CE EPISODE 5

VADIM ROMASHOV
Welcome to the “Critical Edges” podcast. In this podcast we explore critical edges that may seem distant and marginal at first glance, but which are in fact very much connected to, and even interdependent with our global society and politics. In our podcast we discuss with different scholars who have, one way or the other, addressed critical edges critically.

HANNA LAAKO
For the past few decades, Indigenous studies and Indigenous activism have significantly enriched both scholarly and civil society understandings of colonization and the genuine pursuit of decolonization, justice, and solidarity. Today, on the Critical Edges -podcast, we are honored to welcome round one and or Fierranjot Kirstte Rávdná, a distinguished Sámi scholar from Ohcejohka, or Utsjoki in Finnish, who has extensively studied the intersectional struggles of Indigenous peoples in the Northern Hemisphere.

VADIM ROMASHOV
Rauna Kuokkanen is a Research Professor of Arctic Indigenous Politics at the University of Lapland, and Adjunct Professor of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Her research delves into comparative Indigenous politics and law, Indigenous feminism and gender, Sámi governance, and settler colonialism in the Nordic countries. Rauna is a member of the Standing Committee on the Indigenous Involvement of the International Arctic Science Committee, and editor of Settler Colonial Studies Journal.

HANNA LAAKO
This is Vadim and Hanna in the studio, and you're welcome to join us as we explore these rich insights and experiences Rauna brings from her research and advocacy for Indigenous Peoples.

VADIM ROMASHOV
In your academic career you have been engaged with the development of Indigenous studies for a long time. In 2007 you published your first book called Reshaping the University. In this book you argued that the epistemic foundations of the university as institutions are too narrow, despite claims that universities are places of knowledge. These narrow foundations are also exclusionary, neglecting and dismissing other ways of knowing.

Later, you have also discussed how in academia it is often assumed that Indigenous studies means anthropology. However, in fact, Indigenous studies involve many other disciplines and different academic perspectives. And you actually yourself are focused on political studies, international relations. So a big question here is what

are in your viewpoint Indigenous studies?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Well, first of all, thank you very much for the kind invitation to join your podcast. Indigenous studies, I think, there's a fairly broad consensus that Indigenous studies is its own discipline. It's an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary field of study that involves many disciplines, and a lot of researchers within Indigenous studies come from a very diverse disciplinary and scholarly backgrounds. But, there is this, also kind of fairly common misunderstanding that Indigenous studies is only about studying about Indigenous Peoples.

And, as we know, as you mentioned, that has fallen traditionally within the field of anthropology. But Indigenous studies is really a kind of interdisciplinary field with its own methods, methodology, theoretical and epistemological assumptions. And they relate to, what you referred to, what I was critiquing in my ”Reshaping the University” book that the kind of epistemologies, relational understanding of the world, and epistemologies that stem from that understanding, so they form the foundation of Indigenous studies’ theoretical and methodological framework.

Indigenous studies have been around… They began developing first in the United States in the early 70s as the result of the civil rights movements, Indigenous women's, black rights movements. There was an American Indian movement that came about largely from the academia and from the narrow foundations like ethnic studies and anthropology and this claim and desire to create space for Indigenous studies. And it has evolved into a very broad fields where there are similar subfields, similar disagreements that any, and conversations about the direction and the kind of key issues, that any discipline has. And most recently it has… There is this subfield called critical Indigenous studies, that has also increasingly incorporates kind of critical analysis of, well, I guess, perhaps most closely to my own research as well, Indigenous and state relations and Indigenous and settler colonial relations.

HANNA LAAKO
You are from the Ohcejohka, Utsjoki in Finnish. So, this is part of the broader transboundary Sámi, the Sámi homeland basically, that mostly lies north of the Arctic Circle. So, in general terms, could you discuss a little bit what kind of critical edge is Sámi today? What are kind of the main challenges and developments that you consider affecting the Sámi territory? And, well, perhaps also like how that relates to your own research within the Indigenous studies?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Sápmi today indeed is very much a critical edge, also because of the desire, the global desire for critical minerals. We know the critical raw minerals act that was passed last year at the EU level and the energy transition. All the eyes are looking at the Arctic now. The European Arctic in particular.

Europe wants to be self-sufficient, brake dependency from Chinese critical minerals. So the assumption is that Sápmi, the Sámi territory, is kind of like a vast, almost you could ague that going back to the idea of colonies, like it's the resource colony where Europe can extract its minerals for the energy transition.

So there is this, in the past five years, perhaps a decade, but more rapidly even the past few years the increase and the pressure of various energy transition initiatives. Not only mining, but also expansion of hydro development, wind industry, in particular, not so much in Finland yet, but certainly a very big issue in other parts of Sámi.

So there is this kind of conflict and the huge push for, especially, wind energy development, which is very area intensive. Like you have to, they are massive turbines and the wind energy complexes are massive, they are like over 100 turbines. So it's that combined with the road and at the line infrastructure, it's very huge. It puts huge pressure on Sámi society, particularly Sámi reindeer herding.

VADIM ROMASHOV
You have recently written and spoken about the case of Deatnu river. And this river is located at the heart of the Sámi land. And this river is often regarded as one of the finest salmon river in Europe. It is one of the oldest, actually, political borders in Europe, created by the 1751 peace accords between Norway and then Sweden. And actually this border later became the Finnish-Norwegian border. Could you tell us more a little bit about the meaning of the Deatnu river for the Sámi people? What is the history related to this, how it has affected the Sámi people, especially prior to the Second World War, but also after that? So the situation has changed, to our knowledge. So could you tell us more about this river?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Indeed. It's a home river for me and for people living along the river, but also there is the invisible border that goes in the middle. Myself, like others, have family on both sides of the river. So it really, you don't feel the border in your daily life. And this certainly was the case for a long, long time after the establishment of the border that you mentioned, in 1751. And life continued very much as it had been, until perhaps before the war and especially it was felt more strongly after the war, when, basically, it was like the political tensions, the Iron Curtain, and those kind of tensions were felt on the both sides. And there was a short period, when the Sámi were required to carry a kind of like a piece of document if they wanted to cross the river anywhere else other than the official border crossings. But for a long time, people have been fishing there together, the villages on both sides of the river.

The border was established in 1751, 100 years later the first Deatnu agreement was established. This is the kind of agreement between Norway and Finland, how to govern the river, the salmon fishing in particular, in that river. So it was like this kind

of bilateral agreement, but also to stop gradually controlling the traditional Sámi salmon fisheries along the river. And of course, people along that river, many of them are not reindeer herders, but they fish, they get their livelihoods, they are *the river People,* like in the Sámi we call them *the river People, the river Sami,* or *the valley People*. And they are very much, their identities are formed through the river, the fact that they are able to go fishing salmon.

And we know that the past, the most recent Deatnu agreement was negotiated and agreed in 2017, which closed salmon fisheries altogether for everyone in Deatnu, which was a huge blow for people along the river on multiple grounds: in terms of livelihood, income, but also the mental impact has been huge, like the psychological impact that you can not go to, what you've been doing all your life, you cannot transmit the knowledge, the language related to that salmon fisheries practices to the next generations. But also the kind of connection that people have inherited and created, acquired through their lives. Suddenly it's gone. And the river is empty. Like even the fact that you see that there are no boats, nobody is fishing. It feels a huge loss. And this is what I discuss in the article that you mentioned that it's these gradual closures that began in the mid 19th century, have practically restricted, slowly but surely, the traditional Sámi fisheries to a point that now nobody can fish.

Last year, and this is, I was just listening to the news this morning and they said that due to the very steep decline of salmon, continued decline of salmon stocks in the river, the fisheries is closed this year as well. So it means that this kind of, there will be a generation soon that hasn't been able to go to the river.

So yes, it has been for centuries, it was one of the finest and greatest slam rivers in Europe, but now there's no more salmon. Like the salmon is not returning, and people can't really agree on what the reason is. The state and some researchers like to suggest that it's overfishing. But it's clear that the numbers, well, it depends on who's numbers and what numbers you look at, but it's not possible to pinpoint to a one factor. Climate change, we know warmer waters is harmful for salmon. The massive increase of salmon farming aquaculture along the coast of Norway. All this has an impact. But still, we are in a situation that in the greatest salmon River there's no salmon and people can't fish. So it's really a kind of local crisis in many ways.

HANNA LAAKO
Yes. To make sure, in this river we don't have dams, right?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
No, there are no dams.

HANNA LAAKO
Yes. So then you are saying that more or less until the end of world wars, well, this river was culturally important, and in a way still pertaining to a context where the

Sámi people also, perhaps were more in communication with Norway and towards that area, rather than to the rest of Finland.

But do you see that that changed also after the world wars. And I'm also thinking, I don't know, how to do they, do you know, how do they define the border in the river? I mean, because in international rivers, you've got couple of different ways of defining the border.

Also, I would like to ask about this development with the Deatnu agreement. How does that relate to conservation and conservationists, and how has that situation with salmon conservationists developed also in that context? So, well, many questions, but…

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Yeah, the Deatnu, it really is, you can feel that the closest relations are to the other side of the river and then northward, because there's a long tradition of the Deatnu Sámi going to the bigger towns on the Norwegian coast, where they would trade their fish. So the kind of, the trade routes and the communication routes were very much to the coastal Sápmi, which is now northern Norway. So it was kind of isolated from the rest of the Finland and, for instance, there was a health care center on the Finnish side not far from where my home places is, which treated patients from the both sides of the river. So it was really like a community of its own.

But then the border, after the war, was more intensely patrolled. And this was before the war when people had to decide, like if they had, say, a summer place on the Norwegian side and the winter, place, like, say, for their cows or sheep fields. So they had to decide which side they are going to settle. So hence, what will be their citizenship, which had obviously far reaching consequences.

But, if I move on to your other question about conservation and traditional Sámi salmon fisheries: there has been a long history of tension there, as elsewhere. And it is kind of similar to reindeer herding as well. This idea that the state knows better how to conserve and how to manage, how to govern a natural resource than the local people who have governed it for thousands of years. Sámi historians who have studied this, say that Sámi have governed successfully the salmon, and the salmon species and the salmon fisheries for centuries.

And then now the government comes, the both governments, Norway and Finland, come and say that the declining salmon, or the collapse of the salmon stocks is because you have overfished. It's kind of ludicrous. And obviously it creates tension. So this kind of finger pointing to, and we know that if your livelihood depends on our resource, you make sure that you don't over harvest it. Well, this is not to romanticize the fact that there has been, that Deatnu it's a long river, so always there has been also tensions along the river. That this kind of, I'd say fairly typical disagreements

that the ones on the headwaters saying that people lower over fish, they fish too much, so not enough salmon comes to the upstream or the tributaries. So there has been those tensions and they still are.

HANNA LAAKO
I think that's interesting, and also because you have been linking, in terms of this case, you have been talking about the kind of *figurative wall*. I mean, we've got the actual international border there, and now you have been showing that in terms of these developments with the Deatnu agreement, it's a bit like putting a figurative wall as well. That is political, but it's also obviously cultural that affects the self-determination and the culture and Sámi rights for fishing. So it would be interesting to hear a little bit more about that. And also related to this, you have been connecting this to the Nordic settler colonialism. So if you could explain a little bit those links as well?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Yeah. About that figurative wall. And I realized I forgot your second question earlier about how the borders defined in Deatnu. It's where the river is the deepest, where the deepest part of the river goes. And obviously that shifts annually. But with the Deatnu agreement and the ban on Sámi salmon fisheries along Deatnu I argue that the figurative walls are also now on the banks of the river, that bar people going for fishing. Obviously there are people who continue fishing, and then the question is, is this poaching? Is it illegal? Like this is the argument that has been put forward within Indigenous studies elsewhere in the Arctic, perhaps Arctic Indigenous research, particularly in similar cases in Alaska and in the Canadian Arctic, that how states criminalize Indigenous ways of life.

And this is directly comparable to that and relates to the question of Nordic settler colonial presence. That colonialism is very much in the contemporary structures, it's not something that happened in the past but continues today.

Ellos Deatnu was a movement that emerged in the wake of that 2017 Deatnu agreement to reclaim the river and reclaim the governanc, of Deatnu and the Sámi governance. And show that the locals can, and should be, in charge of dispensing permits.

And part of that movement was to declare a moratorium around a small island in the Deatnu river, just outside of Ohcejohka, Utsjoki town. The moratorium declared that the state laws pertaining to salmon fisheries don't apply within the waters of that island. And if people want to fish, then some fisheries was permitted, but if somebody wanted to fish in those waters, you need to ask the permission of the local people around that island, who’s traditional fishing areas those are.

So it was a kind of like a new approach to resist this agreement and the new regulations. The people who involved in Ellos Deatnu set up a camp on that same island. It was Čearretsuolu, the Arctic tern island. If you look at the logo it's this beautiful illustration of an Arctic tern.

That was a time when some fisheries were still allowed. Nobody could foresee in 2017 that they will be, like this is the fifth year now, when the fisheries ban is in force. So the question now is, how to move forward when the native salmon stocks have collapsed and now there is the invasion of new species, the very aggressive Pink salmon.

HANNA LAAKO
Well, one thing would perhaps be interesting to hear a little bit is how this resistance is part of the broader Sámi resistances or struggles or movements that are currently taking place, that are quite related to natural resources and these kind of questions as well. And then, for those who listen and perhaps are not familiar with the Sámi: to know more about the Deatnu river, to what extent are the riversides colonized? I mean populated. Like how many communities are there in the river side along this river, or is it more like natural environment? Or how does it look like, alongside the rive, how is the landscape?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Well, for somebody from that part of the world, well this is not only my opinion, many others who are from that part they say that it’s one of the most beautiful valleys that they know. And, it's rolling hills. It's sparsely populated, small villages mostly. There are some larger towns, like Ohcejohka is one, and then Deatnu another, down the river in the Norwegian side, Gáregasnjárga, Kárášjohka, they are along the tributary Anárjohka.

Up until recently the population have been mostly Sámi. I guess after the war, I'd say when the road came in the early 70s to the, if I'm thinking of the Finnish side of the valley, the road was built. There's actually a Sámi song that says roads both bring and they take. And one of the impacts that, what they brought was this influx of Finnish sports fishers. So what you now see along the Deatnu Valley also, especially and particularly on the Finnish side, are these cabins. All the way, they are on the banks, they are along the hills, thy are on the top of the hills. Then if you go walk along, what I was doing last summer, walking along the tributary not far from my own Fierranjohka, slightly bigger one. And I was shocked to see how also the small tributaries are dotted by these cabins, like they are everywhere.

So, yeah, I guess you can say that that's kind of also colonization by construction and taking over. Like this kind of well known phenomenon from other parts of the Indigenous world, this kind of fragmentation of Indigenous territories. And obviously, they are the Sami themselves who have inherited the farmlands. And some decide to

sell their shares, at least parts of it. So it really becomes fragmented.

And in that agreement, the 2017 Deatnu agreement, what was most striking, especially for the locals, was that disproportionate reduction of Sámi traditional fisheries compared to the sports fisheries. Actually the sports fisheries were slightly increased in that agreement or that years regulation.

So yeah, those are just a few examples that kind of indicate how the settler colonial structures seek to eliminate or replace Indigenous Peoples. And if not physically, then replace their knowledge, their governance practices, the skills, language etc..

But if we go back to your question about the other Indigenous or Sámi struggles and resistance. Ellos Deatnu certainly was inspired by the Standing Rock movement in the U.S. in North Dakota against the Dakota Access pipeline. And some of the Sámi who were in Ellos Deatnu, they also went to that Standing Rock camp. So there is also this kind of global Indigenous solidarity.

And now, most recently, we see that post-Fosen decision, the demonstrations in Oslo that were taking place two years ago to, basically, call attention to the fact that Norwegian government is not respecting to its own Supreme Court's decision. It was a decision that surprised everybody when it unanimously held that the Fosen, the South Sami region of Fovsen Njaarke, the Fosen peninsula, is near Trondheim in Norway. That the 150 turbine wind industry complex violates the human rights of the Sámi reindeer herders of the area. And it took, what was it, two years, before the government of Norway started actually doing something.

I argued that this a kind of a settler colonial strategy that like now with the Strategic Mineral Act in the EU: if you identify a project as a strategic then the permitting process is accelerated. So on the one hand, there's this speeding up certain processes, but then on the other hand there is this delay and tracking your feet when it comes to upholding Indigenous rights.

VADIM ROMASHOV
Well, we approach this topic of the political issue here, which is clearly related to the problem of Indigenous self-determination. And you have discussed in your recent publications, your recent publications are actually revolving around this problem that remains largely unresolved in many lands of Indigenous People, including Finland. So, I wonder what are the current political constraints to exercise the self-determination right that the Sámi people encounter in Finland?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
It goes back to the refusal to recognize Sámi rights to their territories. Because you cannot really exercise Indigenous self-determination without some kind of authority or jurisdiction or decision making powers over a territory. Like in Finland the problem

is that Sámi self-determination, so-called, is reduced to cultural autonomy, which I argue reduces Sámi as an Indigenous people to a cultural minority.

Like Sámi self-determination is framed in terms of right to language and culture. And there was a development in the late 80s, early 90s, it was more comprehensive legislation called the Sámi Act, which included, on the one hand, the establishment of the Sami Parliament and then also addressing the question of Sámi land rights. The proposal was fairly laudable in the sense that it is proposed to return the lands that were so-called considered state land, so not private land, but the state land, to the local Siidas as the Sámi governing units.

But there was such a strong opposition both nationally and locally and regionally, that the government backed out and decided that we are only gonna move forward with a governance piece part of the legislation which then became the Act on the Sámi Parliament and the Sámi Cultural Autonomy Act. So it's very much like, it's constrained to a point that Sámi… And even within the Sámi Parliament, as it currently functions, the Sámi don't have authority to make decisions over affairs that impact them or deal with them. They are only allowed to issue statements or make initiatives. They can represent their representatives to various bodies where they have one voice, so it doesn't amount too much. So there is no decision making authority in Sámi self-determination.

You could argue that maybe in Norway the authority is slightly greater, but in my view Sámi self-termination today is not more than a self-administration. That you can administer your affairs to a point, you can administer the funds that you receive annually from the state, but that's it.

VADIM ROMASHOV
Well, in the recent weeks we observed that Greenland suddenly appeared in the center of world politics. And we know that you have started this issue of self-determination of Inuit people in Greenland. What are your view about what is happening there and how their rights will be now positioned and all this radical changes which are happening around this land?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Greenland is such a fascinating case when you consider Indigenous self-determination, because it it takes you to such, it muddies, it kind of like, it shows the complexity of Indigenous self-determination. I was there soon after the 2009 self-determination agreement and then the law that they negotiated with Denmark, the Greenlanders in 2013, doing my research, which I write about in the my 2019 book ”Restructuring Relations”. And there's been this long standing desire for full independence from Denmark, since the early 70s. Like here are premiers who have said that independence is ingrained in the Inuit soul or greenalnders soul.

So, there is this 50 year old independence movement, that they want to become an independent nation. But the nation that they want to become is really a kind of like a western nation state. Like this is what they are aiming for, at least the politicians in Nook in the capital of Nook.

So the question is then like it's almost 90% of the population of Greenland are Inuit, Inuit Greenlanders. So if this becomes an independence state, is it an Indigenous state? Nation state? With similar political institutions, the way it functions, than any other European nation state or Western state? Or is it something different?
These debates are ongoing, obviously. Like not everybody agree that this is where, I know from the conversations that I had that not everybody agrees to this direction. But also it's the fact that if go back to the what we were talking about earlier, climate change, that why everybody is suddenly interested in Greenland. Well, partly it is because of the strategic minerals, the rare earth metals and minerals.

When I was in Greenland in 2013, they just elected their first female premier, who was very business oriented and wanted to, she basically said, Aleqa Hammond, that Greenland is for sale and we have mountains of gold and uranium and you name it, we are open for the world to come and do business with us. Because it's clear that if Greenland wants to become independent, they also need to fund the independence. Denmark won't be sending their annual transfers, not anymore.

So the question then is that are you trading your political independence to an economic dependance on these multinational corporations. Because Greenland is covered in ice, but now it's melting. So the minerals and the resources become more easily available. And of course, now with the also military tensions growing, intensifying, by day, almost. So it's very strategic also. Look at the Arctic, everybody wants, China and the U.S. and everybody is vying for the kind of military leadership in the Arctic. So that's why the U.S. now wants to claim Greenland.

But the election results, like they had recent elections there, and it was very surprising how the moderates then, Democrats, who have been in the minority forever, a very small party so far, and suddenly they win a landslide. So it's also telling how there is this desire for stability as well.

VADIM ROMASHOV
You actually approach in your discussion about the Greenlanders and their desire for establishing a nation state, kind of a traditional nation state, which is used to be the kind of the dominant model of organizing or ordering the social relations ant the international relations in general.

So I actually have a question related to that. So how much, or how should we distinguish between the right, or the Indigenous self-determination to actually for this for nationalism, which some communities might have in terms of their fight for

independence.

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
Yeah, thats a very good question. And something that was very much debated when the UN declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was negotiated and then finally adopted in 2007. But it was like 20 years of intense negotiations and the question was that can we include the mention, or the idea of self-determination in the declaration? Because then it means all Indigenous Peoples suddenly want to become independent.

And it took decades of persuasion that, by Indigenous representatives globally, that Indigenous self-determination doesn't mean independence, political independence or separation. Though they are those exceptions and Greenland is one of them.
So this is what I was referring to, that kind of Greenland is one example that complicates this notion of Indigenous self-determination. But by far, you could say over 90% of Indigenous Peoples are not interested in, are not talking about full political independence or separation. They have no means, they have no interest. What the Indigenous self-determination basically means, and this is as it's expressed in the article three that is similar to the other UN human rights conventions that say all peoples have a right to self-determination, Indigenous Peoples have a right to self-determination. But then articles four and five kind of modify or clarify this right, saying that what it means in practice that Indigenous Peoples have internally autonomy to, authority in decision making over their own affairs.

And then the other side of the coin is that they have right to participate in the affairs and the social life of the broader society, so that they are not kind of excluded from the society within which, the nation state, within which they live and exist.

VADIM ROMASHOV
What is the future of Indigenous studies? What is the future of many Indigenous communities across the world, including the Sámi people? What are these critical edges? How they are going to change, transform or preserve certain specificities which we have at the moment? So how do you view the future of these critical edges?

RAUNA KUOKKANEN
One critical edge is, and this has been said by Rose Bird, if I remember correctly, that the most powerful act by Indigenous Peoples is to stay in place. This idea that by staying where you are, staying home basically, is the most radical, it is the resistance that you don’t, you are not removed. You are not eliminated. You are not replaced.

Personally, I think that, the future, the critical edge of Indigenous studies, the future of Indigenous studies is certainly feminist. That's something that we didn't have a

chance to touch upon. But how I have framed and looked at Indigenous self-determination, for instance, that we do need to look at also the relations that are not necessarily supportive or sustaining, the relations of domination, if we want to attain full and proper self-determination. So we do need that kind of analysis, Indigenous feminist analysis, to understand those relations.

And my critical age is, I guess, I recently wrote a piece in which I theorize Indigenous feminist relational freedom that emphasizes the fact that the relations, the relations and structures of domination impact women and gender diverse people. And how we also need to, kind of like, in international relations there's been this relational turn, and then we also talked about the Indigenous relational turn, and the emphasis of Indigenous relationality.

Sometimes it's discussed in a kind of superficial or shallow ways, that we only talk about the good relations. But I think we also need to look at all relations. So in this piece that I consider my current critical edge is that we need to look at all our relations. That critique, the kind of conventional framing of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, only through relation of non-interference, that obviously, Indigenous People require non-interference, and autonomy from state intervention. But then what are the kind of the deeper aspects of Indigenous freedom.

So I kind of theorize this Indigenous feminist relational freedom, drawing on feminist relational autonomy, citizenship and Indigenous gift relations, and how they can be informing this understanding of Indigenous feminist relational freedom into the future.

HANNA LAAKO
Thank you for listening to the Critical Edges -podcast. We are Hanna Laako, Vadim Romashov, Eleonoora Karttunen and Katherine Hall - researchers at the University of Eastern Finland, who explore and inhabit many critical Edges.

VADIM ROMASHOV
This podcast is made possible by the Kone Foundation and the Borders, Mobilities and Cultural Encounters research community of the University of Eastern Finland.