

NATIONAL COMMEMORATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE LIGHT OF CHANGING TRADITIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF KUWAIT'S NATIONAL AND LIBERATION DAYS

Author(s) / Szerző(k):

Németh Kinga¹

University of Debrecen (Hungary)

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Abstract

This study undertakes an anthropological analysis of Kuwaiti National celebrations. It examines the construction and reinforcement of national identity, the development of the nation-state, and how these are expressed within the local community. Through an examination of historical narratives, governmental influence, and public performative expressions, this paper aims to identify the mechanisms by which these national commemorations function as tools for collective memory, social integration, and the processing of historical trauma within Kuwait's diverse demographic landscape. The anthropological investigation also considers the historical evolution of these commemorations, the role of governmental influence in the construction of collective memory, and the performative aspects of public participation, particularly concerning the processing of transgenerational war trauma and intergroup relational dynamics. The study's

¹ Németh, Kinga. Department of Ethnography, Faculty of Arts, University of Debrecen, Program of Ethnography and Cultural Anthropology, PhD School of History and Ethnography (Hungary). E-mail address: nemeth.kinga@gmail.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-2973-2002>

objective is to provide a nuanced understanding of how these traditions function to construct identity, facilitate social integration, and shape historical narratives within the local group context. Examining the development and historical changes of Kuwait's National and Liberation Days reveals a dynamic interplay between official commemoration and popular expression.

Keywords: kuwait national holidays, national identity, anthropology

Discipline: Cultural Anthropology

Absztrakt

A NEMZETI MEGEMLÉKEZÉS ÉS KULTURÁLIS IDENTITÁS A VÁLTOZÓ HAGYOMÁNYOK TÜKRÉBEN: ANTROPOLÓGIAI TANULMÁNY KUVAIT NEMZETI ÉS FELSZABADULÁSI NAPJÁRÓL

Jelen tanulmány Kuvait Nemzeti ünnepeinek antropológia szemszögű elemzését kíséri meg, melynek során vizsgálja a nemzeti identitás konstrukciójának és megerősítésének, a nemzetállam kialakulásának és annak artikulációs módjait a lokális közösségen belül. A történelmi narratívák, a kormányzati befolyás és a nyilvános performatív kifejezések vizsgálatán keresztül a dolgozat elvégzi azon mechanizmusok feltárását melyek révén a tárgyalt nemzeti megemlékezések a kollektív emlékezet, a társadalmi integráció és a történelmi trauma feldolgozásának eszközeiként funkcionálnak Kuvait sokszínű demográfiai tájképén belül. Az antropológiai vizsgálat tárgya továbbá a megemlékezések történelmi fejlődése, a kormányzati befolyás szerepe a kollektív emlékezet konstrukciójában, valamint a nyilvános részvétel performatív aspektusai, különös tekintettel a transzgenerációs háború okozta trauma feldolgozására és a csoportközi kapcsolati dinamikákra. A tanulmány célja, hogy árnyalt képet nyújtson ezen hagyományok identitáskonstruáló, társadalmi integrációs és történelmi narratíva-képző szerepéről a lokális csoport kontextusában. Kuvait Nemzeti és Felszabadulási Napjainak kialakulásának és történelmi változásainak vizsgálata a hivatalos megemlékezés és a népi kifejezés dinamikus kölcsönhatásainak játékát tárja elénk.

Kulcsszavak: Kuvait Nemzeti ünnepek, nemzeti identitás, antropológia

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

This study delves into the socio-cultural dynamics of Kuwait's National and Liberation Day celebrations, employing an anthropological lens to analyze the construction and reinforcement of national identity. Through an examination of historical narratives, governmental influence, and public performative expressions, this paper aims to elucidate the mechanisms by which these national commemorations function as vehicles for collective memory, social integration, and the negotiation of historical trauma within the diverse demographic landscape of Kuwait. Through an anthropological approach, we examine the historical evolution of these celebrations, the role of governmental

influence in shaping collective memory, and the performative aspects of public participation, particularly in relation to trauma processing and intergroup relations. This study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how these traditions function as mechanisms for identity construction, social integration, and the negotiation of historical narratives within the Kuwaiti context. The evolution of Kuwait's National and Liberation Day celebrations reveals a dynamic interplay between official commemoration and popular expression. National Day, initially characterized by organized parades, transitioned to widespread residential decorations, reflecting a shift towards broader

public engagement. Liberation Day past practices, post-conflict traditions, emerged as a spontaneous expression of victory and remembrance. The Kuwaiti government plays a central role in shaping national memory through organized events, memorials, and regulations, demonstrating a top-down approach to collective memory formation. The spontaneous historical re-enactment of the liberation war, involving both Kuwaiti citizens and expatriates, served as a temporary suspension of social norms and hierarchies, fostering a sense of social integration and acceptance. While historically prevalent, these re-enactments are now prohibited due to safety and resource concerns. The Iraqi invasion left a deep psychological impact, with re-enactments analyzed as potential subconscious attempts to process trauma, though scholarly debate exists regarding their therapeutic value. Notably, a clear distinction exists between everyday social interactions and the temporary dissolution of boundaries observed during these celebrations. The celebrations themselves can be seen as a form of releasing frustrations caused by trauma.

A brief history of Kuwait

Established as a fishing settlement in 1613 under Portuguese rule, Kuwait transitioned to Ottoman-aligned governance by the late 17th century. The 18th century saw Kuwait develop significant regional diplomatic and commercial ties, notably as a key trade hub between Aleppo and the Gulf. Its maritime trade flourished, leading to its reputation as a cosmopolitan and tolerant center. The Al-Sabah family, from the Bani Utbah, assumed rulership in the late 17th century and continue to rule Kuwait today. In 1899 Shaikh Mubarak Al-Sabah reinforced the country's diplomatic relationships with Great-Britain by signing the Anglo-Kuwaiti Agreement which made Kuwait a British protectorate until 1961. The 1st and the 2nd World War were governed by the continuous fight between East and West for the control of (also)

Kuwaiti territory due to its geopolitical importance which affects the country's political, economic and military position even today. In 1961, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah terminated the British Protectorate, enabling Kuwait to cultivate stronger commercial and political relations with the United States. Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah promulgated the 1962 constitution, leading to the establishment of Parliament in 1963. Kuwait is considered one of the most democratic Gulf countries and is a significant US ally, hosting a persistent US military presence. The first commercial oil well was dug in Burgan, in 1938, and since, Kuwait has become an increasingly important actor in international politics and economy.

The Invasion and the Liberation – the beginning of a tradition

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, under Saddam Hussein, stemmed from a complex interplay of factors. Potential reasons include territorial disputes over oil resources, Iraq's debt to Kuwait, and the historical Iraqi claim of Kuwait as a lost province. Operation Desert Storm, the subsequent US-led coalition intervention, liberated Kuwait and significantly solidified its alliance with the United States, contrasting sharply with Saddam Hussein's anti-Western stance. Despite his execution, Saddam Hussein retains a degree of popularity within certain segments of the Arab world, where he is viewed as a symbol of Arab independence and a leader who modernized Iraq's infrastructure, including healthcare and education systems, which were subsequently damaged during the US-led military intervention. The Desert Storm Operation concluded in 3 days, contrasting sharply with the Iraqi invasion's occupation, which lasted over 7 months. During this period, Kuwaiti citizens were subjected to hostage-taking, torture, and interrogation, with numerous executions occurring. Iraqi forces also engaged in deliberate

environmental damage, setting oil wells ablaze, and employed chemical warfare across the country. While many Hungarian and other Western expatriates evacuated during the invasion, some remained to witness the conflict. It is notable that, in general, the Western expatriate population did not experience the same magnitude of tragic losses as the Kuwaiti citizens. Anecdotal evidence from the local Hungarian community indicates that Kuwaiti citizens were the primary targets of the Iraqi occupation and search. Following Iraq's refusal to comply with multiple United Nations resolutions demanding withdrawal, the United States initiated Operation Desert Storm, liberating Kuwait and conducting military operations against Iraq, commencing on February 24, 1991.

Demographic key takeaways

Kuwait exhibits a high degree of ethnic diversity within the Gulf region, a consequence of its historical, geopolitical, and economic circumstances. Kuwaiti citizens constitute approximately 31.3% of the resident population, with the remaining majority comprising stateless residents and foreign expatriates. This demographic includes roughly 27.9% Arab nationals, 37.8% South Asians, 1.9% Africans, and 1.1% other nationalities, predominantly from the United States and Europe. A significant 98% of the population resides in urbanized areas, encompassing approximately 25% of Kuwait's total land area. These urban centers are concentrated along the coastal region, where the more advanced infrastructure is prevalent. The remaining landmass consists of arid and semi-arid terrain utilized for oil production, military installations, and irrigated agriculture. Kuwait is characterized by significant ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, forming an ethnic mosaic, which (among other factors) has fostered a heightened sense of national identity. This is evident in initiatives such as Kuwaitization, a centrally administered program designed to

prioritize Kuwaiti citizens in the labor market, particularly within the government sector.

The history of the National and Liberation Day

Interview

Amer S. (24. f., Iraqi-Kuwaiti, BSc, Debrecen.)

About the National Day:

„My parents told me that the celebrations started around 1977, back at that time the houses were not decorated with the flag and the lights as you can see it nowadays. Instead, there was a big show on the Gulf Street, on the seaside, where private companies and governmental institutions decorated cars, and big carts, and they were driving them through the Gulf Street, and people would be standing on the sides to see the show. So, you can say it was something similar to the Virágkarnevál in Debrecen, but with the decoration of Kuwait, with Kuwaiti flags. This thing remained until around 1986, when I think it was the 26th anniversary of the independence of Kuwait, when the Amir of Kuwait ordered the people of Kuwait to decorate their houses, with all the lights and the flags we see nowadays, and the big show and festival on the Gulf Street stopped, it wasn't done anymore. Still people were going out in the streets, playing songs, carrying the flags, so much of what we see nowadays. But the foam and the water were not used at this time.

So, the celebration remained the same until the end of the war in 1991, when people started to use as a new way of celebration after the war ended, and it remained in use for several years, until it got banned because of the incidents that happened, the damage that the foam caused in the paint of cars and getting in contact with the skin and the eyes. This is the reason it got banned and replaced by water. But even until recently the government is trying to minimize or even prohibit the celebration with water, as it is considered wasteful, and some people are using contaminated water, some of them are using even liquids other than water. So even until now, they are trying to minimize or even completely prohibit the celebration with water.”

Analysis of the interview data reveals a gradual evolution in the celebration of Kuwait's national holidays. The National Day, observed on February 25th since the 1970s, has consistently been a centrally organized event. According to Amer, the government initially mandated the display of the Kuwaiti national flag on residential facades. Currently, the national flag is ubiquitously displayed on large villas, vehicles, and even within smaller residences. Vehicle decorations are particularly elaborate, with portraits of past and present leaders adorning the exteriors of various vehicles, including jeeps and land cruisers, alongside large national flags. These elaborate decorations, as described by Amer, bear resemblance to the Debrecen Flower Carnival. A military air show, featuring national colors and the flag, constitutes an integral component of the national celebrations. Furthermore, skyscrapers in Kuwait and other regional cities, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, are illuminated in the national colors, a practice also observed during significant sporting events. The Liberation Day, commemorating the 1991 victory over the Iraqi forces, emerged as a celebration post-conflict. While the precise origins and rationale for these celebrations remain largely undocumented, they appear to have arisen as spontaneous and collectively accepted forms of commemoration, potentially serving as a mechanism for collective trauma processing.

The two celebrations – key takeaways

Kuwait's National Day, observed on February 25th, commemorates the ascension of Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah to the throne in 1950. Notably, Sheikh Abdullah Al-Salim Al-Sabah is revered as a pivotal figure in Kuwaiti history, credited with terminating British protectorate status and solidifying the nation's sovereignty. The subsequent day, February 26th, marks the celebration of Kuwait's liberation following the Iraqi invasion. Historical accounts indicate that the

inaugural National Day celebrations occurred in 1963. Contemporary celebrations are characterized by a diverse array of events, including concerts, firework displays, and family-oriented programs, fostering communal gatherings. Public parks serve as focal points for these festivities, attracting both Kuwaiti citizens and expatriate residents. These spaces facilitate a confluence of diverse populations, united in the celebration of national identity and resilience, as evidenced by the shared anticipation of roadshows, pyrotechnic displays, and aerial demonstrations.

Kuwait commemorates its liberation from the Iraqi army on February 26, 1991. While the Kuwaiti government actively engages in initiatives aimed at mitigating the enduring psychological impact of the invasion—through the construction of memorials and the organization of public commemorations—the socio-psychological ramifications remain substantial.

Empirical evidence, derived from interviews, suggests a significant reluctance among individuals to recount their experiences during the invasion. Interview subjects consistently provided limited responses, demonstrating an unwillingness to engage in detailed narratives of their personal traumas. This reticence resulted in a scarcity of in-depth, first-hand accounts.

Despite this reluctance, the narratives of the invasion are preserved through ongoing oral history projects (AUK oral history project), demonstrating a commitment to documenting collective memory. Furthermore, the invasion is a recurring theme in Kuwaiti media and is visibly memorialized in public spaces, particularly in high-traffic areas. These public representations serve as tangible reminders of the historical event and its lasting impact, while providing space for grieving.

A plausible hypothesis posits that the construction of national collective memory, encompassing its structure, content, and narrative, and the mechanisms by which transgenerational

traumas are processed, are subject to centralized definition and organization. Consequently, it may be inferred that collective consciousness operates within a hierarchical framework, exhibiting a top-down rather than bottom-up organizational structure in this regard. This assertion finds potential support in the selective representation and emphasis of elements within national commemorative practices.

Strategies of Historical Commemoration

Top to bottom: For maintaining and establishing historical remembrance, the government has erected numerous memorials for the martyrs. One such example is the Wall of Martyrs in Al-Shaheed Park, which is one of the most frequented areas of Kuwait during festivities, and it's among the first places that tourists visit.

Thus, the martyrs central to Kuwait's historical narrative and independence are positioned within the visual purview of tourists. This strategic placement serves to communicate the national narrative to local citizens, tourists, and expatriate residents alike. The observances of National Day have retained their fundamental structure; however, there appears to be a heightened emphasis on carnival-esque festivities following the conclusion of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, National Day celebrations in Kuwait were primarily characterized by events such as the Gulf Road show, fireworks displays, picnics, concerts, and the public veneration of past sheikhs, reflecting a degree of personality cult. Contemporary celebrations, however, have shifted towards staged performances, organized carnivals, and events held at historically significant locations. A consistent feature throughout both periods has been the prominent attendance and active engagement of children across all age groups.

Bottom to top: Historically, certain elements were consistent across both commemorative days. However, the 26th of February, Liberation Day,

was particularly notable for the spontaneous re-enactments of the conflict, utilizing water guns and water balloons. During these celebrations, roadsides were populated by vendors selling toy weapons and balloons, and a temporary suspension of normative social conduct was observed. This manifested in playful, albeit unregulated, interactions, including mock attacks with water guns, the projectile use of water-filled balloons against pedestrians and vehicles, and simulated vehicular assaults.

Additionally, individuals engaged in deceptive tactics, feigning injury at roadsides to elicit assistance, only to then execute ambush-style attacks on unsuspecting individuals. The scene used to be a whirlwind of chaos. Cars, plastered with portraits of sheikhs, children perched through sunroofs, unleashed torrents of water on unsuspecting passersby. Modern and traditional Arabic music blared from every direction. Children, decked out in national colors, and expatriates alike, joined in the revelry, creating a melting pot of celebration where everyday practices of norm control were temporarily suspended. While these re-enactments were historically a recurring feature, they are now officially prohibited by authorities during contemporary celebrations. This prohibition was initially implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period in which all large-scale celebrations and public gatherings were legally restricted.

Although limited observances were permitted, the use of water, toy weapons, and any implements simulating weaponry is strictly forbidden. This measure was predicated on the understanding that the dispersal of water and the close-contact nature of re-enacted combat could facilitate viral transmission within crowds. Furthermore, the significant water consumption associated with these activities was deemed unsustainable in a region characterized by limited freshwater resources, while several individuals got injured each

year in the heat of these games. The prohibition has remained in effect post-pandemic.

The phenomenon of both expatriate and local participation in the re-enactment of the conflict and the subsequent victory over the Iraqi forces may be interpreted as a symbolic act of social integration, potentially signifying a degree of acceptance of expatriate communities within the broader Kuwaiti social fabric. This symbolic action is particularly noteworthy given the pronounced social differentiation that characterizes everyday interactions between Kuwaiti citizens and expatriate populations, encompassing Arab, Asian, and Western communities.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the prevalence of symbolic competition and inter-Arab national rivalries within everyday public discourse. Condescending narratives concerning Kuwait's cultural and economic achievements are frequently articulated in casual conversations, often positing that these successes are contingent upon territorial claims against Iraq or the intervention of the United States. Consequently, the re-enactment of the conflict, and even the mere presence of diverse Arab nationalities at a celebration commemorating the definitive act of Kuwait's sovereignty, can be interpreted as a tacit act of legitimation and acceptance by other Arab nations.

In conclusion, regardless of the inclusion of re-enactments, the carnival-esque emphasis of both National and Liberation Days, coupled with the active participation of Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti populations, can be interpreted as a reciprocal act of acceptance and legitimation. Kuwaiti citizens, through their inclusive celebrations, recognize the integration of other nationalities within their cultural and historical narrative, as evidenced by the inclusion of non-Kuwaitis on the Wall of Martyrs in Al-Shaheed Park. Conversely, the active involvement of other Arab nations in the re-enactments and celebrations serves as a

performative affirmation of Kuwait's sovereign status.

The aforementioned performative act stands in stark contrast to everyday social interactions, which are characterized by a separation between Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti populations. Observational data collected over an eleven-year period reveals a hierarchical structure of social distance, with Kuwaiti citizens demonstrating the closest proximity to other Arab nationalities, followed by Western citizens, and subsequently, Asian populations.

The re-enactment of the conflict can be conceptualized as a mechanism for the temporary suspension of normative social controls and social order, specifically those governing intergroup interactions between Kuwaiti citizens and non-Kuwaiti residents. Through the medium of play, which permits otherwise prohibited actions such as mock attacks, and unconventional social interactions, a temporary dissolution of social boundaries is facilitated, a characteristic feature of carnival culture.

In contrast to Bakhtin's concept of social hierarchy inversion, the observed phenomenon demonstrates a more profound dissolution of social stratification. During these events, social hierarchies are effectively abolished, as evidenced by the indiscriminate participation of all social groups, irrespective of socioeconomic or racial background, in the re-enactment's spontaneous play. The inherent nature of the games, specifically the simulation of combat, constitutes a manifestation of aggression. This aggression is expressed among individuals, irrespective of their aforementioned social backgrounds, and is characterized by a temporary suspension of customary social consequences, thus social roles and hierarchies are blurred, taboos are temporarily lifted.

In this very custom, the uncustomary became a

tradition, spontaneously. Since the dissolution of customary social norms releases inhibitions and may channel frustrations, we may conclude that this temporary tradition evolved spontaneously as a channel to ease frustrations resulting the transgenerational trauma caused by the Iraqi invasion and group asymmetries.

The observed spontaneity of these re-enactments, when compared with established literature on trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suggests a potential interpretation as subconscious repetitions of the traumatic events. It is posited that the victory itself does not fully mitigate the underlying traumatic factors, and these repetitions may represent a subconscious attempt at resolution.

While some scholarly work cautions against the potential for re-traumatization through such re-enactments, empirical observations indicate that the playful, decontextualized nature of these events, devoid of real danger, may facilitate a process of re-contextualizing traumatic experiences for the general population. Notably, ongoing clinical research endeavors are investigating the long-term psychological sequelae of the Iraqi invasion and subsequent liberation.

Group identity and celebrations

National celebrations and commemorations, particularly those intended for public self-representation, such as Kuwait's National and Liberation Days, serve as critical platforms for the articulation of core cultural values and identity markers. These events, functioning as international spectacles, facilitate the symbolic enactment of essential identity construction elements. Consequently, a confluence of intended external representation and internalized self-perception is manifested, offering a unique lens through which to examine the interplay between performative identity and collective self-understanding.

Consequently, to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the group's self-perception, it is imperative to examine the most prevalent and consistently recurring elements within these celebratory events. The elements consistently observed within these celebrations, without hierarchical prioritization include:

- the ubiquitous display of Kuwaiti flags (historical and contemporary);
- the prominent visual representation of past and present rulers;
- the performance of the national anthem;
- the historical re-enactment of the fights;
- the military air show;
- traditional dance performances (Al-Ardha)

The flags

The contemporary national flag, featuring a horizontal tricolor of green, white, and red with a black trapezoid, has been in official use since 1961, at the same time with Kuwait's attainment of independence from British protectorate status. These colors—green, red, white, and black—are recognized as pan-Arab symbols, representing, respectively, the land, peace, sacrifice, and historical military engagements. Prior to 1961, a red flag bearing an inscription of the name of Kuwait was utilized. While acknowledging the existence of other pre-1961 flags, this analysis focuses on the red flag with inscription, and the four-color contemporary flag, given their prominent representation during national commemorations.

As Kuwait times writes: *“For centuries, Kuwait’s flag, emblem and national anthem have been more than just national symbols — they have navigated the tides of history, adapting to shifting alliances, economic realities and the pursuit of independence. As Kuwait grew, so did its symbols, evolving from foreign influences to proudly represent the nation’s strength and heritage. Each transformation tells a story of resilience, identity, and freedom. [...]*

By 1914, after becoming a British protectorate, Kuwait introduced a red flag with the word "Kuwait" in white, replacing the Ottoman crescent and star. This marked Kuwait's first distinct national flag, symbolizing a turning point in its political identity. In the 1940s, under Sheikh Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, the flag was modified into a triangular version, incorporating Islamic inscriptions and symbols to reflect Kuwait's growing national consciousness. The most significant transformation came in 1961 with Kuwait's independence. The country adopted its current flag, featuring four colors — green for the land, white for peace, red for sacrifice, and black for battles fought. Inspired by an Arab poetic verse, this flag became a symbol of Kuwait's sovereignty and unity, replacing all previous versions tied to foreign influences." (2025, February 20).

This recent publication in the Kuwait Times, dated February 20, 2025, preceding the national celebrations, presents a narrative of national sovereignty and introspective self-definition, effectively serving as a symbolic representation of Kuwait's identity as an independent nation-state. Furthermore, the historical evolution of Kuwait's flag designs can be interpreted as a tangible manifestation of the nation's progressive liberation from external influences, with each successive iteration signifying a step towards consolidated autonomy.

Both the contemporary and historical national flags are prominently displayed throughout the commemorative period. Citizens exhibit these symbols through various means, including personal attire, vehicular adornment with flag-themed wraps and national color decals, and the installation of large-scale flags on building facades. Public spaces are similarly decorated, with palm trees illuminated by national color lighting and the Kuwait Towers, a significant architectural landmark, bathed in the same palette. Children's attire, including traditional female dress (the Ra), is rendered in the national colors. Furthermore, a range of merchandise, such as baseball hats, badges, gloves, pictures,

accessories, face paintings, and balloons, adheres to this consistent color scheme during these nationally significant observances.

The pervasive and diverse display of both historical and contemporary national flags during Kuwait's commemorative periods reveals a complex cultural phenomenon. Anthropological inquiry suggests that this ubiquitous display functions as a potent symbolic articulation of shared national identity and collective unity, reflecting a culturally embedded desire to express patriotism. The deliberate display of historical and contemporary flags at the same time underscores the cultural importance of historical continuity and the nation's narrative of independence, serving as a *mnemonic* device for collective memory. The extensive decoration of public spaces, including iconic landmarks like the Kuwait Towers, points to the role of the state in shaping and reinforcing cultural expressions of patriotism, potentially fostering a shared sense of belonging. Furthermore, the incorporation of national colors into children's attire and commercial merchandise acts as a form of cultural transmission, ensuring the perpetuation of national identity across generations and different nationalities present. The sheer diversity of media employed in the display of national symbols highlights the cultural significance of these commemorations as a public performance of shared values and historical narratives. Ultimately, the consistent application of the national color scheme across various cultural artifacts reinforces the visual representation of culturally salient values and historical narratives, serving as a material expression of collective identity.

The National Anthem

The Kuwaiti national anthem (Table 1), as a cultural artifact, functions as a salient instrument in the construction and reinforcement of national

identity. This process resonates with the theoretical frameworks articulated by Benedict Anderson (1983), particularly when considering Kuwait's demographic mosaic. The anthem, through its symbolic content, serves to bind diverse ethnic and social groups under a unified national identity, thereby delineating shared norms, values, and a

collective sense of belonging.

The lyrical content of the Kuwaiti national anthem articulates core cultural values, including prosperity, peace, and strong leadership, thereby reflecting the nation-building processes elucidated by Ernest Gellner (1983) in *Nations and Nationalism*.

Table 1. *The Kuwaiti National Anthem*

Arabic language	English language
Waṭanī l-Kuwayta salimta li-l-majdi Wa-‘alā jabīnika ṭālī‘a s-sa‘di <i>Janqa:</i> Waṭanī l-Kuwayta salimta li-l-majdi Wa-‘alā jabīnika ṭālī‘a s-sa‘di Waṭanī l-Kuwayt waṭanī l-Kuwayt Waṭanī l-Kuwayta salimta li-l-majdi <i>I</i> Yā mahda ‘abā‘i l-‘ulā katabū Sifr al-xulūdi fa-nādat iṣ-ṣuḥubu Allāhu ‘akbaru ‘innahum ‘Arabu Ṭala‘at Kawākibu jannati l-xuldi <i>Janqa</i> <i>II</i> Būrikta yā waṭanī l-Kuwayta lanā Sakanan wa-‘iṣṭa ‘alī l-mada waṭanan Yafdiḳa ḥurrun fi ḥimāka banā Ṣarha l-ḥayati bi-‘akrami l-‘aydi <i>Janqa</i> <i>III</i> Naḥmika yā waṭanī wa-ṣāhidunā Ṣar‘u l-huda wa-l-ḥaqqu rā‘idunā Wa-‘Amīrunā li-l-‘izzī qā‘idunā Rabbu l-ḥamiyati ṣādiqū l-wa‘di <i>Janqa</i>	My homeland Kuwait, you have prospered to glory, And on your forehead is an omen of fortune. <i>Chorus:</i> My homeland Kuwait, you have prospered to glory, And on your forehead is an omen of fortune. My homeland Kuwait, my homeland Kuwait, My homeland Kuwait, you have prospered to glory. <i>I</i> Oh cradle of forefathers, they wrote A book of eternity, then the meteors called God is the greatest, indeed Arabs Ascended as the planets of paradise of perpetuity. <i>Chorus</i> <i>II</i> Blessed be my homeland Kuwait, for us It was peaceful, and you lived on the extent of the homeland Kept free in your protection to build A palace of life with the most generous arms. <i>Chorus</i> <i>III</i> Let us protect, oh my homeland, and we witnessed The revealing of the guidance and the truth, our pioneer, And our Amir is the powerful, our leader, The master of my protection, the truthful of the promise. <i>Chorus</i>

Gellner's book, which emphasizes the role of industrialization, modernization, and subsequent standardization through institutionalization, finds resonance in the historical trajectory of Kuwait. The nation's transition from Portuguese rule, Ottoman, Iraqi administration, and British protectorate to full sovereignty in the 20th century aligns with Gellner's theoretical framework. Kuwait's accelerated industrialization and modernization, particularly following the commencement of commercial oil production and trade, have precipitated rapid population growth, industrial expansion, and the development of administrative and infrastructural systems. This process necessitates standardization and the reinforcement of national identity through symbolic expressions, encompassing shared values and norms (e.g., Islam as the state religion) and diverse public cultural manifestations. These manifestations include, but are not limited to, musical and choreographic performances, the display of national flags and emblems, the organization of national celebrations, and the commemoration of individuals who have made significant contributions to the nation's historical development.

Also, interview data reveals that the Kuwaiti dialect is a significant marker of national distinctiveness from other Khaleeji (Gulf) countries, underscoring the role of language as a critical component of national identity and cultural expression.

The performative aspect of the anthem, particularly during national celebrations and official events, functions as a collective ritual, akin to Emile Durkheim's concept of 'collective effervescence,' fostering a sense of unity and belonging among Kuwaiti citizens.

The anthem's opening line, "My homeland Kuwait, you have prospered to glory", actively constructs a narrative of national achievement, fostering a collective identity, while the phrase 'Oh cradle of forefathers' establishes a historical

continuity, legitimizing the nation-state through ancestral lineage and tying modern Kuwait to a broader Arab identity.

The inclusion of religious and ethnic markers, such as "God is the greatest, indeed Arabs ascended", reinforces a shared cultural and religious identity, emphasizing Kuwait's place within the Arab and Islamic world and simultaneously distinguishing it from other nations.

The line "And on your forehead is an omen of fortune" suggests a belief in a prosperous future, serving as a cultural expression of hope and aspiration, central to the nation-building project. The emphasis on the Amir as a strong and benevolent leader, as seen in "Our Amir is the powerful, our leader", reinforces the political structure and legitimizes the ruling authority, highlighting the importance of leadership in national unity. "Kept free in your protection" reflects a sense of security and protection provided by the nation, essential for fostering national cohesion. The anthem's emphasis on independence and prosperity reflects the historical context of Kuwait's emergence as a modern nation-state, while the mention of 'forefathers' and 'Arabs' connects the modern nation to its historical and cultural roots, reinforcing a sense of continuity and tradition.

The military air show

The significance of a military air show and an exhibition like "Safe Kuwait" during national celebrations can be analyzed from several Anthropological perspectives, particularly in the context of a rising nation-state.

Military displays during Kuwait's national celebrations serve as a multifaceted symbolic performance, projecting national power and reinforcing state authority. These visual representations of military capabilities, particularly poignant in the context of Kuwait's history marked by the Iraqi invasion, reaffirm the nation's capacity for self-

defense and contribute to the establishment of security and stability, crucial elements in nation-building (Giddens, 1984).

Moreover, these events function as potent instruments for the construction of national identity and patriotism, evoking feelings of pride and fostering a sense of collective belonging, aligning with Benedict Anderson's concept of 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983).

The spectacle of military prowess inspires awe and reinforces nationalistic sentiments, while the shared experience of witnessing these displays cultivates community and solidarity, reminiscent of Durkheim's 'collective effervescence' (Durkheim, 1912).

The military and associated forces embody national values such as discipline, courage, and dedication to service. From a ritualistic perspective, parades and exhibitions reinforce social order and hierarchy, with disciplined movements symbolizing the state's structure (Turner, 1969). These events also serve as a public display of state power, demonstrating the government's ability to mobilize resources and project force, and as a means of commemoration and remembrance, honoring those who have served and reminding citizens of past struggles. Anthropologically, military displays can be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence, representing the state's monopoly on force and its means of social control (Bourdieu, 1977). They function as cultural performances, where the state enacts its authority through symbolic actions, contributing to national myth-making and reinforcing the narrative of a strong, unified nation, particularly in Kuwait's case, as a testament to its resilience and ability to rebuild after trauma.

Al-Ardha

Given Kuwait's historical prominence as a significant musical center within the Gulf region, dance and musical expressions hold particular cultural salience for Kuwaiti citizens. Among the

enduring traditions, the Al-Ardha dance occupies a position of notable significance. The Al-Ardha, as recognized by UNESCO's 2015 inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, serves as a quintessential cultural expression for the indigenous populations of the Arabian Peninsula, maintaining its widespread practice in contemporary society. While its precise origins remain obscured, with scholarly speculation placing its emergence no later than the 17th century, the Al-Ardha functions as a multifaceted traditional performance. It integrates dance, percussive instrumentation, and poetic recitation, signifying the commencement and conclusion of culturally significant events, including religious observances, rites of passage, and national commemorations. Male participants, carrying ceremonial swords, align themselves in opposing rows, creating a space for the percussive ensemble. A poet's vocal delivery of occasion-specific verses is met with antiphonal responses from the participants.

The UNESCO description highlights the performative synchronicity, noting the rhythmic swaying and sword movements, harmonized with the percussion and vocalizations, culminating in a collective gathering around the national flag.

Notably, the Al-Ardha's inclusive nature allows for participation across diverse social scope, age groups, and professional backgrounds, underscoring its role as a unifying cultural practice. This performance, therefore, acts as a powerful symbolic representation of shared heritage and collective identity, demonstrating the enduring significance of intangible cultural heritage in the Arabian Peninsula. (Kuwait Times, February 29, 2024).

The Al-Ardha, this traditional sword dance performed during Kuwait's National Day, transcends mere entertainment, functioning as an expression of national identity and cultural heritage. This living embodiment of Kuwaiti tradition connects con-

temporary citizens to their ancestral past, reinforcing the importance of cultural preservation and asserting a distinct Arab identity within the broader cultural landscape of the Arabian Peninsula.

As a potent national symbol, the Al-Ardha represents Kuwait's strength, resilience, and cultural distinctiveness, serving as a powerful historical commemoration. Evoking martial traditions, it honors the bravery of ancestors and reinforces shared historical narratives, fostering a sense of continuity across generations. In the context of National Day, it becomes a symbolic celebration of victory and resilience, particularly relevant in light of Kuwait's historical experiences. Functioning as a public display of Kuwaiti culture, it showcases rich heritage to diverse audiences, serving as a ritualistic performance that reinforces social norms. Anthropologically, the Al-Ardha is an embodied form of cultural expression, transmitting values through physical movement and serving as a cultural performance that enacts and reinforces social roles and identities, communicating symbolic messages about national identity, history, and social values.

The adoption and prominent display of the Al-Ardha, a generic Arabian tradition, as a defining element of Kuwaiti heritage during National and Liberation Day celebrations holds significant anthropological weight. By selecting this shared cultural practice, Kuwait strategically reinforces its connection to the broader Arabian Peninsula, solidifying its regional identity and historical continuity. This choice serves to construct a cultural narrative that transcends immediate political boundaries, emphasizing a shared ancestral heritage and fostering a sense of belonging within the larger Arab world. Furthermore, showcasing the Al-Ardha on national holidays underscores its symbolic role in representing Kuwaiti resilience and unity, particularly in the context of nation-building and post-conflict commemoration. The

performance, with its martial undertones and collective participation, acts as a potent visual and kinesthetic representation of national strength and cultural cohesion, effectively communicating a narrative of shared values and historical experience to both domestic and international audiences. By weaving this tradition into the fabric of national celebrations, Kuwait underscores the enduring significance of cultural heritage in constructing and maintaining a cohesive national identity.

Summary

This micro-research explored the dimensions of Kuwait's National and Liberation Day celebrations, focusing on their role in shaping national identity and fostering social cohesion. The analysis traces the historical evolution of these celebrations, highlighting the interplay between state-directed commemorations and spontaneous public expressions. The study emphasizes the significance of national symbols, such as flags and the national anthem, in constructing a unified national narrative, particularly in the context of Kuwait's diverse population and historical experiences. The performative aspects of these celebrations, including military displays and traditional dances like the Al-Ardha, are examined as cultural rituals that reinforce national values and historical memory. The research also addresses the matter of trans-generational trauma processing, particularly in relation to the Iraqi invasion, and explores how re-enactments and public commemorations serve as potential mechanisms for collective healing. Furthermore, the paper investigates the role of these celebrations in mediating intergroup relations, highlighting the temporary suspension of social hierarchies and the promotion of social integration. By weaving together historical analysis, ethnographic observations, and anthropological theory, this study aims to provide a comprehensive

understanding of how national celebrations in Kuwait contribute to the ongoing negotiation of identity, history, and social dynamics.

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