

Anyone who dismisses the “Sechseläuten” as “not inclusive enough” does not understand traditions

by Kacem El Ghazzali,* Switzerland

I love Sechseläuten. And I love roasting sausages over embers with a can of beer in my hand while the flames completely consume the “Böögg”. True Sechseläuten fans are not afraid of the hot embers. They persevere. Because it is precisely this collective experience of persevering together that is the magic of this unique Zurich ritual.

The self-appointed guardians of diversity have now set their sights on this custom. “Too masculine, too bourgeois, not inclusive enough” is the cheap criticism, mostly coming from the left. But this criticism fails to recognise the essence of cultural traditions. Sechseläuten does not have to reflect every modern identity politics to be cool. It is a historically grown event that follows its own logic.

Anyone who dismisses the guild system as “patriarchal” is simply spreading falsehoods. The guild system represents a piece of living Swiss history and preserves important community traditions. The participation of the Fraumünster community – an association created in 1989 as a female counterpart to the traditional guilds – is not a concession to the spirit of the times, but a natural development.

Deep human wisdom

However, the woke critics do not want to preserve a tradition but strive to completely transform it according to their own ideology of a “just” world. They do this without regard for cultural characteristics. But this apparently only applies to Swiss traditions. When it comes to foreign traditions, great importance is suddenly attached to cultural sensitivity and respect. A strange double standard.

The depiction of Arabs or Bedouins in traditional costumes by some guilds is also branded as “cultural appropriation”. Ironically, many Arab visitors and authors are proud that their culture



Sechseläuten in Zurich, 28 April 2025. Not every traditional event has to reflect the entire diversity of society. Different events can coexist. (Picture wikipedia)

inspires such fascination and is honoured at a traditional festival.

The constant demand for “representation” fails to recognise that not every single element of a culture has to reflect the entire diversity of society. The strength of a city like Zurich lies precisely in the coexistence of different traditions and celebrations. Alongside the Sechseläuten, the Street Parade, the Caliente Festival and numerous other cultural expressions have their rightful place.

In a world that is becoming increasingly demystified and mechanised, we need such meaningful rituals more than ever. The Sechseläuten perfectly embodies the dialectic of magic and demystification: on the one hand, we celebrate a modern, secular city festival, while on the other, it preserves magical elements such as fortune-telling based on how long the Böögg burns. Of course, we know that the length of summer does not really depend on an exploding snowman, and yet we love the playful way in which superstition and symbols are handled.

This combination of enlightened consciousness and ritual practice contains a deep human wisdom, because humans do not live by rationality alone. This is also and especially true for an atheist like me.

Source: <https://schweizermonat.ch/wer-das-sechselaeuten-als-zu-wenig-inklusive-abtut-versteht-traditionen-nicht/>, 24 April 2025

(Translation “Swiss Standpoint”)

* Kacem El Ghazzali is an essayist and human rights activist. He comes from Morocco and arrived in Switzerland as a refugee in 2011, where he has since become a naturalised citizen. Read all about Kacem El Ghazzali.