

Bloody Sunday: The nun, the Defiance Campaign and South Africa's secret massacre

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CITATION

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's mandate to investigate gross human rights violations from March 1960 has created the perception that apartheid violence only really began with the Sharpeville massacre and that Sharpeville was the largest mass killing by the police in the apartheid era. *Bloody Sunday: The nun, the Defiance Campaign and South Africa's secret massacre* challenges these and other dominant liberation narratives.

The 'Bloody Sunday' of the title refers to events on 9 November 1952 in Duncan Village, East London, when, at the height of the ANC Defiance Campaign, police broke up a meeting that had been organized by the ANC Youth League. In the mayhem that followed, police shot and killed an untold number of black people and angry crowds attacked and killed two white people, including Irish nun and medical doctor Sister Aidan Quinlan. Although the official black death toll was eight, survivors have said 'hundreds' were killed (compared with 69 deaths at Sharpeville). With the life of Sister Aidan as the central thread, *Bloody Sunday* explores the social and political context in which the Duncan Village events occurred, the details of what happened and the ongoing legacies of shame and denial on both sides. The book braves topics that have been hidden or glossed over – including the mutilation of the nun's body and the extent and cover-up of the police massacre.

In 2022 *Bloody Sunday* won South Africa's premier award for non-fiction, the Sunday Times Literary Award, and was short listed for the National Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS) non-fiction award. Reviewers have described it as 'an exemplary piece of historical research' that is 'accessible and understandable to as broad a reading public as a divided South Africa can offer', a 'credible work of rigorous scholarship and phenomenal story telling'. The NIHSS stated that it 'contributes enormously to our understanding of the Defiance Campaign, the ANC, Eastern Cape society and politics'. *Bloody Sunday* builds on prior research by historians and anthropologists but presents new archival and field research that involved a personal trip to Ireland and many to Duncan Village, where Breier traced survivors of the massacre. Breier was a member of the PASS (professional, administrative and support staff) in the Research Office from 2009 to 2019 when she retired. Her academic association with UCT continues under the umbrella of the School of Education where she obtained her PhD in 2003 and where she is an honorary research associate.