

EPISODE 2 – Connecting Voices

Nataly Herrera (host)

Karen Tucker

Matthew D Brown

Voiceover 00:06

Hi, this is *To the Righthouse*. A new podcast series by the Global Campus of Human Rights, from skepticism to hope, from utopia to empathy. We discuss human rights riding waves, but also signaling where the light is. This podcast we recorded in Venice, Italy on the island of Lido, at the Global Campus headquarters.

Nataly Herrera 00:34

Welcome everyone here is Natalie and thank you for joining us in this episode, named, *Connecting voices* today, we have the privilege of speaking with two remarkable specialists, Karen and Matthew from Bristol University, who have developed an important project for women affected by forced sterilizations in Peru, the *Quipu project*. Their work sheds light on a painful chapter, and, above all, amplifies the voices of victims seeking trust, justice and dignity. It's an honor to share this conversation and learn from their experience and commitment. Welcome. Karen and Matthew,

Karen Tucker 01:19

Thank you.

Matthew Brown 01:20

Exactly

Nataly Herrera 01:22

So, to start off, I would like to propose the first question, and this is, why don't you think that being truly listened is so important for victims?

Matthew Brown 01:37

It's such an important question, Natalie, I think many people around the world are disempowered because they don't feel like they are listened to. And this is even more the case when people have been victimized in traumatic ways, for example, the unconsented sterilizations of 1990s Peru. So, we found when, we were part of the team that made the Quipu project, that the creation of an innovative process for sharing testimonies enabled new listening opportunities. And the creation of this project, this Memory Project, became a definitive word, defiant attempt to share the memories of this event that powerful people would have preferred was forgotten, and that built connections and built communities which could be the foundation for other longer term struggles. So, an insistence to be to be heard, as well as listened to,

Karen Tucker 02:39

Something I might just add to Matthew's very eloquent answer there, is that speaking to some of the survivors of the forced sterilizations who were involved in the project, this was something they themselves found very important, and particularly the fact that people around the world would have the possibility to listen to their stories, to hear about their experiences, was something that they truly found amazing. And I think that also speaks to the fact that in the immediate context, very few people have wanted to listen to those women. So, the fact that you get an international audience who's very interested in doing so was, I think, particularly, particularly important, particularly meaningful for them.

Nataly Herrera 03:25

Wonderful, wonderful. And from your own experience, how can women survivors be empowered when they are given a space to speak in their own voices and take an active role in this process?

Karen Tucker 03:42

I think that word empowered is an interesting one, and it's a word that's often used when thinking about collaborations, particularly between people in the Global North people in the Global South, who perhaps haven't been listened to. But it's one I think I would probably avoid using in this context, and I prefer to think more in terms of how you can work in partnership with people, and how you can support and amplify the voices that they already have. I think, for me, empowerment suggests that there's a hierarchy in the collaboration. And I prefer to think more about how we work with those women, with those organizations, the grassroots organizations who are trying to support survivors, and how you can kind of amplify their efforts, rather than thinking in terms of empowerment, exactly.

Nataly Herrera 04:34

Interesting, very interesting.

Matthew Brown 04:38

Yeah, if that's okay Natalie, that one of the ways that the Quipu project tried to do that was by creating a platform and putting the technology into the hands of the women who'd been victims of this campaign. So, we were able to use the technology to, as Karen said, to amplify those voices, giving anybody a voice, but it was enabling them to share those stories more broadly. And I guess it's worth saying that this was a labor intensive and emotionally intensive project for those women, but it was them that chose to speak out, to name themselves and to shape the finished project.

Nataly Herrera 05:31

Well, as you have mentioned, these are stories from these women that have been affected during this period, and I have a specific question regarding the Quipu project, what kind of tools or approaches help these to turn these personal experiences, these voices and these human connections, because the quipo project is not necessarily connecting women that they were they were in contact before because they had different experience women from different sectors. So how they these tools connect these human connections into meaningful ways of bearing witness?

Matthew Brown 06:20

Yeah. So, the Quipu project was an idealistic interactive documentary from the period when we made it, over 10 years ago now, when social media felt like it had the potential to create new connections, new forms of empathy and even moment movements for change. So, we use the affordances of the, of the internet and the new social media back then. But what we learned also from doing this, this project, was that it was the physical events, the workshops, the film screening and the conversations that could also create those connections. So, although we were able to use a website and a phone line and servers to bring people's voices together, we often also use manual translation, so we had translators and interpreters who were producing the transcriptions. So we use technological tools, but we also use social tools, bringing people together. And so the example that you raised Natalie, is a good one, because there were lots of small groups of women who had been affected in their particular pueblo or region, and it was this project was able to bring them into contact with one another, just like some of the national campaigning organizations were also able to do. So, they realized that they weren't alone, that they hadn't suffered this thing just in the one place. But rather, this was a national campaign to which they'd been subjected.

Karen Tucker 08:05

Maybe I would just add to that something about the act of listening, I think is very important here as well, particularly when thinking about the external audiences for these testimonies, that those people who are bearing witness, I think there's quite a difference for people outside Peru, particularly, to be able to actually listen to the voices of these women, have them explain in their own terms, with their own concepts, what happened to them. We don't often get a chance to do that. And there's something about the act of listening, and something about the act of listening through this platform where you have to concentrate, there's a kind of line of subtitles going across the screen that people have to kind of sit, sit and really look at. And I think all of that kind of encourages a particularly detailed kind of listening and a particularly detailed kind of recognition. I'm sure the same is true for Matthew, but I often use these, these testimonies in the project, in my own teaching and seeing the way that my own students, particularly undergraduate students, respond to these, to the to the fact that they can really sit down and concentrate and hear and listen to what people in Peru are saying about their experiences, talking about something that is totally new information for these students. There's something very powerful in that. So I think kind of alongside the technological innovation, kind of coming back to something very simple and very human, the act of listening to people and really hearing what people who aren't normally heard, have to say, is also really important.

Nataly Herrera 09:43

This definitely is very touching and something that I would like to explore a little bit more, because, as you say, the voice that you, through the project, are giving to these women help them to talk about what they have lived through, but also to help them to see the future.

We know, basically in our experience, that, like a person that has going through a violation of their rights, his or her rights, they don't want to be labeled for the whole life as a victim. In this case, how do these women create or shape these memories that allow them to process their past and move forward, to see like, to be seen, to be recognized, but not only as a victim, to try to to not to forget,

not to forget, but to to move forward from that situation into like we are going to say, normal life, not being labeled all the time as a victim.

Karen Tucker 11:01

So I think the project provided these women with a space in which they could assert their defiance against perhaps this kind of labeling, not necessarily of them as victims, but as as women who couldn't make decisions about their own reproductive choices, and so it's perhaps not so much giving a voice, but creating a space in which those voices and what they have to say can be expressed, and the defiance that those women feel in relation to their situation, the fact that they haven't had any recognition from the Peruvian government. We created a space in which they could, they could express those things and be connected, then with other people, both other people who've had the same kind of experiences, but also this kind of international audience who cares, who wants to hear so it's a space for defiance, I think that's how I would talk about this project and what it did in relation to those women.

Matthew Brown 12:09

Yeah, I would add to that that I think that memory projects like Quipu aren't only about the individual reconciliation with a violent past. They're not only about sharing stories and hoping or trusting that truth will out and do good, but they're also about building capacity, individual capacity, but also the capacity of a community to be resilient, so the memory of that experience and the process of sharing the story and having that story being listened to, then becomes the building block of a society that can look forward as well as back, so those women who shared their stories became able to see themselves as agents of change, as active citizens in other, or in all areas of their lives.

Nataly Herrera 13:11

Thank you and and link with something that Karen has just mentioned it some of the women have not been recognized as victims and from from part of the government or maybe international organization. However, I would like to know your thoughts about this recent judgment from the Inter American court of human rights in the case of Celia Ramos versus Peru. What is your opinion on this decision, and what is the impact that do you think it may have on, I don't know, on the broader, broader implications in the Peruvian context?

Matthew Brown 13:56

Yeah, it's a really important judgment, Natalie, and I was delighted to see it. Over the course of the last 25 years, the women have been calling for justice, and this is one element of that justice, a recognition in front of the whole world that the Peruvian state was responsible for what happened. So, I would be hopeful that that can be transposed into other forms of justice, social and economic, affecting the day to day lives of those women. But of course, we're talking in April 2026 in the middle of another Peruvian presidential election in which, again, Keiko Fujimori, the daughter of the 1990s President behind those crimes, is talked of, again as a as a possible winner. So we have to see that these legal calls for justice, and the legal judgment, is part of a broader social context around calling for justice and even proclaiming justice doesn't necessarily bring about reconciliation, because these

were very political decisions, political interventions in women's bodies, and they continue to be political today.

Nataly Herrera 15:23

Thank you very much, Matthew. Indeed, the political situation that a Peru is living in this moment, it's gonna mark and before and after, and especially with this, with this new judgment. Well, we have really some minutes more, we had a very interesting conversation. And to close, please give us your final thoughts regarding the Quipu project. How our audience, the people that is listening this podcast can find more information about the keep project and how we can be more involved on, on, on this project.

Matthew Brown 16:13

Yes, so people listening to the podcast can go and find out more about the project by listening to the stories. So, Quipu is Q, U, I, P, U, project. If you Google that, then that takes you to the interactive documentary website. There's also on the website of The Guardian newspaper, a film about the project called Quipu calls for justice, which is a 20-minute introduction, which is a wonderful, wonderful summary of it. So, I think the main call would be to go to the project website and to listen to some of those testimonies, which even 10 years after they were able to be shared, and 25 years after the events they refer to are still, as Karen said at the start, extraordinarily powerful.

Karen Tucker 17:10

Thank you, Matthew, something I might add in terms of a key lesson or takeaway about this project is the importance and power, really, of collaborations for academics who are interested in memory or justice, human rights, for other groups who perhaps don't work in a direct way on these kinds of issues. And there's a lot of power, I think, that comes from working across the different academic disciplines, different kind of professions, working across conventional boundaries, when thinking about working with communities who have suffered and survived violence. And I think that's the thing to bear in mind if people are thinking about, well, how do you work alongside survivor groups, thinking about different communities, connecting different communities, building different communities. I think Quipu shows the possibilities, the potential and also the power of working in those non-conventional ways.

Nataly Herrera 18:18

Thank you. Thank you very much. Dear Karen, dear Matthew. Really I appreciate and I deeply thank you the time that you have taken for this conversation today, but especially as a Peruvian woman, the time and all the effort that you have put on this Quipu project, because, as you say, you have put a voice on many, many Peruvian women that they could not speak at the time that that they are speaking now, and they are trying to find justice after all those years that we have, we have been through since all these human rights violations happened in Peru. Once again, thank you very much and to our audience, we really hope you enjoy this, this, this podcast. Thank you all.

Karen Tucker 19:17

Thank you, Natalie.

Matthew Brown 19:18
Thank you, Natalie.