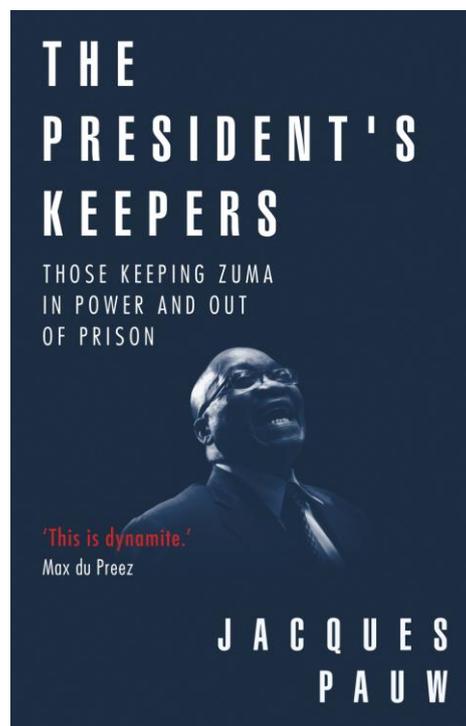


# BORDERS

## GLOBAL INTERVIEW WITH GILL MOODIE

### Gill Moodie



## PREAMBLE

Kristenn Einarsson, Chair of the Freedom to Publish Committee at the International Publishers Association (IPA), used these words to introduce *The Growing Threat of Self-Censorship*, the panel he moderated at the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the IPA African Seminar Series held in Nairobi, Kenya, June 14<sup>th</sup> – June 15<sup>th</sup> 2019. The panel which I missed but recorded was a brigade of stalwarts in the movement to protect the freedom to publish: Einarsson is President of the Bjornson Academy of Literature and Freedom of Expression; Sihem Bensedrine is

*“The heartbeat of publishing is to publish all that we feel that we are entitled to publish and it implies the willingness to challenge established boundaries in society concerning the freedom to publish. In IPA we have seen that censorship is a threat to publishing in many countries and self-censorship also due to pressure from government and interest groups who try to influence what is published”.*

**Kristenn Einarsson** (Norway),  
Chair, Freedom to Publish Committee, IPA;  
President, Bjornson Academy for Literature & Freedom of Expression  
[Panel: *The Growing Threat of Self-censorship*]  
IPA Nairobi Seminar, June 2019 on which Gill Moodie participated as publisher of *The President's Keepers* by Jacques Pauw.

President of the Truth and Dignity Commission in Tunisia; Khanya Mncwabe is Centre Coordinator for PEN, South Africa. The panel boasted world famous political cartoonist from Tanzania, Gado Mwampembwa and Dr. Tom Odhiambo, renowned Kenyan scholar of literature. Also participating was Gill Moodie of NB Publishers, South Africa, publisher of *The President's Keepers*, the controversial exposé of the corruption scandal besieging former South African President, Jacob Zuma .

*The President's Keepers* is a runaway best seller; the second biggest selling book in the history of South Africa. After the seminar, I met with commissioning editor, Gill Moodie, to talk about the publishing phenomenon pulled off with style and drama by the book's author Jacques Pauw, the book's publishers, NB, the brave booksellers and the thousands of readers who bought the book in solidarity.

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### **Tell us a little about your background and how you found your way into publishing.**

I worked in England at the beginning of my career and I worked at the Guinness Book of Records. It wasn't at all like traditional publishing. It's a very unusual project and company. Then I moved back to South Africa and became a journalist for 18 years. Then the industry went into contraction. Newspapers are in a really bad way. Then I saw a job advertised at NB Publishers. I've been here now for about 4 years.

### **Are you originally English?**

No! I'm South African but after the 1994 elections, South Africa got back into the Commonwealth and for a while there was a program called Commonwealth Visas. England let young South Africans come to the UK for work experience.

### **Let's go back to your work with the unique Guinness Book of Records. Was the experience useful?**

Oh, yes! It was an amazing company. They are very good at thinking about the reader. They used to drum it into our heads that the reader is a 12 year old boy; his mother buys the book; his father reads it. So think of mum when you do the cover; for everything inside, think of Dad and the little boy. That is a remarkable marketing message: extremely honed.

### **And very useful for you as a commissioning editor at NB Publishers – National Books. According to the cover letter to your catalogue, NB is the biggest trade publisher in South Africa. How many imprints do you have?**

We have 7: Tafelberg which means Table Mountain, Kwela, Human & Rousseau, Queillerie, Pharos, Best Books and Lux Verbi.

## How did you merit this attribution?

Ok. So, we don't import books at all. We make local books and produce about 350 a year which is one a day. No-one makes as many books in South Africa and we have the biggest revenue and the most people.

**So this is an official statistic? That you have the biggest revenue? It must be great to work for such a successful venture! I know NB recently won the American Association of Publishers Freedom to Publish prize for Jacques Pauw's book, *The President's Keepers* published by the Tafelberg imprint.**

*Talk to us about the book's position on the Jacob Zuma corruption question.*

Well, it's not a question. (Laughter). South Africa has a long tradition of very independent media. Zuma is being prosecuted for corruption on charges going back to a multi-million rand arms deal, fifteen years ago. The idea for the book was very clear. Jacques had the title from the very beginning and the sub-title: Those keeping Zuma in Power and out of Prison. Jacob Zuma is a part of it but what Jacques was most interested in was the cover-up by perverting law-enforcement agencies. We have had a succession of people he has appointed at the top of our agencies who would not prosecute him for corruption over this arms deal which goes back to when he was Deputy-President.



## **Give us a little of the history behind the scandal.**

After 1994, the elections, there was a famous corruption trial – it's quite hard to convict people of corruption- involving a confidant of Jacob Zuma, an old comrade in the Struggle. He was convicted of taking bribes from British and Swedish arms dealers and manufacturers and the person he was paying the bribes to was Jacob Zuma. So, if the corrupter was being convicted, why was Jacob Zuma not being prosecuted? That's the history.

## **How did Jacques Pauw try to solve the mystery?**

He looked at what was happening within the Police, the Intelligence communities and then at the Tax Revenue service. There was someone there, at the Tax Revenue service, who was a close friend of Jacob Zuma who wouldn't look closely into Zuma's tax affairs. That wasn't a bad thing because it was Jacob Zuma: it was bad because it was perverting this incredibly important institution. Jacques found evidence that an old friend of Zuma, a very rich business man, was paying him a salary while he was President. It was declared in his taxes. Jacob Zuma didn't declare it. The business man declared it. Zuma didn't know. And generally there was a lot of information in the tax realm that was proof of things going on.



*Jacques Pauw signing autographs in the dark after a sudden and suspicious power outage at the book launch.*

**What risks did NB Publishers run by publishing this kind of content? I know for instance that the book's code name during production was *The Peacock's Keepers*.**

Well, we had to break a few laws.

**You were so daring! (Laughter)**

They were Apartheid era laws but they still stand. We broke the laws on confidentiality, classified information law. We argued that we were doing it in the public's interest and that the country needs to know about the President's tax affairs and why he has been trying to cover it up. The public also needs to know what is happening to our prosecution authority and how it is being undermined.

**Tell us about Jacques Pauw himself, the author of *The President's Keepers*. What are his credentials for writing this kind of book?**

He is one of the country's premier investigative journalists. In the Apartheid era, in the 1980s, he was a founding member of an alternative investigative newspaper, an Afrikaans newspaper. He broke a huge story about an Apartheid death squad. Someone who was police intelligence, Eugene de Kock, was convicted of crimes. His death squads dragged black people off the streets and coerced people to become informers. A very bad guy. There were rogue elements in the squads and enormous cruelty. They would have big barbecue parties to celebrate, after their killings. Jacques' story was the first proof that there were death squads sanctioned by the state. It was huge.



*Jacques Pauw talking to the audience in the auditorium of a Johannesburg shopping mall. There were far too many people to fit into a bookshop.*

**So he has the credentials, the street cred!**

Oh, yes. He may have an Afrikaans background but he is absolutely independent.

**I hear *The President's Keepers* has sold more than 200,000 copies in electronic and print editions and it's one of the biggest selling books in South African history. Congratulations.**



*Boxes of the controversial exposé, *The President's Keepers*, marked EMBARGO by the publishers.*

Thank you. It became the fastest selling book in South African history only since 2009 when Nielsen started to measure book sales. Perhaps some books sold more before that - we don't know. Before that each individual publishing house kept its own data.

**So, Nielsen Book Research International started measuring data for the South**

**African book industry in 2009. That's a good decade of proof of the value of Nielsen's systems. I hope other African countries follow suit.**

*Talk to us now about publicity around the sales of *The President's Keepers* and about any drama around the sales.*

The book is a once in a lifetime book. I say once in a lifetime despite the fact that Jacques will write many more books; and despite the fact that NB Publishers are still actively seeking out investigative journalists. Let me explain: there was a confluence of very strange events around the time Jacques book came out. The head of our own version of the FBI issued a Cease and Desist order – a legal letter saying we must take the books off the shelves because they contained classified information. The bookshops refused and stood by us as the publishers of *The President's Keepers*. They said the book is out. If it's out, it's out. The bureau chief was using intimidation tactics, testing to see if they would work because you actually can't do that in South Africa today. We have enshrined freedom of speech. He hoped the booksellers would get nervous and put the books back in their boxes.

Well, because of all the intimidation, someone pirated the book (off Amazon, I think) and released a pdf version into the wild telling the world that the government was trying to ban the book. So we put out a statement via social media, Twitter especially, to say that the book isn't banned and do please try to support the author. We didn't want to wave a big stick at anyone though. It was a nightmare for us as the publishers but it was very well intentioned. And then Jacques put a post on social media which changed everything. He said, if you can't afford to buy the book, read the pirated copy but if you can, please buy it. It shifted everything. People started buying the e-book and putting pictures of themselves on social media saying, "*I bought the book*", "*I downloaded the book*".

**What solidarity! Did you shed tears? It's such a lovely story.**

It was very heartening. We were constantly barraged by government so it kept us going. It also really helped Jacques. Everyone wanted a piece of him. Everyone wanted to interview him. We went on a book tour and hired bodyguards. There was one heart-stopping moment at the big Johannesburg launch –

**Where is NB based?**

Cape Town. The publishing industry is mostly based in Cape Town but Joburg is where all the action is so we had the big launch there. We held it in the auditorium of a shopping centre because the bookshops couldn't contain the crowds. And then suddenly the power went out. Just like that. Jacques was talking to Peter Vrees, a veteran newspaper editor. I thought someone was going to do something bad to them. The bodyguards jumped up and formed a human chain around the two of them. The lights never came back on but everyone stayed. Jacques signed books in the dark for over two hours. It was the book launch of book launches.

**It must have been a pivotal moment in your life too as a publisher.**

Yes, it was. That's why it's a once in a lifetime book. A very unique experience. The book became a protest movement. It isn't only NB: all the publishers in South Africa are actively commissioning books that speak truth to power. We don't just wait for the journalists to come to us; we look into an area and find a good author to write about it.

**But Jacques Pauw was writing *The President's Keepers* before you met, wasn't he? I read something about you and your boss going to see him because you liked the project and then taking it on.**

Yes, that's right. Jacques is also the kind of person who would never be commissioned to write anyway. He is such an independent person. He would say, '*No, I have my own ideas!*'

**Is the public responding to the protest movement in the publishing industry?**

Yes, South Africans are definitely responding. They're enjoying reading non-fiction about politics.

**How did you feel when you were shortlisted for the 2019 IPA Prix Voltaire? It's a prestigious Freedom to Publish award.**

We were quite stunned! The book was a big deal in South Africa but we didn't sell the foreign rights. We were humbled and amazed that anyone outside the country took notice.

**The Prix Voltaire is a nomination process so the book must have been considered very worthy.**

We are such an insular country with a strange history and it's a big economy. We do tend to look inwards. So when someone outside takes notice, we go, wow, thank you so much! We also got the American award which is \$10,000. My CEO is looking to donate it to an NGO that focuses on freedom of speech.

**Finally, Africa Rising. Give me your main takeaways from the IPA Nairobi seminar.**

It's always interesting to pause from your daily life, get out of the office and meet your peers from other countries. It's interesting to see where we have similarities and where we don't. It's especially interesting for South Africans because for a long time we weren't properly part of things. For me, publishing in indigenous languages is a very interesting take away from the seminar. It's huge in South Africa, something we talk about and think about a lot. It's very interesting to see how important it is across Africa and to see the interesting things people are doing like the Jalada Collective's multi-media translation project.

What I will definitely take home to publishers is news about how much support there is for the industry. This African Publishing Innovation Challenge Fund! To support something innovative that can be scaled up. How interesting is that!

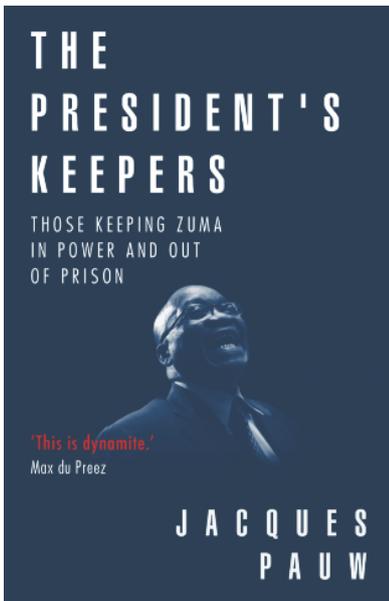
And then the privilege of listening to Ngugi wa Thiong'o. I'm going back with lots of ideas, things we can do with our books that have been successful. The ones with the right hip content that are published in English and Afrikaans; let's see about translating the ones that have sold well into Zulu. I've already got an idea for one book by a young, hip black guy. It sold about 7,000 copies. He has very edgy views on all sorts of things like black identity. That would be a perfect experiment in Zulu.

**Gill Moodie, thank you for coming on Borders.**



*Author, Jacques Pauw*

Journalist and author Jacques Pauw was a founder member of the anti-apartheid Afrikaans newspaper *Vrye Weekblad* in the late 1980s, where he exposed the Vlakplaas police death squads. He worked for some of the country's most esteemed publications before becoming a documentary filmmaker, producing documentaries on wars and conflicts in Rwanda, Burundi, Algeria, Liberia, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone, among other countries. When he left journalism in 2014, he was the head of investigations at Media24 newspapers. He has won the CNN African Journalist of the Year Award twice, the Daniel Pearl Award for Outstanding International Investigative Reporting in the US, Italy's Ilaria Alpi and the Nat Nakasa award for bravery and integrity in journalism. He is the author of five books: four nonfiction and one fiction. They are *In the Heart of Whore*, *Into the Heart of Darkness*, *Dances with Devils*, *Rat Roads* and *Little Ice Cream Boy*. Three of his books have been shortlisted for major literary awards.



**Blurb on back cover of The President's Keepers:**

Investigative journalist Jacques Pauw exposes the darkest secret at the heart of Jacob Zuma's compromised government: a cancerous cabal that eliminates the president's enemies and purges the law-enforcement agencies of good men and women.

As Zuma fights for his political life following the 2017 Gupta emails leak, this cabal the president's keepers ensures that after years of ruinous rule, he remains in power and out of prison. But is Zuma the puppet master, or their puppet?

Journey with Pauw as he explores the shadow mafia state. From KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape to the corridors of power in Pretoria and Johannesburg and even to clandestine meetings in Russia. It's a trail of lies and spies, cronies, cash and kingmakers as Pauw prises open the web of deceit that surrounds the fourth president of the democratic era.



*Host, Olatoun Gabi-Williams*