


# The place of the Bulhoek massacre in South African history

**Author:**Robert R. Edgar<sup>1,2</sup> **Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of African Studies, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Howard University, Washington, DC, United States

**Corresponding author:**

Robert Edgar,  
redgar@howard.edu

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24 May 2021 marked the centenary of the Bulhoek massacre in which government police and soldiers killed about 200 members of an Eastern Cape religious group called the Israelites who had been called by their prophet, Enoch Mgijima, to prepare for the end of the world. This essay examines Mgijima's life, his apocalyptic visions, his call in 1919 to his followers to come to a holy village, Ntabelanga, near Queenstown, and their clashes and negotiations with government officials over their right to occupy land. It discusses the government decision to use armed force to expel the Israelites and what happened on 24 May 1921. Finally, it draws a comparison with a United States (US) massacre in May 1921 in which white vigilantes attacked a black community in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

**Contribution:** This essay narrates how the Bulhoek massacre resulted from a century of white land conquest and dispossession and some Africans turning to apocalyptic visions to understand their plight. Since then, the South African state has used force on numerous occasions to suppress both black and white dissidents. This essay draws a transnational parallel with the commemoration of another white massacre of blacks that also took place in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the US in May 1921.

**Keywords:** Enoch Mgijima; Bulhoek massacre; Israelites; Jan Smuts; Ntabelanga.

## Introduction

Government brutality has scarred the last century of South African history. One of the earliest examples, the Bulhoek massacre, shook the morning of 24 May 1921.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 600 heavily armed white policemen and soldiers were pitted against the prophet Enoch Mgijima and some 3000 of his followers known as Israelites who refused to leave their holy village of Ntabelanga ('the mountain of the rising sun') located about 25 km southwest of Queenstown. Called by Mgijima to await an impending millennium, they had been gathering since early 1919. While the Israelites maintained they were there to pray and worship in peace, the white authorities viewed them as illegally squatting on land they did not own. After protracted negotiations, the government had sent a heavily armed force to remove them. The ensuing battle devastated the Israelites. While Mgijima and his followers held fast to their conviction that God would protect them, their spiritual arsenal and their knobkerries, ceremonial swords, and spears were no match for the state's lethal array of rifles, machine guns, and cannon. In the 20-min battle, nearly 200 Israelites were killed and over 100 were wounded. To understand why this massacre happened, we must go back to the turbulent times of the early 19th century when dramatic transformations drove many Africans in the Eastern Cape to search for 'promised land'.

## Colonial conquest and African land dispossession

One development, triggered by European colonists encroaching on the lands of Xhosa-speaking groups living between the Kei and Sunday rivers, brought wars and chaos to the Eastern Cape for many decades. Boer cattle-keepers who trekked into the region in the early 18th century contested with Xhosa cattle keepers for grazing land, but while their efforts led to several wars, they did not change the balance of power. However, the arrival of British forces in 1806 changed everything. Their military power was decisive in the conquest of large swaths of land for European settlement. By the end of the 19th century, white people controlled 93% of South Africa's land; and in the Eastern Cape, Africans were consigned to the reserves of Ciskei and Transkei.

1. On the massacre, see R. R. Edgar, *Because They Chose the Plan of God: The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre of 24 May 1921* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006); R. R. Edgar, *Kuba bakhetha isicwangiso sika Thixo: Ibali lendyikityha yokufa kwabantu eNtabelanga/Bulhoek ngowana -24 Meyi ka-1921* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2011); and R. R. Edgar, *The Finger of God: Enoch Mgijima, the Israelites, and the Bulhoek Massacre in South Africa* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2018).

The other significant development was the Mfecane, an early 19th century eruption of political conflicts and widespread migrations, which propelled movements of people throughout many parts of present-day South Africa and as far north as Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania. In what is now KwaZulu-Natal, some groups, including Enoch Mgijima's Hlubi people, fled their ancestral homes southward along the Indian Ocean coast, where they began assimilating into the Gcaleka Xhosa kingdom. But some decided to shift sides and ally themselves with the British in wars against Xhosa kingdoms. Called Mfengu, they agreed to a covenant with the British and white missionaries in 1835 to show loyalty to the British and faithfulness to God and mission education in exchange for meagre allocations of land in the Ciskei and Transkei. However, their loyalty to the crown was not repaid. In 1878, the Cape Parliament passed the *Peace Preservation Act* which required all Africans to turn in their guns to a magistrate in their district in exchange for compensation. If they did not, they could be fined or jailed. Many Mfengu were angered by the clear message that they no longer enjoyed a special status.<sup>2</sup>

## Enoch Mgijima

The Mgijimas were among the Hlubi families that settled in Kamastone at the northern tip of the Ciskei in the 1850s.<sup>3</sup> Enoch's father, Jonas, was a prosperous farmer. After converting to Christianity, he and his family became staunch members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Born in 1868, Enoch was the last of nine children born to Jonas and his wife Makeswa. Believing in the value of mission education, they sent three of their sons to the celebrated schools, Lovedale and Zonnebloem. Enoch was due to attend Lovedale, but in route, severe headaches forced him to return home, where he became a landowner and small game hunter.

In his classic work, *Native Life in South Africa*, Sol Plaatje observed that 'South Africa is a land of prophets and prophetesses'.<sup>4</sup> That was certainly the case historically in the Eastern Cape, where visionaries frequently appeared. Mgijima's call to prophecy came on 09 April 1907 as he was nearing 40. He had a dramatic vision in which God instructed him that he had a mission to preach to people and that he had a responsibility to warn them about a coming judgement day. Only those who followed the name of the Lord would escape His wrath. To Mgijima and his followers, the appearance of Halley's comet in the sky in 1910 and the outbreak of World War I in 1914 validated his prophecy.

Although he was reluctant at first to take up his call to preach, Mgijima relented and began operating as an independent evangelist in his area. He attracted a large personal following. He remained a Wesleyan Methodist and German Moravian missionaries at Shiloh mission welcomed his revival

2.W. Storey, *Guns, Race, and Power in Colonial South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

3.Edgar, *The Finger of God...*, 35–37.

4.S. Plaatje, *Native Life in South Africa, before and after the European War and the Boer Rebellion*, 2nd ed. (London: PS King and Son, 1917), 255.

meetings. However, like other African Christians who were growing disillusioned with the leadership and cultural imperialism of white missionaries and raising questions about their interpretation of Christianity, Mgijima challenged their power and legitimacy. Quoting approvingly from an article in the African newspaper, *Abantu Batho*, one Mgijima follower boldly stated that black people were making their own claim to Christianity because whites had expropriated religion as 'an instrument of power for the establishment of white supremacy and domination in the world'.<sup>5</sup> He pointed out the hypocrisy of white persons claiming to practice Christianity. How could they hate black persons when Jesus Christ taught Christians to love thy neighbours?

In November 1912, Mgijima broke from the Wesleyans and announced that he had joined the Church of God and Saints of Christ, founded by an African American prophet William Crowdy in the late 19th century.<sup>6</sup> His theology was based on a literal reading of Old Testament doctrine and ritual, and identified with the Israelite quest for freedom from Egyptian captivity narrated in the book of Exodus. The church had sent a missionary to South Africa, Albert Christian, but the person who had the most impact on Mgijima was John Msikinya, who had attended historically black Lincoln College in the United States (US) and converted to Crowdy's denomination. Other African independent churches and African American churches dotted the Queenstown area, but none gave Mgijima the space for his prophetic gifts.

Identifying with the Old Testament Israelites, their primary annual ritual, adopted from Crowdy, was a week-long Passover festival held every mid-April at Kamastone. Its daily rituals were patterned on the book of Exodus, whose central message was exile and the quest for freedom of biblical Israelites from the Egyptian pharaohs' oppressive rule. For instance, the highlight of day 2 of the Passover is a recessional march recreating Pharaoh's chariots chasing after the Israelites and their horses, which got stuck in mud before the Red Sea swallowed them up.<sup>7</sup>

While Mgijima and his followers called themselves Israelites, they were not seeking an escape from South Africa. Nor were they exiles. They envisioned themselves as 'inziles', black people who, as Plaatje put it, had become pariahs in the land of their birth as colonial conquest took its toll on their lives.<sup>8</sup> Mgijima's Israelites believed in a God of salvation and deliverance who liberated his chosen people from tyrannical authority. The Exodus story has been a source of inspiration for both religious and secular movements who identified with the Israelites' trials and tribulations as well as their dreams and triumphs. Exodus had a special resonance for African Americans and Africans living under white domination as well as Afrikaner nationalists who saw themselves as a chosen people.

5.*Queenstown Daily Representative*, 13 October 1920. Established in 1912, *Abantu Batho* was the official mouthpiece of the South African Native National Congress. See P. Limb (ed.), *People's Paper: A Centenary History and Anthology of Abantu Batho* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2012).

6.See Edgar, *Finger of God...*, 46–56.

7.See Edgar, *Finger of God...*, 63–67.

8.Plaatje, *Native Life...*, 17.

## The call to Ntabelanga

In early 1919, Mgijima stood outside the Israelite tabernacle holding two crossed sticks in front of him. He uttered the words, 'Juda, Efrayime, Josef *nezalwane*', meaning Judah, Ephraim, Joseph and others. Then he exclaimed, '*Bonke bevile* (They have all heard)'.<sup>9</sup> This was a summon for his followers to gather at the holy village of Ntabelanga and to await an imminent judgement day. Eventually, some 3000 persons heeded his call.

What compelled Mgijima to create his Exodus community? There were ominous signs at the end of World War I in 1918 that filled many Africans with anxiety, anticipation, and a sense of urgency and dread about what the future might hold. Prices of staple foods were soaring. The Spanish influenza pandemic (known to the Xhosa as *umbathalala* or the 'disaster') swept through South Africa between October and November 1918, leaving 300000 dead in its wake. It devastated rural areas.<sup>10</sup> In the Ciskei and Transkei, the death toll was especially high, with an estimated 1000 Africans dying in the Queenstown area alone. In Kamastone 50 of every 1000 persons died.<sup>11</sup> Mgijima spoke of the influenza as a round thing that would envelop the world, leaving no place unaffected, and instructed his followers to paint their houses white so the plague would not infect them. Following the influenza came a devastating drought in which rainfall fell to its lowest in 30 years. Pastures were destroyed and crops and tens of thousands of sheep and cattle were wiped out. Famine was a real prospect.

These crises intensified the pressure on Africans to seek more land. A magistrate in Lady Frere reported that among Africans, 'The cry everywhere is "land"'.<sup>12</sup> Mgijima's home in Kamastone, which was surrounded on three sides by white farms, felt the pinch. A South African Native National Congress member put it this way: 'the natives of Oxkraal and Kamastone are packed like sardines; they cannot move'.<sup>13</sup> Mgijima called his followers to Ntabelanga in 1919 for the Passover, but when many did not leave, it became apparent that they intended to stay indefinitely. That laid the basis for a dispute with local white officials. The Israelites maintained they were there at the command of the Lord, while the state defined the problem in strict legal terms – it was an issue of

9.R. Edgar, Interview with Gideon Ntloko, 02 July 2010.

10.H. Phillips, "Black October": The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa," in *Archives Yearbook for South African History* (Pretoria: The Government Printer, 1990); H. Phillips, *Epidemics: The Story of South Africa's Five Most Lethal Human Diseases* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 68–93; and B. Carton, "The Forgotten Compass of Death: Apocalypse Then and Now in the Social History of South Africa," *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 1 (2003): 204–205.

11. *Queenstown Daily Representative*, 29 October and 06 November 1918. The influenza put an Eastern Cape woman, Nontetha Nkwenkwe, into a coma during which God directed her to prophecy. Fearing that she and her followers might confront the government like Mgijima and the Israelites, government officials decided to silence her by committing her to a series of mental hospitals in Fort Beaufort and Pretoria. See R. R. Edgar and H. Sapire, *African Apocalypse: The Story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, A Twentieth-Century South African Prophet* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000).

12.M. G. Apthorp to J. X. Merriman, 15 December 1919 (JX Merriman Papers, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town).

13.Report of the Natives Land Commission, volume 2, U.G. 22-1916 (Cape Town, 1916), 118. Oxkraal was a location adjacent to Kamastone.

property rights. In July 1920, they issued summons to Israelite 'strangers' to appear in court for illegally squatting on Crown land. None honoured them. Then the Queenstown magistrate tried a different tactic, ordering the Israelites to compile a register of their community at Ntabelanga. Charles, the prophet's brother, objected, stating that their members were already enumerated in 'God's book'.<sup>14</sup> They were there, he explained, on God's time, not European time.

In the ensuing months, Ntabelanga became a self-sufficient, self-contained community that threatened both black and white farmers in the area. They had their own surveyor, saddle maker, cobbler, butcher, blacksmiths, builders, and police force. The women formed a nursing brigade. A school for biblical instruction taught students in isiXhosa and English. A court of elders regulated life by hearing cases of those who had transgressed the Ten Commandments.

For the Israelites who deeply valued their autonomy, the shootings of African strikers at the coastal city of Port Elizabeth on 25 October 1920 presented worrying implications. A large crowd of demonstrating workers had gathered outside the Baakens Street Police Station demanding the release of a trade union leader. More than 30 white vigilantes offered their services to the police. The police provided guns and ammunition to the vigilantes, none of whom were deputised for official law enforcement action. The vigilantes and police opened fire on the crowd, killing several dozen protesters.<sup>15</sup>

On 07 December 1920, government officials in Pretoria decided that local white officials could not cope with the Israelites and sent an armed force of almost 100 police to intimidate the Israelites into backing down. Because of the shootings at Port Elizabeth, the Israelites were apprehensive about what the police intended to do to them. When a large group of Israelite men confronted them, the police retreated to a nearby white farm. Fearing that this could be the prelude to a general insurrection, many white farmers in the area fled to Queenstown for sanctuary. This was a disaster for the government. The Queenstown newspaper called it 'the finest bungle in native policy that has occurred in these parts in many years', while Frank Brownlee, an administrator in the Transkei, warned the government about the alarming repercussions.

One of the worst features of the whole business is the fact that the police had to withdraw. This will encourage the high priest and the people in their belief in Divine intervention and they will adopt further measures of defiance with the hope of being further protected.<sup>16</sup>

In the eyes of Brownlee and most whites, the Israelites' sin was subverting proper black-white relations – that black persons had to be docile and pay deference to white authority.

14.Evidence of Geoffrey Nightingale, preparatory examination, Rex vs. Israelites, 23 June 1921.

15.G. Baines, "South Africa's Amritsar? Responsibility for and Significance of the Port Elizabeth Shootings of 23 October 1920," *Contree* 34 (1993): 1–10.

16. *Queenstown Daily Representative*, 11 December 1920; F. Brownlee to J. X. Merriman, 14 December 1920 (JX Merriman Papers, National Library of South Africa, Cape Town).



Officials in Pretoria, recognising that local officials had lost control of the situation, sent a delegation of high-ranking officials, including the respective heads of the police and army, Col. Theo Truter and General van Deventer, to negotiate in person with the Israelites on 15 December 1920. Their position was very direct. The Israelites had to submit to secular authority. Truter put it bluntly:

You must obey the Regulations. Every community has its rulers, but they are themselves subject to the laws. I rule the 20 but I must obey the laws. It is no use awaiting an answer to your prayers.

Charles Mgijima responded: 'God has sent us to this place. We shall let you know when it is necessary that we go'.<sup>17</sup> Edward Mpateni added: 'We wanted to live peacefully with all ... You can try to interfere in God's work if you like, that is not our affair'.<sup>18</sup>

From that point on, the stances of both the Israelites and the government dramatically hardened. The Israelites concluded their confrontation with the police unit showed that:

[T]he Government has already sent people to kill us. After sending enemies to kill, they send others to meet with us ... We cannot talk when surrounded by guns ... We are peaceful, the Government had declared war.

Their warning that the government was in a fight with God changed to a belief that Jehovah would intervene on their side against secular authority. At the same time, the government began interpreting Israelite daily ritual practices such as marching and wielding ceremonial swords with their uniforms as signs of resistance and that their religious practices were a pretext for plotting an armed rebellion.

Because secular authorities and leaders of millennial groups hold vastly different world views, they have such negative perceptions of each other that they almost inevitably end up clashing rather than resolving their differences. This is what happened in the case of the Israelites and the government. From December 1920 to May 1921 relations continued to deteriorate. The Israelites refused to pay taxes and to allow white officials and farmers to enter Ntabelanga. An Israelite evangelist recruiting new members in Glen Grey said to a crowd:

Do you people still pay taxes, because we no longer pay taxes where we are? We have a prophet there and it has been given out that the time of the native has come when we should rule ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

Some African landholders who neighboured Ntabelanga opposed the Israelites' defiance. They feared that the Israelites' claim to the land would lead the government to use the crisis as a justification for confiscating all African land, Israelite and non-Israelite alike. In December, the

17. Evidence of Edward Barrett, Rex vs. Israelites, November 1920; "Rough Notes of a Meeting held in McComb's Drift, near Bulhoek Location on 17 December 1920" (National Archives of South Africa, Department of Justice 288 2/853/20).

18. *Queenstown Daily Representative*, 18 December 1920.

19. Evidence of Oliver Nobuza, preparatory examination, Rex vs. Israelites, 28 July 1921, Rex vs. Israelites, November 1921.

Israelites had requested to present their case in person to Smuts. He consented, but he was wary of how it would affect his political standing with whites and never found time to meet with them. Instead, in early April, he sent the three-member Native Affairs Commission, which the state had recently established to liaise with Africans on a range of issues, to negotiate. They offered free rail passage to the homes of Israelites who were not from Kamastone and promised to consider granting an Israelite application to set up a permanent site at Ntabelanga. The Israelites rejected their proposals. A second meeting on 11 May was equally fruitless. As they were leaving, a commission member, Alex Roberts, warned Charles Mgijima, whom he had taught at Lovedale: 'We shall see what will happen. We part being very clear that things are not in order'. Charles responded: 'Very well, we thank you for your patience. And now it will be a matter between the Lord and the Government'.<sup>20</sup> The Commissioners then advised government officials to send 'a sufficiently strong force to overcome natives if possible'.<sup>21</sup>

The government was already weighing its options, including sending planes to bomb Ntabelanga.<sup>22</sup> They rejected that tactic because the aeroplanes might miss their target and kill men, women, and children indiscriminately. Another tactic considered was for soldiers to surround Ntabelanga and starve the Israelites into submission. That was scrapped because it would have required almost 4000 men to stay for an indefinite period.

The government decided to mobilise a combined force of police and soldiers from different provinces to expel the Israelites. With the recent Black Lives Matter movement challenging police use of excessive force, one can link, in a historical continuum, the South African government's choice to exercise authority through lethal force in a situation that would have likely turned out differently if law enforcement had implemented a strategy of de-escalation of what was equivalent to a misdemeanour. After the massacre John Dube's newspaper *Ilanga lase Natal* questioned why it was necessary to unleash an army when the regulation the Israelites were breaking was a minor offense involving legally sanctioned dwellings on an allotment of land. Would the government, Dube asked, have treated a white religious group in the same way?<sup>23</sup>

## What happened on 24 May?

The showdown between the government and the Israelites was 24 May, the birthday of both Queen Victoria and Jan Smuts.<sup>24</sup> The previous day, the government despatched police and army units with 22 officers and 590 men which

20. Evidence of AW Roberts, Rex vs. Israelites, November 1921.

21. *Cape Times*, 24 June 1921.

22. In March and May 1922, respectively, the government had no reservations about using aeroplanes to bomb white gold miners on strike in Johannesburg and Bondelswarts (Khoisan) rebels in South West Africa (Namibia).

23. *Ilanga lase Natal*, 03 June 1921.

24. I have reconstructed the battle from police accounts in government records and magazines, transcripts of Israelite trials after the massacre, newspaper reports, and oral testimonies of Israelites who were there. See Edgar, *Finger of God...*, 159–163.

encamped several miles away from Bulhoek. As they approached Ntabelanga on the bitterly cold morning, the units split into two regiments. One was positioned on a hillside overlooking the holy village and the other was placed on another hillside with machine guns and artillery. The top officers established a command post.

The Israelites' morning service featured ritual marching, which the police mistook for a war dance. The Israelites were very aware that a confrontation was likely and split their adult men into five regiments of 100 men each who were roughly divided by age. Israelite women and children remained in the Tabernacle praying and singing. Around 11:15, the police asked the Israelites if they wished to have one more discussion. An Israelite representative asked the police why they had come. They replied that the Israelites should lay down their arms and surrender. Otherwise, the soldiers would advance on them. One Israelite was defiant: 'If it is to be a fight I warn you that Jehovah will fight with us and for us'.<sup>25</sup>

The police then marched about 400 m from the Israelite men. Truter tried one last time to get the Israelites to back down. The police warned them they were prepared to attack Ntabelanga and that they would use force to remove them. An Israelite confidently countered: 'We will fight, and Jehovah will fight with us. Then that's all; it's finished; Jehovah will fight for us'.<sup>26</sup> What touched off the ensuing battle is unclear. The official view is that as soon as the Israelite spokesmen returned to their line, Enoch Mgijima commanded them: 'Jehovah says you must charge the Heathen', and the Israelites rushed towards the police line. The police also claimed that some Israelites fired guns at them – although the police only found some old rifles after the battle.

The Israelites had a different view of what sparked the fight. They maintained that as soon as the Israelite representatives returned to report their last exchange, the soldiers started shooting, leaving them with no alternative but to attack. Some Israelites may have believed in a story that was circulating that bullets would turn to water. But most had no illusions because they had witnessed their destructive power. Charles put it this way: 'If we had run away they would have shot us all the same'.<sup>27</sup> Or, as another Israelite remembered, 'When bullets are coming at you and people are in front of you, you can't turn back. You'll die going forwards. You face them rather than show your back'.<sup>28</sup>

The Israelites, dressed in white tunics and brown khaki shorts and armed with knobkerries and spears, were conspicuous targets as they surged towards the police lines. Soldiers fired a volley at the Israelites to see how they would react, but because their rifles were armed with bayonets, their shots fell

far short. But after adjusting their aim, their bullets began slicing through the Israelite ranks. They advanced, shouting, 'Magvala (cowards). You will all die here'. A handful made it as far as the police lines and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. But aside from a few injured police who suffered stab wounds, none of them were killed. In the 20 min of fierce fighting over a 4 km front, several 100 Israelites were killed and nearly 130 wounded. The rest of the day and throughout the night, Israelite men and women tended to the wounded and gathered their dead who were buried in three mass graves. Soldiers converged on Ntabelanga to arrest Mgijima and Israelite men and burn the village. Those arrested were placed on carts and were jeered by white citizens as they entered Queenstown. The soldiers also confiscated Israelite holy relics, including their Ark of the Covenant which eventually made its way to the basement of the Albany Museum in Makhanda (Grahamstown) where it was discovered in 1994 and returned to the Israelites the following year.

## Conclusion

From the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 to the present government, the Bulhoek massacre was but one of many occasions in which the government used lethal force to crush people it defined as its 'enemies'. Port Elizabeth in 1920, Bulhoek, Bondelswarts in 1922, Duncan Village in 1952, Ngquza Hill and Sharpeville in 1960, Soweto in 1976, Langa and Queenstown in 1985, Winterveld in 1986, Bhisho in 1992 and Marikana in 2012 are all part of the lexicon of repression in which the state – before and after 1994 – sanctioned its forces to slaughter dissidents.<sup>29</sup> Marikana is a stark reminder that the introduction of democratic governance did not bring about a marked shift in how police handle dissent.

In 2021, Americans commemorated the centennial of another tragedy – the white destruction of Greenwood, a thriving African American community in Tulsa, Oklahoma on 31 May and 01 June 1921.<sup>30</sup> Greenwood was known as the Black Wall Street. A shroud of silence hid the truth about this horrendous racist massacre for many decades. I grew up in a small town north of Tulsa in the 1950s and 1960s and learned about what happened at Bulhoek long before I became aware of the Tulsa race massacre. American and South African histories share terrible silences and traumatic memories.

Over 2 days of terror, torment and trauma, a white mob killed an estimated 300 black persons, looted and torched 1200 homes, businesses, churches, schools, a hospital, and a library, and displaced as many as 10000 people. Some white citizens even commandeered aeroplanes to drop turpentine bombs to raze black businesses and homes. One survivor,

25. Evidence of Ernest Woon and William Henry Quirk, preparatory examination, 04 August 1921.

26. Report of W. H. Quirk, Inspector, South African Police, 28 May 1921 (Bulhoek file, South African Police Archives, Pretoria).

27. Evidence of Charles Mgijima, Rex vs. Israelites.

28. Robert Edgar, interview with Nondumo Ndike, Dudumashe Location, Nqamakwe, July 1974.

29. On the East London massacre, see L. Bank and B. Carton, "Forgetting Apartheid: History, Culture and the Body of a Nun," *Africa* 86, no. 3 (2016): 472–503. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972016000346>

30. K. Hill, *1921 Tulsa Race Massacre: A Photographic History* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011); J. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race Riot and its Legacy* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2021); T. Madigen, *Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2001); and S. Ellsworth, *The Nation Must Awake; My Witness to the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921* (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2021).

107-year-old Viola Fletcher, testified to the United States House of Representatives Judiciary subcommittee on Civil Rights about what she experienced as a 7-year-old. She said:

I still see Black men being shot. Black bodies lying in the street. I still smell smoke and see fire. I still see Black businesses being burned. I still hear airplanes flying overhead and I hear the screams. I have lived through the massacre every day ... Our country may forget this history, but I cannot. I will not and other survivors do not and our descendants do not.<sup>31</sup>

Viola Fletcher's powerful statement is a painful reminder that what happened at Tulsa as well as at Bulhoek continue to reverberate in the present. Even though these tragedies occurred in different circumstances, they share a common theme – whites using violence to control black communities. Tulsa's white business and political elite successfully suppressed public discussion of the massacre for many decades, but it was kept alive in writings and oral accounts in the black community. The South African police version of what happened at Bulhoek prevailed in museums and printed accounts until several decades ago when a memorial was opened on the site of the massacre. Despite that, the Israelites and freedom movements passed on their own memories of the massacre for generations.

We have to come to grips with these dark moments in our troubled racial pasts no matter uncomfortable they may be. Scott Ellsworth, a historian who has written on the Tulsa Race Massacre and its aftermath, captures the moment we are living in globally.

For all across America, and, indeed, all across the world, we are living in the Age of Reevaluation. Long-standing institutions are coming under new brand-new scrutiny, histories are being challenged and reexamined, statues are toppling. Moreover, those whose voices have long been kept from being heard are claiming their rightful places at the table, while others are waiting in the wings.<sup>32</sup>

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The author(s) declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

31.D. Smith, "I Am Seeking Justice', Tulsa Massacre Survivor, 107, Testifies to US Congress," *The Guardian*, 19 May 2021, [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/19/viola-fletcher-tulsa-race-massacre-congress-oldest-survivor](http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/may/19/viola-fletcher-tulsa-race-massacre-congress-oldest-survivor)

32.Ellsworth, *The Nation Must Awake...*, 272.

## Author's contributions

I declare that I am the sole author of this research article.

## Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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