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# Perspectives on Iraq's Past, Present, and Future in the Works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf

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PERSPECTIVES ON IRAQ'S PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE IN THE  
WORKS OF MUHAMMAD BAQIR AL-SADR AND YUSUF SALMAN YUSUF

by

AMNAH ALMUKHTAR

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of

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2016

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Middle Eastern Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## **Abstract**

Perspectives on Iraq's Past, Present, and Future in the Works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf

by

Amnah Almukhtar

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Through a look at the writings of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf, I argue that Iraq's communists and Islamists during the middle of the twentieth century could not escape a common language, common circumstances and conditions which framed their conceptions of the relationship between their pasts, presents, and futures. Their political visions did not come from their disparate traditions, although couched in those terms, but from their common circumstances and struggles towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent Iraqi nation. Despite their disagreements or variously framed answers, they were guided by similar questions. Yusuf Salman Yusuf, also known as Fahd, presented his vision of the future within the communist tradition, which subscribed to the view that a progressive future is premised on a complete break with the past. Sadr posited a better future that would be undetached from the past and previous experiences, including the Shiite tradition. Both of their visions, as I will argue here, were shaped by the conditions of possibility and shared language of their present. While both Fahd and Sadr espoused a teleological view of history, the former secular and the latter theological, their political decisions and actions remained grounded in the

circumstances of their time and place, both of them primarily concerned with the fight against colonialism, the establishment of political sovereignty, and a developed future for their nation-state. Those actions were not fueled by their respective Marxist and Shiite traditions but from their shared conditions and overlapping questions and concerns.

## Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Historical Development in the Works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf	7
Conclusion	43
Bibliography	45

## Introduction

Scholarship on Iraq's history during the middle of the twentieth century has insufficiently appreciated the relationship between older generations' "problem spaces," or a series of questions and answers upon which political stakes hang<sup>1</sup>, and the political visions of those generations. The answers or political visions that these groups advocated for as a means towards their hoped-for futures have been criticized in this scholarship from the vantage point of the questions which animate the problem space of the scholars as opposed to the questions which animated the time and space of the historical actors whose stories are being told. This failure to recall history in terms of a particular discursive context has resulted in a tendency to view the concerns of Iraqi communists and Islamists as unrelated or directed towards different ends. I argue, through a look at the writings of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf, also known as Fahd, that these two groups in fact could not escape a common language, common circumstances and conditions which framed their conceptions of the relationship between their pasts, presents, and futures. Their political visions did not come from their disparate traditions, although couched in those terms, but from their common circumstances and struggles towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent Iraqi nation. Despite their disagreements or variously framed answers, they were guided by the same questions as they were located in the same problem space, questions which no longer frame political presents today. Fahd couched his vision of the future within the communist tradition, which subscribed to the view that a progressive future is premised on a

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<sup>1</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 4.

complete break with the past. Sadr posited a better future that would be undetached from the past and previous experiences, including the Shiite tradition. Both of their visions, as I will argue here, were shaped by the conditions of possibility and shared language of their present.

My approach is inspired by David Scott's article, "The Temporality of Generations: Dialogue, Tradition, Criticism," in which Scott reflects on a research project he conducted which investigated various dimensions of temporal experience: the ideas of generation, memory, tradition, and criticism. Through a series of interviews, he aimed to connect the lives of individuals to the emergence of a distinctive set of political concerns, or to underscore the events which animated the problem spaces in which their questions and concerns were developed. Through his own experience of the collapse of the projects of anti-imperialist self-determination, political sovereignty, and socialist transformation which made the Anglo-Creole Caribbean which his generation inherited, he recognized that he was unable to appreciate the ways in which older generations' lives were connected to their political visions, or how they understood the relationship between their pasts, presents, and hoped-for futures. He thus sought to reconstruct the problem-spaces in which the project of anticolonial sovereignty, the building of a new nation-state, and the project of anticapitalist socialist change were developed.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, by looking at the works of Sadr and Fahd, I seek to reconstruct the problem space in which the mid-twentieth century Iraqi project of anticolonial sovereignty and building a new nation-state was formed.

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<sup>2</sup> David Scott, "The Temporality of Generations: Dialogue, Tradition, Criticism," *New Literary History* 45, no. 2 (2014): 157-9, accessed May 13, 2016, doi:10.1353/nlh.2014.0017.

Significantly, in order to engage in historical criticism, Scott argues that we must be able to understand and establish a relationship with the ethos which animated the problem spaces of older generations. Scott turns to Karl Mannheim for a discussion of the way in which generations may be understood as a social institution of time, particularly Mannheim's evocation of Wilhelm Dilthey's concept of generations as institutions of temporalization which displace standard units of chronological time for a more meaningful understanding of lived time, as temporality is the content of experience. Dilthey is particularly interested in the coexistence and overlap of generations, which results in those who are cotemporal not necessarily being contemporaries. Those who are contemporaries constitute a generation as they have been impacted by the same formative experiences. Mannheim is interested in the sociological problem of generations, or the noncontemporaneity of generations, for what it can contribute to an understanding of the structure of social and intellectual movements, particularly in times of rapid political transformation.<sup>3</sup>

Mannheim describes the unity of a generation as location, which is different from that which unites social groups, both those based on biological affiliation and those which are self-consciously formed. Instead of biological or rational processes, generations are governed by shared historical experience which orients them towards a specific mode of thought and action. Scott takes the disconnect between the generation which experienced and participated in the making of political independence and those who inherited that legacy as an important aspect of the interviews he conducted. Mannheim also differentiates between generation units which are present within actual generations, with

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 161-4.

separate units understood as holding different political views. While belonging to the same generation, these units hold opposite intellectual and social responses to historical events.<sup>4</sup> I propose that Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf can be understood in this sense, as sharing a location and thus being part of the same generation but belonging to separate generation units. This understanding of location and contemporaneity is useful for my purposes insofar as it allows for a recognition of commonality between the perspectives of Fahd and Sadr on the basis of their shared formative experiences. That commonality might be understood as a “distinctive structure of temporal feeling, a style that sets the tone of its moral and political sensibilities.”<sup>5</sup> That temporal feeling for Fahd and Sadr was characterized by an anticipated horizon of political sovereignty. Further, the differentiation between generation units is useful for understanding that, despite that commonality, generations are not homogenous and the tendencies that a generation shares are realized in different ways by groups and individuals. Beyond that, these reflections allow for a better understanding of the shape and transmission of traditions and what that means for historical criticism and the relationship between question and answer in historical reflection. Through such a lens, we may better understand a generation’s way of living and experiencing the relationship between experience and expectation or past, present, and future.<sup>6</sup>

Scott reflects on one of the interviews he conducted and provides a tangible illustration of the ways in which his contemporary questions were not applicable to the generation he sought to understand. Scott’s assumptions about nationalism, formed by the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 164-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 166.

ethos of his own generation, as a party-political issue or an ideological political contest between rivals, were disarmed by his interlocutor's description of the anticipated "new Jamaica" which was an experience of possibility and an open future. Scott's generational understanding of the nation as a dead-end, as a state, precluded the possibility of his experiencing Jamaica in terms of the horizon of possibility of his predecessors.<sup>7</sup> Being able to see that horizon allows for criticism that moves beyond denunciation. Scott urges the critic not to assume sovereign distance from the space she engages with and instead to recognize how one's own understanding of the connections between pasts, presents, and possible futures rests on former understandings of those connections by previous generations, despite disagreement. To accomplish that is to escape a problem of contemporary criticism which views the past as error in comparison to a more developed present. Rather than thinking of history as a series of progressive answers, it is useful to understand it as governed by shifting questions and changing problem spaces and recognizing the noncontemporaneity of overlapping generations and their moral-political visions.<sup>8</sup> Criticism in this view, Scott proposes, is a mode of engagement in which a tradition is juggled with across overlapping generations.<sup>9</sup>

I seek to highlight the ways in which the generation of intellectuals who are the subject of my study conceived of, fostered, and promoted the anti-colonial struggle for political sovereignty and the building of a new nation-state, or the problem space and the conditions of possibility from within which these intellectuals came to articulate and promote that project of progress and the anticipation of a different future. I will

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 168-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 171-3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 177.

demonstrate how Iraqi communists and Islamists espoused notions of movement and change in their conceptions of their hoped-for futures, albeit with significant differences in their understandings of “progress.” In spite of those differences, they shared the political aspirations of ending British colonial power, achieving political sovereignty, and building a new Iraqi nation-state, shared conditions and a language of resistance and liberation that was available to them given the circumstances and events which marked them as a generation. I thus seek to locate similarities and highlight the contingencies of space, time, and generation which shaped these ideologies.

The anticipated future of the new Iraqi nation-state has been explored by Sara Pursley in her dissertation “A Race Against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-63,” where she explains that the majority of those who had a voice in Iraq’s public sphere championed progress represented by a future developed nation which would be educated, scientific, and industrialized.<sup>10</sup> I make a similar argument here about the espousal of such a notion of progress by Fahd, Sadr, and the adherents of their political ideologies. In Pursley’s exploration of the 1959 Iraqi Law of Personal Status, she looks at how the text of the law constructed “progress” and “tradition” through a search for what notions of historical temporality were to be found in the text of the law and in the discourses of its supporters. Through this focus on visions of the national future, she uncovers how these visions shaped public debate over different forms of political mobilization. For Pursley, these examinations shed light on broad frameworks within which such contestation took

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<sup>10</sup> Sara Pursley, "A Race against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-63" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2012), 6.

place.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, by searching for notions of historical temporality and visions of the national future in the works of Fahd and Sadr, I seek to shed light on how such visions framed the debate over forms of political mobilization and political ideologies. Here, the problem space I explore can be understood as a space of common understanding and a common language within which contestation took place.

### **Historical Development in the Works of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr and Yusuf Salman Yusuf**

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr was born in Baghdad in 1935 into a prominent, religious, politically active family. Upon completing his primary education in Baghdad, he moved to Najaf in 1946. Then in 1958, after completing further studies, he began to teach and became increasingly active in politics after the July Revolution, forming the anti-Communist Islami Party. Sadr was imprisoned several times due to his political opposition to the government and was eventually executed in April 1980 along with his sister Amina al-Sadr.<sup>12</sup> Sadr wrote several books, his most famous being *Iqtisaduna*, or Our Economics, on Islamic economics. His book *Falsafatuna*, or *Our Philosophy*, which I explore below, was published in 1959 and was a critique of communism and dialectical materialism, arguing that they were too flawed to serve as a solution to societal problems.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> T.M. Aziz, "The Meaning of History: A Study of the Views of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr," *Islamic Studies* 31, no. 02 (Summer 1992): 117, accessed February 02, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> T. M. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr in Shii Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 02 (May 1993): 209, accessed February 02, 2016, doi:10.1017/s0020743800058499.

Sadr played a significant role in the Shi'i community and attempted to politicize the religious establishment, which had been relatively apolitical since their 1920 revolt against the British. As communism grew and became a prominent political force in Iraq, the religious establishment was increasingly faced with antireligious sentiment as well as communist recruitment of people from religious families in the Shi'i holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, and Kadhimiyya. Further, the religious establishment was split between those who were politically active and those who maintained a distance from politics by focusing on more strictly religious matters. When Sadr was a young scholar, the former group organized the *Jama'at al-'Ulama* in Najaf in order to push back against antireligious sentiment, particularly by challenging the Communists. As both Sadr's father-in-law and brother held positions of leadership in this group, he was able to play a role himself. Sadr also became the head of the Da'wa party and determined its structure and teachings, including its aim of organizing Muslims to gain political power.<sup>14</sup>

Yusuf Salman Yusuf, also known as Comrade Fahd or simply Fahd, was born in 1901 and executed in 1949. He traveled to Moscow in 1935 to study Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. He returned to Iraq in 1938 and assumed leadership of the ICP.<sup>15</sup> He was the secretary general of the party from 1941 until his death.<sup>16</sup> From 1940 to 1944, Fahd unified the party and gained public exposure as its leader, as the party as a whole took on a more public face. In 1944, he held the First Party Conference, or the National Charter Conference, in Baghdad, as the

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 208-9.

<sup>15</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge: New York, 2008), 20.

<sup>16</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 406.

British alliance with the Soviet Union at the time meant that communists in Iraq were given some flexibility. Fahd had also recently been inspired by the first congress of the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon in 1944.<sup>17</sup> Fahd was from Nasiriyyah but worked in Basra and, along with others in Basra formed the Nasiriyyah Communist circle in 1928. Seeking the favor and trust of the laboring classes as well as an understanding of their plight, he worked as a clerk at the Basrah Electric Supply Authority, then as a mechanic, and then a miller and ice-seller.<sup>18</sup> Fahd was first introduced to communism by Pyotr Vasili, an Assyrian who grew up in Georgia, moved to Iraq in 1922, and lived in both Basra and Nasiriyyah, amongst other cities, during his short stay in Iraq. It was in the Basra and Nasiriyyah circles that the Marxist intellectual tradition began to take shape in Iraq amongst about a dozen men. Initially, Hanna Batatu explains, they attacked religious authorities through a bourgeois-democratic Association of Liberals, or *Jam 'iyyat al-Ahrar*, which declared allegiance to the bourgeois principles of “liberty, fraternity, and equality” and released a public program outlining its aims in a moderate tone which leaned more heavily towards the use of legal and parliamentary means rather than fighting the political order. But, Batatu explains, the association’s actual campaign deviated significantly from their public program, holding antireligious views and making more radical political pronouncements. The association failed to attract many followers or secure political achievements. Recognizing the ways in which an assault on religion served to hurt their platform and strengthen their adversaries, the ICP later decided not to

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<sup>17</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge: New York, 2008), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba 'thists, and Free Officers* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 412-3.

touch the subject of religion directly.<sup>19</sup> After Fahd wrote the first proclamation in Iraq to bear the hammer and sickle in 1932 and posted it around Nasiriyyah, more proclamations began to appear and the Communist Manifesto was circulated in Arabic translation. As Bolshevism spread in the south, Communists in Baghdad were more confined to intellectual debates as opposed to practical revolutionary work, and interactions between the south and Baghdad were rare until 1933 when many of them came together around the boycott of the British-owned Baghdad Electric Light and Power Company.<sup>20</sup> When Fahd returned from the Soviet Union in 1938, he played an important role in bridging the gap between theory and practice and applying Marxism to the Iraqi context.<sup>21</sup>

I now turn to an examination of the political thought of Yusuf Salman Yusuf and particularly his views on the progressive steps towards revolution, followed by a look at Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's political philosophy and his treatment of dialectical materialism, evidence of his interaction with the ICP and their political thought. Yusuf Salman Yusuf's essay "A Communist Party, Not a Democratic Socialist Party," which was likely written around 1946 although the year is not specified, was written in response to a question posed by his comrades, and opens by saying that the answer to the question posed cannot be understood without reference to the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and those who follow the working class movement in its three stages. The First International, he explains, is representative of the first stage, when the movement takes on the role of understanding the issues at hand, spreading their ideas amongst workers of various countries, and recognizing the foundational issues of the working class and

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 404-9.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 428-30.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 448.

workers' organizations. The Second International, he continues, represents the second stage, which sees the working class movement take on a peaceful, nonviolent role, mirroring that of the capitalist class; producing and spreading literature; and taking advantage of opportunities to strengthen the socialist movement and encourage its growth and development by putting pressure on bourgeois governments through parliament, law, and elections. Lastly, the Third International or The Communist International or Comintern is representative of the third stage during which the working class seizes power in its hands as capitalism enters its final stage and the revolution of the proletariat is enacted. In order to progress through these stages, he explains, it is necessary for the proletariat class to form an organization which is prepared to execute this path, and to garner support amongst the working classes of the East and the West and amongst the colonized while being cognizant of the varied situations, environments, and circumstances of those peoples, as well as developing an understanding of the history and future of the movement.<sup>22</sup>

Addressing the problem of the national bourgeoisie, an issue relating to the early stages of the process outlined above, Fahd explains that during the stage of the fight against imperialism, communist parties must be formed on a mass, centralized basis in order to fight for freedom from foreign interference.<sup>23</sup> Although he highlights the role of communist parties in the struggle of the working class, his emphasis on remaining unified and eschewing division to fight a common enemy makes clear that he is advocating for collaboration with the national bourgeoisie, a stance which he couches in the traditional Marxist-Leninist approach of the early stages of revolution.

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<sup>22</sup> Yūsuf Salmān Yūsuf, *Kitābāt Al-Rafīq Fahad* (Baghdād: Al-Ṭarīq Al-Jadīd, 1976), 33-4.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

This approach by Fahd demonstrates Johan Franzen's argument that the ICP became a leftist nationalist party, and that their desired role in Iraqi politics became ambiguous as they shifted towards becoming an Iraqi political party.<sup>24</sup> This highlights the need to approach understanding this problem space in its entirety, as it is clear that nationalism and political independence were at the core of this space and were common ideals across political factions. But while Franzen makes a significant point, it is also important to note that, as part of the Communist International, Fahd and the ICP were following policies dictated by the International and thus acted as a nationalist party which was more left-leaning than the democratic parties; this happened not only in Iraq, but also in other countries whose communist parties ascribed to the policies of the Communist International.

While I do not seek to rigidly define the shared problems which concerned political actors of this problem space, it is necessary to recognize the factors which allow for such an appellation to describe the space. Monarchism, British presence, imperialism, and independence were common issues which linked various political ideologies and in relation to which futures were conceived. Sara Pursley explains that the four parties which made up the United National Front agreed on abolishing the monarchy, establishing political sovereignty, declaring a democratic republic, implementing land reform, working towards industrialization, and shaping a new type of citizen through legal and social reforms. This overlap existed in spite of their differences: the National Democratic Party (NDP) envisioned a liberal democratic national-sovereign space conducive to capitalist development, while the ICP and Arab nationalist parties both saw

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<sup>24</sup> Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 2.

the revolution as the first step towards an end which would be achieved in the long-term, socialism for the former and an Arab nation for the latter.<sup>25</sup> Samira Haj similarly argues that nationhood was the focus of all opposition groups. The Ba'ath, she explains, saw the Arab nation as the proper means to achieve social and economic change, while the NDP sought to free the national bourgeoisie from the control of the agrarian classes and imperialist powers, and the ICP highlighted class conflict but aligned with the Iraqi nationalists in practice.<sup>26</sup> Further, she differentiates the ICP from the NDP in that the former placed emphasis on organizing the working class in unions and implementing the eight-hour workday, advancing women's rights, and securing national rights for the Kurds.<sup>27</sup> According to Franzen, the ICP was part and parcel of Iraqi nationalist politics, and their early members were drawn to it for its anti-imperialist stance more so than an understanding of or attraction to Marxist-Leninist ideology.<sup>28</sup> Franzen's conclusion here, though, insufficiently differentiates the ICP from other parties who called for an end to British rule in Iraq and fails to explain what may have attracted its members beyond that which was shared with pan-Arabists, Ba'athists, and others; thus the lines drawn by Pursley and Haj are significant. This particular discursive context is useful in understanding what prompted Fahd to explain the difference between a communist and a democratic socialist party and to make a point of differentiating and clarifying the views of the ICP.

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<sup>25</sup> Sara Pursley, "A Race against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-63" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2012), 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 109.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>28</sup> Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 39-42.

As explained by Franzen, communist parties working in a Third World colonial context faced the dilemma of the working class being a minority and not having reached the same level of development as the proletariat in Western countries. In communist theory, the national-democratic stage was seen as the first step of the revolution, one in which the national bourgeoisie could play a part as this stage required a unification of social forces to oppose imperialism, secure national peace and equal rights, and create the ideal conditions for class struggle. In the next phase, the social revolution, a shift would occur from national to class struggle, the struggle would become distinctly social, and tensions between the working class and the bourgeoisie would then surface. Franzen highlights the incompatibility of the term “national bourgeoisie” with the context of 1940s Iraq, considering that the majority of the small industry which did exist was foreign-owned. Thus, it might be assumed that Iraqi communists were referring to the Sharifian-effendi elite who were involved in industry or traders who were involved in export, when they used the phrase. Or, rather than referring to an economic class, the national bourgeoisie was sometimes understood as reference to political parties such as the NDP or Istiqlal.<sup>29</sup> Tariq Ismael similarly notes the limits of the ICP in the 1930s and 1940s due to the lack of a substantial working class which, where it did exist, was predominantly within British-controlled industries; he also mentions the ICP’s inability to recruit the peasantry.<sup>30</sup>

The issue of the national bourgeoisie was directly linked to the issue of anti-imperialism as the anti-imperial revolution could not be successful without the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 42-3.

<sup>30</sup> Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (Cambridge: New York, 2008), 26.

participation of the national bourgeoisie, but such an alliance with them included a risk that they would gain power after the success of a revolution or would betray the proletariat. Lenin suggested that communists in the colonial world use any means possible to gain mass support and warned against resistance to the national bourgeoisie, although he emphasized that the proletarian movement should maintain its independence. At the Second Comintern Congress, Lenin's view was countered by an Indian communist, M.N. Roy, who argued that alliances with nationalist leaders should be avoided in countries with a reformist nationalist movement as they would be bound to join the imperialists. In Iraq, the ICP formed an alliance with those they identified as the national bourgeoisie. Fahd described that bourgeoisie as fitting into two camps, one of which were the pro-British imperialists, or civil servants and ministers, and the other were the reformist patriots as well as those who had ties to the national industry and thus clashed with foreign companies. Fahd saw the possibility of an alliance with the latter group because their personal interests overlapped with the national interest. Managing this relationship, though, meant having a separate public and private program, the former for gaining mass support and the latter for achieving a communist society. Thus, Franzen explains, Fahd did not comment as frequently on the long-term goal but his traditional Marxist-Leninist views were still clear, particularly in his *Hizb Shuyu'i, La Ishtirakiyyah Dimuqratiyyah*, "A Communist Party, Not a Democratic Socialist Party," mentioned above. In his mention of the preface to this text by Fahd's aide Husayn Muhammad al-Shabibi, Franzen states that al-Shabibi made clear that the party should always maintain awareness of their long-term revolutionary goal of achieving the dictatorship of the

proletariat and not distance themselves from it or take any steps that do not lead to it.<sup>31</sup> I suggest that that lack of frequent comment on the long-term goal was not only due to a desire to gain mass support, but more importantly because that would not have been useful for the movement at that particular moment. Fahd and the ICP were instead interested in the immediate struggles they were faced with, primarily the fight against colonialism. Still, they espoused a future-oriented utopian ideal of socialist revolution.

The question of the national bourgeoisie may be better understood with further reference to the policies of the Comintern. In my quest to understand the conditions of possibility available to the ICP and to conceptualize the time and place which I explore here, I refer not only to the conditions on the ground in Iraq but also to the sources from which the Iraqi Communist Party shaped their policies and through which their language was developed. To that end, Soviet policy and, relatedly, the policies of the Comintern, significantly shaped ICP rhetoric and decisions. As described by Fernando Claudin, in his chapter on the policy of the Comintern in regards to national liberation movements, the Comintern was faced with the issue of liberationist struggles being characterized by a bourgeois leadership who, in their efforts to involve the working class movement in their anti-colonial struggles, also took on a major role in trade union organizations. Faced with this dilemma, two sets of theses were drafted at the Second Congress to determine a strategy. Lenin's thesis prioritized the relationship between the Soviet state and liberation movements as well as that between the Comintern and those movements, while the other thesis by M.N. Roy, as mentioned above, prioritized the relationship between the Comintern and its class enemies. Thus, Lenin's main concern was for Soviet Russia to be

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<sup>31</sup> Johan Franzén, *Red Star over Iraq: Iraqi Communism before Saddam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 43-5.

able to have the allegiance of nations fighting imperialism and in order to achieve that he believed the Comintern must ally temporarily with bourgeois democrats in colonial countries. Roy, on the other hand, felt that the role of the Comintern was to struggle against the control of the poor and the workers by the bourgeois-democratic national movement. While Lenin recognized that the colonial revolution would be controlled by the bourgeoisie for a long period, he felt that the proletariat of the Soviet state and other advanced countries would lead the anti-imperialist struggle on a global scale.<sup>32</sup>

This relied in part on Lenin's assumption that the contradictory aims of the bourgeois-democratic national movement, namely national independence and capitalist development, and those of imperialism, were sufficiently divergent to ensure that an alliance between the bourgeois national movement and the Soviet state as well as the proletariat of advanced countries was possible. He also believed that the working classes of the colonies were too weak to play a prominent role in national liberation movements, and cast doubt on the possibility of proletarian parties forming in colonial countries.<sup>33</sup> The ICP followed this policy, in large part because Lenin's assumptions did in fact apply to their situation in which the formation of a proletarian party was not possible and the national movement in their country shared the ICP goal of fighting imperialism. In accordance with this policy, they maintained that once independence was achieved, class struggle could be emphasized.

Further, while the Fourth Congress was more critical of the national bourgeoisie, stating in its theses that the bourgeoisie disguised their democratic aspirations in order to

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<sup>32</sup> Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 262.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-3.

detract from the communists' attempts at class organization,<sup>34</sup> Haj explains that the subsequent rise of Stalin meant that the Soviet state would take precedence over the revolutionary actions of other countries, thus weakening the internationalism of the socialist revolution. Stalin institutionalized Lenin's ideas about the democratic bourgeois nature of colonial revolutions, necessitating a stage of capitalist development prior to socialist revolution. Haj explains that this limited the ICP's ability to act in accordance with the particularities of their local context and led to a disconnect between their long-term theory and immediate practice.<sup>35</sup> As the ICP failed to question Soviet leadership, they accepted the theory of revolution by stages and thus participated in anticolonial struggle as a step towards a national bourgeois revolution. But following Soviet leadership also meant that the ICP fluctuated in their positions on the Iraqi nation. For example, when the Soviet Union was fighting fascism in the 1940s in an alliance with Western democracies, the ICP supported their British colonizers as well as the Iraqi monarchy. Once the war ended, the ICP returned to its anti-imperialist and anti-regime stance. Moving progressively to the left at that time, Fahd and the party increasingly faced persecution.<sup>36</sup>

Fahd justifies and situates the necessity of the first stage of the revolution through an analysis of the Bolshevik Party and a discussion of the tactics through which they were able to reach what he considers a higher form of organization or a later stage of development. He quotes Lenin explaining that when the proletariat is in a divisive fight

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>35</sup> Samira Haj, *The Making of Iraq, 1900-1963: Capital, Power, and Ideology* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 92-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 95-6.

with the bourgeoisie over power, it is necessary to work with reformists as well as those communists who may display a tendency to lean towards the views of the reformists.<sup>37</sup>

Based on all of the above, I argue that Fahd's political vision, representative of the ICP's position and direction under his leadership, was one which highlighted the goals of attaining political sovereignty and building a new nation-state. Although he outlines a traditional Marxist-Leninist approach to achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, the political circumstances of his time were such that ICP practices only embodied the first stage of that process. Fahd makes clear that the ICP allied with nationalist, bourgeois parties in order to resist the dominant problems of their colonial situation. The broader ideology of a socialist utopia which they espoused, taken in its totality, was not and could not have been relevant to the conditions of their time. Thus, although their rhetoric was couched in Marxist terms, their immediate struggle was one shared across Iraq. The ICP stagist strategy which entailed first participating in the nationalist bourgeois revolution in many ways shaped their politics on the ground; in seeking alliances with nationalist forces in practice, they became, in effect, very similar to other Iraqi nationalist parties. In this sense, the ICP's romantic utopian anticipation of a pre-determined socialist future governed by accelerated progressive time was disconnected from the reality of contingencies in their present and conditions of possibility. But although the ICP's actions were governed by the same issues that governed the actions of other nationalist parties and other parties across the Iraqi political spectrum, its utopian vision was markedly different from those espoused by others. As mentioned above, while the ICP and Arab nationalist parties both anticipated anti-

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<sup>37</sup> Yūsuf Salmān Yūsuf, *Kitābāt Al-Rafīq Fahad* (Baghdād: Al-Ṭarīq Al-Jadīd, 1976), 37-8.

colonial revolution as the first step towards an end which would be achieved in the long-term, that goal was socialism for the former and an Arab nation for the latter. For the NDP, that vision was of a liberal democratic national-sovereign space conducive to capitalist development.<sup>38</sup> As was the case for the ICP, the aspirations of these parties did not have substantial practical implications for their actions on the ground, namely because of their utopian, forward-looking nature.

The ultimate goal of the Bolshevik party, Fahd reiterates, was the fall of the bourgeoisie and the rise of the proletariat, and there is no communist party which exists but on that basis, a necessity of belonging to the Communist International. Marx, Engels, and Lenin, Fahd adds, made clear that the era of the dictatorship of the proletariat marks a transition from inhumane, barbaric, animal life to a society which treats people based on their wants and in which the history of man can begin.<sup>39</sup> This future-oriented outlook is reflective of modern understandings of the future as a rupture or break from the past. The notion that history can only begin once a radical shift occurs from inhumane life to one governed by progress and development is a clear marker of that modern notion of the future. Again, I argue that this idea was necessarily disconnected from the problem space from which Fahd wrote. During that time and place, the ICP was not contending with the bourgeoisie but was in fact cooperating with them in their joint challenge to colonialism and in their immediate struggle towards the establishment of a sovereign Iraqi nation-state.

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<sup>38</sup> Sara Pursley, "A Race against Time: Governing Femininity and Reproducing the Future in Revolutionary Iraq, 1945-63" (PhD diss., The City University of New York, 2012), 3-4.

<sup>39</sup> Yūsuf Salmān Yūsuf, *Kitābāt Al-Rafīq Fahad* (Baghdād: Al-Ṭarīq Al-Jadīd, 1976), 36.

Consistent with his argument for forming a national anti-imperialist front as the first step towards achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat, Fahd reflects on the nature of modern colonialism and imperialism and its links to economic oppression and the communist struggle. Modern colonialism, a common enemy which unites Arab people, he explains, is distinguishable by the following characteristics: first, an instance of colonialism in one country does not only represent the interests of one colonial power but of them all. Secondly, colonialism is first and foremost economic colonialism although it depends on oppressive political, military, and administrative power in order to exploit the resources of colonized countries and the efforts of its people, to destroy national industries, to impoverish the people, and to entrench the dependence of the nation on its colonizer. Third, that colonizing countries share the colonies and their markets amongst themselves, and each instance of this leads to a war for which the colonized people pay the price. Lastly, colonizing countries are organized and equipped with the latest means of repression and protected by military bases, efficient armies, and administrators.<sup>40</sup>

Fahd identifies colonialism as an uncompromising enemy which represents global capitalism and whose interests are intertwined with those of financial institutions. It is incumbent upon the people who want their emancipation, he adds, including the vanguards of the popular classes, to confront and expel this oppressive enemy. Thus it is necessary that they organize themselves in a manner that facilitates effective resistance and attracts the majority of the people to join the fight. According to Fahd, the struggle against one global enemy demands unity and coordination between the struggles of all liberationist movements. The struggle against colonialism requires that those involved

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 219-20.

develop a clear, national stance so that there is no room for its misrepresentation, a stance which depends on the popular masses in the struggle in order to be able to achieve societal progress. The strength required to struggle against colonialism can be fostered if the political, economic, and intellectual struggles are coordinated and the masses are gathered and trained, Fahd pronounces.<sup>41</sup>

Above, we see Fahd equating the fight against colonialism with the fight against capitalist exploitation. He names colonialism as a common denominator for the struggle and highlights the use of military power and technology to oppress and impoverish. By highlighting the economic as the main feature of modern colonialism, Fahd is making explicit the manner in which an alliance with the national bourgeoisie against colonialism and imperialism will ultimately serve the needs of the communist revolution and facilitate the battle against economic exploitation. But, I argue, although he frames the struggle against colonialism and its necessary alliance with the nationalists in terms of the ultimate revolution of the proletariat, the conditions of the moment were such that the communist struggle could not be brought to bear. Through his use of the language of emancipation and liberation through resistance, it is evident that his central concern, as was that of his party and several other political parties across Iraq's landscape in this problem space, was a national struggle against colonialism which sought political sovereignty and the establishment of the Iraqi nation-state.

In his discussion of political struggle, Fahd argues that it is necessary to train the nation's people in all forms of political struggle and prepare them for a critical fight with the enemy. The political struggle against the enemy, he continues, is an inevitable fight

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 220-2.

which must be fought by all people who want emancipation and liberation, especially in the current age, that of national liberatory struggles against colonialism. The Arab peoples who want liberation cannot depend on an external force in order to rid themselves of colonialism, nor can they wait for the appropriate global conditions, thus allowing opportunities to escape them one after another, he says. He argues that several attacks were carried out by the colonialists against the Iraqi people which could have been responded to in kind, were it not for the people's lack of experience in political struggle. This enabled the colonizing forces to enforce their political and economic control. Some nationalist leaders, Fahd explains, hold the view that the masses should be left to learn without the guidance of the nation's conscious, organized leaders, thus stripping the people of their weapons and leaving them unarmed and unable to defend against attack, leaving them unable to attain freedom, national sovereignty, and prosperity.<sup>42</sup> Here, again, we see evidence of Fahd and the ICP's central concerns of national sovereignty and the battle against colonial forces. But unlike other political groups who sought to attain sovereignty through negotiations as opposed to building a mass movement, Fahd and the ICP distinguished themselves by addressing raising the consciousness of the masses as a first step towards building a national liberation movement. Thus, while Fahd cooperated with and depended on the nationalists, he remained critical of them and the limits of their tactics and structural weaknesses.

Clarifying his position on collaboration with the national bourgeoisie as it relates to the Iraqi context specifically, Fahd engages in a discussion of the internal political situation. He laments the failures of the al-Pachichi government in implementing reforms,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 223-5.

and argues that one reason for this failure is that the opposition is split into two main factions. The first group is made up of pro-British Iraqis, or the reactionary bourgeoisie, who serve colonialism and imperialism as employees and ministers in the Iraqi government. The second group is itself divided into two groups, the first of which is made up of nationalists who argue for the necessity of reform, and the second of which is composed of the progressive bourgeoisie, or owners of goods who clash with foreign companies, fighting for their individual interests and the interests of their class, which happens to overlap with the national interest as they seek to protect national resources against the invasive capitalist market. The government thus did not respond to the demands of the opposition, according to Fahd, because the latter is not unified, does not have clear goals or an organized party, and does not demand the aid of the people for support of their struggle.<sup>43</sup> Again, here, Fahd emphasizes the need to create a unified front with those he identified as the second group, or those members of the national bourgeoisie who are willing to participate in the struggle against imperialism because of the threat that the world market economy poses to national growth and progress, the immediate concern before them. While describing those allies as instrumental towards the ultimate, end goal of the proletarian revolution, that future goal did not in fact directly impact the ICP's alliances, strategies, or interests on the ground. Instead, those alliances and decisions were opportunistic means to an end which ultimately backfired when, under the rule of Abd al-Karim Qasim, the ICP was unable to progress with their communist vision as their hands were tied by those alliances. But, significantly, by highlighting the weaknesses of the national bourgeoisie, Fahd is asserting the importance

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 144-7.

of the ICP and the necessity of their support for the struggle for independence as the nationalists are not strong enough to carry it out on their own.

In the spirit of creating that unified front, Fahd calls his comrades to a national duty to raise awareness amongst Iraqis of the colonizer's attempts to secure their hold on Iraq, to divide the nation's people, and to block the people's attempts at reform. Fahd calls all the people of the nation to act quickly to organize themselves and garner strength amongst them to defeat the attempts of all who want to divide the people, all who want to retain their privileges at the expense of the nation's democratic freedoms, and all those who want to stand against the people in their struggle towards "a free nation and a happy people."<sup>44</sup>

Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr's *Falsafatuna*, or Our Philosophy, is an explication of the philosophical foundations of Islamic Shia thought, but it is also an engagement with the question of the materiality of the modern world, particularly through Sadr's interaction with historical materialism on the one hand and liberal capitalism on the other, and his refutation of both through Islamic philosophy as an alternative. In it he critiques communism and dialectical materialism and argues that they cannot serve as an answer to societal problems because they are based on false assumptions.<sup>45</sup> The basic premise of this work provides a clear example of one aspect of my argument, that Iraq's communists and Islamists could not escape a common language and shared political concerns. In order to engage in his discursive context and debate the merits of his own philosophy,

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>45</sup> T. M. Aziz, "The Role of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr in Shii Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25, no. 02 (May 1993): 209, accessed February 02, 2016, doi:10.1017/s0020743800058499.

Sadr familiarized himself deeply with the literature of his political adversaries and engaged them on the same series of questions with which they were concerned.

In this work, Sadr engages in a discussion about development, change, and movement. He opens his chapter on movement with a quote by Joseph Stalin on dialectical materialism in relation to metaphysics, stating that the former school of thought holds that nature is in a state of constant change, movement, renewal and development, and that phenomena should always be viewed with such renewal and its counterpart, disintegration, in mind. Sadr follows this with a similar quote on movement by Friedrich Engels. He then claims that proponents of dialectics allege that they alone consider nature to be in a continuous state of movement and change and that the logic of metaphysics holds that nature is in a state of complete stasis, while Sadr argues that metaphysics does not in fact describe nature in a manner contrary to its reality of change and movement. Sadr goes on to argue that while dialectical materialism, and the dialectical laws of development, is considered a new and original argument, it in fact has precedent in other forms of thought. What is new, he continues, is its dialectical aspect, which he believes must be dissociated from it as its actual content, or the central aspects of its theory, is in harmony with metaphysical logic and does not necessitate the incorporation of dialectics. Thus Sadr sees no value in couching the dialectical laws of development in terms of dialectics, as the core of this school of thought has already been formulated through metaphysics, and he seeks to strip the dialectical laws of development of what he considers their contradictory framing within the dialectical tradition.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr, *Falsafatunā* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Fikr, 1969), 228-9.

Leading into his argument against the communist and materialist concept of revolution as dramatic and disruptive change, and his argument for slow change and evolution, Sadr adds that, as he claims is clear to all, faith in the presence of change in the natural world is a matter which does not require prior study of science and is not a subject of disagreement or debate, but that inquiry into what shape such change takes and the scope and depth of its reach is a meaningful pursuit. And, in the history of philosophy, he continues, one can see that this debate over the nature of change has played out. Sadr breaks down this debate as one between advocates of change as progression or a series of stages which culminate in the mind as the appearance of movement and those who see change as uninterrupted movement or motion. Sadr explains that some schools of Greek philosophy took up the former view, including Zeno of Elea who described movement as a series of successive stops or moments of stillness, whereas Aristotle advocated for the latter, that movement is continuous. Aristotle's school, he continues, proved the existence of continuous movement, progress, and development in natural phenomena. The succession of distinct phenomena each occurring after the other, on the other hand, is not growth or movement but a general type of change. Sadr thus explains the philosophical definition or the metaphysical understanding of movement as the gradual actualization of something's potentiality. In other words, motion is not the disintegration of one thing which makes room for the birth of something new. Because the shift from potential to actualization occurs at each stage of movement, movement always has two characteristics at each stage: it is real because it is the actualization of previous possibility, and it is also potentiality which will be exhausted at a later stage. Development thus always contains the actual and the potential, and movement proceeds as long as both are present. This

understanding of movement, Sadr adds, was misunderstood and misrepresented by dialectical materialism, which instead claimed that movement can only proceed through contradiction, a constant which runs through the core of all things.<sup>47</sup> As I will explain further below, this understanding of potentiality and actuality reflects Sadr's conception of the relationship between present and future, and his belief that the birth of the future does not entail the disintegration of the past and present. Instead, just as potentiality and actuality are co-present, past and present are coterminous.

In order to counter materialist explanations of change, Sadr refers to Muslim thinkers who address the concept of change in order to locate his explanation of it in the Islamic tradition, as constant and gradual. By doing so, he is able to emphasize change not as a rupture from the past but as a process of movement which engages the past. Sadr addresses the role of Islamic philosophy and its place in this debate, particularly with reference to the Muslim philosopher Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi, who demonstrated that movement does not solely concern natural phenomena but that its presence in such phenomena is only one aspect of broader progress and development. Al-Shirazi clarified that the principle of movement in nature is one of the philosophical essentials of metaphysics. Further, Sadr adds, al-Shirazi explained the connection between the old and the new by countering the assumption of some metaphysicians that faith in the eternal creator necessitates, from a philosophical perspective, a belief in the old and eternal nature of the world, so that the effect mirrors its cause. Al-Shirazi solved this problem on the basis of the law of movement, with the view that the natural world is in a constant state of renewal and development, so the coming into being of the world on this basis was

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 230-4.

an inevitable result of its nature of renewal, and not because of the stable and eternal nature of the cause or creator.<sup>48</sup>

After these and other reflections, Sadr asks if dialectical materialism's accusation against metaphysics, that the latter believes in the still and unchanging state of nature, is sound. This accusation, he argues, has no justification and amounts to nothing but dialectical materialism's misunderstanding of the true meaning and nature of movement. So he asks what the difference is between the Islamic conception of movement and its general laws versus dialectical materialism's understanding of movement. The difference between the two understandings, he explains, boils down to two essential points.<sup>49</sup>

The first point is that the dialectical understanding of movement rests on the basis of contradiction and conflict between opposing forces, with this contradiction and conflict acting as a force which propels linear and progressive movement forward. To clarify this point, Sadr redraws the distinction between potential and actualization, and argues against the Marxist consideration of the two as an entity in conflict. Marxism, he writes, takes the relationship between these two forces to be a type of contradiction or a dialectical association, and holds that this conflict between opposites is what produces movement. Opposite this, Sadr explains, is the Islamic understanding of movement as a result of both potential and actualization; without either of these two elements, it is not possible for movement to occur.<sup>50</sup> Through this argument about the nature of movement, Sadr rejects the ICP's conception of the future as a complete break from the past. Rather than the future entailing a surpassing of the past, the actuality of the present is intimately

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 234-5.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 236.

connected to the past as it is the realization of past potential. Past and future are not in conflict; rather, the future proceeds gradually from the past.

Quoting Engels, Sadr rejects the understanding of movement as described by dialectical materialists on the basis of contradiction, and argues that movement cannot be described but in light of the principle of non-contradiction. Sadr questions whether movement which brings about change is possible when contradiction is a factor in that process of movement, for if it does not involve change and renewal then it is not movement but stillness and stability. Noting that Marxism does espouse a theory of renewal and change in movement, he pushes back on Marxists' insistence that actualization of movement contains a dialectical relationship. The most basic analysis of movement, he argues, makes apparent that the contradictory or dialectical relationship between opposing forces is not possible and cannot be present for change to occur. Instead, movement shifts gradually from potential to realization and these forces are not in conflict at any stage. Sadr reiterates what he views as Marxism's misunderstanding of movement and its resultant rejection of metaphysics and the principle of non-contradiction. He contends that Marxists are not the first to make an argument of this kind as some metaphysical thinkers have made arguments about change and movement in the same vein, but the difference is that Marxism incorporated the dialectical aspect as a means to justify contradiction by highlighting its presence within movement.<sup>51</sup>

As mentioned above, I suggest that this correlation between potential and actualization can be understood as the relationship between present and future. Understood in these terms, it becomes clear how Reinhart Koselleck's explication of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 237-9.

modern understandings of the future as fundamentally new and different from the past<sup>52</sup> are apparent in the context of Sadr's rejection of dialectical materialism based on its proposal that potentiality and actuality, or present and future, are in conflict. As was made clear in the discussion of Fahd's writing above, the ICP's ideology and political vision for the future posited that future as a break from the past. Contrary to that notion of the progress of time, Sadr views the present and future as necessarily intertwined, with the future building off of and growing out of the past, and not in any way in conflict with it. Despite that understanding of the contemporaneity of present and future, Sadr's political philosophy maintains a forward-looking anticipation of a new future, although one that is not characterized by a definitive rejection of the past.

Sadr then adds another element to his argument about the nature of movement. Having established the understanding that movement is not a conflict between contradictory elements but that it is a gradual move from potential to realization, he explains, we are able to recognize the impossibility of movement occurring on its own and without reason, and that development does not move from potential to actualization without the presence of an outside influence. There must be a reason for movement from potential to actualization, for possibility to become reality. Thus, internal conflict or contradiction is not sufficient to bring about movement. Sadr owes this necessity of an external force to what he calls a general law of movement, and explains that it is a quality of nature that movement happens in accordance with this law. Because there is no stability in the natural world according to this law, and all that exists is in motion, it is not possible to stop at the boundaries of an entity or dynamic in uncovering a reason for its

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<sup>52</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

movement.<sup>53</sup> While this displays Sadr's recognition of the role of human action in movement from present to future, as well as his ultimate attribution of the nature of movement to God, he fails to understand the place of human agency through the proletariat as a significant influence on movement in the communist understanding of change. Sadr incorrectly assumes that because class struggle is understood as the driving force of historical development, that it thus lacks an agentive force. Sadr's laws of movement will be further elucidated below in my look at T.M. Aziz's exploration of Sadr's philosophy of history.

The second point Sadr makes about the difference between the two understandings of movement is that Marxists do not view movement simply in terms of its manifestation in nature but also in terms of human thought. In this view, as external material reality develops and grows, intellectual perceptions undergo the same laws of development and growth which apply to the natural world. In contrast to this, in Sadr's view, the general law of movement is a natural law which governs the material world and does not extend to the realm of thought and knowledge, as knowledge cannot involve this type of development.<sup>54</sup> But, as will become clear below, Sadr prescribes to a particular view of change in history and historical development, and thus moves beyond the scope of change in the natural world in his explorations of development. As will also become evident, this view reflects Koselleck's notion that historical processes are governed by a certain temporality which is different from that found in nature, one which acts as a causal force in the unfolding of events and which contains different speeds of

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<sup>53</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr, *Falsafatunā* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Fikr, 1969), 239-40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 240-1.

acceleration.<sup>55</sup> But again, Sadr's critique of dialectical materialism incorrectly assumes it to be a theory of natural development. Marxism, too, draws a distinction between natural and historical development.

Sadr summarizes three main attempts by Marxism to explain the dialectical nature of the movement of thought and knowledge, with the first being that thought and knowledge reflect reality and thus reflect its laws and movement. Thus, thoughts develop dialectically just as nature develops in the same manner, consistent with the law of motion, such that thoughts are in accordance with the reality which they are formulated about. In this view of dialectical logic, truth cannot be something which is fixed or complete but instead consists of growth and change in knowledge of the world. Sadr instead argues that, although it is clear that thought and knowledge reflect reality, it does not follow that the growth and movement of the former moves alongside that of the latter. This is so because nature is governed by fixed laws, including the law of motion, which proponents of dialectics themselves acknowledge. Faced with Sadr's contention that those fixed laws logically must be reflected by fixed truths or knowledge, he says dialecticians are left with two routes by way of which they can reconcile with that logic. First, they may accept Sadr's proposition; otherwise, they are forced to reconsider their belief in the law of motion.<sup>56</sup>

Further, Sadr argues that the understanding of a thing is different from and cannot play the same role as the thing itself. He thus argues that the laws of objective reality, including that of motion, do not apply to thoughts and ideas. If ideas did reflect reality in

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<sup>55</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>56</sup> Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr, *Falsafatunā* (Bayrūt: Dār Al-Fikr, 1969), 241-3.

that way, they would never be true. Notions about external reality are fixed and different notions correspond to various stages of movement, and thoughts do not change and shift along with that moving reality. In Sadr's view, knowledge does not develop dialectically in a manner that reflects reality; rather, knowledge of each stage of moving reality is fixed. Sadr argues that if Marxism's aim in arguing for the dialectical development of thought is simply to explain that external reality must not be understood as frozen and motionless, then Marxism is in agreement with metaphysics and need not argue for the movement of thoughts and notions, but simply for successive fixed notions.<sup>57</sup>

The second attempt by Marxism to explain the dialectical nature of the movement of thought and knowledge lies in their proposition that thought is a natural phenomenon and a superior form of matter and is thus governed by the laws which govern nature and progresses dialectically as does all that is found in nature. Acknowledging that this sounds similar to the first point, Sadr clarifies the distinction: while the first point represents thought as a reflection of its corresponding reality and thus moves along with that which it reflects, the second point describes thought as itself part of the natural world and thus subject to the dialectical law of movement in its own right and not simply due to its status as a reflection of reality. As the human is part of nature, the products of the human mind are as well. This explanation of thought and knowledge is materialist in its ascribing all the laws of nature, including that of motion, to thought, according to Sadr.<sup>58</sup>

Sadr's maintenance of this distinction between the natural world and the realm of thought and knowledge is related to his placing responsibility for historical change with thoughts as opposed to natural processes or material conditions, a point explained further

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 244-6.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 246-7.

below in my discussion of the work of T.M. Aziz. Sadr argues that ideas shape history rather than simply reflecting material circumstances or themselves being part of the natural world. Sadr seems to suggest that the Marxist understanding of the dialectical nature of thought is a conflation of the material and metaphysical sides of the historical process. His maintenance of that distinction and his resultant argument that truths may only be fixed if they are not subject to the natural law of movement is a way to establish his argument for gradual change and a carrying over of past into present. If truths are fixed, change cannot entail a radical and complete break from the past.

In Richard Lux's dissertation, "Revolution and the Will to Change: Cosmology, Cognition, and the Mechanics of Transformation in the Thinking of Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, and Mao Tse Tung," the author includes an analysis of some aspects of Sadr's *Falsafatuna*. In this analysis, he notes Sadr's recognition of some degree of overlap between Islamic contentions and Marxist thought, and Lux concludes that it is in some instances difficult to find significant divergence between some of Sadr's ideas and Marxist discourse.<sup>59</sup> I propose that this is a manifestation of the shared language between communists and Islamists in the space from which Sadr wrote. But, Lux adds, despite that overlap, Sadr has a well-developed critique of dialectical materialism.

Lux also offers an interesting discussion on Sadr's *Al-Sunnan al-Tarikhiyyah fi-l-Qur'an*, which presents a theory of history, mentioned above, which says that the universe was created on the basis of *sunnan*, or universal natural laws. Historical *sunnan*,

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Lux, "Revolution and the Will to Change: Cosmology, Cognition and the Mechanics of Transformation in the Thinking of Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr and Mao Tse Tung" (PhD diss., The University of Utah, December 2007), 363.

though, are a unique set of laws which are distinct from the others in that they involve human action which is directed towards an objective or goal. They signify a forward-looking, teleological relationship with a future occurrence, Lux explains, and they direct history. Further, they must have a social impact by moving beyond the scope of one individual and affecting others in a society. What can be drawn from this, he continues, is that thoughts and actions are formulated based on an ideal or goal.<sup>60</sup>

I suggest that Sadr's vision of a new future can be discerned through his historical *sunnan*. Although, as I explained in regards to his theory of potentiality and actuality in movement, Sadr does not espouse a view of the future which posits it as a radical break from the past, we see here that he does understand historical progress as being steered by a future goal. Here, we see parallels with what Koselleck describes as modern understandings of progress and the future, as Sadr's historical *sunnan* look forward into an unknown future, and he understands human thought and action to be based on a future end. Sadr claims that the Qur'anic explanation of history does not espouse theories of surrender to destiny or random chance, and thus it is imperative that people come to an understanding of the *sunnan* so that they are able to take action. In this sense, human successes and failures rely on their setting "objective conditions," a phrase Lux relates to Marxist literature.<sup>61</sup> But although this may appear to be a reflection of the modern, liberal understanding of rational, autonomous individuals who are able to determine their own futures and are unobstructed by circumstances or conditions of possibility, Sadr does not believe that man can determine his own future but instead argues for action and human agency as part of a community and as a collective, as one factor contributing to historical

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 108-110.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 108-11.

change. Although Sadr emphasizes the importance of human thought and action in influencing the direction of history, he contends that naturalistic laws or patterns exist which cannot be altered by men. This will become clear below in my engagement with T.M. Aziz's breakdown of Sadr's three types of laws of history.

T.M. Aziz's "The Meaning of History: A Study of the Views of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr," presents Sadr's views on the philosophy of history based on lectures that he delivered to his students in Najaf, as Aziz explains that Sadr made a significant effort to formulate a theory on the development of history, an effort which had not been made by a Muslim scholar since that of Ibn Khaldun. Sadr's view of history is drawn from his Islamic beliefs as he believes that God has set forth a system through which all aspects of the historical process are linked and governed by rules and natural processes, but that process has both a material side and a metaphysical side. The causal progressions of physical forces also have a social impact although they occur independently, and the ultimate goal of the historical process is divine. Thus, while he acknowledges the Marxist belief that changes in modes of production affect social change, he believes that ideas are responsible for shaping history, while the historical process as a whole is ultimately shaped by God.<sup>62</sup>

Aziz outlines Sadr's *sunnan* or laws of history which direct the historical process, as explained above. These laws are of three types: voluntaristic, naturalistic, and deterministic. Voluntaristic laws relate to human agency and they function like physical laws of nature, only in that they are based on actions and consequences or cause and effect. Naturalistic laws consist of patterns which cannot be altered by the actions of men.

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<sup>62</sup> T.M. Aziz, "The Meaning of History: A Study of the Views of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr," *Islamic Studies* 31, no. 02 (Summer 1992): 117-8, accessed February 02, 2016.

Although men commit social violations which deviate from these patterns, those violations can only last so long until God's will prevails in the unfolding of history. Lastly, deterministic laws direct the movement of history towards its end goal and as such these laws determine the ultimate outcome of the historical process which will end with the coming of the Mahdi, the twelfth Imam, and the establishment of justice, regardless of what shifts occur by man's volition through voluntaristic laws.<sup>63</sup> Again, through this philosophy of historical development, Sadr leaves room for a new future directed by the actions and thoughts of man, although he does not espouse a secular teleological approach in which man is the ultimate arbiter of historical development.

Further, Aziz explores Sadr's three stages in the history of man: rearing, unity or solidarity, and dispersion or discord. The first stage is bounded by the creation of Adam and Eve and their descent to earth. During this stage, God gave man knowledge and free-will, and imposed a system of reward and punishment, all to ensure man's progress on earth. The stage of unity, according to Aziz, has parallels to the state of nature of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. During this stage, according to Sadr, men lived in social harmony. Driven by his need to survive, man cooperated with others; as man is motivated by the natural instinct of self-love, he depends on others in order to care for himself and ensure his needs are met. Social units during this stage were void of any exploitation and man was guided by Divine knowledge, thus refraining from evil. Because the only threat to this social order was deviation from the way of life mandated by God, political leadership and agencies of social enforcement were not necessary. The third stage, that of discord, which will last until the arrival of the Mahdi, resulted from an increase in differences

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 119-20.

between people. The increased complexity of life and human needs led to the uneven distribution of goods and exploitation of the weak. This oppression or social contradiction is the primary feature of this stage and takes various forms in different social systems.<sup>64</sup>

Here, Aziz notes that Sadr's social contradiction differs from Marx's in that the latter owes it to the growth and shift in means of production or the economic environment whereas the former sees the origin of the contradiction within man rather than in external conditions or changes in the forces of production although he does attribute a rise in contradictions to changing economic conditions. Man, in Sadr's view, is responsible for shaping his surroundings, including economic conditions and social relationships. The human mental faculty is what governs the forces of production and they do not develop naturally simply by way of a dialectical process. Working with the Marxist definition of production as that which precedes social relations, Sadr proposes that thought and language must have preceded production. Man's deviation from God's way led to social contradiction, class division, abuse of power, and a struggle between those who seek to maintain their power and those who desire revolt and change.<sup>65</sup> This relates back to the point I made above regarding Sadr's separation between thought and nature, and thus his recognition of the difference between natural time and historical time as well as his recognition of the role of man and his interactions with his environment in the unfolding of history. But again, this relies on a misunderstanding of dialectical materialism as a natural process as opposed to one that is acted upon by the proletariat and by the bourgeoisie who shape the means of production.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 120-2.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 123-4.

Aziz then outlines Sadr's three types of social ideals, which make the historical development of one society different from that of another, which Aziz refers to as *Ideals*. In the first type, the present condition shapes the future and stunts the progress of history as the future becomes only a replication of the past. Sadr suggests that a society may choose this path for two reasons: either that they are accustomed to their current way of life, or that an authoritarian regime has imposed maintenance of the status quo in order to ensure its own survival. Regardless of the impetus behind this type of *Ideal*, it necessarily results in the waste of a society's resources and the society is bound to collapse.<sup>66</sup> This demonstrates Sadr's outlook towards a new future that is different from the past although not radically opposed to it, and the importance of collective human thought and action in moving towards that future.

The second type of *Ideal* is that which contains a futuristic ambition and seeks development and progress for a nation or society, or a future that is better than and different from the present. Sadr argues that such an *Ideal* is necessarily short-sighted and will always fall short of achieving a utopia. Because there are limits to human reason, man is unable to fully perceive the end goal and the goal's imperfections will eventually become apparent once it is realized. Despite such an *Ideal's* ability to mobilize people to improve their material conditions, its capacity to induce growth and development is limited. Once the goal is achieved, growth is no longer possible and the *Ideal* becomes of the first type explained above. Sadr argues that this type of *Ideal* fails to properly grasp its lack of potential. With such an ideal, man rejects all that is related to his present and past in imagining his future. Sadr names the Enlightenment goals of freedom from

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 129-30.

religious, economic, and political oppression and the movement's resultant unjust and amoral capitalist democracies as an example of the failure of such an approach to the future. So the second type of *Ideal*, like the first, also results in the destruction of society.<sup>67</sup> I suggest that while the first *Ideal* highlights the importance of political change for Sadr and his espousal of a new future, the second demonstrates his eschewal of utopian futures which seek a radical break from the present and are estranged from the historical realities of contingency and conditions of possibility. Instead, Sadr's ideal is one which can be achieved through gradual change.

I argue that Sadr's recognition of the flaws of such a political vision or ideal which seeks a break from the past and a radically different future, and particularly his relating of that vision to the Enlightenment, is related to Reinhart Koselleck's argument that progress is not natural or given but that it emerged out of the European experience of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment which posited accelerated time and progress as a break from the past. In his *Futures Past*, Koselleck traces the origins of the use of the concept of "progress" and its being situated in opposition to "decline." Progress, he explains, is a modern category which was not available prior to the end of the eighteenth century. He demonstrates how this new concept of progress as a break from the past and as change or accelerated time was naturalized. The future, in this new configuration of progress, would be both different from and better than the past, and could not be deduced from experience. This notion of the future also defined its opposite, decline, as that which is traditional and unchanging. In this sense, progress was a way to ensure the separation

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 131-2.

of the future from past and present.<sup>68</sup> By rejecting such a notion of progress and relating the future to the present and the past, Sadr pushes back on the modern concept of progress as a divergence between the “space of experience” and the “horizon of expectation.” Although the future would be better than the past according to Sadr, as is made clear by his rejection of the first type of *Ideal* which entails stagnation and maintenance of the status quo, complete rupture is also to be eschewed, an argument he makes against the second type of *Ideal*.

Further, Koselleck’s ideas demonstrate the tension between Sadr’s theological teleology and Fahd’s secular Marxist teleology, and is helpful in allowing us to understand how both espouse a utopian ideal but each of a different nature. Koselleck explains that the European Enlightenment posited the idea that man can control nature and his environment through reason and that scientific knowledge and reasoning will allow man to achieve perfection. The Day of Judgment was replaced by a utopian illusion of the perfection of man through reason and pre-modern theological teleology was thus secularized. Dialectical materialism can be understood as one manifestation of that secular teleology. Thus, both Fahd and Sadr uphold a teleological view of historical development, but one secular and the other theological, respectively.

Lastly, the third type of *Ideal*, or God, is that which Sadr deems the real one. Religion is the means through which man moves towards God and progresses. Regardless of the *Ideals* which societies and nations adopt, all mankind is part of a historical process which is directed towards God. Thus, because all are progressing towards God, Sadr contends that it may be done either responsibly, by submitting to and worshipping God,

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<sup>68</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

or irresponsibly, by adopting an *Ideal* that is not God and thus remaining ignorant of the inevitability of historical development. Responsible progress places no limits on the development of man and would end the social contradictions that stem from man and all forms of oppression. Thus, according to Sadr, religion is the only *Ideal* which allows for man's progress through history and an end to social contradictions and oppression.<sup>69</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Fahd's political vision focused on anti-colonial liberation, obtaining political sovereignty, and building a new Iraqi nation-state. Although he espoused a traditional Marxist-Leninist approach to achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat as a long-term, future-oriented goal which sought a rupture with the past, the political circumstances of his time were such that the political activities of the ICP only fell within the realm of the first stage of that process. Following Soviet leadership and direction, the ICP allied with nationalist, bourgeois parties in order to form a unified national front to deal with the pressing issues of their time. The broader ideology of a socialist utopia which they espoused, taken in its totality, was not and could not have been relevant to their conditions. Thus, although their rhetoric was couched in Marxist terms, their struggle was one shared amongst Iraqis of various political factions.

Similarly, Sadr's espoused *Ideal* and his grand vision of the historical process could not come to bear directly on his political activity when considered practically in terms of the conditions of his time and place and the concrete circumstances he faced.

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<sup>69</sup> T.M. Aziz, "The Meaning of History: A Study of the Views of Muhammad Baqir Al-Sadr," *Islamic Studies* 31, no. 02 (Summer 1992): 133-5, accessed February 02, 2016.

Instead, he rejected both the first and second types of *Ideals* by being an active participant in the political fight against colonialism and for political sovereignty and emphasizing the important role of man in historical development but avoiding a utopian vision which would fail to recognize its own limits and the contingencies which would obstruct its ultimate realization. In his refutation of dialectical materialism, he drew from the Shiite intellectual tradition only to engage with a common language of his time and place regarding the nature of historical change and the relationship between past, present, and future. He argued against the materialist concept of revolution as abrupt change and instead argued for gradual change and saw no conflict between present and future. Contrary to Fahd's vision of the future as a break from the past, Sadr saw the future building off of the past. But despite that understanding of the role of the past, Sadr also anticipated a new future, as displayed by his historical *sunnan*.

While both Fahd and Sadr espoused a teleological view of history, the former secular and the latter theological, their political decisions and actions remained grounded in the circumstances of their time and place as well as the common language of their present, both of them primarily concerned with the fight against colonialism, the establishment of political sovereignty, and a developed future for their nation-state. Those actions were not fueled by their respective Marxist and Shiite traditions but from their shared conditions and overlapping questions and concerns.

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