

A Fleet Street newspaper reporting the death of a Briton following an accident off the coast of Mombasa said that the deceased had been "taken to an African hospital". The apocryphal denigration of standards instantly presumed in faraway London was there. You had the distinct impression of doctors at this "African hospital" rattling cowrie shells, whispering incantations, and dancing a jig around the patient instead of using stethoscopes and other modern equipment.

No African in his right mind would jubilate over the killing of White man or woman, yet it is pertinent to recall the extent of coverage given to the sickening murder of Mrs Dora Bloch in Uganda. It just so happened that the dreadful regime in that country perpetrated this particular outrage shortly after the horrible killings in Wiriyaumu, when

Rhodesian troops invaded Mozambique and slaughtered African women and children. Who can remember the name of a single victim in Wiriyaumu?

And it does not escape attention that we know the names of some of the Whites "massacred" in Kolwezi but not a single one of those Africans who "died".

You learn also that there is one kind of language for African nationalists and another for Europeans resisting oppression. The French nationalists who fought against the Nazi occupation of their country were the "French underground". The Greek nationalists during the same period were "Greek partisans". But the African nationalist guerillas in southern Africa are "terrorists". □

THE PASSING OF PAGEVIEW

By Manfred Hermer
Reviewed by Alan Paton

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Manfred Hermer's "The Passing of Pageview" with its brief history, its interviews with those who tried to save Pageview and those who were ejected from it, and finally Mr Hermer's twenty-four beautiful and human paintings, is a book worth possessing.

It is the story of another triumphant operation of the Group Areas Act, another destruction of a place that had a unique inner life, a life that is irrecoverable, for it can never be found again in the soulless townships, that replace what has been destroyed.

The life of Vrededorp centred on the Pageview traders, who lived there and traded there, and whose colourful shops and streets are here so warmly portrayed.

Another such place was Sophiatown, not so affluent as Pageview, but also with a vital life of its own. It had no conventional beauty, but when it was destroyed Trevor Huddleston, using the words of Walter de la Mare, wrote: "Look thy last on all things lovely, every hour." But the loveliness that he saw was invisible to the rulers of the land, and it was lost in the matchbox town of Meadowlands. Sophiatown was replaced by the white suburb of Triomf, a name signalling the triumph of the ideology of separation over the haphazardness of human growth and imagination.

Yet another famous place was District Six, full of colour and life and song, of good and evil, and its own special kind of freedom, now lost in the sandy wastes of the Cape Flats.

In 1968 certain areas of Pageview were declared "white" under the Group Areas Act. In 1975 traders received quit notices, and the Oriental Plaza was built with very high rentals, but it has never recovered the magic of Fourteenth Street in Vrededorp, which Nat Nakasa

declared to be long overdue for recognition as one of Johannesburg's most famous streets, and which is portrayed in many of Mr Hermer's paintings.

In 1884 the London Convention meeting attended by representatives of the Transvaal Republic envisaged equal rights for Indians in the Transvaal. However in 1885 the Volksrad introduced "coolie locations" and one of these occupied the present site of Vrededorp and Pageview. By 1935 Indians owned most of the south-western corner of Vrededorp. In 1950 the Group Areas Act forced Indians who wished to own property to move to Lenasia. In 1977 the shopping areas were finally closed, and Pageview was dead.

The interviews make sad reading. The end of Pageview meant in large measure the end of the patriarchal family, though that would probably have happened anyway. Mr Essop Ismail Haffejee supported thirty-five assistants, but his business was destroyed, and very few of his old customers come to the Oriental Plaza. Mr Rashid Bulbuliya's father had one of the biggest shops in Fourteenth Street "and they took it away by the stroke of a pen".

I have a story to tell which shows clearly the great diversity of people in Pageview. I was principal of Diepkloof Reformatory, an institution for African boys, and one of them came from Pageview. He was due for release and I went to visit his family. He explained to me that I must not be surprised to find that his family was Coloured, but they claimed that he was African so that he need not be sent to faraway Cape Town. I had a long talk to his sister who must have felt some trust in me, for she confirmed that her husband was a white man, and an officer in the Union Defence Force. Such was Pageview.

This is a very beautiful book about a very ugly deed. □