

'Assessing the Impact: the Zahid Mubarek Inquiry

– Five years on'

Zahid Mubarek was murdered by his racist cell-mate in Feltham Young Offender Institution in March 2000, and after considerable pressure, the then Government ordered a public inquiry into his death, chaired by Lord Keith. The Inquiry, which reported in June 2006, made 88 recommendations. Prompted by shared interests across the Faculty of Law and Institute of Criminology in developments, the Centre for Public Law sponsored a one-day conference to assess the impact of this inquiry, which took place on 30 June 2011. It was attended by about 70 people: family of Zahid Mubarek, people who work in prisons and for the National Offender Management Service, lawyers, academics, members of various NGOs, and others and Independent Monitoring Board members (IMBs).

The first session heard three speakers Imtiaz Amin, Zahid's uncle, Chief Executive Officer of the *Zahid Mubarek* Trust and lead campaigner for the family's right to a public inquiry, Bobby Cummines, OBE, FRSA, who had been expert adviser to Lord Keith's Inquiry into the murder, and Chief Executive of UNLOCK, and Dexter Dias QC who had been counsel to the Mubarek family at that public inquiry. They powerfully reminded the conference of the personal context of the Inquiry, and made some acute observations about the failure to respond to previous inquiries (the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry and the Coonan Inquiry included), as well as raising challenging questions about the failure to implement the Mubarek Inquiry Report's recommendations.

Next Dr Coretta Phillips (Senior Lecturer at the LSE) presented her current research into relationships between prisoners of different ethnicities, based on observations and interviews in two prisons. Although she showed how local 'postcode' identities could supersede ethnic identity (especially amongst young people), she discussed important perceptions of racism and the unintended consequences of certain policies. Phil Copple presented a view from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). He presented a frank analysis of what has been achieved, and what has still to be done in terms of safer prisons and race equality. He identified the significant increase in the BME prison population in the last 10 years, and was far from complacent in outlining challenges for the future. Finally Dame Anne Owers (former HM Chief Inspector of Prisons) presented a personal vision of the distance travelled in terms of improvements in dealing with race matters, and the distance still to go, focusing on such issues as cell sharing, dynamic relations, mental health and socio-cultural awareness. She argued that we need 'not-prison' places as well as prison places; that is, we need to give more attention to provision for offenders in the community. She also pointed out some of the consequences of disinvestment in the criminal justice system (because of the need to reduce costs) where it means that specialist knowledge and expertise in regard to race issues are lost. In sum, she argued that whilst there have been positive developments in regards to dealing with race issues, it would be a huge mistake to think that we had somehow 'got there'.

Each session provoked a lively debate, which continued over an excellent buffet. The event was impressively organized by Felicity Eves, to whom we are most grateful.

Nicky Padfield & Loraine Gelsthorpe

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