. 71-75. Emphasis added.
[85] P. Casanova, *La République mondiale des lettres*, cit., pp. 163-164. In this regard, Felix Lang and Richard Jacquemond also stress that, especially in moments of crisis, the processes of "autonomisation" and politicisation are not always at odds in the Arab literary fields. However, in al-Ramlī's case, the crucial question is not so much politicisation but the fact that the issue of ethno-religious identities became associated with some of the most significant heteronomous forces that shape the Iraqi field today, as also stated in the previous sections. See R. Jacquemond; F. Lang, *Introduction*, in Eid., *Culture and Crisis in the Arab World: Art, Practices and Production in Spaces of Conflict*, I.B. Tauris, London-New York 2019.

both the Iraqi field and the international literary space, deals with ethno-religious identities much more explicitly than al-Ramlī[86].

The examination of these two novels also shows the importance of paying closer attention not only to a writer's specific trajectory and the effects of refraction of their national field but to the role and impact of the international space, especially when exploring such a sensitive issue as the presence of ethno-religious identities in post-2003 Iraqi fiction. Research work on this issue could be extended beyond the level of the texts, as I have partially done here, to include other elements connected with their context of production and circulation. One could investigate, for instance, the material effects generated by ethno-religious identities in the literary market, dealing with the reception and consumption of fictional texts inside and outside the Iraqi context. However, focusing on all these elements would require considering a greater number of sources and literary actors that, to date, have received little attention in the field of Arabic studies.

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[86] Of course, the position in the literary field is not the only element that distinguishes a writer like Ṣaḫī from al-Ramlī. However, this emerged as a crucial element in my previous study. See A. Pacifico, *Pluralism and Ethno-Religious Identities in Iraqi Fiction: ʿAbdullāh Ṣaḫī's Trilogy on Thawra City*, in F. Fischione, A. Monaco (eds.), *Be Like Adam's Son: Theorizing, Practicing and Writing Peace in the Arab Region*, Equinox, Sheffield (forthcoming).