



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

وحدة دراسات الخليج والجزيرة العربية
Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb

Critical Social Sciences in the Arab and Gulf Context

13 February 2025

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About

The late Kuwaiti sociologist Khaldoun al-Naqeeb (1940–2011) holds a special place in Arab thought, academia, and research due to his critical approaches to major social phenomena that are fundamentally linked to the political sphere, such as political tribalism, the authoritarian state, and more. His intellectual contributions stemmed from a deep societal concern, which led him to become one of the advocates and proponents of political reform, whether in Kuwait, the Gulf, or the broader Arab world. Therefore, it is possible to say that al-Naqeeb was not merely an academic but rather a public intellectual.

In keeping with one of its key research missions, the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies seeks to examine prominent intellectual and academic figures in the Gulf region, not merely as a form of tribute, but also to understand the intellectual, research, and academic landscape of the region.

Despite considering his intellectual sphere to be the wider Arab world, al-Naqeeb played a foundational role in Gulf studies by breaking away from the dominance of historical narratives that accompanied the emergence of the modern state in the region and instead situating Gulf studies within the framework of the social sciences. Therefore, it is impossible for Gulf studies to overlook al-Naqeeb's pioneering role. Engaging with his work serves as an opportunity for review, exemplary inspiration, and critical examination alike.

Symposium Output

The ACRPS plans to publish the paper presented at the symposium in a book in Arabic.

About the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit

The Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit is specialized in the humanities and social sciences, focusing on both theoretical and applied research. It aims to produce objective knowledge about the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula region and the societies therein, address topics that are connected to the region, and track regional and international networks of relationships in this area. It organizes an annual Gulf Studies Forum, providing an open and academic environment for scholars and decision-makers to discuss the most pressing matters for the region through a research-driven lens informed by the landscape and societal needs. The unit also welcomes research papers and studies, in addition to hosting seminars and discussion panels that address relevant issues from academic and intellectual perspectives.

Timetable

Thursday, 13 February 2025

9:30-10:00	Registration
10:00-10:15	Opening Remarks
10:15-11:30	<p>Session One al-Naqeeb: State and Civil society</p> <p>Chair: Marwan Kabalan</p> <p>Ghanim Al-Najjar: The State and Civil Society in Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's Thought Harith Hassan: Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's Approach to the Authoritarian State within Arab Authoritarian Studies</p>
11:30-11:45	Break
11:45-13:00	<p>Session Two al-Naqeeb: Anthropology and History</p> <p>Chair: Ismail Nashef</p> <p>Yagoub Al-Kandari: Khaldoun al-Naqeeb: An Anthropological Reading Abdulrahman alebrahim: Khaldoun al-Naqeeb as a Historian</p>
13:00-14:00	Lunch Break
14:00-15:15	<p>Session Three On al-Naqeeb's Methodology</p> <p>Chair: Amal Ghazal</p> <p>Kristin Diwan: Tribes and Citizenship: A Critical Reflection Based on Khaldoun Azzeddine Alfaraa: Constructivism as a Theory and a Methodology: Khaldoun al-Naqeeb and the Palestine Question</p>
15:15-15:30	<p>Closing Remarks</p> <p>Haider Saeed</p>

* The symposium will be held at the Arab Center (New Building) Ground Floor Auditorium

Participants

Abstracts



Abdulrahman Alebrahim

Assistant Professor in the Department of History at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and Researcher for the Gulf and Arabian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He earned his PhD from the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter (2017). He specializes in the modern history of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula and related studies, with a special focus on the northern regions – Kuwait, Najd, and Al-Zubayr – examining the historical sources of the sheikhdoms in the 19th and 20th centuries through a critical lens. His research interests include the marginalized history of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula including the history of slavery, cultural and religious thought history, and social history. He has published widely, including *Kuwait's Politics Before Independence: The Role of the Balancing Powers* (2019); "The Neglected Sheikhdom at the Frontier of Empires: An Introduction to al-Zubayr" (2020); and "History Is Not Written Once" (2022).

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb as a Historian

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb was not merely a sociologist; he was also a critic of official history and traditional narratives about the Gulf. His writings were characterized by deep analysis and rigorous methodology. al-Naqeeb rewrote the history of the region more objectively than many Gulf historians of his time, categorizing them based on their contributions to the history of the region. In his books *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula (RLE: The Arab Nation): A Different Perspective* (1987) and *The Struggle Between Tribe and Democracy: The Case of Kuwait* (1996), he provided a critical reading of the role of tribe, religion, and economy in shaping Gulf societies. al-Naqeeb employed history methodically, and his familiarity with the legacy of the second generation of the French Annales School, particularly the works of Fernand Braudel, deepened his understanding of society and allowed him to frame his concepts with greater precision. His reliance on historical sources, evident in the extensive reference lists in his books, further demonstrates his awareness of the significance of history in his work. This paper examines Khaldoun al-Naqeeb as a historian by examining his own critique of historians and his method of utilizing sources, seeking to bridge different disciplines within the field of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula studies.



Azzeddine Alfaraa

Moroccan social science researcher and a high school philosophy teacher in Morocco. He holds a PhD in Sociology from the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences at Dhar El Mahraz, Fez. His research focuses on social movements, the state, borders, and colonialism. He has participated in several local and international academic conferences and seminars and has published various studies and research papers in collective books and peer-reviewed journals such as *Omran*, *Idafat*, *Journal of Social Sciences* (Kuwait), *Journal of Culture* (Malaysia), and others. He has an upcoming book titled *Colonial Borderlands: Society, Economy, and Identity*, to be published by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

Constructivism as a Theory and a Methodology: Khaldoun al-Naqeeb and the Palestine Question

Constructivism has been firmly established as a branch of critical social theory within Arab social sciences by prominent Arab sociologists, particularly Khaldoun al-Naqeeb. al-Naqeeb provided in-depth, critical scientific interpretations of the dialectics of society and the state in the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, employing constructivism as an anti-positivist approach. Like most critical constructivist theorists, al-Naqeeb's perspectives cannot be separated from critical social theory, which requires a conscious engagement with social and political questions while uncovering the hidden stakes embedded in these issues. These stakes, inseparable from the social structures of economy and political culture, are often ignored by positivist approaches, whose proponents overlook hidden power dynamics and authoritarian policies under the pretext of "commitment" to neutrality and objectivity – or in service of research agendas and academic policies. The tragedy of Gaza starkly illustrates this dynamic. Constructivists emphasize culture, identity, values, and shared individual and collective perceptions because identity serves multiple functions, including demarcating the boundaries between self/other, defining self-identity, outlining behavioural norms toward friend and foe, and shaping interests and actions. Constructivists also agree on the functional role of social identity and political culture in defining and shaping state interests and determining their roles in various contexts and environments. Given this, several key questions emerge: Which social research projects employed the constructivist approach in al-Naqeeb's work? What were the most significant findings of these studies? How did al-Naqeeb perceive the Palestine question and what major events shaped his views on the issue?



Ghanim Al-Najjar

Professor of Political Science at Kuwait University, founder of the Center for Strategic and Future Studies at the same university, a member of the Board of Directors of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, a member of the Board of Trustees at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, and the editor-in-chief of *Majallat Dirasat al-Khalij wa-l-Jazira al-Arabiyya*. He has been a visiting professor at a number of universities, lectured in many foreign and Arab universities, and is an international expert in many international organizations. He was an independent expert in the United Nations for Somalia, the Head of the Arab Human Rights Fund. He has published widely in the fields of human rights and political science.

The State and Civil Society in Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's Thought

This paper examines Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's focus on establishing the concept of the "state" and outlining its dimensions. While his initially sharp stance against the state as a basis for monopoly became more accommodating over time – allowing for engagement with it as an entity – his critical approach to the state persisted. The solution al-Naqeeb envisioned for achieving societal balance was the strengthening of civil society, the promotion of public engagement, the entrenchment of freedom, and political participation, so that the state could uphold justice. Consequently, much of his criticism of the state was directed at its authoritarian tendencies, particularly its restriction of civil society and its freedoms. In his early works, his criticism stemmed from what he saw as the state's failure in fulfilling its central role and its bias toward the most influential groups. Although his initial critique was rooted in deterministic and largely ideological considerations, over time, he shifted toward what was pragmatically feasible, offering reformist proposals where ideology receded, and what he called "disciplined pragmatism" took precedence. However, his belief in the central role of civil society and its capacity to regulate and influence state trajectories only grew stronger. Thus, al-Naqeeb concluded that no state can be effective, balanced, stable, and productive without genuine political participation. While his perception of the state evolved in some respects, what remained unchanged was his vision of it as a vehicle for public good, justice, freedom, non-discrimination, the empowerment of the marginalized, and the reduction of monopolization.



Harith Hassan

Associate Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He holds a PhD in Political Science from Sant'Anna School for Advanced Studies in Pisa, Italy and an MA in Political Communication from the University of Leeds. He previously worked as a non-resident researcher at the Malcolm H. Kerr Carnegie Middle East Center, and a resident researcher at both the Central European University and Harvard University. He has published widely in Arabic and English academic journals. His interests centre on state issues and their relationship to society, identity, and development.

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's Approach to the Authoritarian State within Arab Authoritarian Studies

This paper focuses on Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's contribution to the field of authoritarianism studies in the Arab world, particularly through his approach and analysis of the concept of the "authoritarian state", which he developed, particularly in his writings from the late 1980s and early 1990s. His most notable works in this regard include *The Authoritarian State in Contemporary Arab Mashreq: A Structural Comparative Study* (1991) and *Society and State in the Gulf and Arab Peninsula (RLE: The Arab Nation): A Different Perspective* (1987). al-Naqeeb employed advancements in the social sciences to provide a general framework for understanding "authoritarianism" within the modern bureaucratic state. In doing so, he diverged from the traditional Arab cultural approach to the concept of despotism, instead centering the impact of modernization and the expanding role of the state in reshaping the economy and society. His work elucidated the nature of the modern authoritarian state and the contexts in which it operates. He also made a fundamental contribution to understanding the interplay between formal and informal mechanisms of control, as well as the role and nature of corporatism in the Arab state during the post-independence period. al-Naqeeb drew upon dependency theories to analyse the model of dependent authoritarian state capitalism and to explore how this dependency shaped the state's relationship with society, the patterns of authoritarianism it adopted, and the crises it faced. This paper situates al-Naqeeb's contribution within its historical context, examining the key intellectual influences that shaped his approach and assessing whether it rises to the level of a comprehensive theory. Furthermore, the paper explores the specific nature of al-Naqeeb's contribution to authoritarianism studies and his position within the field, comparing its development in both Western academia and the Arab world.



Kristin Diwan

Senior resident scholar at the Arab Gulf States Institute, where she heads the division on Politics, Society, and Culture. She received her PhD from Harvard University. Her expertise lies in Gulf states and societies and has written and been cited in publications including *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Times*, and *Financial Times*. She was previously an assistant professor at the American University School of International Service and has held visiting scholar positions at the George Washington University and Georgetown University. Her current projects concern generational change, nationalism, and the evolution of Islamism in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Her recent publications include "The New Industries: Tourism and Entertainment in a Changing Saudi Arabia," in: John Sfakianakis (ed.), *The Economy of Saudi Arabia in the 21st Century* (Oxford, 2024); "Clerical associations in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates: soft power competition in Islamic politics" (*International Affairs*, 2021).

Tribes and Citizenship: A Critical Reflection Based on Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's Writing

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb's mighty catalogue of work sought to understand the Arab, and more specifically the Gulf Arab, reality through a systematic analysis of its political economy, grounded in an understanding of its global connections and how these have changed over time. It worked to understand the impact of these changes on social formations. He held a special interest in the tribe as a foundational social and economic actor. Indeed, he held that the question of tribal forces – their integration within a system dominated by the ruling family and urban elite and the response to their legitimate demands – would be determinative of the political struggle between the ruling elite and the urban opposition forces. Inspired by al-Naqeeb's methodology of excavating history to gain insights to apply to contemporary issues, this paper elucidates the current political dynamics undermining the tribal power base in the outer constituencies of Kuwait. The temporary suspension of the parliament and the amendment of citizenship laws marks a crucial moment, undermining the social contract and even the underlying social composition of the state. The existence of similar manipulations of citizenship and political rights – in Qatar as well as Bahrain – suggests that this historical moment reaches beyond Kuwait and speaks to a broader redefinition of political belonging amidst the centralization of state powers. How can we conceptualize this within the current global political economy beset by the decline of the neo-liberal order? And where would one find the potentialities of political reformation within this moment?



Yagoub Al-Kandari

Professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Kuwait University. He holds a PhD in Anthropology from The Ohio State University, United States. He has held several positions, including Dean of the College of Social Sciences at Kuwait University, Director of the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of *Majallat Dirāsāt al-Khalij wa-l-Jazira al-‘Arabiyya*. He directs the Center for Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies.

Khaldoun al-Naqeeb: An Anthropological Reading

This paper argues that Khaldoun al-Naqeeb is one of the few figures in the Arab region who did not draw clear distinctions between social sciences. He read in psychology as he did in politics, sociology, anthropology, education, and cultural studies. His anthropological educational background profoundly influenced his diverse writings. Anthropology, known as a holistic science in studying humans from multiple dimensions due to its focus on human culture – a defining characteristic of this branch of knowledge – formed the foundation of his higher academic studies. Despite the fine line separating sociological and anthropological analyses, his reliance on the principles and methodologies of anthropology was evident in his scholarly writings. His scholarly contributions stemmed from a theoretical and methodological analysis shaped by his academic background in anthropology and his postgraduate studies in culture, enabling him to comprehend and grasp the transformations of local and Arab cultures, clearly identifying their components and defining their dimensions when addressing social issues. As a result, his analyses aligned with a socio-cultural perspective that encompassed different scientific and intellectual aspects, particularly in his discussions of topics such as the tribe, political tribalism, tribal solidarity, socio-cultural history, social stratification, education and culture, the culture of authoritarian regimes, and attitudes toward the West. Thus, this paper examines al-Naqeeb's anthropological analyses while identifying the anthropological principles and foundations underlying his interpretations. The study relies on a scholarly and analytical review of his major intellectual output, including books, academic articles, lectures, and seminars.

Chairs

Amal Ghazal

Professor of History and Dean of the School of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. She received her BA from the American University of Beirut and her MA and PhD in History from the University of Alberta, Canada. She was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto, and a faculty member at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada, and Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, where she also directed the Centre for Comparative Muslim Studies. She was the recipient of several grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, of the Gerda Henkel Foundation Research Scholarship, and the Institut d'Etudes Avancées de Nantes Fellowship. She specializes in modern Arab intellectual history and her publications have covered many topics, including Arab nationalism, conservative religious thought, Islamist reform, Ibadism, and slavery, and have encompassed a wide geography, from the Arabian Peninsula to East Africa, from the Levant to North Africa.

Haider Saeed

Head of the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, and Editor-in-Chief of the journal of *Siyasat Arabiya*. He holds a PhD in Linguistics from Baghdad's Al Mustansiriya University (2001). His research interests focus on Iraq, divided societies, and critical analysis of political discourse. He published in the Arab Center a book titled *Arab Shi'is: Identity and Citizenship* (2019), as well as other publications: *The Politics of the Symbol and the End to National Culture of Iraq* (2009); *The Status of Social Sciences in Iraqi Universities* (2008). He wrote three chapters in the book published by the Arab Center titled *The Islamic State Organization, 'ISIS'* (2018), and supervised with a research team the completion of a study on "Islamic Civil Society in Iraq" (2010). He contributed to writing the "National Report on Human Development in Iraq" for the years 2009 and 2014.

Ismail Nashef

Associate Professor of Anthropology on the Sociology and Anthropology program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He has worked in several universities and as an art critic and curator. He has published several collections of short stories and has initiated different cultural and intellectual projects. His main research fields are materiality, language, ideology, plasticity, and aesthetics. He explores the (neo)colonial contexts, particularly in the Arab-Palestinian context. He published: *Literary Arabic in the Zionist Regime: The Story of a Colonial Mask* (2019); *Ruins: On Expressing al-Nakbah* (2019); and *Images of the Palestinian Death* (2015).

Marwan Kabalan

Director of the Political Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy studies. He chairs the Gulf Studies Forum and serves as Program Manager for Diplomatic Studies and International Cooperation at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He is also a Board Member of the Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies. Previously, he served as the Head of the Sham Center for Research and Studies, a lecturer of International Politics, the Dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy at the University of Kalamoun and the University of Damascus, and a lecturer at the Department of International Politics at the University of Manchester in the UK. He has served as an international affairs consultant for various Arab and regional research organizations and institutions. His publications include *Qatar's Foreign Policy: Geography, Politics, and Strategy Since 1971* (2024), and two edited books published by the Arab Center: *Arab Gulf States and Iran: Origins of Gulf Regional Competition* (2023) and *Arab National Security and Challenges of Regional Security* (2023), among others.