

<b>Institution:</b> University of Kent		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27: English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Countering the 'Hostile Environment' through Creative Practice: Making Space for the Stories of Immigration Detainees		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2009-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
David Herd	Professor of Modern Literature	1997-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Co-organised by David Herd and Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG), the <i>Refugee Tales</i> project calls for an end to the UK's policy of indefinite immigration detention by sharing stories of people who have been detained. Since its inception in 2015, the project has made space for detainees' stories across multiple contexts: as part of the annual 'Walk in Solidarity with Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Detainees'; in three internationally acclaimed volumes of tales; across various media, including film and radio; at lobbying events and meetings with MPs. Through this process of making space for accounts of the lived experience of detention, the project has: influenced policy on immigration detention; established an international model of campaigning practice; changed teaching of migration in schools and universities nationally and internationally; and provided a community for former detainees isolated by the hostile environment.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<b>Research problem</b>		
<p>Herd's research into the UK's policy of indefinite immigration detention began in <b>2009</b>. Although the power to detain indefinitely had existed since the 1971 Immigration Act, its use was significantly increased by the UK Borders Act of 2007. Whereas in 1988, 1,800 people were held in immigration detention, by 2009 that figure had risen to 28,000 (including 15,780 asylum detainees). At that time, it was widely unknown that the UK is the only country in Europe that detains people indefinitely under immigration rules, and, as a consequence, the stories of those detained were rarely, if ever, heard. There was therefore insufficient understanding of the human costs of large-scale indefinite detention, or of the function of detention in the UK's increasingly hostile immigration environment.</p>		
<b>Research aims</b>		
<p>Working initially with the NGO Kent Refugee Help, from <b>2009</b> to <b>2015</b> Herd visited people held at the Dover Immigration Removal Centre, attended asylum and immigration tribunals, and observed the lived experience outside detention of people whose asylum cases remain pending. His principal research observation concerned the way people who had experienced immigration detention were deliberately held outside key modes of communication. Such exclusion, as Herd has documented, took multiple intersecting forms [<b>R2</b>, <b>R4</b>]. The asylum interview, for example, commonly took the form of a sequence of approximately 100 questions immediately repeated, the aim being to generate discrepancy and a basis for doubt. Hearings in the Asylum and Immigration Tribunal system were not courts of record, meaning that the words of the appellant are not preserved. At the level of daily existence, the relief granted the refused asylum seeker who cannot</p>		

return (£5.05 per day) was paid in the form of a voucher that could only be spent at certain outlets on certain products (not including public transport) and which stigmatised individuals at the point of transaction. Having directly observed the effects of these processes, Herd set out to: consider the ways such symbolic exclusion compromises the individual's capacity to act in the world; explore how, in the face of such hostility, forms of community and solidarity can nonetheless be established; contribute to the development of a social and linguistic environment in which the voices of those who had been detained might be heard.

### Individual research outcomes

Since 2009, Herd's research has taken various forms. Through a series of articles, essays, and works of creative non-fiction he has detailed modes of linguistic exclusion that shape the experience of people who have been detained [R1, R4, R6]. Across two collections of poetry, he has used lyric and documentary modes to explore the affective consequences of such exclusion and arrived at expressions of solidarity that both register and seek to overcome the prevailing linguistic hostility [R3, R5]. This work has been internationally acclaimed, with the *Los Angeles Review of Books* describing *All Just* (2012) as 'one of the few truly necessary works of poetry written on either side of the Atlantic in the past decade' [R4].

### Collaborative practice-as-research outcomes

Building directly on his individual research into the linguistic exclusion of people who have experienced detention, Herd helped co-found the *Refugee Tales* project with GDWG in 2015. The aim of the project was to create a space in which the stories of those detained could be safely shared, thus demonstrating both the human costs of indefinite detention and the power of stories to generate community. Stories are written either as co-productions with established writers (where anonymity is required) or as first-person testimonies. Taking *The Canterbury Tales* as its model, the project first shares all stories in the context of an ongoing series of large-scale public walks. They are then published as part of the *Refugee Tales* series, now in its third volume [R2]. As Co-Director of the project, Herd has been integral to all aspects of its organisation and execution throughout. In particular, he has led its cultural inquiry through the commissioning of co-produced tales, the mentoring of people writing first-person testimony, the co-editing of the project's volumes, and the constant articulation of the project's findings through essays, broadcasts, and at numerous high-profile political events. In particular, he has framed the space in which published stories are shared, through the verse 'Prologues' and discursive 'Afterwords' he has contributed to each volume. Herd's contribution to migration studies through *Refugee Tales* has been extensively discussed in articles and essays (see Barr, 2019; De Michelis, 2019).

### References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[R1] Herd, David (2019). 'Calling for an end to indefinite detention: the spatial politics of *Refugee Tales*', *From the European South* 5, pp. 15-25.

[http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it/journal/2019-5/2\\_Herd.pdf](http://europeansouth.postcolonialitalia.it/journal/2019-5/2_Herd.pdf)

[R2] Herd, David, and Pincus, Anna (eds) (2016, 2017, 2019). *Refugee Tales*, 3 volumes. Manchester: Comma Press.

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/64733/>; <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/64734/>; <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/87258/>

[R3] Herd, David (2016). *Through*. Manchester: Carcanet. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/64729/>

[R4] Herd, David (2015). 'The View from Dover'. *Los Angeles Review of Books*, 3 March 2015.

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/view-dover>

[R5] Herd, David (2012). *All Just*. Manchester: Carcanet. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/40574/>

[R6] Herd, David (2011). 'Merely circulating: the movement of persons and the politics of abandonment'. *Parallax* 59. <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/64839/>

**Grants**

**[G1]** British Academy award (2019). Investigation of the structures and effects of different international hostile environments faced by people who have been displaced and are seeking asylum. PI: David Herd. Value: £49,026.

**[G2]** Arts Council England (2015-18). For the collaboration with GDWG. Co-I: David Herd. Value: £45,000.

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)

As the Director of GDWG, Anna Pincus, states: 'without David's [Herd] expertise as a researcher and writer *Refugee Tales* could not have achieved its influence and reach' **[a]**. The impact achieved is as follows:

**Influence on the framing of detention policy**

The accounts of indefinite detention shared by *Refugee Tales*, and published in the project's three volumes, have directly influenced the framing of detention policy and legislation. Following the publication of Volume II (2017), the project used the published stories as a lobbying tool to press for a change of law. Herd and other project members engaged in one-to-one meetings with MPs from all parties, using the project's accounts of detention as evidence of the need for change. During this process, *Refugee Tales* secured the support of a sufficient number of MPs to establish a working cross-party majority (in the 2017-19 Parliament) in favour of a change to the law **[b, c]**. In **September 2017**, Herd was invited to contribute to Diane Abbott's Party Conference Speech as Shadow Home Secretary.

In **2018**, *Refugee Tales* invited Shami Chakrabarti (Shadow Attorney General) and Afzal Khan (Shadow Immigration Minister) to take part in a Labour Party Conference Fringe Event, which Herd hosted and addressed, with the aim of securing the Party's adoption of a 28-day limit to asylum detention. Khan posted a policy announcement immediately after his appearance at the event: 'Tonight I spoke at the @RefugeeTales fringe at #Lab18 on the need to end indefinite detention. @UKLabour will implement a 28-day limit on immigration detention. It's #Time4aTimeLimit' **[b]**. Writing in the *Guardian*, Chakrabarti has publicly cited *Refugee Tales* as a book to 'inspire activism' **[e]**.

In **October 2018**, *Refugee Tales* further built the campaign for a limit by launching 28for28.org: a series of filmed readings of the published tales (by leading writers and actors), with an introduction scripted by Herd, and released one per day for 28 days across social media **[d]**. Subsequently, a submission including extracts from *Refugee Tales I* and *II* was considered as evidence by the Joint Committee on Human Rights' Report on Immigration Detention (JCHR Report), helping inform the report's case for a time limit on detention **[c]**. Following this political groundwork, *Refugee Tales* was actively involved in the process of preparing for, and drafting, an amendment to the 2019 Immigration Bill, sponsored by the Labour Front Bench and designed to end indefinite detention **[c]**. Though the bill was ultimately deferred (by prorogation and the 2019 election), the amendment has set the terms for subsequent legislative discussion of detention in the UK.

**An international model of campaigning practice**

*Refugee Tales'* influence on national policy-making on immigration detention has established the project as an international model for campaigners for migrant rights. Herd has been invited to address numerous audiences of international activists and educators seeking to learn from and emulate the project's practices in working with immigration detainees, speaking in Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Holland, Italy, and the USA. He has been asked to advise on projects working with refugees and asylum seekers in Germany and India.

In **2019**, Herd was invited to the Kenan Ethics Institute at Duke University to advise volunteers working at refugee camps in Jordan on good practice in relation to refugee testimony. The Director of the Institute wrote that Herd had 'inspired us to think much more carefully about the impact of

our own work' [f]. By communicating his research in these settings, Herd has extended the reach of both Refugee Tales and GDWG, whilst continuing to maintain international focus on the UK Government's policy of detention. The project has been cited as a model of civil society activism in publications in Australia, Germany, Italy, South Korea, the UAE, and the USA. In **2019**, Herd was interviewed by InfoMigrant, 'a news and information site for migrants at every point of their journey', which reaches over 160,000 migrants worldwide and is supported by France Médias Monde and the German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle, and is co-financed by the European Union [g].

In **2020**, Refugee Tales consolidated the international reach of its practice. On **3-5 July 2020**, a series of online stories and talks, led by Herd's introductory film, provided the context for people to walk 'in solidarity with detainees' in 20 countries worldwide, confirming the project's international influence [a].

### Changing teaching in schools and universities nationally and internationally

Refugee Tales has changed the way the realities of immigration detention are taught at a time when it is increasingly a defining international issue. The three volumes are taught in over 50 universities around the world (including Cambridge, Oxford, Glasgow, Cornell, Avanza College, Argentina, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Ottawa, Lodz, and Leiden) and in secondary schools in Denmark, the UK, and the USA. Teachers describe the transformative effect of the books. As a teacher at Rowland Hall High School in Salt Lake City, Utah wrote: 'My students have responded so well to the text that I first of all just wanted to thank you [...]. This book could do so much good if read and taught widely' [h].

That widespread teaching is now a reality. In **April 2020**, the Oak National Academy developed a series of online lessons for Key Stage 3 Students dedicated to the *Refugee Tales* books. The Academy is funded by the Department of Education and is the main national provider of home-school education during lockdown, with a reach of 4.7 million visitors. The purpose of the *Refugee Tales* lessons is to 'look at how [the project] uses poetic tone to get across the message of how refugees should be treated with respect', with Herd's 'Prologue' being the sole focus for this discussion [i]. His research has thus directly influenced the way 11-14-year-olds in the UK are taught to think about migration. As a teacher writing in *Public Books* concluded: 'As much as Chaucer is the father of English literature, Refugee Tales and the culture it creates can be its future' [h].

### Providing a community for people isolated by the UK's hostile environment

Refugee Tales is unique in the way it has built a community by sharing stories of people who have experienced immigration detention. Stories are first shared in the context of the project's annual public walk, which since **2015** has taken place across several days and has included, on any given day, up to 200 walkers, approximately 25% of whom have experienced detention. Herd has shaped all walks by commissioning all the talks and tales that constitute their focal points. The annual walks – along with the project's interim monthly day-long walks – provide a space in which former detainees experience a sense of belonging that is of considerable benefit to their wellbeing. This benefit can only be registered through individual testimony. As 'R' (for whom Herd acted as writing mentor) observed in 'The Volunteer's Tale' in **2019**: 'So now I feel, like, you know, I am surrounded by a new family. I can feel that now. And I hope everything stays like that' [j]. Such accounts of the project's value have been echoed when people with lived experience of detention have spoken to national media (for example on *Ramblings* and *Today*) and in feedback to the project. As a first-time walker said following the **2019** walk: 'As a refugee in this country, I have never felt so welcome than I did on this particular walk' [j, k].

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[a] Letter from Director of Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group (GDWG) detailing the impact of Herd's research, expertise, and involvement on their practice, outcomes, and opportunities.

- [b] Report compiling Parliamentary support for Refugee Tales on Social Media.
- [c] Report detailing the contribution of Refugee Tales to Parliamentary scrutiny of Government policy on immigration.
- [d] Film of 28for28 campaign:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31sXmnkzb0I&feature=youtu.be>
- [e] Shadow Attorney General cites Refugee Tales as inspiring activism.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/mar/05/shami-chakrabarti-five-books-to-inspire-activism>
- [f] Email from the Director of the Kenan Institute for Ethics (8 April 2019).
- [g] Compilation of international engagement with the Refugee Tales project.
- [h] Teacher testimonials from Rowland Hall High School (7 November 2018) and from *Public Books* (Philadelphia). <http://www.publicbooks.org/chaucer-and-humanitarian-activism/>
- [i] Oak National Academy Lesson on 'Prologue' to *Refugee Tales*.  
<https://teachers.thenational.academy/lessons/tone-6mu3gc>
- [j] First-person testimony of the benefit to those experiencing indefinite detention: 'The Volunteer's Tale', in David Herd and Anna Pincus (eds.), *Refugee Tales III* (Manchester: Comma Press, 2019), p. 69.
- [k] Compilation of media coverage of the benefits of the Refugee Tales project to those experiencing indefinite detention. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0b3fkqh>  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-46685081>