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## Pinto: Blood on the British governor's and Kenyan hands

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Cyprian Fernandes, a former Chief Reporter of the Nation and the author of 'Yesterday in Paradise', and 'Stars Next Door', reviews the recently released 'Pio Gama Pinto, Kenya's Unsung Martyr 1927-1965', edited by Shiraz Durrani, for Café. Cyprian's association with the book's subject and other characters offers a deeper perspective

'Pio Gama Pinto, Kenya's Unsung Martyr 1927-1965', the long-awaited book on Pio Gama Pinto, edited by Shiraz Durrani, is finally here. It was launched in Nairobi on October 16, 2018. It is simply just a word or two short of being colossal. Perhaps, one flaw is that there is too much repetition.

However, I found myself thinking about a gigantic banquet. Your tour guide is the book's editor and he takes you on an almost never-ending safari to the events, the people, milestones, and most of all the history... with Pinto in the starring role and the reader will get to know virtually everything there is to know about him. Sometimes the book is taxing to read, other times it races along. Through it all, Pinto is never too far from the reader's gaze (if only in the mind). The entre is about one of the key figures of the Kenyan struggle for freedom: Senior Chief Koinange. Appointed by the colonial government, he surprised them by choosing to fight for freedom. He was also a man Pinto looked up to.

The other two big influences in Pio's life were India and Goa. He spent five years in the latter, agitating against the Portuguese. His association with India was far longer because India chose to support the Kenyans' fight for freedom and played an important role throughout the emancipation period.

But Goa was never too far from Pinto's mind, as Fitz De Souza recalls his talks on his early days in Goa: "One day during our discussions, Pio suggested that we should do something in East Africa to assist the liberation of Goa. I was a little surprised and told him that while I was very sympathetic to the liberation of Goa, and indeed the rest of the world, I thought as we were East Africans we should confine our activities to East Africa. We might dissipate our slender resources and there was also the risk of being misunderstood, even by our friends. He explained that as a student and a young man in India he had taken part in the struggle for the liberation of Goa. He had actively assisted in the formation of the Goa National Congress and escaped from Goa only when police were searching for him with a warrant to arrest and deport him to an island of West Africa. It was our duty, he suggested, as socialists to assist all liberation fronts. Even if we did not consider ourselves Goans we had names such as De Souza, Pinto, etc. Portuguese colonialism was as bad as any other."

The main course, naturally, is Pio Gama Pinto. Durrani does not solve the mystery of Pio's assassination but through the words of the various players, he takes the reader on a guided tour to the assassination and underlines what we have known for a long time: It was a conspiracy of the British Government, especially the last Governor of Kenya, Malcolm MacDonald, and Jomo Kenyatta and his KANU moderates in power. We will never know exactly who ordered the assassination or who pulled the trigger. That is the other tragedy that will claw at the heart of anyone who can remember the assassinations in Kenya, because without closure, no one can rest in peace either on earth or in the afterlife. Perhaps, there are one or two people who could offer Kenya the sacrament of closure or will they too take it to their graves? Just as Njoroge Mungai, James Gichuru, Mbiyu Koinange and others may have done?

"...the engineers of the neo-colonial Kenya feared him even more than the colonial authorities did and they had him assassinated."

There are many voices in this book but few are the so-called KANU moderates, except of course, the late Joseph Murumbi and the former Deputy Speaker of the House, Fitz De Souza. But then, they were Pinto's personal friends.

Pinto was driven by a single ideal:

Kenya's Uhuru must not be transformed into freedom to exploit, or freedom to be hungry, and live in ignorance. Uhuru must be Uhuru for the masses – Uhuru from exploitation, from ignorance, disease and poverty. The sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands of Kenya's freedom fighters must be honoured by the effective implementation of KANU's policy – a democratic, African, socialist state in which the people have the rights, in the words of the KANU manifesto: "to be free from economic exploitation and social inequality".

So there we have it: Moderates on one side and Oginga Odinga and his socialist supporters on the other. Pio chose the socialists and in doing that probably signed his death warrant because the moderates feared his organisational and strategic skills would lead to revolutionary changes in Kenya unless he was stopped.

Malcolm MacDonald: "I thought if the moderates ... came to power in independent Kenya they would not only be moderate in their national policies, in economic and social and political affairs, but on the side of moderation in international affairs, and for example not go Communist and not come under the influence of any other communist anti- British, anti-Western power."

The imperialist manipulation of Kenya's politics provided the momentum that ultimately led to the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto, according to the book. It was in the corridors of Parliament where Pinto's fate was sealed. "It was around 'Sessional Paper No.10 of 1965: African Socialism and its implications for Planning in Kenya'that the polarisation between Pio and KANU erupted exacerbated by revelations of misappropriation of funds by the Kenyatta regime.

"The paper, written by an American Edgar O. Edwards, despite its claims of socialism was a perfect articulation of how subservient capitalism would be developed in the post-independence period. It was in opposition to this text that Pio wrote a counter proposal which, had he not been assassinated, could very well led, some believe, to the removal of Kenyatta as president through a vote of confidence and the emergence of Odinga as the new president."

Fitz De Souza: "He had falling out with the Powers that Be and he got into a shouting match with Kenyatta over what was perceived as land grabbing by those in power. He refused to participate in such things as he was all for equality."

There was also the issue about missing money which was given to Government.

Pheroze Nowrojee: “This money was not distributed to these ex-freedom fighters and ex-detainees for whom it was intended. Instead a few powerful persons pocketed it. Pio vehemently opposed this. He spoke out against this betrayal of the freedom struggle. He said he would raise the matter in Parliament to ensure the sums be paid over to the ex-freedom fighters and ex-detainees. The powerful persons saw such an exposure as a threat to their wealth and their positions. They decided to get rid of Pio.”

The money in question was “grants and loans for development, land settlement, compensation for overseas officers and administration (12,400,000 pounds) from Britain.

In the final analysis, according to Durrani, “the imperialist manipulation of Kenya’s politics provided the momentum that ultimately led to the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto. Thus, the responsibility for this death lies not only with the Government of Kenya but also with the British Government whose policy and actions supported the Western-oriented Government.

“The assassination was part of the overall imperialist plot to ensure Kenya remained in the capitalist camp managed by the key imperialist powers USA and Britain.”

As I said this is a huge banquet of Kenya’s emergent history. I hope every man, woman and child gets to read this some time in their lives. There are some important lessons to ponder, celebrate some of the men and women who lived and died in the cause of freedom and to look anew at life as we know it.

There is an interview with Emma Gama Pinto by Frederick Noronha, and another by Benegal Pereira. Pio’s late brother Rosario’s memoir is also featured as are the memories of Angelo Faria. There are also several contributions by members of the family.

Naturally, this book is a monument to Pio Gama Pinto and his once socialist ideals for a Kenya without capitalism. Shiraz Durrani, the book editor, makes no apology for that.