

## Fasching und Karneval: Grüße und Narrenrufe (greetings and fool shouts)

der Brauch, die Bräuche: custom  
 das Gruß, die Grüße: greeting  
 der Ausdruck, die Ausdrücke: expression, saying  
 der Narrenruf, die Narrenrufe: shouts, screams, calls from a fool

### THE CALLS YOU'LL HEAR AT CARNIVAL—AND WHAT THEY MEAN

The origin of the Cologne 'fool's call' - which today is also heard in Bonn and Aachen - is well-documented. Old clay jugs have been found in Cologne, dating back to around 1550, with "Allaf" written on them.

"This was a cheer, a drinking word that had nothing to do with carnival and meant 'may he live well,'" the linguist explains.

Literally, "All af" meant *alles ab* - everything down, or everything else falls below it. The cry referred to the bishop, the mayor, or the Cologne region, so people also called "All af Kölle" - everything else under Cologne, meaning "Cologne above everything else". Today, people also call "Kölle Alaaf".

"There are technical reasons for the reversal," explains Cornelissen .

"Try it: 'Alaaf Kölle' is harder to shout than 'Kölle Alaaf'."

By the 19th century when Carnival became more organized with its own customs and traditional mockery of the authorities, the people celebrating referred to themselves as fools or jesters - *Jecken* - and made the call their own.

"We suspect that 'Alaaf' spread around Cologne at the expense of 'Helau,'" says Cornelissen.

If you move away from Cologne, you soon meet the boundary where Alaaf becomes "Helau". This is the traditional cry in the carnival strongholds of Düsseldorf and Mainz, as well as in many other German cities.

However, as to its meaning, linguistic researchers are groping in the dark.

"With 'Helau' there are no reliable facts, only speculation," says Cornelissen.

Some of the possibilities include the idea that Helau could have its origins in the words *Hellblau* (light blue), *Hallo* or *Halleluja*, or that it may be a reference to the northern goddess Hel, who in winter opens the gate to her kingdom. The only certainty of Helau is that it expresses "the fun of joy", as Michael Euler-Schmidt, deputy director of the Cologne City Museum, explains.

In the Swabian-Alemannic language region in the southwest of the country, people yell "Narri-Narro", which simply means "I'm a fool, you're a fool".