

On the twisted trail of Dulcie's death

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Mail and Guardian, January 9, 1998

When Evelyn Groenink set out to investigate the murder of Dulcie September, she found herself embroiled in a Kafkaesque world full of French secret service plots and fake publications.

In March 1990, while investigating Dulcie September's workplace for the period just prior to her murder, I discovered something odd. The small company across the hallway from her African National Congress office, on the fourth floor of a typically narrow building in the Rue des Petites Ecuris, moved there on the same day as the ANC.

Even though the company officially edited a newsletter on sports trade, the editor-in-chief was a foreign reporter for the French state radio and specialised in South Africa and the ANC. He and his colleagues moved out of the building shortly after the murder.

On March 29 1988, September, a former teacher from Cape Town who had joined the struggle out of

anger at the way kids were treated by the apartheid education system, was murdered by a salvo of five bullets fired straight at her face. She died instantly. Her murderers were never found.

The murder was not seen. Of course it was the South African death squads one heard so much about. Who else?

The neighbouring office was completely French. They published a bi-monthly two-page account of sports trade fairs named Sport Eco. It would never have occurred to me to pay any attention to this company had September's colleagues in Paris not told me that September herself did not trust these neighbours.

September was a nice woman, but she never greeted these particular people. She took great care to ensure that the ANC's mail did not get mixed up with theirs. And once or twice, according to her colleagues, she mentioned that she thought these people were watching her.

The above, together with the fact that Sport Eco's editor-in-chief, Pierre Cazeel, was the person who waited half-an-hour next to September's dead body for the police to arrive, and that September's colleagues mentioned that somebody seemed to have messed with the mail and her handbag, were the reasons why I began looking for Sport Eco in the Paris register of companies.

I decided to phone Herve Delouche, a journalist for a new French monthly, J'Accuse, that had shown an interest in my investigation. J'Accuse planned to investigate scandals of the French government and secret services, Delouche told me.

The first issue of J'Accuse was to be released in April and, according to Delouche, the cover story was to be dedicated to my French connection to the September murder.

J'Accuse was so interested in this story, it asked me to come and visit even though I told them I had nothing concrete as yet. It paid me a cash advance, assigned three people to assist me, and, in their new offices, I got the biggest desk.

People brought me coffee and complimented me extensively on my yet to be written, wonderful article. They even mentioned a prime-time television slot!

When I met Delouche and my first J'Accuse contact, Michel Briganti, to discuss the new developments, I had

already phoned several established sport and trade publications in Paris. Nobody had ever heard of Sport Eco.

I did learn that Cazeel had reported extensively on the 1982 bomb attack on the London office of the ANC. Delouche and Briganti nodded pensively: this could indeed be an indication of secret service involvement in the murder of September.

They suggested a high-powered meeting of the core group of J'Accuse to discuss this trail and invited me to spend the evening at the home of their editor-in-chief, Jacques de Bonis, in the Rue des Pyrnes.

De Bonis's flat was full of boxes, sheets and other just-moved-in articles: he had recently arrived from Lyon to take up his new job.

De Bonis showed great interest in the Sport Eco trail and jumped up to phone J'Accuse's director general - a man, he says, who knows a lot about the sports business.

He talked, showed surprise, put down the phone and said: "This is a real track. This company does business deals with South Africa."

My French colleagues beamed with delight, but I was confused: I hadn't stumbled on the slightest suggestion that there was anything South African about Sport Eco.

My suspicion was, and still is, that Sport Eco was an antenna for the French secret services, and established to keep an eye on the ANC. I

had not arrived at the conclusion that Sport Eco was involved in the murder itself, at least not directly. But, if it was a French antenna, why hadn't it at least seen the South African death squad coming? That was the question. And what had Cazeel been doing, alone for half-an-hour, next to the body?

My story, as proposed to J'Accuse, was to be about this and other mysterious French tracks that I had stumbled on in the previous two years - about the French secret service which had repeatedly launched false tracks and smokescreens, messing up the police investigation.

About French individuals who appeared to play some suspicious role concerning September and her office when she was still alive. Such as Monsieur G, an extreme right-wing mercenary from the French Foreign Legion, who shortly after the murder told a journalist he had been recruited to make a map of the ANC office by a top French government official.

Such as Antonia S, ex-girlfriend to another foreign legionnaire, who not only told a friend that she had been spying on ANC targets, but revealed that she knew on the eve of the murder that an attack was going to take place in Paris.

And such as a third foreign legionnaire who was adamant that the above-mentioned top government of-

ficial was directly involved in the murder operation.

The French underworld of right-wing mercenaries has its base on the partially French Comoros Islands. This base reaches a strong right-wing network in French cities like Lyon and Marseille. Officially, the French government dismisses the private military grouping as a bunch of unruly adventurers over whom the state has no control.

But, despite the French concern over this group's involvement in coups d'etat and other strife on the Comoros and in other parts of Africa - some of them were involved in sanctions-busting and arms-smuggling between France and apartheid South Africa - some experts say the adventurers can't make a move without the approval of the French authorities.

"How else can the obscure right-wing private security companies, that some of these men manage, continue to operate even in Paris itself?" as one source puts it.

"They have no problems because of their good relations with the army and the foreign secret service, DGSE. The Comoriens are sources of information as well as instruments for the DGSE. Whenever they need the adventurer-type for an operation, they recruit them from this bunch."

If Monsieur G, Antonia S, and the third Comorien - whose name is un-

known to me - had anything to do with the murder of September, it is quite unlikely that the French authorities would not have had a clue about the attack that was going to happen in Paris: all three have, as various independent sources confirm, good relations with the DGSE.

The big question around the murder is, however, not the who but the why. Why did September have to die? The idea that Pretoria, or Paris, or both, could have felt threatened by the political activities of the ANC office in Paris seems far-fetched.

“Dulcie etait une zero [Dulcie was a zero],” an expert observer of the French anti-apartheid movement told me. “She made speeches in community centres and sold badges and stickers. Her political influence was non-existent.”

According to this expert, as well as to numerous other observers, it was highly unlikely that the motive for the murder could be political. September, in other words, would not have been killed in a professional, risky and costly operation just because she happened to say anti-apartheid things to a few hundred people in a small town city hall every once in a while.

Pretoria was, in the late Eighties, desperately looking for a thaw in its foreign relations, especially with the West: they wouldn't risk all that just to kill Dulcie. “Whoever did it, did

it for a very special and urgent reason, a reason that would also be valid to France - so that they would allow the operation,” says Alex Moumbaris, ANC activist and former colleague of Dulcie in Paris. “She was an obstacle to something. But what?”

That was a question I could shed some light on. September, stubborn and persistent, alone with her fighting spirit and suffering from rheumatism in cold, inhospitable Paris, had, since her arrival in 1984, soon had enough of being a zero. She had experienced that the South African question wasn't of much real interest to French politicians, whether they were right wing, centre or Mitterrand left. The left would, at official occasions, speak out beautifully against apartheid - and some would probably really mean it - but all the while French state corporations kept trading with the apartheid government.

France never agreed to a coal boycott, peaceful nuclear co-operation got more and more intimate, and the official military boycott of the United Nations never really seemed to stop the military contacts.

September wanted to do more than just make noises against apartheid. She wanted to stop the illegal trade between Paris and Pretoria. Shortly before she died, September had stumbled on some information concerning arms trade. She had had a military source who, regret-

tably, was known only to her.

Just weeks before she died, September phoned Abdul Minty of the World Campaign against Military and Nuclear Collaboration with South Africa in Oslo, Norway, and told him she would send him something. She never did.

But she did repeatedly phone her then superior in the London ANC office, Aziz Pahad. "She said we should come to Paris," Pahad told me. "There was a sensitive question that we had to sort out - I think it was something nuclear. She said she felt threatened. But because it sounded all so paranoid, I dismissed it. I thought she was being a bit of a drama queen."

A few weeks later, September was dead.

What could it have been that she stumbled on? There is no doubt that France did break the arms boycott to South Africa, and did so repeatedly - the three or so scandals that came to light formed only the tip of the iceberg. The co-operation reached a new height in the six months prior to September's murder.

"In the autumn of 1987, some French diplomats and secret service and military people were here, ostensibly to negotiate a prisoner swap between Angola and South Africa. But, in the meantime, they were dealing arms all around," former apartheid spy Craig Williamson told me. "And

if September stood in the way of that, she would surely have been killed."

Interestingly, rumours that a South African death squad would be on its way to Paris started to surface in the autumn of 1987, about the time that September started reporting to friends and colleagues that she felt threatened.

September, however, did not drop her efforts to convince the ANC structures to come and help make a public fuss.

"She just could not accept that there were things going on that she could do nothing about," say those who knew her.

"She was too stubborn," said Pahad. "Of course the French authorities wanted us to withdraw Dulcie. They asked me to do that, just as they made trouble with her residence permit. But we never had enough skilled people to just oblige such a request."

And then there was another track, I told my colleagues from J'Accuse, after one week of continued investigations in Paris. In the three months prior to the murder, the building that housed the ANC office was painted.

There was so much rattling of buckets and walking up and down, that on the morning of the murder nobody bothered to come and see what the noises of the shooting were. Everybody thought it was the painters.

I related the stories that Septem-

ber's colleagues told me: that the boss of the painters had insisted he have the key to the ANC office. September refused to give it to him. That afterwards, a young painter had tried to make friends with Dulcie, had gone into her office a few times to chat and had bought an ANC lighter. Which was remarkable, as the young painter - according to his fellow painters - was an extreme right-wing xenophobe who was looking forward to a military career. I went on to talk about the young man's friend, also working at the site but, according to his colleagues, not a real painter.

"He gave us a headache with the way he was painting in one corner and not finishing, already moving on to the next," the professional painters said. "But fortunately, he didn't stay very long. He left not long after that lady was killed. To Switzerland, because he had a Swiss passport." His name was Daniel, his right-wing young friend was Stephane. On the day of the murder, the two had been together and fairly undisturbed in the building: one of the professional painters was working on a remote floor; the other, the foreman, had been summoned to a working site somewhere else in town.

Did it happen often, that the boss would take him, the foreman, away from a site and put him back again after a day or two? "No," the fore-

man had said. "Come to think of it, that actually never happens."

I tried to convince the J'Accuse team to follow up on the track of the painting business. I told them that the company's boss lied to me a few times.

I related my search for painter Daniel's Parisian address. When I found it on the computerised phone directory, it disappeared from the screen before my eyes. I rattled on, almost pathetically, searching for a reaction. Didn't they see that the arms trade motive would explain it all? How that would provide a motive for both Paris and Pretoria, and explain why French secret services and adventurers seemed to be so involved in the preparation and the cover-up of the murder? When I finally looked at the circle of investigators, I felt the ground sinking away. The faces expressed disapproval, boredom, a tinge of compassion, but certainly no enthusiasm.

De Bonis started to speak. "The director general phoned," he says. "He was mistaken. Sport Eco has no links with South Africa."

"But doesn't that confirm what I said in the first place," I tried desperately. "That they were French ... that the French were monitoring Dulcie." It doesn't help.

"So, the track is dead," continued De Bonis. "Do we agree on that?"

Delouche and Briganti agreed.

“We don’t need to look any further,” said Briganti.

De Bonis saw me to the door; assured me that my story on the French links would still be published in *J’Accuse*. “It is a good story. I just don’t want to spend any more time on it.”

Back in Amsterdam I obtained, via other Paris contacts, a copy of *J’Accuse*.

My article wasn’t there. I looked at the cover to see if this was indeed the first issue and saw the date: April 1, fools’ day.

I phoned *J’Accuse* and De Bonis a number of times, but the phone just kept ringing.

Only once I happened to get Delouche, who cried: “I know nothing! I know nothing!” and hung up. A few months later I received a concerned-sounding letter from Briganti, in which he told me that *J’Accuse* unfortunately would cease to exist, but that I should really keep him informed of my investigation’s progress.

I should have smelled a rat in the first place, I told myself. How Briganti had giggled and answered: “That is a good question” when I asked him where *J’Accuse* got the money for its glossy launch. How I got a big cash advance without even asking, or showing a synopsis. How they did not want to sign a contract: “Not needed,” they had said. “We trust you.”

How could they be real investigative journalists anyway, this editor formerly from a regional paper in Lyon (De Bonis), this forever cause-changing activist (Delouche), this attorney from the French state electricity company (Briganti)? And didn’t the French electricity company have longstanding nuclear cooperation links with Eskom?

Typical of a secret service, by the way, to set up a publication that investigates secret services.

Maybe I have gone completely paranoid. Maybe all this is just one big coincidence. But it does remind me of my visit to the Paris brigade criminelle, whom I also presented with most of my findings. There I saw the same stern faces, the same unwillingness, the same haste to get me out of the door again. Only one young officer had seem slightly interested. He had looked pensively ahead of him for a second or so, then asked: “But you certainly don’t think that we would arrest our own colleagues?”

He had given me his card and phone number, and I had called him often. But, always, someone else answered, someone else giving me an excuse why I couldn’t speak to the other one.

Only once did I manage to break through and secure an appointment with him. But in the cafe opposite the Palais de Justice it wasn’t him who appeared, but two frowning

other gentlemen in raincoats. They new in the September case.
asked me if I had discovered anything