

Institution: University of Bristol		
Unit of Assessment: 26) Modern Languages and Linguistics		
Title of case study: The Quipu Project: innovative collective biography method has raised awareness and secured justice for victims of forced sterilisation in Peru		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2006 - 2018		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Matthew Brown	Professor in Latin American History	09/2004 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		

1. Summary of the impact

The Quipu Project has broken the silence surrounding the forced sterilisation of some 280,000 Peruvians during the 1990s, shaping both international debate and political campaigns around this subject. The project's innovative research methodology brought isolated groups of sterilised women together, empowering them to share their stories nationally and globally. The women who shared their testimonies through Quipu drew new energy to their fight for justice. The thousands of people who listened to their stories in 127 countries created raised global awareness of the subject. Quipu has reinforced local and international campaigns for justice and put the forced sterilisations at the centre of political and policy debate in contemporary Peru.

2. Underpinning research

During the government of President Alberto Fujimori in Peru, an ambitious Population Planning Programme was adopted. When rolled out into rural areas, it became a targeted attack on the rights of women, with an estimated 280,000 people sterilised between 1996 and 1999, often without their consent, and with only rare rumours circulating in the mainstream media. The Peruvian state has never taken full responsibility for the programme, and legal cases against ex-President Fujimori and the ministers responsible have been repeatedly delayed and shelved. The Quipu Project – a collaboration between Professor Matthew Brown (University of Bristol), Dr Karen Tucker (Department of Politics, University of Bristol), transmedia documentary company Chaka Studio, and four local women's organisations in Peru – was developed as a vehicle for sharing the stories and experiences of those affected by the sterilisation programme.

Development of the Quipu methodology for collective biography

Brown's research over the period 2006-2012 sought to find ways to analyse collective or group histories through innovative storytelling devices. His 2013 collective biography of the veterans of the battle of El Santuario [3.1] wove life stories from the Americas and Europe into the local history of one place in Colombia that had been thought peripheral to global history. His 2014 book [3.2] redressed the absence of cultural history in the narratives of Latin America's engagement with global empires since 1800, in order to avoid the ideological invectives of political interpretations, and to offer a more wide-ranging and diverse account of the continent's past. In both cases, the methodology he developed to deal with the fragmentary nature of surviving historical sources fed directly into the methodology of the Quipu Project. Individual testimonies across time and place were tied together around common themes, enabling a collective history to be told through text, audio, and interactivity.

As an interdisciplinary collaboration, Quipu involved another Bristol academic, Karen Tucker. Brown's research findings [3.1], together with Tucker, attracted the interest of Chaka Studio through the AHRC REACT-Hub, and together they researched how new digital techniques could overcome some of the obstacles to collective storytelling and global dissemination they had identified. Brown and Tucker explored the nature and implications of this collaborative approach

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to interactive documentary, aesthetics, and creative technology [3.3], arguing that digital technologies can help build new spaces for, and modes of engagement with, participatory research, even in contexts such as the Peruvian Andes where digital platforms are not well-established or commonly used. The project has been recognised for changing the terms of debate through its innovations in collective storytelling, receiving the Nominet Trust 100 award (2015), the Prix Ars Electronica Digital Communities Honorary Mention (2016), and the International Documentary IAWRT Mette Janson Innovation Award (2017). Citations for all prizes noted the way in which Quipu brought a marginalised history to new, broad audiences through its methodological innovation.

The Quipu Project

The research in interactive documentary, aesthetics and creative technology was delivered in partnership with multimedia collective Chaka Studio. Once the project team had identified the most effective way of building a collective history of the forced sterilisations, the collection of testimonies was carried out by partners in Peru – the activist women's groups in Huancabamba, Cusco, Ayacucho and Piura. Quipu linked an offline Peruvian telephone number to an internet platform that brought the global sharing possibilities of the internet to people with stories to tell but no access to conventional media (because of the silence that surrounded the subject in Peru) or new media (because of geographical and technological isolation) [3.5]. The innovative participatory methodology brought hi- and lo- technology together and enabled them to speak to hitherto unreachable audiences. This gave rise to what the University of Melbourne documentary theorist Kim Moore called Quipu's 'implication' (2017) of the listener in the collective stories of forced sterilisation. As Quipu developed, it attracted funding from the AHRC, the Tribeca Film Institute, Crosscurrents Doc Fund, and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation. Between 2014 and 2017, Quipu gathered over 150 testimonies in three languages (56 in Spanish, 67 in Quechua and 27 in Shipibo) and 80 responses in Spanish and English, adding up to 9 hours and 20 minutes of audio material. The audio testimonies are now stored in the University of Bristol library, along with digital transcriptions and translations, searchable and listenable for free online in three languages [3.4]. They form a rich corpus of data for researchers on this subject and have been used widely to demonstrate the role of state actors, and the role of gender- and ethnicity-based prejudice, in creating the conditions for these human rights violations.

3. References to the research

- 3.1 **Brown MD** (2012), *The Struggle for Power in Post-Independence Colombia and Venezuela*, Palgrave MacMillan, published in Spanish translation (2016) as *El Santuario: Historia global de una batalla*, Bogotá, Externado de Colombia [Available on request]
- 3.2 **Brown MD** (2014), *From Frontiers to Football: An Alternative History of Latin America*, Reaktion [Available on request]
- 3.3 **Brown MD** and **Tucker K** (2017). Unconsented Sterilization, Participatory Story-Telling and Digital Counter-Memory in Peru, *Antipode*, **49.5**, pp.1186-1203
<https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12316> *Antipode* (impact factor 3.289) is 'one of the most influential peer-reviewed geography journals'
- 3.4 **Brown MD**, **Tucker K** (2020), *Data from Quipu Project (12-2018)*, University of Bristol
<https://doi.org/10.5523/bris.30xw6snm2bwml2q0bmoiviy2qg>
- 3.5 Quipu Project website <https://interactive.quipu-project.com/#/en/quipu/intro>

Funding information

- **Brown MD** (PI), **Tucker K** (CI), *The Quipu Project Prototype*, AHRC REACT-Hub, 2013, GBP50,000
- **Brown MD** (PI), **Tucker K** (CI), *Quipu Project Alumni*, AHRC REACT-Hub, 2014, GBP50,000
- **Brown MD** (PI), **Tucker K** (CI), *Tying Quipu's Key Knots*, AHRC FoF Impact AH/P010253/1, 2016, GBP156,060

4. Details of the impact

Quipu's impacts have been felt at local and global levels – by the victims of forced sterilisations, numerous NGOs and activists, creative practitioners, and the wider public. It continues to shape new projects in South America through its example and the activities of those whose careers it developed. Quipu has: empowered victims, strengthened access to justice and contributed to community development; informed campaigns for justice and stimulated political debate; enhanced public awareness and understanding of the sterilisations and contributed to the process of memorialisation; inspired creative and educational practitioners worldwide [5.1].

Empowered victims, strengthened access to justice, and contributed to community development

The four collaborating Peruvian women's organisations were co-producers of the research, meaning sterilised women participated fully in the Quipu project design. These organisations were trained by the Quipu team in eliciting testimonies and building story-telling confidence. One participant recalled that 'Quipu gave us the confidence to know that we should not feel shame, that we were not alone, that we could stand together and fight for our rights'. Another said 'it's like we [participants in the research] are one big family...I feel proud, I feel happy to listen [to the other testimonies] and happy that others are listening to what we're saying'. One participant reported that 'it has taught us we have rights...that we are not humiliated, we are still here, our lives matter. Even though they did that to us, we're not incapable, we still have rights just like everyone else, like professional people, that we're at the same level as them' [5.2]. Quipu offered these groups' members a way to thrive through increased confidence, generating a positive ripple effect on their communities and beyond as their voices were amplified worldwide. Group leaders learned new skills (public speaking, negotiation, campaigning), widened their sphere of influence, and enhanced their ability to create social change at communal, national and international levels. Some participants called the phone line years after leaving their testimony, to listen to, and find solidarity with, others.

Since her participation in Quipu research, Esperanza Huayama has become the president of her local women's organisation and one of the most recognised faces in the campaign for justice for Peruvians affected by sterilisation. She has been interviewed by international media and spoke directly to over 3 million listeners on BBC Radio 4's Women's Hour (2017) [5.4]. She represented sterilised women in a public meeting with the Peruvian President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski and travelled internationally to advocate for justice. 299 sterilised women, like Esperanza, participated in 15 Quipu workshops across Peru, building impetus for their campaign. As Esperanza said in the *Guardian* short film [5.3]: 'Before we didn't even know what communication was. Now we can communicate, we can understand what we feel in our bodies. We can now talk to be heard by other women, by the authorities, by other countries.'

Building on Quipu's efforts to thread together fragmented storytelling and justice-seeking efforts, in 2017, Quipu supported the second national conference of AMAEF, the National Association of Groups of Sterilized Women, and the first to be held outside Lima. 40 participants from the departments of Ayacucho, Cuzco, Ucayali, Lima and Piura met in Huancabamba. The meeting resulted in a new national structure for organisation and several groups affiliating for the first time [5.7]. One noted: 'We would not have been able to come together, to get to know one another, and to plan our future strategy, without Quipu. Now we are stronger, together, working so that this terrible past is not forgotten' [5.2].

Quipu's impact at a local level arose because of the ethos of trust and co-partnership that sustained its work, in collaboration with Peruvian NGOs such as Amnesty International Peru, DEMUS, the IAMAMC-AMHBA (Institute of Support for the Autonomous Movement of Peasant Women, part of the Association of Women of Huancabamba) and the AMAEFC-GTL (Association of Women Affected by Forced Sterilisations of Cusco), in addition to non-institutionalised groups of sterilised people from the district of Independencia in Ayacucho.

Informed campaigns for justice and stimulated political debate

Over 2014-2016, Quipu worked alongside several Peruvian organisations (DEMUS, Amnesty, GREF, AMAEF and others) to focus national attention on the forced sterilisations, and to place

the victims and their calls for justice centre-stage. The combination of local testimonies with global awareness enabled Quipu to bring the forced sterilisations out of the margins of public discourse in Peru and into the centre of political debate to gain justice and reparations, in particular during the run-up to the 2016 presidential elections [5.5, 5.7]. A woman from Callao, Peru (response #758) called Quipu during the campaign to say that 'I have heard the testimonies of the women that were sterilised. I feel inspired by the fight and by the courage of these women' [3.5]. The leading candidate for president, Keiko Fujimori, had to confront the story in which her father, former president Alberto Fujimori, was heavily implicated (Jelke Boesten, 'Peace for Whom? Legacies of Gender-Based Violence in Peru' in Hillel Soifer; Alberto Vergara, eds., *Politics after Violence: and Legacies of the Shining Path Conflict in Peru* (University of Texas Press, 2019), chapter 6).

In 2015, testimonies collected by Quipu were used in Amnesty International's 'Against Her Will' campaign, which resulted in a petition of 10,898 signatures demanding justice. It was the power of the collective testimony that enabled Quipu to appeal to groups beyond Amnesty's traditional supporters.

The online archive of Quipu testimonies [3.5] continues to be used by the victims in their fight for justice, through legal proceedings against ex-President Alberto Fujimori, as well as ex-officials of his administration, for their leading role in the forced sterilisations. The testimonies are being used by legal representatives in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. When asked what the impact of Quipu had been for her, one of the leaders of the women's groups stood up and stated: 'We are going to continue our struggle! Now we have strength, and support from far away. Now we know how to commit ourselves to the struggle together, not weakly like we did before. Long live Quipu! Long live the Women who were sterilised without their consent!'

Enhanced public awareness and understanding of Peru's forced sterilisation and contributed to the process of memorialisation

Quipu elevated the international debate around Peru's forced sterilisations and amplified the voices of women who are traditionally marginalised from media and politics. In December 2015, the Quipu Project online archive [3.5] was launched with parallel events in Lima and Bristol. Its stories have been listened to by over 21,000 unique users in 127 countries around the world. Total listening time stood at over 117 hours (November 2017). The project was covered in China, India, the USA, and across South America and Europe, in *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, *The Independent*, *Scroll India*, *Wired*, BBC World Service, TV Perú Noticias, *La República*, *The Conversation*, *Latin Correspondent*, *New Internationalist*, *El País*, *New Statesman* and others [5.4]. *The Guardian* commissioned a film about it [5.3] which was seen by 37,001 YouTube viewers (31 July 2020) plus thousands more on *The Guardian's* own site. The Head of Video at *The Guardian* commented that 'by amplifying their story on the Guardian, we and the excellent filmmakers took their story to a significant audience, spread their story to 100,000s of viewers who were not aware of them, were inspired by them, and looked out for further iterations of their story and the story of those like them. The film was universally praised for its originality and its beauty, but most of all for its new information' [5.3]. In 2016 and 2017 the film was screened at 10 micro-cinemas around Peru to a combined audience of 2,000, revealing Quipu's collective histories to previously isolated communities [5.3].

Working with the new national memory museum the Lugar de la Memoria (LUM), Quipu's findings were subsequently disseminated through talks and an exhibition that ran from 2016 to 2019, being visited by 70,537 people in 2017 alone. In a 2019 event, the director of LUM remarked that Quipu 'made a remarkable contribution to our creation of a space for memory in Peru – it enables forgotten voices to be heard, and changes history'. Coverage of Quipu in Peru in 2017 in traditional print media (*El Comercio*, *La República* newspapers) radio (Radio Programas del Perú, Radio Onda Azul) and online media (including *La Mula*) was estimated to have reached over 2 million Peruvians [5.9].

Quipu method adopted by creative and educational practitioners worldwide, leading to greater inclusion of marginalised groups in documentary/history-sharing

The Quipu method has illustrated that the creative use of technology in story-telling and history-sharing can achieve local impacts as well as global reach. It has been used as an educational

resource in over 20 universities worldwide, in a variety of disciplines such as Cultural Studies at Queen's University Belfast; in Translation at Warwick; in Media Arts at Occidental College California: 'The attention to access and inclusion demonstrated by the Quipu Project team and their advisory board at every stage of the process is exemplary' (Professor); and in American Studies and Ethnicity at the University of Southern California: 'The Quipu Project opened my eyes and made me realise the brutality behind the mass sterilisation program' (student), putting real people and the stories at the heart of buzzwords like decoloniality and co-production [5.8]. The accessible Quipu video guide has been promoted by the AHRC (<https://ahrc-blog.com/2020/05/28/ending-the-silence-the-quipu-project/>), who used Quipu as an example of best practice at the 2017 Mobilizing Global Voices International Development Summit. Collaborators on Quipu have used the project as a springboard to establish themselves in South American and British creative technology and interactive documentary. For example, Ros Lerner, co-producer of Quipu, founded Lucida Media based in Peru, producing documentaries on climate change and participatory media projects with communities in disaster risk areas. Invitations to speak in Lima, Bristol, London, Bogotá, Santiago and Mexico City have demonstrated the way that the project inspired a new wave of participatory story-telling using digital methodologies to reach as broad and deep an audience as possible, engaging marginalised people in contemporary mainstream dialogue and becoming co-creators of their own participatory narratives. Maria Court, co-producer of Quipu and now an established practitioner and educator in the field in Chile, said that Quipu 'was our first experiment of an interactive documentary which allowed us to continue exploring and researching about new ways of telling social impact stories. We were encouraged to work as a team, to keep developing future projects working hand in hand with the new technologies available. It expanded our horizons on how we can represent and understand reality' [5.8]. In 2019 Quipu was chosen by the World Merit and SIMA to represent the Sustainable Development Goals around the world: the director of SIMA called Quipu 'an exemplary work of impact storytelling that raises crucial awareness, celebrates the resilience of Peruvian women and the power of grassroots community initiatives to hold government accountable' [5.6].

The legacy of Quipu

Quipu's pioneering work to deliver social change in Latin America through co-produced collective storytelling has since been adopted more widely at Bristol, for example in the AHRC Peace Festival projects (GBP79,248) and the UKRI/Newton/Colciencias 'Bringing Memories in from the Margins' (GBP403,688), which is working directly with the Gender Working Group of the Truth Commission in Colombia using Professor Brown's research findings on communicating collective storytelling in order to collect testimonies from marginalised women across the country. A Truth Commissioner in Colombia said that she was inspired by Quipu to adopt a similar research methodology in order to collect a greater diversity of testimonies of Colombia's armed conflict [5.10]. Inspired by Quipu, the Transform Drug Policy Foundation created a platform campaigning for a change in drug policy both in the UK and in Mexico [5.10]. It is anticipated that Quipu's impact will continue to resonate during the next decade.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- 5.1 Quipu final report (2020)
- 5.2 Transcriptions of testimonies collected in interviews by Tucker in Huancabamba, 2017
- 5.3 Guardian News & Media – short film, [Quipu](#) (2017); Email (July 2019), Head of Video; Film screenings and awards (2015-2018)
- 5.4 Media coverage (December 2013-March 2017)
- 5.5 Bertha Foundation [Advocacy Case Study about the Quipu Project](#) [Accessed 16/11/20]
- 5.6 SIMA endorsement (May 2019)
- 5.7 AMPAEF campaign for justice
- 5.8 Testimonials from Quipu partners (2019); Occidental College and University of Southern California (2019)
- 5.9 LUM exhibition evaluation (2017)
- 5.10 Letters of support from Truth Commissioner in Colombia (2020); Transform Drug Policy Foundation, Deputy CEO (October 2020)