Jacques Pauw

“A favourite form of entertainment was looking out for the weird scumbags, murderers or torturers whom Jacques Pauw brought to the office. He had a remarkable talent for getting these people to confess their evil deeds to him for publication. More policemen and soldiers spilled the beans to Jacque than to the Truth Commission years later.” – Max du Preez, Pale Native

1. Biographical information

Jacques Pauw is a South African investigative journalist who became famous after breaking the story about the "apartheid death squad" at Vlakplaas with its operations under the command of Dirk Coetzee and later commander Eugene de Kock (eventually convicted and sentenced to six life sentences).

Pauw started his journalist career in 1984 at Rapport. After the resignation of editor Willem de Klerk (due to his political leanings) in 1987, Pauw left the paper and got offered a job at Huisgenoot.

In 1988 Pauw was a co-founder and assistant editor of the Vrye Weekblad (a progressive, Afrikaans anti-apartheid national weekly newspaper), where he achieved international acclaim after exposing the apartheid death squad in November 1989. (He worked with editor Max du Preez.)

The inside story of the death squad story as told by Du Preez in Pale Native

Pauw “wanted to be a real news reporter and do investigations” writes Du Preez, and Pauw became the core of the Vrye Weekblad news team. Pauw and Du Preez co-wrote the first edition of Vrye Week Blad’s front page story, with the lead headline reading “Mandela: ‘n Nuwe Era” (Mandela: A New Era).

During his time at the Vrye Weekblad Pauw wrote a story about P.W. Botha having lunch with a mafia boss, Vito Palazzolo, based on an affidavit that an accountant had made to the Harms Commission of Inquiry. Botha sued for defamation and demanded R 100 000.

Du Preez writes: “...on 17 November 1989, Vrye Weekblad published the most important story in its existence.’ “Bloedspoor van die SAP” (The SAP’s trail of blood) in which Captain Coetzee (commander of the death squad) told “the full gruesome story of political assassinations, poisoned cocktails, bomb attacks and a letter bombs...the biggest story to break in South African journalism in many years, if not decades.”

Pauw’s main character that led him into and throughout the death squad story was commander Dirk Coetzee. The paper arranged to get Coetzee out of the country for his own safety/security. Jacques took a flight with Coetzee to Mauritius, from which Coetzee was to leave for England to meet the then ANC Chief of Intelligence Jacob Zuma, for protection. In Mauritius Pauw spent weeks tape-recording Coetzee’s confession. The Weekly Mail first published a story on
the death squads, a confession from Almond Nofemela – who was hung a day later for the killing of a farmer. In Nofemel’s statement Coetzee’s ‘cover was blown. As a result, the story had to be pushed to an earlier publishing date than planned. The story ran on November 17 1989, and was seven pages long – names and all. Du Preez states that Pauw later told him that he had serious doubts about this story, not only because of it was dangerous to publish, but because he was having second thoughts about helping an apartheid assassin escape justice in South Africa. Coetzee’s famous quote “Ek was in die hart van die hoer” (I was in the heart of the whore) became the title of his later book on the topic.

After the story broke, many more confessions and statements from policemen came in, mostly because of what Du Preez attributed to the trust relationship that Jacque had with sources, and because “as white Afrikaner men, Jacques and I (du Preez) understood where these people came from and what made them do what they did.” Vlakplas under new commander Eugene de Kock continued several years after Coetzee’s confession, as Judge Harms (appointed to head a commission of inquiry) found Coetzee to be a lair. There were also three assassination attempts on Coetzee’s life while he was in England, and he had to move houses 38 times, and was once even protected by Scotland Yard.

It was not all smooth sailing for the news team either. Du Preez describes how they were constantly being watched and followed by security police and others, their phones were tapped, and in one instance they were involved in a car chase. Du Preez describes one night when only he and Pauw was left in the office, and they received a phone call from someone warning them that two members of the right-wing group Church of the Creator were on their way to come and kill them. Minutes later they heard banging on the door, and frantically tried to hide in cupboards and under desks. But being cornered, and with the men knowing they are in the office, they ended up opening the door to their potential killers in the hopes of talking the men out of going through with it. The men, however, each arrived with an attaché bag containing a bible and pistol… and ended up making a clear warning to Pauw and Du Preez that they would end up dead if they kept on doing what they were doing.

(Pauw spent another five years investigating state-sponsored death squads, and his reporting contributed to the prosecution of the death squads’ commander. Vrye Weekblad declared bankruptcy in 1994 due to the costs of legal battles.)

After a short time at The Star and Sunday Star as the chief investigations reporter, Pauw in 1993 joined the SABC as a documentary filmmaker.

In 1996, Pauw was a founder member of the SABC’s Truth Commission Special Report and in 1998 he was a founder member of SABC’s current affairs programme Special Assignment. (The Truth Commission Special Report was a weekly, hour-long documentary-style programme on testimony before and issues surrounding the TRC.)

The first screening/broadcast of Special Assignment was in August 1998, a collaboration between Pauw, Du Preez & Anneliese Burgess.
In 1999 Pauw became the executive producer of Special Assignment, a position he held until 2007.

In June 2009 Pauw was appointed as the Director of the Wits Justice Project, but shortly afterwards left to join Media24 as an investigative reporter. (The Wits Justice Project is an experiment in teaching reporting through the investigation of the plight of those locked up unjustly in South Africa’s prisons).

Pauw has reported on wars and civil conflicts in Algeria, Burundi, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Sudan. He also made documentaries about the Rwandan Genocide, the War in Darfur and the police death squads in South Africa under apartheid.

Pauw is a member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), an exclusive association of the world’s best investigative journalists.

2. Bibliography

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2. Into the heart of darkness: Confessions of apartheid’s assassins (1997)
4. Little Ice Cream Boy (2009)

**Pauw’s thoughts on fiction and non-fiction:**

“I have never considered myself to be an ‘author’. I am a journalist who happened to write a work of fiction. And I’m endlessly curious about the man; curious about prisons,” said Pauw about his fiction work *Little Ice Cream Boy*.

Pauw took the fiction route with *Little Ice Cream Boy*, a novel based on the life of convicted assassin, gangster and drug dealer Ferdi Barnard. He did this because Barnard said he’d come after Pauw if he writes it as a straightforward biography. Interestingly, despite this, when Barnard married Betsy de Ridder in jail, he asked Pauw and the infamous killer Eugene de Kok to be his best men. [‘Correctional Services said no, but Pauw made a Carte Blanche documentary about the wedding.’ – Books Live]

3. Awards and Recognitions

Jacques Pauw’s work both locally and internationally received acclaim and several awards.

- In 2007 he received the Nat Nakasa Award for Integrity and Bravery in Journalism from the South African National Editors’ Forum, Print Media South Africa and the Nieman Society of South Africa. (Other winners of this award are Alf Kumalo, Guy Berger, Max du Preez, Greg Marinovich, Debbie Yazbek, Mathatha Tsedu.)
- The Young African Leadership Award.
- Premo Ilaria Alpi Award, Italy’s television award (2000);
• Pauw also received the 2001 ICJ (International Consortium of Investigative Journalists) Award for The Bishop of Shyogwe, a documentary that exposed the secret hideout of bishop Samuel Musabyimana, who was wanted on genocide charges in Rwanda.

• 2 NTVA AVANTI Craft Awards
• Twice won the CNN’s African Journalist of the Year (2000 & 2001), the first time for General News - TV. Jacques Pauw, SABC & Adil Bradlow, for Children of War (2000). Pauw also won a sub-category of the CNN competition in 2006.
• Won the Vodacom Journalist of the Year Award in South Africa (2004) for a documentary Mainline that investigates drug running in Southern and East Africa.
• John Manyarara Investigative Award from MISA (2004).
• The Award for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting;
• The Media Institute of Southern Africa’s Award for Investigative Journalism;
• Pauw’s Truth Commission Special Report work for the SABC won him the International Foreign Correspondent Award.

4. Extract
The following extracts are from Dances with Devils by Jacques Pauw
[This story about the exposé of the East African drug route]

Koekemoer, aka Stellianos (p259)

Alex Stellianos was sold to me as a grubby and mangy character who mingled with the underworld and was embroiled in the whore business. He’d been a confidential police informant at some stage, was some kind of private eye and spoke Portuguese, which made him the ideal operator for Mozambique. A friend suggested that I should meet Alex and find out if he could help me finish the story about human trafficking in Mozambique. Alpheus was gone and only half the programme had been done.

‘He sounds perfect,’ I said.
‘And by the way,’ my friend added, ‘the little finger on his right hand is missing.’
‘What happened to the finger?’ I wanted to know.
‘Rumour has it that it was cut off by a drug cartel in South America in order to test his allegiance,’ said the friend.
‘What was he doing in South America?’
‘Infiltrating cartels for the Americans,’ she said. ‘He was apparently very good.’

An African drug safari (p271)

It was a gleeful Alex Stellianos who pulled the small Sony camcorder from his grey bag and disentangled the mesh of red, black and white wire, his nine fingers trembling.
‘You will not believe it! Un-fucking-believable!’ he crowed. A flame illuminated his lined face as he lit a cigarette.
‘Believe what?’
‘Fucking watch this,’ he said, as he pushed the ‘play button and the black screen flickered. A pair of denim-clad legs and white sneakers walked in front of Alex up a flight of grimy and dimly lit stairs. I knew by then it was Jimmy, a young drug addict and housebreaker we had hired in order to gain access to the notorious crack and heroin houses of Maputo’s Little Colombia. He knocked on the door. It slowly creaked open. The unkempt and spotted face of a white woman peeked through the bars or a steel gate. ‘Hi lá, Mamma!’ said Jimmy. She recognised him, unlocked the gate and embraced him. He was clearly a regular client… Alex said the woman was sloppy and he felt repelled when she embraced him, too. She pressed her thickset frame against his body and the hidden camera was momentarily blinded as she blocked the lens… While many preferred to spike – inject the narcotic into their veins – Jimmy chased the dragon, as addicts call the art of smoking heroin. He sprinkled the brown powder on a piece of tinfoil and lit a coal of tightly rolled toilet paper. He held this underneath the foil until wisps of smoke began drifting upwards… Our drug investigation had started two weeks earlier, when I asked Alex: ‘How are we going to get into Little Colombia?’ ‘Jimmy. We’re going to use Jimmy.’ ‘Who’s he?’ ‘A criminal. A housebreaker. Also uses drugs. Smokes anything. Knows Little Colombia well.’

A French kiss in paradise (p293)

‘I’ve found them!’ Alex announced triumphantly. ‘And they are willing to see us. But we have to leave right away.’ It was a Sunday morning at the Café Costa do Sol in Maputo. Across Avenida Marginal, craftsmen displayed their wooden carvings on the pavement, beach boys erected volleyball nets on the beach and a fisherman with a basket of coral fish strapped to his bicycle pedalled his way to the market. Further down the road, vendors set up stalls for the day while street chefs lit charcoal fires to roast flattened chickens that had been soaking for hours in a fiery marinade of olive oil, chilli, garlic and lemon juice. We had returned from Tanzania the day before to start the final leg of our drug investigation. So far, we had achieved virtually everything we had set out to do tow months earlier when we set up camp in a Maputo apartment. Alex had made contact with twelve drug dealers in Maputo, Pemba and Dar es Salaam. He had filmed them, their merchandise, homes and women. We had countless pieces of paper on which they had scribbled prices and quantities and descriptions of the drugs they had on offer. Each time Alex returned from a rendezvous and pulled the Sony camcorder from his grey sling bag, there were some anxious moments. On several occasions our apprehension turned to despair when he pushed the ‘play’ button and we saw either an overexposed white screen or and underexposed black picture in which nothing and no one was discernible.

Marauding miscreants in blue (p318)
At the end of 2003, following our exposure of the Heroin drug route from Afghanistan to East Africa, Alex had a yen to go back into law enforcement. When his contract with me expired, he wanted nothing less than to be a Scorpion – one of South Africa’s so-called super cops!
The Scorpions were eager to bust drug syndicates and expand their investigations beyond South Africa’s borders. Alex had names and numbers. I brokered a meeting between him and senior Scorpion officials, who agreed to employ him to find and bust a drug syndicate in Johannesburg. If successful, they said, they would offer him a longer contract.
I was sceptical from the outset. I had never had a happy relationship with the police, but it transpired that they held Alex Stellianos in such low esteem that they would seemingly go to any lengths to discredit him.
Among the Scorpions in charge of Alex’s trail operation were two of the agents who blundered the arrest of Rwandan génocidaire Bishop Samuel Musabyimana. Alex’s handler was a whiskey-nosed buffoon whose office desk seemed to be in the bar of the Ellis Park Hotel…
Within days, he had infiltrated two Nigerian drug syndicates in Hillbrow. All his meetings were recorded on spy cameras. One of the syndicates operated from a pawnshop and wanted Alex to fly to Brazil to pick up a consignment of cocaine. Before long the second syndicate also tried to recruit Alex as a drug courier. Alex thought this terribly important, as it might indicate the influx of Colombian drug cartels to our shores.
The Scorpions thought differently. Despite two intelligence reports detailing his meetings with the syndicates, five spy camera types and names, and telephone and car registration numbers, his handlers said the information was useless and fired him without payment.
After just a month as a Scorpion, Alex was back at Special Assignment. I gave him a contract to continue infiltrating the drug rings. Then, in an act of incredible deviousness and without telling Alex, the Scorpions raided one of the syndicates. Of course they didn’t find drugs – but that didn’t seem to be their main purpose. They wanted to set Alex up. They told the Nigerians they were actually looking for a middle-aged white man with grey hair who visited them every day. The description could only have fitted Alex.
When he walked through into the shop later the same day, the Nigerians slammed the door behind him, surrounded him and accused him of being and informer. All the while the spy camera was rolling. The footage was a see-saw of black and white and voices hurling abuse at one another before the door opened and Alex stumbled back onto the pavement.
I phoned one of the Scorpions. ‘You could have killed Alex!’ I said. ‘How could you?’
‘We were merely verifying his information,’ was the ludicrous response.
He launched into a stream of abuse. ‘We refuse to work with such a sleaze-ball! Do you know who this man is?’
‘Who do you get to infiltrate drug syndicates?’ I asked him. ‘Sunday school teachers and nun?’
Pappy and Captain Cut-Hand (p199)

Hard as it may be to fathom, on of modern Africa’s most bloodcurdling mortals had once been a wedding photographer. He was also the an illiterate, pot-bellied geriatric who chose a former hairdresser and nightclub dancer to command his army of child soldiers, who hacked and mutilated thousands of people in the name of freedom.

The erstwhile photographer and lowly army corporal adopted the title of Chairman Pappy, while the hairstylist chose the nom de guerre of General Mosquito. Together they headed a West Africa rebel movement called the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and transformed it into a cult. Pappy achieved almost messianic eminence, with followers worshipping him like a god and engaging in occult practices that reportedly included the drinking of blood and eating of human flesh.

When the RUF embarked on a campaign to prevent their Sierra Leonean countrymen from casting ballots in a 1999 election, Mosquito announced on BBC World the commencement of Operation No Living Thing, in which every entity ‘down to the last chicken’ was to be killed.

Jungle bases spewed forth commanders with names like Colonel Blood-shed and Colonel Doom. At their disposal was an army of mostly abducted teenagers and children, forced at gunpoint to hate or slay loved ones before being dragged into the bush and perverted into killers. The children, emulating their commanders, gave themselves names such as Captain Cut-hand and Corporal Carnage and formed what became known as the Small Boys’ Unit. Captain Cut-Hand was only eleven years old when he emerged from the bush clutching a Kalashnikov assault rifle in one hand and an axe in the other. As the boys prepared for battle, commanders wired them by rubbing cocaine, amphetamines and gunpowder into incision on their arms and faces. The RUF’s war cry was Hungry Lion, and the little children threw themselves around shouting Pappy, our Leader, our Hungry Lion while clawing at the air. With red bandannas bound around their heads, they were ordered to amputate as many limbs as they humanly could. A message had to be sent. Voters without legs couldn’t walk to polling booths and those without hands could not cast ballots.

On Tuesday morning in January 1999, a Small Boy’s Unit and their adult commanders arrived at the hoe of L Hansana Sessay, a fifty-year-old father of five. They wore women’s wigs, Ray-Ban sunglasses and necklaces made of machine-gun bullets. Most had guns, while one boy carried an axe. ‘Where’s your money, Pa?’ they asked him. He gave them everything he had. They ordered him and his family to line up in the street outside. As the family prayed and pleaded, the boys laid L Hansana and his three-year-old daughter out on their stomachs on the broken tar. A boy lifted a crude axe high into the air and slammed it down through the bones of the child’s arm. Her hand seemed to jump away from her body. The hacked off her father’s hands as well. With blood gushing from his wounds, L Hansana ran after the boys. ‘Kill me! Please, gentlemen, kill me! Don’t leave me like this!’ One of the older boys turned around and smashed his rifle butt into L Hansana’s face, crashing his front teeth and breaking his jaw.
Unlike Rwandan genocide, some of the barbarity of Operation No Living Thing took place in the full glare of the international spotlight, due to the presence of incredibly brave journalists and one Sierra Leonean cameraman in particular, who never stopped rolling film amid the mayhem. Thousands of corpses rotted in the streets and rolled into the Atlantic surf that washed Freetown’s pristine white beaches. In the countryside, vultures hopped from one body to the next, pecking and tearing at flesh. Thousands of survivors – like Lansana Sessay and his family – were condemned to a life of begging or dumped in an amputee village of white and blue canvas shelters.

As the grotesque acts of violence were briefly elevated to the world’s front pages and CNN splashed the bloodshed in Freetown, two new names were added to the list of the world human beings on earth. The first was that of Foday Saybana Sankoh, the man who called himself Pappy and headed the RUF. The second was that of his army chief of staff, General Sam ‘Mosquito’ Bockarie, who unleashed terror of the Small Boys on the civilian population of Sierra Leone… (p200)

5. Doing what Pauw does

{Pauw’s writing style and techniques are discussed in the slideshow “Presentation – Pauw’s writing”}
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