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## An Intellectual on a Mission: Abdullah Jalal Fatah, his dissertation on Kurdish culture (1978) and heritage making inspired by Józef Chałasiński and Polish academia

Joanna Bocheńska<sup>1</sup> and Karwan Fatah-Black<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

*The paper presents a previously unknown doctoral dissertation prepared in the 1970s in Polish by Abdullah Jalal Fatah under the guidance of Polish sociologist Józef Chałasiński. The thesis, entitled 'Development and Dissemination of the Kurdish Culture in Iraq', bears the mark of communist ideology but also of Polish heritagisation, in which culture and intellectuals became an important driving force in the process of nation-building and in seeking international recognition. Following David C. Harvey's definition of heritage, and focusing primarily on its intangible aspects, we suggest that Fatah's thesis can be read today as an interesting document of Kurdish heritage-making inspired by Polish experience and academic tradition.*

**Keywords:** History of Kurdish studies; Kurdish culture; Iraqi Kurdistan; communism

### Abstract in Kurmanji

**Rewşenbîrêkî bi peywîr: Evdila Celal Fatah, teza wî ya li ser çanda kurdî (1978) û mîratsazkirina bi îlhama Yuzêf Xalasînskî û akademîsyenên polonî**

*Ev nivîsar tezeke doktorayê ya nenas pêşkêşî xwendevanan dike ku di salên 1970î de, ji bêla Evdila Celal Fatah ve û bi çavdêriya civaknasê polonî Yuzêf Xalasînskî, bi polonî hat nivîsandin. Di bin navê 'Pêşketin û belavbûna çanda kurdî li Iraqê' de, ev tez nîşanên bandora îdeolojiya komûnîst di xwe de vedibewîne, digel mîratsaziya polonî ya ku çand û reşenbîr tê de rola hezêke çalakger û bingeîn dileyizin di pêvajoya netewesazkirin û pesenda navneteweyî de. Li gorî pênaseya mîratê ya David C. Harvey, ku bi taybetî li ser aliyên wê yê neguberbar radimeste,*

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*em pêşniyazî vê yekê dikin ku teza Fatah wek belgeyeke balkêş a mîratsazkirina kurdî bi îlhama tecrube û adeta akademîk ên polonî bê xwendin.*

### **Abstract in Sorani**

***Rewşenbîrêk be peyamêkewe: ‘Ebdullah Celal Fatah, doktoranamekey le ser keltûrî kurdî (1978) û kelepûrsazî le jêr karîgerî Yuzêf Xalasînskî û ekadîmyay pollend de***

*Em nûsîne başî le doktoraname nenasrawekey ‘Ebdullah Celal Fatah dekat ke le salleanî 1970 da be zîmanî pollendî û be serpereştî komellnasî pollendî Yuzêf Xalasînskî bû. Nawnîşanî doktoranameke, ‘Geşesendin û bellawbûney keltûrî kurdî le ‘Îraq’, karîgerî aydyolôjîyay komînzîm û kelepûrî pollendî le ser diyar e. Têda keltûr û roşnbîran bûn be hêzêkî cullêner bo proseya nîştîmansazî û danpyananî nêrdewlettî. Bepîşbestin be pênasay kelepûrî Derîd Harvî we be girîngîdan be layene bercestenekrawekanî, pîşyardekeyn ke doktoranamekey nawbraw le êsta da babetêkî benîrx debêt leser kelepûrsazî le jêr karîgerî ezmûnî ekadîmyay Pollenda de.*

### **Abstract in Zazaki**

***Roşnîrêko bimîsyon: Ebdullah Celal Fatah, bi îlhamê Józef Chałasiński akademîsyenanê Polonya tezê ey ê doktora derheqê kulturê kurdan (1978) û mîrsviraştoxîye de***

*No nuşte tezê doktora ke verê cû nêamebî zanayene û 1970an de binê rayberîya sosyologê polonî Józef Chałasiński de hetê Ebdullah Celal Fatahî ra bi zîwanê polonkî ameyo nuştene, ey pêşkêş keno. Tezê bi sernuşteyê “Îraq de Aversîyayîş û Vilabîyayîşê Kulturê Kurdan” hem wayîrê nîşanê îdeolôjîya komünîstan o hem kî yê mîrassazîya polonan o ke tede kultur û roşnîrî benê hêzê aversîyayîşî yo muhîm seba prosesê netewewirastişî û girewtîşê tesdîqê mîyaneteweyî. Goreyê tarîfê mîrasî yê David C. Harveyî û bi giranîya hetanê ci yê nemadîyan ser o, ma pêşniyaz kenîme ke tezê Fatahî yo ke hetê tecrube û edetanê akedemîsyananê polonan ra îlham girewto, ewro sey belgeyê mîrsviraştoxîya kurdan o balkêş bêro wendene.*

## **Introduction**

This paper introduces Abdullah Jalal Fatah, a Kurd from Sulaimani, and analyses his doctoral dissertation on Kurdish culture and its links with Polish sociology. The thesis was written in Polish and defended at Warsaw University in 1978. Inspired by the works of Józef Chałasiński, it can be considered an interesting example of cultural planning and heritage-making. Although the words *heritage*, *heritagisation* and *heritage-making* are often associated with contemporary cultural policies and capitalist economies, these terms can also be applied to the past in those cases when specific heritage-making practices led to the remodelling of cultural artefacts from previous generations to better fit new ideologies and contemporary social needs. As stressed by David C. Harvey (2001: 327), heritagisation cannot be linked exclusively to the modern ‘heritage industry’ nor the ‘economic practices of exploitation’. Rather, the more inclusive definition describing heritage as ‘shaping modernity from the past’, or ‘a process related to human action and agency and an instrument of cultural power in whatever period one chooses to examine’ should be considered. These ideas are in line with the many perspectives that appreciate intangible aspects of heritage, such as oral tradition or customs, that are sometimes ascribed to Eastern cultures in contrast to the supposedly more materialistic approach of Western societies (Ahmad, 2006; Vecco, 2010; Meutia, et al., 2018).

Abdullah Jalal Fatah came to Poland in the 1960s to continue his education and develop his interests in communism and in what he regarded as its successful social and national policies. His thesis, entitled ‘Development and Dissemination of the Kurdish Culture in Iraq’

(‘Problemy rozwoju i rozpowszechniania kultury kurdyjskiej w Iraku’),<sup>3</sup> was the first doctoral dissertation devoted to Kurdish issues defended at a Polish university. Fatah left Poland soon after defending his thesis in 1978, and his supervisor died a year later. Due to the profound political and social transformations that shook Polish reality at the end of the 1980s, leading to the collapse of the communist regime and to the mass rejection of anything communist, the work remained forgotten. Unpublished and hidden in the Warsaw University library in the form of a hardly readable typescript, it has never been mentioned by any of the Kurdish or Iraqi friends of Fatah who remained in Poland and were in touch with Polish academics. Only in 2018 did Fatah’s son contact me, sending a scan of his father’s work.

The history of Kurdish studies in Poland dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the Polish state did not exist at that time, and thus, works by Poles are usually presented as a part of Russian Kurdology (van Bruinessen, 2014; Omarkhali and Mossaki, 2014; Leezenberg, 2015, 2016). The Poles visiting Kurdistan and the Middle East were usually diplomats serving Tsarist Russia, like August Kościeszka-Żaba<sup>4</sup> and Aleksander Chodźko,<sup>5</sup> or, in contrast, ex-rebels fleeing the persecutions that followed the collapse of different Polish uprisings, like Karol Brzozowski.<sup>6</sup> These Poles were exploring Kurdistan and wrote about the Kurdish language, culture, and geography. After 1918, when Poland gained independence, and until 1939, when it was invaded by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, there was little interest in the Kurds. In the new communist Polish state established in the aftermath of the Second World War (1945) under the patronage of the Soviet Union, the Kurdish topic appeared in some articles from the second half of the 1960s onwards. The first Kurdish students arrived in Poland at the beginning of the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1970, there was a group of around 25 Kurds in Poland, who mainly came from Iraq and Syria, but there were also individuals from Iran, Turkey, and Jordan.<sup>7</sup> The students were supported either by the Iraqi Communist Party<sup>8</sup> or by the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE),<sup>9</sup> whose Polish branch was established in

<sup>3</sup> All translations from Polish were made by the author.

<sup>4</sup> August Kościeszka-Żaba (1801-1894), also mistakenly known as Alexander Jaba, was a Polish-born Russian diplomat and translator. Between 1848 and 1866, he served as Russian consul in Erzurum, where, with the help of the Kurdish scholar Mela Mahmud Bayazidi (1797-1867), he learned Kurdish and collected Kurdish manuscripts and oral stories. Some of the stories, in addition to his commentary, were published in 1860 in Saint Petersburg. He is also the author of the first French-Kurdish dictionary (1879; Paradowska, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> Aleksander Chodźko (1804-1891) was a Polish romantic poet, Russian diplomat in Iran, professor of Slavic Literatures in Collège de France and an orientalist. He was one of the first to write about Kurdish language and grammar (Sulaimani dialect). His paper ‘Études philologiques sur la langue kurde’ was published in the *Journal Asiatique* (No 4, 1857). For further information, see Calmard, 1991; Krasnowolska, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Karol Korab Brzozowski (1821-1904) was a Polish engineer and geographer. He took part in the Polish uprisings of 1840 and 1863. He migrated to the Ottoman Empire, where he became responsible for building telegraph lines in the Balkans and charting maps in Kurdistan in the Sulaimani area (1869). He discovered and described one of the ancient rock drawings in Kurdistan. After returning to Poland in 1884, he wrote about Kurdistan in several popular magazines (Paradowska, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Faraidoon Said and Amir Girgjes, September 2020. As there are no official statistics, the data in this paper are supplied from the memories of the Kurds who studied in Poland and were active members of the Kurdish Students Society in Europe (KSSE).

<sup>8</sup> The Iraqi Communist Party was established in 1934, and especially in the 1950s became popular among the Kurds.

<sup>9</sup> The first KSSE was established in 1949 in Lausanne, Switzerland by a group of Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan on the initiative of Nouredine Zaza. However, this group ceased to exist after several months. Attempts to reestablish the KSSE were made in 1956. The new organisation was initially called The Cultural Association of Kurdish Students, but during the third congress was renamed the KSSE. It published a magazine entitled *Kurdistan* and, in the following years, became very popular among the students. In 1964, the KSSE became a member of the International Union of Students and, between 1956 and 1975, held many international congresses in different European Cities (Sheikhmus, 2019; Jafar, 2016).

1963.<sup>10</sup> The number of Kurds studying in Poland increased considerably in the following decades, constituting a group of around 100 people in the 1980s and 200 in the 1990s.<sup>11</sup>

The first Polish academic interested in the Kurdish topic was Maria Paradowska,<sup>12</sup> who analysed the works by Żaba and other Polish 19<sup>th</sup>-century travellers (Paradowska, 1967, 1968, 1971). Hence, Fatah's master's, and especially his doctoral, dissertations were the first scientific works on Kurdish culture and society prepared and defended at a Polish university. Interestingly, Fatah's research was conducted far from the centres of orientalist knowledge, such as the institutes of Oriental Studies in Warsaw and Kraków, and the Soviet Kurdology departments in Leningrad and Moscow.<sup>13</sup> The theoretical background rooted in social sciences and the wider scope of presented topics distinguish this dissertation from the works of Soviet Kurdologists, who focused predominantly on folklore and linguistics (Leezenberg, 2015, 2016). Following his supervisor, Józef Chalasiński, Fatah paid special attention to the role of intellectuals and their reformist passion, as well as to the role of the institutions, the University of Sulaimani and the Kurdish Academy of Science (KAS).

### **Fatah, his Polish adventure, international engagement, and doctoral dissertation**

Abdullah Jalal Fatah was born in 1936 in Sulaimani in Iraqi Kurdistan. After finishing high school, he studied in Baghdad and, around 1960, graduated from the Preparatory Technical School, Electricity Section. He was interested in continuing his education abroad. Initially, he went to study in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1961 but moved to West Germany. This was the period when the Iron Curtain was being enforced more strictly and the Berlin Wall was built (1961), which might have affected his decision. Instead of studying, Fatah began his training as an electro-technician with the Ingenieurschule in Hannover. At the time, there was a shortage of labour in West Germany and companies were eager to attract workers, primarily from Mediterranean countries. Although there was no direct recruitment agreement with Iraq, skilled and semi-skilled workers were in great demand. During his time in West Germany, Fatah had internships at various companies, both the private company Reinhardt Lindern and the municipal *stadtwerk* Elektrizitätswerk. However, being a worker at a company was probably not the height of his ambition. Judging by the photographs from that period, Fatah continued visiting libraries and liked taking pictures of himself reading or studying. In 1964, the KSSE organised a congress in Hannover, and Fatah met an old friend from Sulaimani, Ali Ghafour, who was visiting West Germany as the President of the Union of Kurdish Students in Poland. Ghafour encouraged Fatah to move to Poland and promised him help in enrolling at university.<sup>14</sup>

In October 1965, Abdullah Fatah travelled to Warsaw. Initially, from 1968 to 1969, and then in 1971-1972, he studied economic sociology in Łódź. The power-grab by the Ba'ath in Iraq

<sup>10</sup> Personal communication with Amir Gorgies, September 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Personal communication with Amir Gorgies, Sidqi Hirori, and Faraidoon Said, September 2020.

<sup>12</sup> Maria Paradowska (1932-2011) was a Polish ethnographer and professor at Poznań University. Among other topics, she studied the reality of Germans assimilated to Polish culture and the image of the Middle East in the writings of Polish travelers and journalists (Podlasiński and Sopata, n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> Although Fatah mentions the outstanding output of Soviet Kurdologists, he only briefly refers to the Armenian scholar Khachatur Abovian (1809-1848), and to Tatiana Aristova's publication on the Caucasian Kurds (*Kurdy zakavkaz'ia: Istoriko-etnograficheskie ocherki*, Moscow, 1966) in Kurdish translation (Fatah, 1978: 39). Obviously, he had access to the Soviet Kurdologists' works only through the books that were published in Iraq.

<sup>14</sup> Personal communication with Ali Ghafour, May 2019.

in 1968 passed Fatah by, as did the new round of persecution against the members of the Iraqi Communist Party and the uprising of the Kurds the following year. However, despite his physical absence from the struggle, Kurdistan remained foremost in his mind.

He received his MA on 3 March 1973. His thesis, supervised by the Polish sociologist Jan Lutyński,<sup>15</sup> was entitled 'The Determinants of the National Consciousness of the Kurds'. Certainly, the thesis prepared the ground for his doctoral dissertation. Fatah received a letter of recommendation to begin a PhD at the Institute of Sociology of the University of Warsaw, and he moved to the capital. He remained very involved in student politics, joining the International Union of Students and being present at international cultural events. Furthermore, at that time, he seemed optimistic about Iraq's future and the place of the Kurds within it. When, in 1973, the non-aligned nations met in Algiers for their fourth summit, Fatah, introduced by an anonymous Polish journalist as 'an Iraqi', commented in a newspaper that 'the summit presented a great occasion for nations still wrestling with the remains of colonialism in their fight for independence' (Fatah, 1973). It is unclear whether his remark was a covert reference to the place of the Kurds in Iraq, or should be taken as a general comment on the postcolonial condition.

**Figure 1.** Abdullah Jalal Fatah's student card from Łódź University



Fatah defended his doctoral dissertation in 1978. According to Ali Ghafour, his thesis meant a great deal for other Kurds studying in Poland, and they tried to support Fatah morally to

<sup>15</sup> Jan Lutyński (1921-1988) was a student of Józef Chalasiński and professor at Łódź University.



continue with his work.<sup>16</sup> ‘The Development and Dissemination of the Kurdish Culture in Iraq’ (‘Problemy rozwoju i rozpowszechniania kultury kurdyjskiej w Iraku’) consists of 349 pages organised in an introduction, four thematic chapters, and a fifth chapter summarising conclusions: Introduction, I: The Socio-Cultural Development of the Kurdish Nation, II: The Elements of Kurdish Culture, III: The University of Sulaimani and the Kurdish Academy of Science and Their Role in Developing the National Kurdish Culture, IV: Forms and Methods of Disseminating the Kurdish National Culture in the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan, V: Summary and conclusions. The chapters are followed by a bibliography, which contains 23 publications in Kurdish, 36 in Arabic, 74 in Polish, 45 in English, and 20 in German. At the end, three appendices in Arabic were added: the laws of the University of Sulaimani, the Kurdish Academy of Science, and the Iraqi Academy of Science. One document (‘The Law on the Kurdish Academy’) is also provided in English.

Judging from a letter in Fatah’s small archive, in May 1978, Andrzej Zaborski,<sup>17</sup> from Jagiellonian University, invited him to lecture at a meeting of the Kraków Branch of the Polish Orientalist Society. However, the session never took place, which to some extent explains why there was no sign left of Fatah’s dissertation among Polish scholars working on the Middle East and Kurdistan.<sup>18</sup> Soon after defending his PhD, Fatah moved to the University of Algiers, where he was contracted as a lecturer at the Department of Sociology from December 1978 to September 1981.

**Figure 2.** The defence of Fatah’s dissertation, 1978, University of Warsaw. First on the left – Abdullah Jalal Fatah (standing), third from the left – Prof. Józef Chalasiński.



Around 1983, an opportunity arose for Fatah to make his education and knowledge useful in Kurdistan. In 1968, the first university had been established in Sulaimani. In 1981, the

<sup>16</sup> Personal communication with A. Ghafour, May 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Andrzej Zaborski (1942-2014) was a Polish philologist, specialist in Arabic and African studies, and professor at Jagiellonian University (Kraków).

<sup>18</sup> The first scientific publication on the Kurdish subject written by a Polish scholar was *The rural community of contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan facing modernisation* by Leszek Dziegiel, at the Jagiellonian University (1981). However, in 1978, Dziegiel was probably in Iraqi Kurdistan, where he conducted field research between 1977 and 1980 as a worker for a Polish company (Dziegiel, 1992:14). Fatah’s dissertation is not mentioned in any of his works.

university transferred to Erbil and was renamed Salahaddin University. Two years later, Fatah joined the university. The social and political conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan were, however, not welcoming under the rule of Saddam Hussein. Fatah was put under pressure by the university leadership to join the Ba'ath party, which he refused to do. Moreover, considering his reformist zeal, he might not have been welcomed. Saddam was far from implementing any of the promises made to the Kurds in the 1970 March Manifesto.<sup>19</sup> Fatah decided to flee and find a way back to Europe. Like many other Kurds persecuted by the Ba'athist regime, he crossed the mountains to Iran and finally arrived in a refugee camp in Karaj, near Tehran. There, he was an outlier; the camp was full of Iraqi deserters who were much younger than him. Along with a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) guerrilla, he made a plan to depart to Europe. However, on 17 April 1985, the day before they were to depart, Fatah suffered a stroke and died.

### **Carving a modern socialist nation with the help of intellectuals and cultural heritage: Józef Chałasiński and Abdullah Jalal Fatah**

#### *Józef Chałasiński and his output*

Józef Chałasiński was an intriguing and controversial figure in Polish academia of the socialist period (1945-1989). He was born in 1904, the son of an educated peasant. He received his education in the new-born Polish state (1918-1939), and though considered a radical leftist, he remained greatly in debt to the young state's independent spirit and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Polish intellectual tradition. Throughout his life, he was affiliated with a few different academic institutions. Between 1923 and 1934, he completed his MA, PhD, and habilitation at Poznań University, where he studied under the guidance of Florian Znaniecki,<sup>20</sup> focusing on the sociology of education and the reality of peasants and workers. Between 1931 and 1933, he was awarded the Rockefeller scholarship to conduct research within the United States and Great Britain, where he investigated the American schooling system and Polish work migration (Winclawski, 1989). He became widely known for his work *Młode Pokolenie Chłopów* (*The Young Generation of Peasants*, 1938), which was based on biographical studies – mainly autobiographies written by Polish peasants (Chałasiński, 1938; Czyżewski, 1992). From 1935 until the outbreak of the Second World War, he worked at Warsaw University. Known as a fierce critic of the elitist and aristocratic model of Polish intellectual life and academia, in the new communist reality, he became the perfect candidate for President of Łódź University, which was established in 1945 by the communist authorities in the 'city of workers' to

<sup>19</sup> The March Manifesto, declared on 11 March 1970, was an accord reached between the ruling Ba'ath party and the Kurdish movement. On paper, it granted the Kurds many cultural and political rights, including the provision for Kurdish to become the second official language of Iraq and the language of instruction in the areas inhabited by a majority of Kurds. The Kurds should have been given posts in the cabinet and army and allowed to establish their own cultural and social organisations. The Constitution was to be amended to declare Iraq the country of two nationalities: the Arabs and the Kurds. However, the March Manifesto was never fully implemented. Rather, it helped Saddam Hussain to win some time to consolidate power. In 1974, the war between the Central Government and the Kurds erupted again (McDowall, 2006: 323; Lalik, 2009: 72).

<sup>20</sup> Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958) was a Polish philosopher and sociologist. He became well known for his English-language publication, co-authored with William I. Thomas, and entitled *The Polish Peasants in Europe and America. Monograph of an Immigrant Group* (1918-1920). He established the first Polish department of sociology at the Adam Mickiewicz's University in Poznań, where he worked between 1920 and 1939, and he is considered the founder of Polish academic sociology. He worked as a visiting professor at American universities and, following the outbreak of the Second World War, he remained in the US. His works were condemned by the new Polish communist regime in 1945, which is why he never returned to Poland. Being a radical leftist, Józef Chałasiński criticised him for his highly elitist approach to research and academia, but on many other occasions he remained in debt to his 'master', referring to his works during many of his classes. According to an anecdote, the students of the Jagiellonian University (Kraków), where Chałasiński lectured in the 1960s, used to joke asking each other if during his classes Chałasiński quoted from Znaniecki or from Karl Marx. Personal communication with Andrzej Stembarth-Sawicki, December 2020.



counterbalance the existing traditional intellectual centres, such as Kraków and Poznań (Piskala and Zysiak, 2013: 279). However, his ‘democratic populism’ (Kłoskowska, 1992: 11), and the idea of the university being open to social needs (or the so-called ‘social university’), (Winclawski, 1992; Piskala and Zysiak, 2013) were not welcomed by the regime, which was not interested in implementing any profound social reforms, but rather in keeping the universities under strict bureaucratic control. Initially, Chałasiński managed to preserve some form of independence for the university. However, after criticising the involvement of the state bureaucracy in the affairs of the universities and cultural institutions, which, to him, endangered free intellectual life, independent public opinion, and the process of democratisation (Chałasiński, 1957, 1959), he was forced to resign from the post in 1961 (Kłoskowska, 1992: 19). Paradoxically, at the same time, he was able to make concessions and present so-called self-criticism. Therefore, he remained an active member of academic life and was even able to travel to the West,<sup>21</sup> which for many other Polish citizens remained an unattainable desire. In the following years, he became the Vice-Secretary of the Polish Academy of Science and, in 1966, he was restored as a professor at Warsaw University (Winclawski, 1989: XLVI-LV).

In some of his works, Chałasiński puts forward the idea of building a ‘modern socialist Polish nation’, which, to him, should tear down borders between different classes (Chałasiński, 1966, 1968; Kłoskowska, 1992). It is important to stress that intertwining communist and national ideology and vocabulary, sometimes described as ‘national communism’, was a feature of many socialist countries (Fragner, 2001; Tyszka, 2004). Bert Fragner proposed the term ‘Soviet nationalism’, claiming that ‘the aim of Soviet policies was not to root out nationalism but, instead, to dominate it and to monopolise the hegemony within nationalist discourses’ (Fragner, 2001: 18). Merging communism with nationalism can also be linked to the many aspects of communist ideology represented especially in followers of Marx and Engels, such as Eduard Bernstein, Otto Bauer, or Kazimierz Kelles-Krauz, who, in different ways, tried to incorporate national sentiments into the communist discourse (Tyszka, 2004: 53-77). From the perspective of many communist intellectuals, socialism was supposed to contribute to building and transforming the new ‘socialist nations’, and not to annihilating them. In the Polish People’s Republic, ‘national’ and ‘ethnic’ sentiments became important from the immediate aftermath of the Second World War and the disaster it brought. Sadly, this policy resulted in creating a very monolithic state that would eradicate or assimilate minorities (Tyszka, 2004: 134-135). The national lexicon may also be linked to the Stalinist era (1929-1953) and to the new attempts made, in Poland (especially after 1956), to build the socialist order in close connection with national tradition. This approach entailed criticising Polish dependency on the Soviet Union and, thus, postulating more collaborative relationship (Tyszka, 2004: 142-143).

For Chałasiński (1968: 127), the nation was the modern concept ‘which offered moral meaning to the different forms of human activity and life’. Hence, the nation-building process was inextricably linked to the ‘democratization of intellectual life’, which was no longer only a feature of the elite (Chałasiński, 1968: 438). Interestingly, the notion of humanism occupied a central place in Chałasiński’s understanding of the nation, according to which the successful nation-building project and its cultural heritage needed to be accompanied by a ‘longing for the greater human brotherhood’ (Chałasiński, 1968: 45).

<sup>21</sup> In 1958, he visited the US again after many years.

A special place in Chalasiński's writings is devoted to the role of culture and intellectuals, whom he perceived as leaders of society. To him, intellectual activity played a crucial role in integrating the nation; yet, he maintained that intellectuals should be recruited 'from the masses', and not only from the elite. At the same time, he remained highly critical of Polish intellectuals. He called for recognition of the role of peasants in Polish heritage-making and, therefore, was often perceived as representing their interests and culture (Nowakowski, 2016: 189-190). His interest in intellectual life was accompanied by his attention toward universities. He could not, however, criticise the institutions of communist Poland, which is why he often wrote about Western – mostly British and American – universities (Winclawski, 1992: 48). He also studied the realities of non-European lands, especially the US and African countries. In 1962, he published the book *Kultura Amerykańska (American Culture)*, and, in 1965, with his wife, Krystyna Chalasińska, *Bliżej Afryki (Closer to Africa)*, and many other papers touching upon the processes of nation-building, integration and what he called 'the crises of European consciousness' in Africa (1973, 1974). Until his death in 1979, he supervised many PhD students from Africa as the Director of the Doctoral Seminar at the Department of Non-European Countries at the Polish Academy of Science (Nowakowski, 2016: 192). Finally, Chalasiński's essays on Polish culture represent a very engaging style of writing, in which the important aspect is not just critical analysis, but also a call for the profound social changes that should ensue.

Fatah's doctoral dissertation follows many of his supervisor's interests and approaches, and it is also a passionate manifesto advocating for change in Iraqi Kurdistan's social reality. Every analysis of the contemporary situation of the cultural reality of Kurdistan, for example, in reference to the University of Sulaimani, the KAS, the press, radio, or fine arts, is followed by a long list of firm proposals for transformation. However, Fatah's inspiration does not seem to be simple borrowing. We know little about the relationship between Fatah and his supervisor but, according to Ali Ghafour, they were 'very friendly'. With their zeal to work for the furtherment of their nations and marginalised classes, and their involvement in social and political life, both Chalasiński and Fatah represented a very engaged type of intellectual. Some of the ideas propagated by Chalasiński were not entirely new for Fatah. The Kurdish poets, writers, and journalists involved in the cultural and political life in the period of changes in the late Ottoman Empire also called for the social engagement of Kurdish intellectuals (Pertev, 2018: 167). Fatah's contact with Chalasiński helped him to develop the many views they already shared.

At the beginning of his dissertation, Fatah contends that thinking about and analysing the role of Kurdish culture has been a neglected topic (Fatah, 1978: 4). He defines his main research tasks as: '1. analysing the main problems of the development of Kurdish culture in postcolonial Iraq, 2. exposing the Kurdish culture's uniqueness, and 3. formulating the main postulates and proposals for social policy with regard to disseminating the Kurdish national culture in Iraqi Kurdistan' (Fatah, 1978: 1). According to Fatah, his research method was mainly based on the analysis of source materials, such as documents and various Kurdish publications, on existing publications about the Kurds, on Iraqi statistics, and on interviews conducted with representatives of Iraqi public life, including politicians and cultural workers (Fatah, 1978: 5-6). However, nowhere do we find a direct reference to an interview, which may be explained by the author's reluctance to reveal the names of Kurdish politicians and activists.

In the second chapter, Fatah presents his theoretical approach and different definitions of culture by referring directly and indirectly to works by many scholars (Alfred Kroeber, Clyde Kluckhohn,<sup>22</sup> Bronisław Malinowski,<sup>23</sup> Stanisław Ossowski,<sup>24</sup> Jan Szczepański,<sup>25</sup> Ruth Benedict,<sup>26</sup> and Antonina Kłosowska),<sup>27</sup> but especially to Józef Chalasiński's publications. As stressed by Fatah, this is because Chalasiński 'worked extensively on the national culture, the links between culture and nation, and the role of culture in integrating the nation' (Fatah, 1978: 65). He directly quotes from Chalasiński, who defines the nation as 'the socio-cultural phenomenon, the internal integrity of which is rooted in the system of values acknowledged by individuals'. Hence, 'nation is the unity based on culture' and, therefore, the leading role in the nation-building process is assigned to intellectuals and intellectual centres that produce ideas (Fatah, 1978: 66).

Following Chalasiński, Fatah gives priority to the 'integrating' role of culture in building the modern nation. To him, contemporary culture is the result of the activities of many previous generations and, at the same time, 'the present stage of cultural development conditions its future' (Fatah, 1978: 63-64). At first, it seems that the main focus in his 'heritagisation project' is one of continuity, which proves the durability of communities (Fatah, 1978: 63). However, it is clear from his many remarks that not all 'cultural inheritance' can be applied for that purpose and, thus, any 'shaping from the past' is a selective process that must accommodate progress and new social needs. This way, although Fatah uses the word 'heritage' (*dziedzictwo* in Polish) mainly to talk about the traditions of the past, his entire project for Kurdish culture corresponds with the modern definitions of heritage, which entail not only passive inheritance but also active selection and modification according to the needs of society (Harvey, 2001; Ashworth, 2015). However, in Fatah's view, these needs cannot be defined by the capitalist desire for profit. It is no accident that he stresses that the Bedirxans were not interested in earning money by selling the *Kurdistan* newspaper, and that their main aim was to serve the Kurdish people. Cultural heritage is perceived by Fatah as responding to the current and future needs of the nation. To achieve this goal, the state should provide financial support, and intellectuals should be responsible for interpreting the world, researching social needs, providing ideas, and guiding people to implement them. If we compare the title of Fatah's dissertation with the titles of other scientific works related to the Iraqi Kurds published around that date, such as the renowned *Agha, Sheikh and State* by Martin van Bruinessen (1978), or the *Rural community of contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan facing modernisation* by Leszek Dzięgiel (1981), it is evident that what Fatah proposed was to look at Kurdish society not through its traditional social structure or rural environment, but through the lenses of developing modern Kurdish culture and its creators. Fatah frequently claims that there are numerous intellectuals in Kurdistan, and even suggests that the emerging Kurdish press, 'which requires many educated people', is proof of this (Fatah, 1978: 183). Following Chalasiński's vision of the

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Louis Kroeber (1876-1960) and Clyde Kluckhohn (1905-1960) were American anthropologists who collected and analysed the many different definitions of culture in *Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952).

<sup>23</sup> Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) was a Polish social anthropologist; between 1914 and 1920, he conducted research in the Triobriand Islands. One of his most famous books was *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (1929). In the 1920s, he taught at the London School of Economics, and later at Yale University.

<sup>24</sup> Stanisław Ossowski (1897-1963) was a Polish sociologist and social psychologist, specialist of culture and social science theory, and professor at Łódź University.

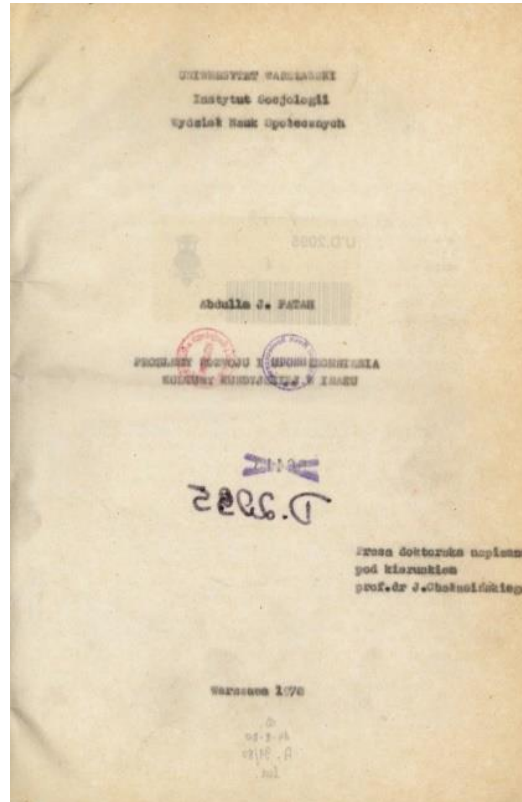
<sup>25</sup> Jan Szczepański (1913-2004) was a Polish sociologist, professor at Łódź University, and between 1977 and 1982, a member of the Polish People's Republic's State Council. His works touch upon the social role of intellectuals and of Polish higher education.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) was an American anthropologist and folklorist, and author of *Patterns of Culture* (1934).

<sup>27</sup> Antonina Kłosowska (1919-2001) was a Polish sociologist, student of Józef Chalasiński, professor at Łódź and Warsaw universities, and author of publications on culture and national identity.

modern Polish nation and culture, Fatah ascribed a special role to intellectuals, and, in every chapter of his dissertation, he calls attention to their importance and the crucial role they are meant to play.

**Figure 3.** The first page of Abdullah Jalal Fatah's dissertation.



*The main tasks and theoretical assumptions of Fatah's PhD thesis*

*Intellectuals and their institutions*

In the second chapter, Fatah identifies actors of the past, such as the classical poets, and calls them 'progressive'. The best example is Ehmedê Xanî, who is called 'the inventor of the national school of poetry', and 'the first poet and intellectual who raised the flag of the positive Kurdish nationalism and patriotism' (Fatah, 1978: 74). According to Fatah, Xanî as a poet 'made Kurdish literature live the life of the nation' (Fatah, 1978: 72), 'presented all the potential for dreaming in the Kurdish nation', and, 'with the mastery of a philosopher, managed to describe all the reasons for backwardness and to provide solutions for them' (Fatah, 1978: 75). However, Fatah's quotations from Xanî's *Mem û Zîn* are scarce, and in no place does he identify any source.

In the third chapter, Fatah focuses on the role of the University of Sulaimani and the KAS, which were created based on the March Manifesto and which he perceives to be crucial intellectual and cultural centres in the new reality of Kurdistan and Iraq. Following

Chalasiński, Fatah regards academics as men on a mission, who are not just specialists in a field, but active and devoted agents of moral, cultural, and social transformation. After presenting the history of Sulaimani, he deals with the history of schooling and education in Iraq as a whole (Fatah, 1978: 134). He presents statistics indicating the general situation of schools in Iraq in 1920-1932 (Fatah, 1978: 132),<sup>28</sup> and the numbers of schools and kindergartens in Kurdish provinces, including Sulaimani, Erbil, Duhok, Kerkuk, and Ninova in 1973-1974 (Fatah, 1978: 136-137).<sup>29</sup> He describes the infrastructure and activities of the University of Sulaimani in great detail,<sup>30</sup> highlighting its crucial role not only in educating the Kurdish masses, providing qualified staff, textbooks, and dictionaries, but also in developing and popularising Kurdish culture (Fatah, 1978: 141). He mentions the opening of the Cultural Centre at the university (1975), and contends that a very important achievement of the Centre was establishing the Museum of Ethnography. He regards the Centre as an important bridge between the university and society, allowing 'for society to become familiar with the activities of the university, and for the university to know the needs of society' (Fatah, 1978: 148). Moreover, this connection 'fosters the dissemination of progressive views and Kurdish culture' (Fatah, 1978: 148). Similar tasks are assigned to the university publishing house, established in 1976, the Central University Library, the magazine *Zanko* (University), and the *Bulletin of the University of Sulaimani*, which was one of the important sources of Fatah's knowledge about the university. Discussing the library, he stresses that its role should be the integration of academic society and search for knowledge (Fatah, 1978: 153). However, he also highlights the university's shortages, such as the lack of qualified staff and equipment (Fatah, 1978: 142).<sup>31</sup> Finally, he criticises the university for its lack of planning, its inability to harness its full potential, for using Arabic and English instead of Kurdish, and for 'still being a home for backward elements that are against the desires of the Kurdish nation' (Fatah, 1978: 156).

Fatah is much more critical regarding the role of the KAS, which he criticises for its narrow interest in language, literature, and history, as well as for being located in Baghdad and not in Kurdistan (Fatah, 1978: 171-172).<sup>32</sup> He notes that the laws of the KAS are a copy of the laws of the Iraqi Academy of Sciences (IAS), established in 1948. He argues that times have changed, and that Kurdish and Iraqi society deserves more progressive and socially engaged thinking that would help develop research in fields such as sociology, economics, and modern technology (Fatah, 1978: 175). To Fatah, one of the main tasks of the KAS was to be the standardisation of the Kurdish language, so that it could serve modern purposes and help integrate the nation (Fatah, 1978: 164). In another section, Fatah presents the different Kurdish dialects as a source of richness, but also as remnants of feudalism and as obstacles to integration and the nation-building process (Fatah, 1978: 116). He elevates the role of the Sulaimani dialect of Sorani Kurdish, calling it 'the language of poets and writers', suggesting that this dialect could be accepted as the language of all Kurds (Fatah, 1978: 117). He also opines that the KAS entirely depends on the IAS for establishing contacts with many

<sup>28</sup> Based on Philip W. Ireland's book *Iraq: A Study in Political Development* (1938), published in Arabic translation in Beirut in 1949.

<sup>29</sup> Based on official Iraqi statistics published in the Yearbook of 1974.

<sup>30</sup> Most of the information was probably taken from the bulletin published by the University.

<sup>31</sup> Based on the statistics of the University of Sulaimani University, published in Arabic in 1976.

<sup>32</sup> As stressed by Leezenberg (2016: 15), the Soviet-trained specialists constituted an important part of the staff of Kurdish departments in Baghdad, Sulaimani and the KAS, which may explain the scope of interests Fatah criticised.



institutions in Iraq and abroad, and thus cannot develop proper international links in the field of Kurdish studies.

It is fairly surprising that, in his dissertation, Fatah does not mention many political leaders of that period. The only political figure who is frequently mentioned is Mahmud Barzinji, whom Fatah talks about when discussing the British mandate in Iraq. Neither Mela Mustafa Barzani nor Ibrahim Ahmad, nor even the Iraqi Arab leaders, are mentioned. However, judging from the two works by Jalal Talabani listed in Fatah's bibliography, and from Fatah's ideas, we may assume he had a close relationship with the Ahmad-Talabani wing of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which, in 1975, established the PUK. The name of the KDP appears only once when Fatah talks about the *Khabat* newspaper (Fatah, 1978: 196). In other places, he refers enigmatically to the 'Kurdish movement' and, surprisingly, never mentions the Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan (1946), even though he frequently refers to Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou's *Kurds and Kurdistan*.<sup>33</sup> Avoiding political context might have also been a strategy advised by Chalasiński to evade trouble. Nevertheless, considering the main ideas expressed in the thesis, it is likely that being silent about the politicians and elevating the role of intellectuals was by design.

#### *Oral tradition and modern Kurdish culture*

Although Fatah regards Kurdish folklore as the core of the national Kurdish heritage, contrary to Soviet Kurdologists, he does not focus on its morphology and content, but rather on the place of folklore in contemporary Kurdish society. He quotes from the Bulletin of the KAS and defines oral poetry as 'simple transparent words, which reach the heart and make people connected to life, earth, and work'.<sup>34</sup> Fatah adds that folklore is a product of a society of different classes (Fatah, 1978: 86). His appreciation of the role of folklore may be considered both an obvious feature of Kurdish nationalism and an inspiration from Chalasiński, with his close attention to the culture of Polish peasants. Chalasiński's approach to peasant culture was very different from the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Polish romantic tradition, with its dwelling on the spiritual aspects of life and the call for heroic sacrifice to liberate the nation. Chalasiński's interest was rooted in his own childhood experience and 19<sup>th</sup>-century Polish positivism, with its attention to organic work, understood as being crucial to the liberation of the nation. Fatah stresses that Kurdish folk stories possess fantastic features, but they 'are not disconnected from reality' (Fatah, 1978: 87). To the contrary, these stories reflect human desires and the struggle for a better future. The characters in folk stories usually have a common goal in life, which is earning a living through hard work and struggle (Fatah, 1978: 87). Fatah pays attention to the folkloric motives in modern Kurdish painting, such as portraits of Kurds in traditional costumes and during their work (Fatah, 1978: 207), and advocates establishing open-air museums that could protect and expose material Kurdish culture in a changing environment (Fatah, 1978: 256). He states with joy that the Folk Song and Dance Ensemble of the University of Sulaimani had recently won first prize at the Festival of Iraqi Universities in Mosul, 'which was of great moral meaning for the Kurdish youth' (Fatah, 1978: 147). Finally, he often highlights the need to invite Kurdish villagers to participate in and contribute to Kurdish cultural life, and criticises Kurdish intellectuals and journalists for being locked in their offices and unable to establish contacts with Kurdish villagers. Hence, in line with Chalasiński, his attention to folklore is connected with the idea of the democratisation of

<sup>33</sup> The book was published in Poland in 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Bulletin of the Kurdish Academy of Science, II/1 (Baghdad 1974), 742.

intellectual life, and of inviting the masses to take part in modern cultural life, which he believes can help integrate the nation.

The fourth chapter of Fatah's dissertation contains information on Kurdish modern activities, such as the press, literature, fine arts, theatre, cinema, radio, and libraries. These elements are presented as useful instruments for disseminating Kurdish culture and, thus, are important in a modern 'socialist' nation-building process. He refers to the first initiatives made to publish Kurdish journals in the late Ottoman Empire, stressing that, from the very beginning, they focused not only on national but also on social struggles and, thus, integrated the work of different classes (Fatah, 1978: 185). When Fatah discusses Kurdish modern literature, he offers no textual analysis and only refers to Kurdish literary works he read as a youth in Kurdistan or found in cultural magazines. He provides no sources, and these literary works are not mentioned in the bibliography. Accordingly, we find some inaccuracies. For example, the poet Sheikh Nuri Sheikh Salih<sup>35</sup> is claimed to be the author of the work *Le xewma* (*In my dream*, 1925), which, as we know, was a short story by Jamil Saib.<sup>36</sup> Following Chalasiński, Fatah focuses on the social roles of modern writers, suggesting that they differ from those of poets in the past. While literature has lost its position as the main source of information about the world, writers are no longer only 'the authors of texts', but they are strictly connected with society through the media and must provide it with interpretations of the surrounding reality (Fatah, 1978: 203). He gives an overview of painters, including Simko Tofik, Shakir Atif, Lala Abda, Azad Ahmad, Jamal Bakhtiyar, Muhsin Mohamed Amin, Dara Mohamad Ali, Mohamed Arif, Omar Tofik, and Tabir Fatah,<sup>37</sup> describing them as 'not separated from the masses' (Fatah, 1978: 205-207). He stresses that 'a work of art is alive if it finds its reception among the masses' (Fatah, 1978: 208). Fatah is also an enthusiast about radio and its role in popularising knowledge and Kurdish culture, 'especially in a country where there are so many illiterates'. He criticises the Kurdish language broadcast from Baghdad for 'not fulfilling the needs of Kurdish people'. He also finds radio useful in the lives of farmers, suggesting that it can be listened to 'while working in the fields' (Fatah, 1978: 210). Television and cinema are considered new media with great potential. He complains about the very few Kurdish language programmes on Baghdad, Kerkuk and Mosul televisions (Fatah, 1978: 215), yet, elsewhere, he highlights that Kurdish writers and the University of Sulaimani were engaged in producing the first programmes and documentaries (Fatah, 1978: 148). Regarding film, he proposes organising a travelling cinema to make it accessible to many (Fatah, 1978: 230).

No less interesting is the information given about theatre. Fatah refers to the plays staged in Sulaimani by teachers and students in 1926, and presents short biographies of Rauf Yahya<sup>38</sup> and Omar Ali Amin,<sup>39</sup> whom he considers 'very important figures' in the history of Kurdish

<sup>35</sup> Sheikh Nuri Sheikh Salih (1896-1958) was a Sulaimani-born Kurdish poet and thinker, manager and editor of the newspaper *Rojî Kurdistan* (*The Sun of Kurdistan*), and considered one of the modernisers of Kurdish poetry. His complete works were published only in the 1980s (Mirawdeli, 2006: 132).

<sup>36</sup> Jamil Saib (1887-1951) was a Sulaimani-born writer, author of the story *Le xewma*, first published in the *Jîyanewê* and *Jîyan* magazines between 1925 and 1926. The story is a heavy critique of the rule of Mahmud Barzinji (Ahmedzadeh, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> Fatah provides no detailed information about these artists. He refers to them only as authors of certain works or topics. Only with regard to Shakir Atif do we learn that he was born in 1937 in the village of Guwar in the Erbil area, and that he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in 1957. In 1974, he presented his works at the exposition of Kurdish artists in Baghdad (Fatah 1978: 206).

<sup>38</sup> Rauf Yahya (1926) was a Sulaimani-born actor and theatre director who played in more than 20 different parts.

<sup>39</sup> Omar Ali Amin (1926-2009) was born in Sulaimani into a poor family, graduated from teacher school and worked for many years as a teacher. He staged and directed many plays in different Kurdish cities and on radio and TV, and authored many children's plays.

theatre. He describes *The Government Inspector* by Nikolay Gogol, which he watched in the last months before the revolution of 1958, when the police arrested many actors (Fatah, 1978: 221).<sup>40</sup> He also pays attention to the situation of Kurdish libraries, providing statistics regarding the number of libraries and books in Arabic, Kurdish, and English in the cities of Sulaimani, Erbil, and Duhok (Fatah, 1978: 239).<sup>41</sup> To borrow a book from these libraries, a pledge of twice as much as the value of the book needed to be paid (Fatah, 1978: 237). In the final section of Chapter 4, Fatah suggests establishing open-air museums of folk culture and cultural centres for young and old, and discusses the importance of educating cultural workers and activists to work in such institutions. He stresses that cultural workers should know Kurdish and be recruited from the regions in which they would work, in order to know their specific characteristics (Fatah, 1978: 248). Many of Fatah's remarks and suggestions were inspired by Polish culture and the communist policy of that period, as he frequently quotes from publications on cultural planning.

### **The interconnectedness of Kurdish culture and Kurdish-Arab relations**

Interestingly, Fatah perceives the dependence on Arabic or Persian classical patterns visible in Kurdish classical poetry as 'the desire of Kurdish poets to understand the literature and spiritual development of their neighbours' (Fatah, 1978: 73). In this way, from the very beginning, he evaluates the interconnectedness of Kurdish culture positively, and this is also a feature distinguishing his dissertation from the Soviet tradition, which to Leezenberg tended to essentialise the Kurdish nation and people and avoided discussing broader contacts with Muslim and non-Muslim neighbours (Leezenberg, 2016: 16).<sup>42</sup> A desire to belong to the world's cultural heritage and to be a part of global developments is repeated throughout Fatah's work, in addition to an emphasis on the uniqueness and originality of Kurdish culture. For example, when Fatah talks about the need to translate publications into Kurdish, he also calls for translating Kurdish works into other languages to 'make others understand the problems of the Kurdish nation' (Fatah, 1978: 231). When discussing the University of Sulaimani, he calls for the participation of its members in international conferences and for organising exchange programmes (Fatah, 1978: 154). Regarding the KAS, he advocates establishing more contacts with other socialist countries, not just with the Soviet Union. He also calls for the KAS and the IAS to establish contacts with Turkey and Iran due to their considerable Kurdish populations, but stresses that he is 'aware of the very negative approach of both states toward the Kurdish nation' (Fatah, 1978: 168). Fatah's openness to the outside world and his repeated calls for interconnectedness may be also ascribed to the influence of Chalasiński, whose concept of nation was deeply rooted in humanism. Moreover, Chalasiński followed and studied the reality of Western countries and Africa and regarded Poland as having strong connectedness with the West, as well as with the Eastern bloc. It is important to stress that, in many cases, Poland became a link to the West even for Soviet citizens, such

<sup>40</sup> This information needs to be verified. According to Rostami, the interruption of the performance and the arrests of Kurdish actors took place in May 1948 when *Têkoşanî Rençberan* was staged (Rostami, 2019: 89).

<sup>41</sup> Based on the Cultural Statistics of the year 1975, published in Baghdad in 1976.

<sup>42</sup> One may agree with Leezenberg that this approach dominated Soviet Kurdology. However, there are works by Soviet scholars in which we find references to the wider Middle Eastern context. For example, commenting on the chronicle of Mastûrey Ardalan, Evgeniya Vasilyeva places it firmly in the wider tradition of historiography in the Muslim world (Vasilyeva, 1990: 39).

as the famous poet and literary Nobel Prize winner Iosif Brodski (1940-1996) and many others.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, the thesis reflects an enthusiasm for the Peace Accords signed between the central Iraqi authorities and Kurdish leaders in March 1970, and it frequently refers to the Autonomy Law of 1974. On paper, this law granted many rights to the Kurds, such as that of establishing political autonomy and vast cultural rights. However, these declarations were never fully implemented and, in 1974, the war between the central government and the Kurds erupted again. Following the signing of the Algiers Agreement between Iraq and Iran in 1975, the Kurds lost Iranian support, which resulted in a heavy defeat, many civilian casualties, and in the dividing of the Kurdish movement into two separate political bodies (McDowall, 2007: 339). Thus, in 1978, there was little cause for optimism, and it seems that this dissertation, or at least some of it, must have been finished earlier and only defended in 1978.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, being far from his homeland, Fatah might not have been fully informed about the situation. Taking into account the obvious tensions between the Baghdad authorities and Kurdish leaders and their possible effect on the atmosphere among Iraqis studying in Poland, Fatah might likely have been advised not to get into trouble with his dissertation. In any case, his historical narration ends in 1974.

Nonetheless, Fatah's dissertation also features bitter comments on Arab-Kurdish relations. For example, when he speaks about television in Iraq, he stresses that:

the content of the Mosul TV is not in line with the spirit of brotherhood between the Arab and Kurdish nations, nor with progress and with the policy of Iraqi authorities and the general interests of the Iraqi nation. (Fatah, 1978: 216)

Obviously, 'the lack of brotherhood' was interpreted by Fatah as 'being against the policy of Iraqi authorities'. This interpretation helped him to present his criticism as a form of loyalty toward the state and was a strategy known from Chalasiński's publications. Finally, when reading about the many shortcomings of institutions such as the KAS or the University of Sulaimani, it is evident that what he covertly criticised was, in fact, the Arabisation policy.

## Conclusions

Fatah's thesis provides interesting material for studying the effects of communist ideology on Kurdish intellectuals and for reflecting on the diverse aspects of Kurdish studies in socialist countries. The thesis bears the mark of communism but also of Polish heritagisation, in which culture and intellectuals became an important driving force in the process of nation-building and in seeking international recognition. Although the Soviet Union was the main place where Kurdology flourished, offering space to many Kurdish students, it was not the only such location in the communist bloc. Fatah's thesis is, to a great extent, different from the works written in the Soviet Union, as the socialist reality of the Polish People's Republic was rooted not only in communist ideology but also in the 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Polish intellectual tradition, and was likewise greatly inspired by the West. Instead of discussing language, literature, and history, Fatah followed Chalasiński's ideas and sought a modern sociological

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<sup>43</sup> Personal communication with Elena Tverdislova, well-known translator of Polish philosophy into Russian, September 2020. Tverdislova stressed that, for many, including Iosif Brodski and herself, learning Polish in the Soviet era was important to obtain access to different publications – including by Russian poets and writers – that were banned in Soviet Union but could be published in Poland.

<sup>44</sup> The latest sources are dated 1976.

approach, wishing to offer new solutions to influence the reality in Iraqi Kurdistan, which he felt responsible for. Like Chałasiński, Fatah perceived intellectuals as the main actors behind the socialist nation-building process. Accordingly, the main preconditions for a successful cultural policy on the part of the intellectuals were their recruitment from different classes, their non-elitist but popular approach to culture, understood as a product of all the society members, and their engagement and devotion to the introduction of reforms. Despite the many ideological and political difficulties, Fatah managed to be critical of the shortcomings he observed, yet idealistically believed in a better future to come. Furthermore, Kurdish nationalism suffuses every part of the dissertation. Nevertheless, Fatah believed in and tried to construct an open vision of a Kurdish nation that could jointly participate in 'the bright socialist future' along with many other nations.

Although some of Fatah's ideas may today sound naïve, especially when we consider the genocide committed by the Iraqi regime in 1988, they still have something to offer. The two main messages he wanted to deliver were as follows: first, Kurdish intellectuals must be in touch with the people, and their activities must be based on field research, and not on paperwork in distant offices. Second, the Kurds and Kurdish institutions must cooperate, because this is the basis for any successful policy. Fatah believed that establishing modern cultural institutions and international networks can help overcome many obstacles, including the oppressive policy of states and governments.

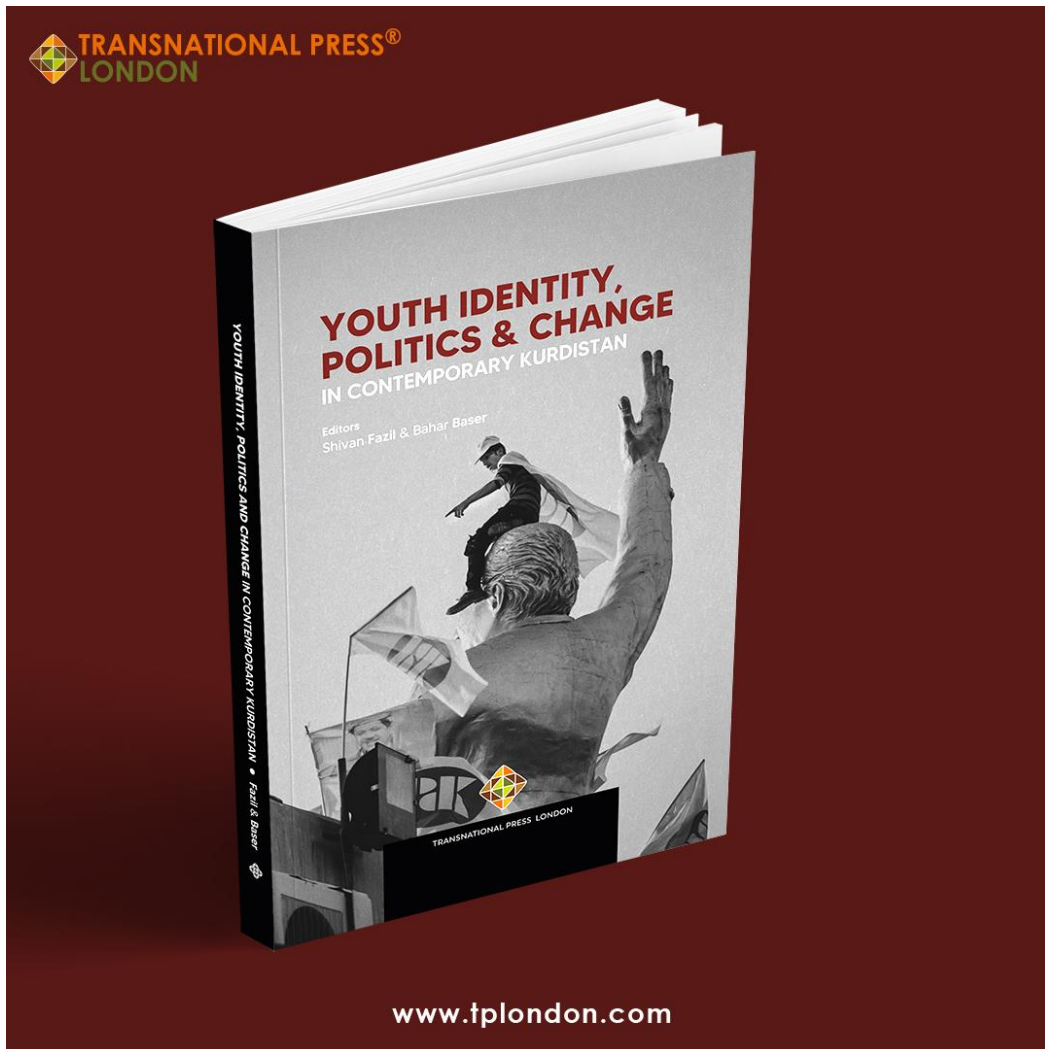
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