



Editorial

Breaking the Rules?

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This volume of *Ethnologia Fennica* introduces topics addressed at the 15th SIEF congress, held online in June 2021. The event was hosted by the University of Helsinki. The theme of the congress was ‘Breaking the Rules: Power, Participation and Transgression’, bringing to the fore discourses and practices of making, breaking, reinterpreting and transgressing rules. The idea was to examine the implications of ‘breaking the rules’ in various social, economic, political, cultural and academic contexts. This special issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* has been edited by visiting editors **Eerika Koskinen-Koivisto, Hanna Snellman** and **Tiina Suopajärvi**.

Art and storytelling are powerful instruments for distributing alternative voices. They can contest and convey rules but also transmit knowledge. In Indigenous frameworks, stories and knowing have an inseparable relationship. **Sanna Valkonen’s** review article, which is based on her opening keynote at the SIEF conference, introduces three stories as examples of research projects based on Sámi perceptions of the world and its ontological and epistemological premises. With these examples, Valkonen shows how Sámi ways of knowing about, for example land and nature, could be applied to issues of global environmental responsibility instead of understanding such knowing as only being connected to the Sámi homeland. The rules she invites us to break are, consequently, the rules for producing academic knowledge while studying Indigenous worlds. This could be done by applying narrative and dialogical methods where human, nonhuman and material become interwoven, like in the making of Sámi *duodji* (handicrafts) or in Sámi artistic interventions.

The review article by **Ellen Hertz**, also based on her keynote lecture at SIEF 2021, is an important contribution to the discussion of rules and breaking them. She takes us to the world of US corporate circles and a consideration of the problems, consequences and alternatives of ‘soft law’, i.e. ‘agreements, compacts, standards, audits, multi-stakeholder initiatives, certification schemes and the like’, and ‘hard law’, i.e. formal legislation. Hertz argues

that in terms of controlling corporations that often exploit both human and natural resources, hard law is more productive when fighting for social justice. So, while we as researchers, who often study people together with other species, are in a weak power position to rightfully challenge current rules and rule-making processes, Hertz reminds us that many large and powerful corporations might want to do the same. Hence, we do need rules and laws to protect especially the most vulnerable by, as Hertz writes, not 'fighting against rules, but fighting for better rules'.

At the time of the conference, we were in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic, which had profound effects on our social life, work and everyday practices. The pandemic restrictions laid the groundwork for the state assuming an unusual amount of power, as it led to closing of public spaces and prevented social gatherings, directing citizens into transitory and liminal social realities. This created varied reactions and led to both collective and individual responses. One example of a response to the restrictions is discussed in the research article by **Nicolas Le Bigre**, who analyses material responses to street art in Scotland. Walking on the streets, he approaches the art as from the perspective of a passer-by analysing street art as fixed, unofficial, creative and public-facing material *interventions*, calling attention to the location of the street art and people's reactions to it. The reactions included transgressive modification, which can add to, alter or usurp the original semiotic contents of street art. The interplay between creators, witnesses and the materiality of the place highlight the complex interactions with and resistance to hegemonic boundaries.

Some forms of resistance are more visible than others. Often, social activists physically participate and perform in public spaces using their own bodies as a means of compliance, resistance and transgression. **Raúl Acosta's** article evaluates cycloactivism in one of the worlds' largest metropolitan areas, Mexico City, analysing cyclists' acts of resistance as embodied experience and transformative practice that challenge neoliberal technocratic politics. Acosta conducted immersive and participatory ethnographic research, attending the meetings of activist groups and cycling on the streets of Mexico City with the activists. Cycloactivists' rule-breaking is a type of urban ritual that seeks to change the city and its power relations, and in this way affect the practices of urban planning or policymaking by attracting maximum attention via onlookers and the media.

Both Le Bigre and Acosta describe urban cultural environments and situations in which local citizens find concrete ways to make their voice heard in public. The performances of local activists and interventions in the street call attention to complicated global issues and power. In their studies, the urban

settings become places where different stakeholders, like political parties, national authorities and global enterprises, become entangled with the everyday practices of the city dwellers. The citizens are resisting and either implicitly or explicitly demanding new rules. Their methods of resistance are sensory and carefully emplaced in a dialogue with the materiality of the streets, like on the ground, where passers-by step on Putin's face, or on the busy motorways occupied by the cyclists. However, as Acosta shows us, citizens from better socio-economic backgrounds are in a stronger power position to start resisting in the first place.

The last text in the thematic volume, by **Coppélie Cocq**, summarises the roundtable discussion that was held to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of European Ethnology in Finland. In July 1921, European Ethnology was established as an independent subject field at the University of Helsinki. The discussion addressed the societal engagements of ethnologists and the social value of ethnological knowledge. In smaller disciplines like European Ethnology, it is of utmost importance to form networks both inside and outside of academia and to actively engage in discussions on emerging social issues.

This issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* also includes three research articles that fall outside the current theme of focus. In the article 'Sleepless Land', **Simon Halberg** re-visits ethnographical records to identify and analyse, via a political ecological lens, how the arrival of sugar beets and the resulting energy transition changed the everyday lives of peasants and transformed an agrarian lifestyle based on fallow land into one based on the global fossil community and gave way to the birth of a sleepless land. The article offers interesting insights into the question of what a profound impact an energy transition can have on a society, especially every-day aspects of life.

Pauliina Latvala-Harvilahti's article focuses on environmental emotions from the perspective of individual experiences of environmental art reception. Latvala-Harvilahti analyses her fieldwork material on how audiences experienced the lament performances of musician and singer Noora Kauppi-la. In Finland, the debate on the impacts of art performances has only been marginally addressed. It is fascinating how this article offers insights into the meanings and interpretations of an individual's relationship with nature and art performed by and in the nature. Performances and other artistic activities can offer new ways to deal with, e.g. environmental anxiety, from the perspective of ritual examination and offer new kinds of approaches to better understand the range of attitudes towards and affects regarding climate change.

The last research article addresses the topic of agentic materials, e.g. crystals, in everyday life of New Spirituality practitioners in Estonia. **Tenno Teidearu's** research participants wear crystals and find the properties of these

artefacts both supportive and comforting from an esoteric standpoint. Teidearu explores how crystals have material lives of their own: they can lose their gloss, crack, break or become lost. Teidearu interprets such esoteric crystals and their importance to certain people within the context of post-humanism and new materialism. He uses the concept of material agency to demonstrate how natural processes of decay can hold various cultural meanings.

This issue of *Ethnologia Fennica* also includes three reviews of recent doctoral theses. **Pasi Enges** evaluates Silja Heikkilä's doctoral thesis and connects her work to a continuation of folkloristic dream research in Finland. **Lizette Gradén** finds Inkeri Hakamies's doctoral thesis highly relevant since it analyses how museums are defined by museum workers themselves through everyday social practices. **Riikka Taavetti** and **Olga Tkach** next review Pauliina Lukinmaa's doctoral thesis. Lukinmaa analyses how LGBTIQ+ people manage to engage in activism in Russia under increasing state oppression and in an environment that is generally hostile towards sexual and gender diversity. Taavetti and Tkach see the thesis as an essential contribution to research on hidden forms of civic activism in closed, non-democratic contexts. As editors, we are delighted to be able to include these reviews of such interesting doctoral theses. Hopefully, the theses will find new readers based on these reviews.

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