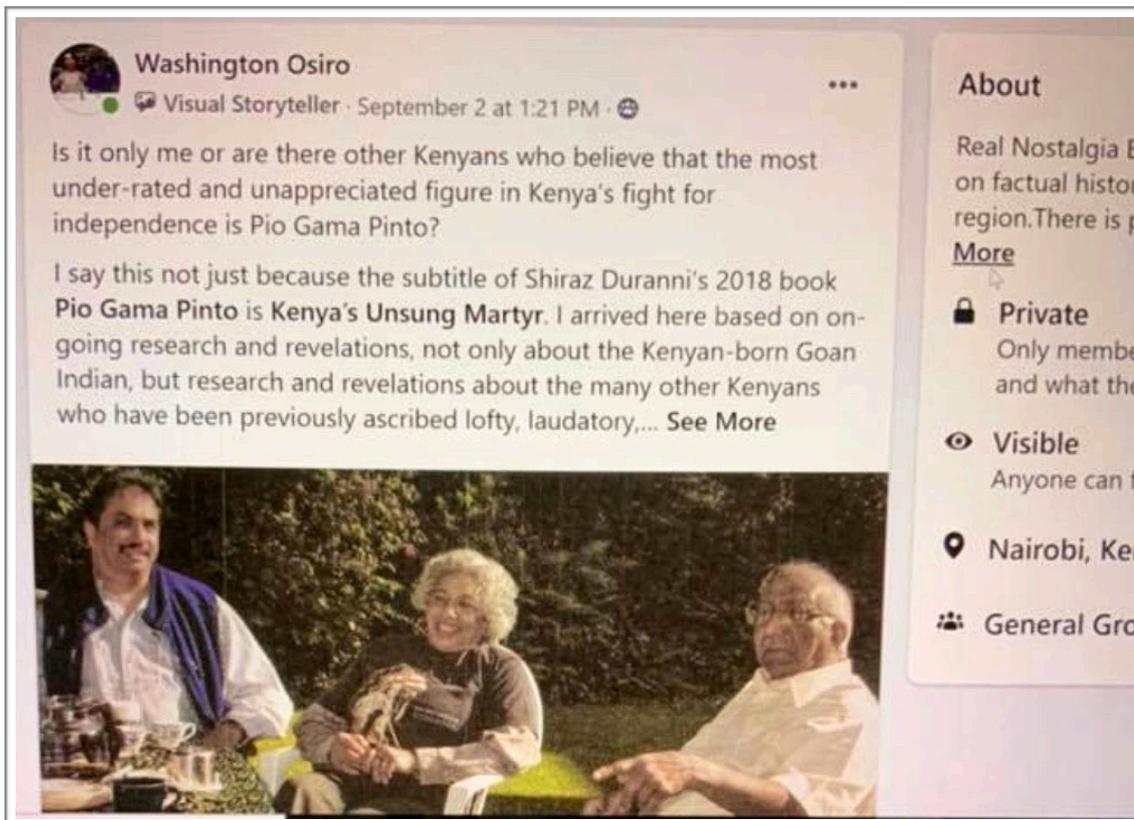


Washington Osiro reviews **Pio Gama Pinto: Kenya's Unsung Martyr, 1927-1965**. Edited by Shiraz Durrani. 2018. Nairobi: Vita Books. Real Nostalgia East Africa. September 2, 2020.



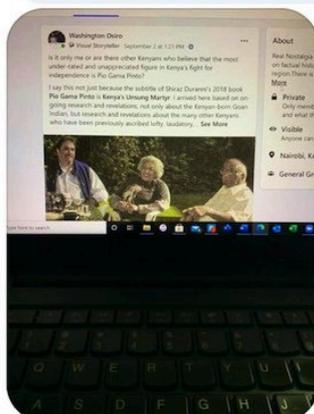
Washington Osiro  
I absolutely agree...

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[Shiraz Durrani](#) - Screen shot of the review.



Is it only me or are there other Kenyans who believe that the most under-rated and unappreciated figure in Kenya's fight for independence is Pio Gama Pinto?

I say this not just because the subtitle of Shiraz Duranni's 2018 book **Pio Gama Pinto is Kenya's Unsung Martyr**. I arrived here based on on-going research and revelations, not only about the Kenyan-born Goan Indian, but research and revelations about the many other Kenyans who have been previously ascribed lofty, laudatory, and now-proven meaningless and undeserved titles such as "Freedom Fighters," "Father of the Nation," "Leader of the Mau Mau," and suchlike labels.

As previously written in my review of Mansoor Ladha's **Memoirs of a Muhindi**, very little history has been written about East Africa's Asians – by East African-born Asian writers. The corollary of this dearth of write-ups about the likes of Pinto is the hyperbolic, patently false, but well-orchestrated lionization of the role played by some non-Asians/Indians – in Kenya's fight for independence.

I did not know that Pio Gama Pinto was "*the only Asian detained under the Emergency Regulations*" known as Operation Anvil. Shiraz Duranni offers this nugget while also clarifying that trade unionist "*Makhan Singh has (sic) also been detained but for other reasons.....*" (p287) During his detention alongside "*hundreds of old men who had been working for years to achieve freedom from oppression,*" Pinto interviewed many of these "*old guards.*" He also took down "*copious notes*" which were smuggled out (of the Takwa Detention camp and later, Kabarnet) to the various villages – by willing detainees – upon their release. Implied in this narrative is that it was through such efforts that those fighting for independence, in and out of detention, exchanged information and presumably, kept their collective eyes on the prize, i.e., independence from Gt. Britain.

Another interesting tidbit: Pinto represented Kenya in the "*Indian Ocean games a few years before*" he met his wife. The two met "*about September 1953*" and married in January 1954. His specialty was the 220yards, 440yards, and "*hop-step-jump*" (triple jump) events. (p286)

Related side note, Seraphino Antao, the first Kenyan to win a gold medal in international competition (1962 Commonwealth Games), was also Goan, a sprinter at that.

Back to Pinto, he used money his father-in-law had given them as "*part-payment on a printing press which he, Gama Pinto, wanted to operate as the voice of the people.*" The venture folded upon his arrest in 1954 – shortly after his marriage – to Emma Dias. Subsequently, it was Oginga Odinga who helped the couple buy a house – in 1960 – which became a haven for "*political refugees from Angola or South Africa.*"

Underscoring the importance of writing one's own version of history, **Kenya's Unsung Martyr** writes that "*although many Asians were politically uncommitted during the emergency, Pio hit their pocketbooks for funds to care for the families of the detainees.*" The book adds that Asian lawyers such as Pranal Sheth took on African cases at no charge, i.e., pro bono and members of the community such as Sarjit Singh Heyer "*gave jobs to tribesmen in the government suspect list; supplied clothing to destitute families, and Dr. Yusuf Eraj spent half his clinical time on patients sent by Pio who could not pay a cent.*" (p289) This narration puts into sharp perspective, the crucial role the Asian community played supporting Kenya's fight for independence. It also underscores the duplicity of a country that in my view, minimized if not outrightly "canceled" the community from its recounting of her past while simultaneously glorifying others less deserving. Conversely and ever the gracious sidekick of her demonstrably

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