

## **UNESCO RILA: The sounds of integration**

### **Episode 36: Caroline Lenette on Participatory Action Research: Ethics and Decolonization (16/08/2022)**

#### **Dr Gameli Tordzro:**

Welcome to the podcast series of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts. We bring you sounds to engage with you and invite you to think with us. Hello, good morning from Glasgow. My name is Gameli Tordzro. Today we are privileged to have with us, Lucy Cathcart from Sweden and Caroline Lenette from Australia. Caroline, could you introduce yourself, and then after that we can have Lucy introduce herself, and then we'll get to the business of the day.

#### **Assoc Prof Caroline Lenette:**

Thank you very much. So I'm Caroline Lenette. I'm an Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences at the University of New South Wales. And I'm joining you today from the colonised and unsettled Land of the Bidjigal people in so-called Australia. I've been living as an uninvited migrant settler in this country since 2005. And I've been an academic, in an academic role, since 2010. And my main area of research is refugee studies and participatory research and arts-based methods and I really enjoy what I do. And one of my passions is also writing, which is what brings us together today.

#### **Dr Lucy Cathcart-Frödén:**

My name is Lucy Cathcart-Frödén, I'm from Glasgow but based in Sweden at the moment, I recently completed a PhD at the University of Glasgow. So I'm quite new to academia. But my PhD was building on about a decade of work in community arts and community music. And the PhD itself was a kind of practice-based piece of research using collaborative songwriting with different groups of people to try to investigate what happens when we do creative things together, how it creates a different kind of space, how it messes with power dynamics. And it was a really fascinating process despite COVID It was a... yeah, a really exciting piece of research to be involved in. I was very privileged to be able to work with some incredible groups of people in Glasgow and more broadly in Scotland. Now I'm based at Malmö University. This is actually my first day in a new job here, and I'm starting off with a bang with this lovely conversation. Part of my lovely summer here has been reading Caroline's book, which I absolutely loved, and I can't wait to talk about. Gameli, tell us about yourself!

#### **Gameli:**

That was brilliant! I was going to say that, I always forget to introduce myself. Yeah, so my name is Gameli Tordzro, as I said earlier on. I'm originally from Ghana, but I'm one of the Artists in Residence for the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts at the University of Glasgow. My background is in teaching theatre, directing film, directing music, traditional African music. I moved to Glasgow in 2003, to join Pan African Arts Scotland. And I joined the University in 2015. But before then, I had begun collaborating with Professor Alison Phipps, on a range of things. So when I joined the university in 2013, it was to do a PhD with her on the Researching Multilingually at the Borders project, which was a UKRI large grant. At the moment, I run the only African symphonic orchestra in Scotland, in fact, I think in the whole of Europe, Ha Orchestra, which

brings together many musicians of African backgrounds with musicians from Scotland and other places, playing music from all the different cultures put together. Today, we are going to discuss Caroline's new book, which I described as a breath of fresh air: *Participatory action research: ethics and decolonization*. And I'd like to start with the idea that participatory action research is a core research model yielding and wielding meaningful research, research processes and rich findings when it uses ethical ways of research. I want to find out Caroline, and Lucy you can also chip in, what the import of process is. I've been interested in how process generates many, many different things. But in your exploration of participatory action research what's the import of process?

**Caroline:**

Thank you. And thanks to you for those lovely introductions. It's so good to be having this conversation with the two of you, given your backgrounds and your experiences. I think for me, because I really value participatory approaches, I've always said that processes are as important as the outcome or as what we traditionally designate as the research findings. It's not to create a hierarchy of what's more important to achieve in a research process, but to simply say that both these things can be done to a high quality and ethically side by side. And so, by trying to get the research findings, we shouldn't neglect the process and vice versa. By trying to focus on the process, we should also think about what kind of research outcomes we're after. So there are many projects that are participatory, that perhaps will not lead to the intended outcomes and will yield a number of unexpected outcomes. But the focus I wanted to take in this book was to really emphasise that if we really are thoughtful and thorough about the process, that's the activities, the strategies, the relationships, the context, the framework of achieving cultural safety, and having the decolonization intent, integrated in a research project, then that in itself, is a really important research outcome. So, in a way, even though I'm speaking about those things, as two separate entities, those boundaries are artificial for me. If we really invest in understanding the process, so that we can put into place an infrastructure, and we can build relationships in the way that the process is a conscious element of the research project rather than an accidental reflection at the end, then there is much to gain from that approach. That can be quite foreign to a lot of researchers who have not paid attention to the strategies that they use or the approach they bring to the research context. And so, I'm a huge advocate to be really explicit about process related issues, process related considerations and ethical concerns.

**Lucy:**

That's fascinating, Caroline and I love that you draw attention to the artificial boundary between process and product. I think previously in community arts and community music, it has been seen as something of an opposition. You know, either you prioritise the process, and you build trust, and the people have a really great time and feel empowered to create things, or you prioritise some kind of shiny end product. And I really think there's a lot of problems with that kind of opposition, the way that it's been constructed in the past. I've really enjoyed reading the work of Grant Kester, who's an art historian, and he talks about this idea of dialogical aesthetics, which is where the collaborative process is part of the art that you're creating, it's not just a kind of sideshow, and it kind of enriches the final product. So the better the process, then the stronger the end product, and words like 'better' and 'stronger', they're perhaps not the right words, but there's a sense that the outcome of

whatever you're doing, whether it's community arts, or whether it's participatory research, is strengthened by the investment in process and relationships and trust, and I guess all those things that can take time, but that yield something much more meaningful at the end.

**Caroline:**

Yes, and our lack of attention to these elements is perhaps a legacy of the colonial positivist approaches, were we discouraged to do this. In fact, it's seen as bad research or research that's not of good quality, whereas we're arguing strongly that no, this is part and parcel, and indeed, that's what makes a research project meaningful and rich, and not the other way around. So we all have in a way to unlearn that myth that process is actually... process in terms of relationships and practices, that's not secondary.

**Gameli:**

That makes me think about the whole concept of participation and the idea of inclusion. Recently, I've been thinking about inclusion and how that can become problematic at times where you can be included yet sidelined. You can be included and yet not embraced fully. And I was wondering, what are your thoughts about that? Because I'm kind of moving on from inclusion to embracing, especially when we talk about decolonization and decolonizing approaches to research. How can we inculcate embracing in our research? For example, when we talk about language, the dominance of English in the academy makes it almost impossible to research in, you know, minority languages, whether in the global south or in the north. So what do you think? How can we begin to resolve some of these issues about participation?

**Caroline:**

I'll speak to the problematic aspect of inclusion because you're quite right. I see words like equity, inclusion, diversity as window dressing. They're not actually addressing the core of the issue, which is the legacy of colonisation. So if we say that we are doing decolonial research, we cannot use words like inclusion. Because first of all, it still positions the coloniser as making the effort of tolerating others in their space and including them. It's still a very demonising, paternalistic approach to say, we're making an effort, and we include you and it's a warm and fuzzy word on paper, but it actually doesn't really mean anything. It doesn't challenge the problematic power imbalances that we're trying to address. So yeah, so that's a really important point to raise. Institutionally, when we use those words, even though they look great on paper, people in the community, people with lived experiences of the issues that we're researching, our collaborators, they see right through it. They know when it's tokenistic, and they know when it's meaningful. So that brings me then to talking a little bit more about participation and what meaningful participation involves. And I have to be honest here and say that I also had to do the work when I started writing this chapter on participation, because I thought I knew what it was and how to explain it. And when I was staring at the screen, I didn't know how to do that. So I had to go back to the basics and think about: what is it that you're trying to explain? What is it that you're trying to challenge? I guess, for me, the problem I'm trying to challenge in the book, but especially in that chapter on participation, is the fact that this word is used over and over again, to disguise approaches that are not at all participatory, and sometimes quite harmful. So, that for me, in the field, there's a lack of honesty about what participation actually means what it costs us to create a participatory framework. And so, this habit of disguising non-

participatory strategies and practices as participatory so that, again, it looks good on paper, and the community collaborators trust us, as academic researchers, can be really harmful and detrimental. So that was my starting point to see that, well, if this is what's happening right now, then what do we need to shift that completely? In the examples that I gave in the book, it goes back to the first question you were asking me about processes and outcomes. So it's more to show that some practices can create those kinds of rich relationships that are a learning experience, especially for academic researchers who are nowhere near the experts in that equation, by the way, who come in with a sense of humility, and genuine willingness to listen, even when things are hurtful to hear, who come with a genuine interest of community partners in mind and co-researchers and who really want to see change and who are not just doing this research project to add to their CV, who understand the agendas of the community and co-researchers, even though there might be pressures institutionally or from their funding bodies, or their own personal agendas. So there are a few elements there that need to be really challenged and to be discussed openly, so that we don't just reproduce the non-participatory approaches. I think people are sick and tired of being asked to give up their time and energy to be part of a participatory project, especially one that is meant to result in action and change. And then to realise over the course of that time of that project, that it's yet just another approach that's disguised as participatory, but that's not participatory at all. I think the other element too, is to be honest about the element of participation in every project. So, participation could occur through all stages. And ideally, it would be great to implement those participatory principles right from the beginning to the very end of projects and beyond, including in knowledge sharing and building further relationships for other research. But we all know that being part of institutions, and because life happens, and people have complex circumstances, that it's not always possible to integrate participatory principles through all stages. And that's okay. But it's about being honest about saying: look, we didn't develop the research questions in a collaborative way, because we couldn't, we had to come up with something to get funding really quickly to implement a project, but how about we design the data collection phase collaboratively? Or it could be that when it comes to the analysis or interpretation of the research data, that community members have no time or interest to do collaborative analysis, and therefore, we cannot call this a participatory analysis process. So for me, it's about honesty to say, this stage, it was participatory, but say if you collected data in a setting in a different country, and then you move back to your country, where you're writing and presenting, and it's not possible to involve co-researchers in the dissemination phase, to be honest about it and say, well, this phase is not participatory.

**Lucy:**

I think that's such an important point about honesty. I think it's very easy in academia to be kind of drawn into this perspective, where you have to describe things in very black and white terms. And also to kind of position yourself in certain ways, you know, in terms of status, or climbing up the ladder, and all those pressures that are on people coming into academia. And so I think that's really important, and really refreshing to hear about that, about participation as something that grows slowly, as a learned skill, to facilitate that. And I think something that I've found in a lot of conversations that I've had with other people involved in participatory projects, as often the skill of facilitation is undervalued or goes unnoticed. And that's something that you talk about quite a lot in the book, the importance of facilitation, and that it's not something... you know, you get dropped into leading a

participatory process, you don't automatically have those skills to hand. And so it's been really interesting to read the case study sections from the book, the one from Yusra Price talks about facilitation and about how she will learn that as a kind of reflexive process. And there's a great humility to being kind of very open about that learning process and how things could have gone better, or how on reflection her response, perhaps, was not the right one. Those are the hugely important learning moments. I think a theme that you come back to repeatedly in the book is mess. And I love that you talk so much about mess and failure and difficulties. So I'd like to ask something about how we can embrace that more fully, the idea of mess and failure and discomfort, to embrace that more deeply and openly and recognise it as a rich site of learning and growth. And you also talked relatedly about the rhetoric-reality gap in participatory action research, what we set out to do versus what actually happens. I'd just be really interested to hear you talk more around those things.

**Caroline:**

Thank you. Can I just say, first, that I'm so pleased that you see what I was trying to do with the vignettes because, you know, like I said in the book, these are the soul of the book, otherwise, it's just another publication. And I really wanted to provide those examples and to give the vignette contributors a space in the book to talk very honestly about those difficulties, because I've taught research methods for a number of years now and I think these are the kinds of examples that students respond to the best. It doesn't matter if you give them a great journal article to read, they can understand things in an abstract way. But when you give a really concrete example like this with the contextual detail, and that's why they're a bit lengthy, because the context is important to understand, that's when the learning opportunity arises. So thank you for saying that about the vignettes. So in terms of this idea of mess, you know, this is from experience. I was one of those researchers that was so worried about presenting my research as really neat, and where everything went well and never talk about the problems and never raise the ethical issues because I thought that's what I was expected to do. But of course, as we all know, the issues were there, but I was sometimes ashamed to raise these issues because I thought it was something I'd done wrong. I was sometimes embarrassed about the situations and confused, and I wasn't always able to articulate what about those situations were messy. And so, it's only in recent times that I've thought, no, actually, again, this is what people appreciate when I talk about my research and I share an anecdote and you see it, people pick up and respond well to that. And I thought, okay, so maybe there is a space to not over-sanitise my publications, and to open up that conversation about messy outcomes and messy relationships and messy research processes. So that early career researchers and PhD candidates and postdocs, when they encounter my writing, they might realise that it's not just them. Or it's not just a group of people to whom these kinds of situations happen, it happens to pretty much everyone, we just don't talk about it. So whether we acknowledge it or not, mess is part of pretty much all of our research experiences. I'm yet to meet someone who said, they've never experienced problems, especially in the community of participatory researchers. It just doesn't happen. And it shouldn't, because then it would mean that your research is so rigid, that there's no flexibility for things to change and for things to go wrong, and for you to resolve those kinds of situations and reflect on them. So it's more about having, in some way, the courage to acknowledge that things did get messy, and they do get messy. And then that gives us a space for the humility to talk about what we think caused those messy situations. Sometimes, it is because people have very complex circumstances,

and they are distrustful of researchers, and they've had negative experiences before, but sometimes it is because we didn't do something right. And we weren't reflexive enough, we rushed a process, we didn't take all the information into consideration. So sometimes it is also on us as academic researchers or the research team. So that's why I use the word humility, like you did, Gameli. I think humility is a huge part of this process to be able to say, we need to talk about this. What happened? What was the impact? What can we do now to try to resolve this situation, if there's still an opportunity? Or what can we do in the future, if there's no opportunity to resolve the situation straight away. What can we learn from it? And then the difficult part of, how are we going to share this with others without feeling that it might affect our reputation, that it might put a stain on participatory research, that it might reflect badly on co-researchers or community partners or on the institution. So, there's a lot of things to consider. But those conversations are really important, and I've received feedback time and time again, especially from PhD candidates who've said: "we so love reading about mess, because we thought we were the ones who didn't have the skills to reflect on what was going on or didn't know what to do". So that's a really good segway into your question about the rhetoric-reality gap, especially for those of us who are based in academic institutions, because we, I was going to say, our training, but we don't really get any training. I think just over years and years of experience, and trial and error, we become really good at coming up with the rhetoric. So we become really good at, say, polishing an application for funding. It's a manicured model, all the details are there, and it's beautiful to look at on paper. And then when reality hits, it can be quite different. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. So it is also a good thing because we need to be able to create a space where those parameters don't constrain what could happen. They don't constrain the possibilities. So there is a good aspect to that rhetoric reality, thankfully. But on many occasions, it's the opposite that can happen, that the rhetoric about a project or a collaboration with a participatory approach with great strategies, great collaborations, etc., the reality of having written this on paper and now having to execute this project means that it's often much more difficult, much more time consuming, much more complex. There are many more ethical concerns than what we were asked to write in our little application that got the tick of approval from the institution. And that's a big one, we can talk about that a bit more. But again, I like the term rhetoric-reality gap, because it's reassuring, once more, to be able to say, we might think we're prepared, and, certainly on paper, everything looks like you've thought about everything, the outcomes are going to eventuate from your activities. But the reality can be so complex and so different from the intended outcomes, that the project looks completely different at the end of it. And like I said, this could be a very good thing, this could be a much better overall outcome than what we said we were going to do or achieve. So, I'll just say a couple of things about ethics. Because I know, Gameli, you wanted to talk about ethics. There is a chapter in the book about that. And I always find this chapter the hardest to write. It's so hard because there is so much to say about ethics. There's never enough time to teach about ethics in research methods courses either. So, I always struggle with choosing what information I'm going to provide in a book chapter on ethics. But I'm invigorated by the discussions I have with my colleagues about the ongoing struggle with institutional ethics when we are using participatory action research. Again, this is another legacy of colonial infused and positivist research approaches, where ethics approval can be far removed from the space we are trying to create through PR. So it's important not to be discouraged. And I know that some institutions are better than others in terms of the openness to participatory research approaches and the lack of

scrutiny, or the lack of meddling with parts of projects that have nothing to do with ethics. I think we still have a long way to go in terms of openness with appreciating participatory research approaches that mean that the collaboration begins well before research questions are drafted and phrased. And that it's also important to take into consideration the perspectives of co-researchers in ethics approval. I think we still have a long way to go in that respect. But essentially, the gist of what I discussed when I talk about ethics is that disparity between what institutional ethics processes ask us to do as a sort of checklist, in a sort of risk averse kind of approach, and the range of ethical issues that can arise when we're in the field and closely collaborating with community partners and co-researchers, and we encounter situations that we haven't thought about before and we have to think, then and there, about how we respond, or how we manage a difficulty or what to do when there's a dilemma. Research books and research methods courses don't necessarily prepare us for the latter. And again, that's something that I'm trying to challenge through my teaching and through my writing, essentially, to beg researchers, and especially PhD candidates and ECRs, to be much more reflexive about their approaches, to document everything and to reflect on it afterwards, to not minimise how they're feeling about an interaction or a project activity or something that they've observed, to really listen to those feelings, because they're really important and they... they're important in the analysis, but they're also important in terms of the growth of the researcher, and also sharing that with others. So that's essentially the gist of what I tried to push for when I write about ethics.

**Gameli:**

That's very interesting. I was particularly interested in finding out from you what you're thinking about the difference between ethics in practice and institutional ethics, but also, you just mentioned interaction, and I find interaction very, very, very interesting in research, particularly as an artistic researcher. My research is by nature interactive, and the direction it drives me towards is the direction of generating rather than extracting, as a researcher, you know. What you think about the need for us as people who promote participation research to more and more and more focus on what we generate rather than what we extract?

**Caroline:**

I think that distinction in terms of the language is really important, and it's something else that I try to do as often as possible is to draw attention to how the language we use influences our approach. And again, this is a common theme in what I've said, this is also the legacy of positivist approaches, where we use words that don't actually align with our practices. And I think what you're describing there, Gameli, is precisely that. We're not systematically analysing necessarily, it's more an interpretation of what's going on, and trying to make meaning out of it to then be able to present perspectives, or narratives, or music, or art, or films, to wider audiences, and diverse audiences. So I do appreciate that distinction, because I think it is important to be able to say, the language that we use when we analyse, it's not a one-off process, it's something that's ongoing. It continues well after we've, as we say, left the field, it's a rich, moving sometimes, experience. One of the points that I make in the book, when I talk about co-production, it's by Oliveira and Veary, when they say, you know, is co-production actually a thing, or is it obsolete, because the narratives that we're talking about, they already exist, and they already have meaning in people's lives, we're just sort of momentarily entering that space and trying to understand

those lived experiences and then writing them up or creating them through artistic outcomes, for others to also understand, but perhaps that's even obsolete to do that, because it already makes sense for the people who are affected by what we're trying to understand better. So, it goes back to that original notion of who holds knowledge and what is knowledge about, and who has authority to create new knowledge or co-create knowledge, and whose voices and perspectives are amplified in the academic spaces, and whose perspectives and narratives are still ignored and belittled and diminished. We still have a very long way to go in terms of changing those dynamics. And so, I think coming back to your question that this idea of embracing what we encounter, and interpreting it, and sometimes putting words around it, sometimes making it into an artistic creation, sometimes writing for policymakers to say, this needs to change, this needs to change. Yes, we still have a long way to go in terms of doing this in a meaningful way. And I think that is one of the research stages that perhaps doesn't receive as much attention because we think, oh, if we do thematic analysis, we're good. But we don't actually know how to do that very well.

**Lucy:**

Something that I really appreciated in the book is you draw attention to things that don't happen automatically. The chapter about ethics that you just referred to, I love the title of it: *Participatory action research is ethical, right?* Question mark. And I just love that because it's so provocative. And it's so true that's often an assumption that people make, that participatory action research is ethical, and that it's going to bring change. The word automatic comes up a few times in the book, in the sense that this is not automatic, this is not just going to happen, you know, without putting in the work, without putting in the critical thoughts, without putting in the time for growth, and relationships and trust. And that's something that I think you make very clear in the book, all these things that are taken for granted, or that are possibly not valued by the Academy, the kind of slow growth of decolonial change in that regard. So I wanted to say thank you for drawing attention to the work that is important in that context.

**Caroline:**

That's great. And you're absolutely right, in terms of the assumed outcomes. Just because we say we do participatory research, or we do co-design, they can all be buzzwords, we all have to do the work to make sure that we don't replicate, you know, colonial practices. And that's why... that's one of the reasons why I included a whole chapter on gender diversity, because there is also that risk of using PR as a cover up to create other layers of discrimination and marginalization. And that's completely unacceptable, especially when it comes to gender diversity. So you're right, these things don't happen as a result of happy coincidence. We have to put in the work, we have to be explicit about what we want to see change collaboratively and what we want to see done differently.

**Gameli:**

I realized that sometimes something as little as just resorting to the affordances in which the language on the ground can offer you makes a whole difference. For example, when I was trying to deal with explaining the messiness of research, in talking about storying and storytelling in my PhD research, I realized returning to my Ghanaian language, my Ewe language, opened up so many, you know, new dimensions of understanding. I was dealing



with the the word for create, create a story, and I realized that in my language, it is to carve a story. And the word...

**Caroline:**

That's beautiful.

**Gameli:**

Yes. And the word that's used for it, is the word *kpa*. And *kpa*, it's just the sound of the axe on the wood. And then instantly, I saw the mess, you know, the mess of the chippings. That's what remains. And so it makes process become so important. In process, we create a mess. What do you do with that mess? And how do you relate with that mess? Do you throw away the chippings? Do you use it for another carving? And so, those are some of the things that we can begin to look at as researchers, when we think about process and we think about embracing when we think about all these other things that we don't encounter.

**Caroline:**

That's really beautiful imagery. And I agree with you that transformation doesn't happen if we're not willing to embrace the mess as well. So the mess is part of the transformation in many situations.

**Gameli:**

Exactly. And for me, it's very important that we see ourselves transform along our research. And your book does just that. It invites us to embrace our own transformation. It's not as if we go somewhere and change things, and we still remain, what we are, as academics.

**Caroline:**

Yes.

**Gameli:**

Our work, for example, in Dodowa, for the past seven years, you know, means that we have to return there, project after project. And so it means creating a long-standing relationship with those we are c-researching with. Yeah, and you mentioned all these things! The whole book resonates so much with every aspect of what I do as an artistic researcher.

**Caroline:**

Thank you. And that's a really important point about transformation. Because, you know, obviously, the perspective I provide are very much based on the fact that I'm in a white-majority context. And I often think about our privileges as academic researchers. This is part of our role, how we can use the privileges that we have to contribute to those transformations, and being open to the fact that that's also part of the process. We are not meant to remain the same throughout the different changes that we are ourselves trying to create through our research approaches.

**Lucy:**

I couldn't agree more, Gameli, in terms of the resonance of the book. It felt like such an important piece of work for me to read it, because I think you brought together so much scholarship and so many stories from all over the world, from different disciplines, from

different art forms, from different types of research. And I really find it a very affirming experience to read the book and to feel like oh, yeah, mess is okay, not knowing what you're doing is okay, you know, as long as you are being reflexive in that process, and trying to always do the right thing in the space that you're in, for the people that you're with. So there was a lot in the book that really made me kind of smile, or laugh out loud, or feel very much affirmed in the work that we do, which can sometimes feel isolating when you're in an academic context where, for example, the initial training that I had to do for my PhD in research methods was very focused on quantitative social science type stuff. And I felt completely like a fish out of water in that context. I had no idea how to make what I wanted to do fit into that mould. And luckily, I had supervisors who said, you don't have to do it this way. But not everybody does have that support and solidarity from people further up to the academic tree. So just the fact that this book exists in the world, I think it's going to be very meaningful for a lot of people who are trying to carve out a space where it's possible to do research collectively, collaboratively, in a different way. So thank you for that.

**Caroline:**

Thank you, Lucy, I really appreciate that. And I couldn't agree with you more. I think, to be able to find a community of people who understand the importance of the principles and the approaches, and for us individually. So if I speak about myself, finding this level of discomfort that you described, when I was first starting off as a researcher and then thinking, it doesn't sit well with me, but I'm just going to do it, because I don't really have any other options. And then finding the right supervisors who say, actually, have you thought about this method, and it might be more appropriate for what you're trying to do? And you're going to do work with refugee background women, and this might be better. And to then develop a whole body of scholarship from that opportunity that, as you quite rightly said, is not afforded to a lot of social science researchers. So I'm hoping that through publications like these, and discussions like we're having now and spreading the word about, you know, it's okay for you to want to do research in this particular way, because it aligns with your values. And you can see the meaningfulness of participatory action research when it's done well. And it's not something that we have to defend. It's something that we can embrace, and we can be proud of, and we can share with others and teach the next generation of scholars, not to think that this is the poor cousin of quantitative methods, or indeed, in the hierarchy of qualitative methods that arts-based methods for examples, or PR models are not as good. We're definitely in that space now where we don't have to explain it, we can just do it. And we can be proud of it.

**Gameli:**

Exactly, that really talks to the importance of making a difference. Because once the method is making a difference, then that's all we want. And for me, it is very obvious that your book is already making a difference by opening up the discussion on alternative ways of looking at research.

**Caroline:**

And can I just say, that's one of the reasons why I put decolonization as part of the title is because we can no longer afford to wait and to have peripheral measures. We have to have much more explicit, much more effective measures to change the way things are done in the academy. So thank you very much. I appreciate that comment.

**Gameli:**

So we're kind of coming close to the end of the podcasts. Lucy, do you have any final thought?

**Lucy:**

I have lots more questions, this hour has passed so quickly! Somebody who you cite in the book and has been really inspired by is Eve Tuck, and indigenous researcher who talks about this shift from damage-centered research, which looks only at people's marginalization and suffering with the kind of... the idea that this is going to provoke pity and empathy and provoke social change through that mechanism. She talks about instead, looking much more holistically at the complex personhood of the people that we're working with in participatory practice. And I think this is so compatible with what you're talking about in the book, Caroline, about moving from just seeing a kind of one-dimensional marginalization perspective, towards seeing kind of the whole person. And I loved that that was really clear in the vignette from Natalie Nesvaderani, who talks about filmmaking in Iran. And this line jumped out to me. She was talking with a group of young people in an area where there are lots of social problems. She sent them out to sit with notebooks and to document and describe what they saw. And they did see the poverty and the social problems, but they also saw these beautiful, you know, an old tree, a generous shopkeeper, these other little pictures, and she says, you know, when you look at these films that have been made previously about poverty or addiction or all these social problems, she's asking these young people: "is this the only truth about this place?" And I just... that line just jumped out at me. Is this the only truth about this place or about this person? And I think that somehow that kind of encapsulates so much of what the potential of participatory practice is. It's not really a question, but I'd just love to hear you talk more about that.

**Caroline:**

It's such a beautiful note to end on. And I really appreciate you raising this particular example, because the academic space does train us to emphasize deficit and problems. And it's not to say that these don't exist and there is marginalization and humiliating settings, but the importance of balancing that with strengths and solution-focused approaches and talking about people's skills and people's culture as a source of strength and providing opportunities to exercise agency, that's equally important. And again, this is something we haven't done enough of. They go hand in hand. It's important to talk about issues, but also about strengths and solutions for change.

**Gameli:**

Thank you very much. This has been such an interesting and very important discussion on Caroline Lenette's book: *Participatory action research: ethics and decolonization*, published by the Oxford University Press. Thank you all very much. Thank you, Caroline. Thank you, Lucy. Thank you for listening to the podcast of the UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Languages and the Arts, a podcast series to make you think. More information about our work can be found on the website of the University of Glasgow [www.gla.ac.uk](http://www.gla.ac.uk). Thank you very much.



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