

STATEMENT OF PADDY FRENCH, REBECCA TELEVISION

1

I am the editor of the website RebeccaTelevision.com — Britain’s first investigative website. It’s independent, unconnected with any other publication or broadcaster and does not take advertising or sponsorship.

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Before resurrecting Rebecca (it was a Wales-based magazine in the 1970s best known for its Corruption Supplement) I was a current affairs producer with the ITV Wales current affairs programme Wales This Week for a decade. I have thirty years experience as an investigative journalist.

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This statement concerns two aspects of the evidence given by Mazher Mahmood to the Inquiry about his work at the News of the World. The first is an allegation that he may have committed perjury when he claimed hundreds of successful criminal prosecutions and the second an allegation that he may have protected a criminal involved in one of his undercover operations.

Alleged Perjury Over “Successful Criminal Prosecutions” (SCPs)

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In common with some journalists and commentators, I have always believed the claims made by Mazher

Mahmood for the number of “successful criminal prosecutions” he has achieved (SCPs) to be overstated.

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In his book Confessions of a Fake Sheikh [HarperCollins, 2008] Mahmood claimed “more than” 230 SCPs. When it closed in July last year, the News of the World claimed there were “more than” 250 SCPs.

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When Mazher Mahmood made his sworn statement to the Inquiry [October 2011] he said the number of SCPs was 253. When he came to give evidence in December last year, under oath, he claimed the figure had risen to 261 with a further two in the pipeline.

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In making these claims, Mazher Mahmood had the considerable resources of News International to assist him. The organisation will have electronic records of every article he wrote at the News of the World and these would have been available to him through his current employment at the Sunday Times.

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In addition, News International will have the huge collection of evidence of the undercover operations he carried out. The legal department will have records of the many cases in which he has had to give evidence.

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Finally, if Mazher Mahmood maintains scrapbooks of all his cuttings, he will have had access to those as well.

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Having given his evidence under oath, I decided to test his testimony by examining every article either written by or featuring him in the period he worked for the News of the World — December 1991 to July 2011.

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The research was carried out at the British Library's newspaper collection at Colindale by myself and a colleague in the first four months of this year. No publicly available electronic database exists of the News of the World between December 1991 and December 1995, so every edition in the microfilm records were examined for articles by and / or featuring Mazher Mahmood in this period.

12

From January 1996 to its closure, all News of the World articles are available on the searchable Newsbank database. Nearly 900 articles were either written or co-written by Mazher Mahmood or featured him in this period. The search parameters were articles written, co-written and /or including his name in the body of the article.

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It was intended to carry out a test to see how comprehensive the electronic version was compared to the microfilm version but this was not possible before the Rebecca Television deadline. This "control test" is, however, currently under way and I will let the Inquiry know the results.

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The assumptions that underlay this study were as follows:

- the News of the World was likely to report the vast majority of its SCPs because it demonstrated the effectiveness of its journalism
- we accepted the word of the paper about the SCPs, even if no name was given
- we accepted that if Mazher Mahmood caught someone in a criminal act, he was entitled to include any individuals who were subsequently convicted even if he had never named them in his original exposé
- however, we recorded separately those who were named and those who were not.

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As the work progressed, and it became clear that the claims were not supported by the paper's own reports of SCPs, I wrote to Mazher Mahmood on March 8 this year to ask him to furnish us with his list — a copy of this letter is attached as Exhibit 1. He did not reply.

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The appendix lists the result of our analysis for each of the years Mazher Mahmood was at the News of the World. We have included the names of those convicted as well as the dates the newspaper reported the conviction.

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We found 52 named individuals who were successfully convicted in the criminal courts — one of these could not be named for the protection of a victim. (In the article published in the Rebecca Television website we

took the decision not to publish the names except in certain limited circumstances.) In addition, the newspaper claimed a further 18 unnamed individuals had been convicted.

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In total, therefore, we found evidence in the pages of the News of the World of 70 SCPs. This compares with the 253 claimed by Mazher Mahmood in his written statement in October and the 261 figure when he gave evidence — with a further two in the pipeline. These results have already been published in the article “A Case To Answer” on the Rebecca Television website [rebeccatelevision.com].

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The 70 figure is, of course, subject to upward revision because some prosecutions were in the pipeline when the News of the World closed. Mazher Mahmood claims a further 10 or so SCPs since his October statement but, since our study was restricted to the News of the World, we have not recorded these claims.

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We sent an email outlining our findings to Mazher Mahmood on April 24. He did not answer. We copied this email to John Witherow, editor of the Sunday Times where Mazher Mahmood is currently employed. He did not answer either.

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I wrote to John Witherow again on April 28. This time he replied: “We are indeed doing a thorough investigation into the number that Mazher supplied. I will examine the

results and decide what to do when I know the outcome.”

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Some commentators believe that Rebecca Television’s figures as reported by the paper may understate Mazher Mahmood’s SCPs for two reasons.

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The first is that not all convictions are reported. There is some justification for this view: we found, for example, two cases which were not reported at the time of conviction. In the final article in 2011, the News of the World named two men who had been convicted much earlier but never reported at the time. These cases are, of course, included in our figures and for the year the paper says they were convicted. We do not believe, however, that there can be many more such cases.

24

Another argument concerns cases related to Mazher Mahmood’s investigations into illegal immigrants. The largest of these took place in May 2006 when 66 men were arrested and detained at Colnbrook Immigration Detention Centre. This article does not state how many of these people were illegal immigrants although eight were said to be failed asylum seekers.

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The Home Office say the illegal immigrants among these 66 could have been prosecuted for being in Britain illegally but point out that there is another procedure — “administrative removal” — which is

faster and cheaper than going through the courts. The News of the World did not report any convictions arising out of this exposé.

26

We believe that Mazher Mahmood should supply a list with the names of each of the individuals he told the Inquiry under oath have been the subject of SCPs. For the purposes of comparison, it would be helpful if this list was in a similar format to the one we have supplied. In addition, it would be useful to have the court where the case was heard and also the date of sentencing.

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With this information, the Inquiry would be in a position to ask the Metropolitan Police to carry out a PNC check to verify that all of the information supplied is accurate.

Alleged collusion in law-breaking

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In the course of our analysis we also discovered an article which suggests Mazher Mahmood may have concealed his relationship with one of the criminals he exposed. He may also have deliberately protected this individual from criminal prosecution.

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On 29 September 1996 the News of the World carried a story about a Bradford hairdresser who was bringing illegal immigrants into Britain on the Eurostar service from Paris using genuine passports doctored to match the foreign national's identity. An electronic copy of this article is attached as Exhibit 2.

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Mahmood reported that the hairdresser's gang bought the genuine passports from members of the city's Asian community who would later report the "loss" of the passport. Forgers would then alter the picture on the passport.

31

The gang found it difficult to buy enough genuine passports. The article states: "To help solve that problem the gang employ a local thug called Mehmood [sic], known as Jaws because he has gold teeth studded with diamonds." According to Mahmood, Jaws said: "I go out trying to buy genuine British passports issued to foreigners born here or settled here."

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The description of Jaws in this article is similar to the Jaws who became Mahmood's minder later on. In his book *Confessions of a Fake Sheikh*, at page 42, Mahmood states: " 'Jaws' was the name we gave Mahmood Qureshi, a second cousin of mine. Jaws was huge, and spent every day at the gym, so was a powerful looking man as well. He was from Bradford and had spent his early adult life committing a number of petty crimes in and around the area".

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If these two Jaws are one and the same person, then Mazher Mahmood needs to explain why, in the 1996 story, he changed Qureshi's name to 'Mehmood' and did not declare that he was his second cousin.

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Mazher Mahmood also needs to explain how Qureshi came to feature in this article. Was Qureshi already in the gang and, safe in the knowledge that Mahmood would protect him, happy to make money out of the illegal activity and pocket a News of the World fee from his second cousin?

35

In the 2005 libel action brought by one of the alleged gang involved in an attempt to kidnap Victoria Beckham, it was revealed that Qureshi's criminal convictions began in 1982 and did not end until 1999. Mazher Mahmood's 1996 fake passport story takes place as Qureshi is still criminally active.

36

Clearly, there is evidence that the Jaws in the 1996 story committed criminal acts. Why didn't Mahmood take his undercover material to the police so that they could investigate? After all, on the face of it, there was an excellent chance that Jaws could be prosecuted successfully, so adding to Mahmood's considerable tally.

37

In his book *Confessions of a Fake Sheik*, Mahmood makes it clear that his bodyguard Jaws was involved in many of his stories. Several of these came from Bradford including the undercover article about quail fighting in the city (exposé 14 March 1999, conviction 7 May 2000). Mahmood admits that Jaws brought this story to him.

38

There appears to be a disagreement between Mazher Mahmood and Mahmood Qureshi over the importance of the News of the World in the latter's life. In Confessions of a Fake Sheikh, at page 42, Mazher Mahmood claims that his decision to take Jaws on as his bodyguard changed Qureshi's life. Qureshi denied this when he gave evidence in the libel action brought against the News of the World by one of the gang alleged to have plotted the kidnap of Victoria Beckham.

39

This statement has been sent, as a matter of courtesy, to Mazher Mahmood and John Witherow at the Sunday Times.

I believe the facts stated in this statement are true.

Paddy French
2 May 2012

APPENDIX: SUCCESSFUL CRIMINAL PROSECUTIONS RESULTING FROM ARTICLES BY MAZHER MAHMOOD AS RECORDED IN THE NEWS OF THE WORLD

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The methodology was as follows: all articles written by or featuring Mazher Mahmood were examined.

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Between December 1991 and December 1995, physical copies of the News of the World were viewed on

microfilm. From January 1996 to July 2011, all News of the World articles on the Newsbank electronic database were analysed. The research took place at the British Library, Colindale, London.

42

The names of 52 individuals reported to have been convicted (including one where the name was with-held to protect a victim) are listed. 18 convictions where the names are not given are identified separately.

43

The date of the article where the conviction is reported, if available, is given. In all cases, the article refers to the conviction and not the original exposé.

1991

No convictions were reported.

1992

No convictions were reported.

1993

6 convictions were reported:

4 July: Terry Valvona & Rosemary Iredale

5 Sept: Norman Wardell

12 Dec: Syed Rizvi, Parghat Heer, Fahim Iqbal

1994

No convictions were reported.

1995

9 convictions were reported (including 5 unnamed):

17 Sept; Shafique & Salim Mumtaz, Iqbal Raja, Ghulam

Murtaza and 5 other unnamed individuals

1996

4 convictions were reported

17 March: Gordon Brown, Paul Garlick

24 March: Stephen Harvey

8 September: Kim Lises

1997

7 convictions were reported (including 3 unnamed)

10 Aug: Mohinder Singh

17 Aug: Bruce Allen, Jonathan Pickering and three others, unnamed

21 Dec: Brenda Tonnesson

1998

2 convictions were reported:

14 June: Iqbal Master

20 Dec: Clifford Davies

1999

4 convictions were reported:

9 May: John Alford

26 Sept: Earl Hardwicke, Stefan Thwaites

17 Oct: Johnnie Walker

2000

7 convictions were reported:

20 Feb: Dr Manohar Rangwani

28 May: Mohammed Khan

13 Aug: Mohammed Yousif

1 Oct: Gary Harris, David Weir, Barry Dickenson

Undated: Ishmail Pirbhai [not reported in 2000 but cited in final News of the World article in July 2011]

2001

No convictions were reported.

2002

3 convictions were reported (including 1 unnamed):

2 June: Shaheen Begolli

29 Sept: Antonio Russo + 1 unnamed

2003

5 convictions were reported:

6 July: Joseph Rivas, Luzum Balliu

14 Sept: Neil Montgomery

28 Sept: David Cheney, Sultan Merchant

2004

2 convictions were reported:

15 Feb: San Keung Yau, Keith Blasdale

2005

3 convictions were reported:

30 Jan: Niki Dimitrov

10 April: Agha Mohammed, Besnik Qema

2006

11 convictions were reported (including 9 unnamed):

23 July: Paul Singh, Adeola Magbagebeola and 9 others, unnamed.

2007

3 convictions were reported:

8 April: Rani & Joginder Kashyap

22 April: Name withheld to protect daughter [but counted as named for the purposes of this survey].

2008

2 convictions were reported:

26 Oct: Mohammed Kutubuddin

Undated: Gary Pennant [not reported in 2008 but cited in final News of the World article in July 2011]

2009

No convictions were reported.

2010

2 convictions were reported:

24 Jan: Suresh Kumar, Baldev Sidhu

2011

No convictions were reported.

EXHIBIT 1

LETTER TO MAZHER MAHMOOD, 8 March 2012

Mahzer Mahmood
The Sunday Times
1 Pennington Street
LONDON E1 9XN

8 March 2012

Dear Mahzer Mahmood

I am the editor of the investigative website RebeccaTelevision.Com.
My team are currently preparing a profile of your career.

I have emailed you via the Sunday Times online contact centre but I

have not received a reply.

In due course, I would like to film an interview with you and I will be in touch with you later on about arranging this.

In the meantime, I'd be very grateful if you would answer the following questions:

Successful criminal prosecutions

You have said in your 14 October 2011 statement to the Leveson Inquiry that NotW articles you've written have "led to 253 successful prosecutions".

When you gave evidence you said that the number had gone up to 261 with a further two in the pipeline. It's not clear whether these are NoW-related or follow your more recent work at the Sunday Times.

I'm sure that like any experienced investigative journalist you keep a detailed cuttings files as well as a record of all of these convictions. I would be grateful if you would furnish me with a list.

You'll appreciate that Peter Burden, in his book [2008 hardback edition, page 125], is suspicious that this figure has been inflated and I'd like to clear up the matter.

Moral-wrongdoing and hypocrisy

In your evidence to Leveson you said that public interest justified your work.

You broke this down into three elements: criminal actions, moral wrong-doing and hypocrisy.

Criminal actions I have already dealt with in the section on successful criminal prosecutions.

When it comes to moral-wrongdoing, I would like to ask you about a series of issues where most people would find your actions questionable.

The first of these is the manner in which you "shopped" friends of your parents, who were selling pirate copies of films, in order to sell a story to the the media. This is pretty well-documented, both in your book and Burden's and it is clear you feel comfortable with your actions.

To many people, and most journalists, this suggests that you are a man who will do literally anything to get the story. You do not seem to have any regrets or shame about causing your father, a journalist himself, such personal anguish. Is that still your position?

Your brother Waseem tells the story of what happened to his career in the wake of your Sunday Times article about moonlighting at BBC Pebble Mill.

You do not comment on this in your book so I'd be grateful to have your side of the story. Your brother, essentially, says your actions destroyed his career in the UK and he was forced to go abroad to rebuild it.

Confessions of a Fake Sheik

This book was published in 2008.

Was the book an attempt to improve the reputation of the News of the World after the Goodman / Mulcaire convictions?

Piers Morgan

In his book *The Insider* Piers Morgan talks about his period as editor of the News of the World in 1994-1995. There's no mention of you in his book.

Similarly, in *Confessions* you do not mention him.

Is there a reason for this?

"Jaws"

I have noted the various references to your second cousin in your book.

However, I have a cutting from the News of the World dated 29 September 1996 which also includes a man called "Jaws". The story was about a Bradford hairdresser called Talib Hussain who was paying British women to escort illegal immigrants into Britain via Eurostar using fake passports.

Although the name has been changed, this "Jaws" is clearly Mahmood Qureshi.

Your story includes the following paragraphs:

To help solve that problem the gang employ a local thug called Mehmood, known as Jaws because he has gold teeth studded with diamonds

Mehmood revealed: "I go out trying to buy genuine British passports issued to foreigners born here or settled here.

"People sell their passports for around Pounds 100 upwards, and when they want to travel abroad themselves in the future they can report them lost.

"By that time Hussain will have used their passports to bring in illegals."

As we left the salon he warned: "You better be serious about business, because Mr Hussain is not someone to cross.

"He's only got to make a phone call and he will get your legs broken, or get you run over by someone.

"You can't mess him about."

Can you tell me why you changed his name — and why you didn't declare he was related to you?

This story suggests that Jaws was not only an "editorial pimp" but also breaking the law. Why didn't you report him to the police?

Anonymity

I note that you were allowed to give your evidence to the Leveson Inquiry without being seen. Are there any legal reasons for this?

I look forward to hearing from you —my email address is
paddy.french1

Paddy French
Editor
RebeccaTelevision.Com

EXHIBIT 2

NEWS OF THE WORLD ARTICLE, 29 September 1996

This man will get migrants into Britain by hooker by crook - NOW
Investigation

News of the World (London, England)-September 29, 1996
Author: Mazher Mahmood

ESCORT boss Talib Hussain's hookers offer an extra personal
service-smuggling their punters into Britain as illegal immigrants.

For Pounds 3,000 a time the vice girls will meet a client on the
Continent, complete with fake passport, and bring him to London
posing as an English girlfriend.

They cruise in comfort on Eurostar trains and Hussain boasted:
"With the new Eurotunnel, getting illegals into Britain is child's play."

The tubby villain runs his slick operation from a hairdressing
salon called Fine Cuts in the picturesque village of Idle, on the
outskirts of Bradford, West Yorks. Last week Hussain, who claims to
have committed three murders back home in Pakistan, bragged:

`Every Tom, Dick and Harry is bringing illegals into the country,
but nobody will offer you the package that I can.

I have partners all over Europe. We arrange a genuine British
passport with your chap's photograph in and send an English girl over
to pretend to be his girlfriend. She will escort your man to Britain.

We can bring them in two or three at a time. Believe me, we've brought thousands of people into Britain.

Lorry

I could have a bloke here from anywhere in Europe in days. Just give me his photograph and I'll do the rest.

And I won't get him to hide in the back of a dirty old lorry, he'll come in style.'

He was right. On Friday our undercover reporter, who was posing as an illegal immigrant, was escorted to London from Paris on Eurostar by a pretty brunette called Julie Carr.

When she turned up on Thursday night Julie, 34, produced a neatly doctored passport.

She told our reporter: "Mr Talib has sorted this out for you.

"You'll be travelling back to London with me tomorrow. There will be no problem."

The passport, number L759679F, had been issued in Liverpool on September 24, 1987, to a 35-year-old man.

But our man's photograph had cleverly been transplanted in place of the genuine one and re-sealed with see-through plastic, leaving Home Office stamps intact.

Over dinner in Paris, the Bradford-born beauty told how she had agreed to help Hussain in his illegal venture.

She said: "He asked me to try and line up some prostitutes for him, as well as hard-up women who need a few quid.

"They get up to Pounds 500 per trip and can have a bit of a holiday and pick up some duty-frees. It's not like smuggling drugs or anything.

"You were going to get a 19-year-old hooker, so you could have got your leg over as well as a hand to get into Britain, but he is sending her to bring someone else in."

On Friday morning the courier led our man aboard the 10.19 Eurostar train from Gare du Nord .

Julie suggested: "Just go to sleep and I'll wake you up in London. Don't talk, leave it all to me. They normally don't even check, but if they do I'll say you are my boyfriend." Twenty minutes into the journey a young pony tailed immigration officer made his way along the carriage.

Julie handed him both passports. The official glanced casually and handed them back.

As the train pulled into Waterloo, Julie nudged our man and said: "Welcome to London, your new home."

Another 78 men are scattered in houses around the French capital awaiting their turn in the queue to head to Britain.

They are lined up by Hussain's partner, Bradford minicab driver Mohammed Azhar, who roams Europe looking for punters.

Azhar said: "Getting girls is no problem. There are so many who will do it. The problem is getting enough passports."

To help solve that problem the gang employ a local thug called Mehmood, known as Jaws because he has gold teeth studded with diamonds

Mehmood revealed: "I go out trying to buy genuine British passports issued to foreigners born here or settled here.

"People sell their passports for around Pounds 100 upwards, and when they want to travel abroad themselves in the future they can report them lost.

"By that time Hussain will have used their passports to bring in illegals."

As we left the salon he warned: "You better be serious about business, because Mr Hussain is not someone to cross.

"He's only got to make a phone call and he will get your legs broken, or get you run over by someone.

"You can't mess him about."

Oh yes we can. Our dossier on Hussain's nasty scam is available to the Home FACT FILE * LAST year the Home Office detected 10,381 illegal entrants and a spokesman admitted: "We know this is the tip of the iceberg."

* It is estimated there are at least 750,000 illegal immigrants in London alone.

* Out of 43,000 claims for political asylum last year, 96 per cent were found to be bogus.

* Each deportation of an alien is estimated to cost Pounds 6,000 and can reach Pounds 30,000 if asylum is claimed.

Section: Home newsPage: 29
Index Terms: ImmigrantsRecord Number: 970145902(c) News Group Newspapers Limited 1996, 2003

http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/UKNB/0F933F29D1DA67E4/0F8BFF68D3921800?p_multi=LNWB&s_lang=en-US

ENDS