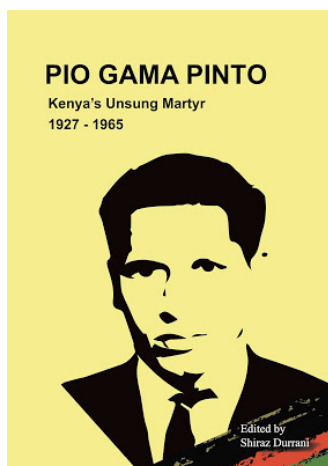


Cyprian Fernandes: PIO GAMA PINTO Blood on British and Kenyan hands



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

Pio Gama Pinto, Kenya's Unsung Martyr 1927-1965
Edited by Shiraz Durrani

<https://www.headlinesofmylife.today/2018/10/pio-gama-pinto-blood-on-british-and.html> [Accessed: 19-09-2020]

October 16, 2018

The long-awaited book on Pio Gama Pinto is finally here. It was launched in Nairobi on October 16. 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. All time 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 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.

Emma Gama Pinto

(Excerpts from the book)

Pio’s detention on Manda Island: Pio told later that he built a small shelter against scorching sun and a simple bed. The land was destitute of vegetation and there were no facilities when he got there. A daily ration of food was barely enough to suffice for one meal. He went on a hunger strike, but after nine days realised that it would hurt prisoners nothing more. They would die like dogs for the all the authorities cared. The prisoners were sullen and dejected. Pio met some of his old friends there ... Achieng Oneko and others and they set about improving the morale of the 9000 men on the

island prison. They organised games and tried to catch fish, turtles and the like to supplement their impoverished diet. After pleading with the authorities, I was allowed to write to my husband once a month but the letter would be censored. His reply would be censored. I received permission to send Pio literature. He asked for the works of Shakespeare and (George Bernard) Shaw. Later Pio said the books kept him from committing suicide. Everything he had, he shared with his friends, even my letters.

Our home: We had little finances. Pio sadly confessed that the money given by my father had been used as part-payment for a printing press which he wanted to operate as the voice of the people. The press was lost as soon as Pio was arrested. On his release from restriction in 1960, Pio asked Oginga Odinga (head of the Kenya People's Union and arch opponent of Jomo Kenyatta) to help him buy a house. It was more like a hotel –we had people coming and going and dropping in for a meal at all hours. Pio would have political refugees from Angola and South Africa spend a night or two and listen to their accounts of their situation.

No African who came to the house was turned away –if they needed school fees for their children, advice or just a letter written to a relative or government official, Pio lent a hand. They were his brothers, and I mean brothers. He knew the weaknesses of some of them but felt they would see reason enough if temporarily they did not put their country first. From the start of his interest in Kenya politics, Pio understood clearly that the African cause must be carried by Africans. **He identified with the Africans completely and secretly suffered anguish that he was no born and African.** He preferred to work behind the scenes, but he did not work in isolation. He consulted with lawyers, economists and politicians before planning his work. He chose his non-African friends carefully for what they could contribute to the cause.

Despite the fact that Pio vehemently worked against those opposed to the African freedom movement, he did not harbour rancour against any individual. I never once heard him raise his voice in anger or swear at anyone, he called them blind or stupid in their policies. He was once given a pistol for protection ... he promptly buried it in the garden. Later when he heard that one of his friends was in danger, he dug the weapon up and gave it to his friend for protection.

On the Goans in Kenya:

Pio and I had attended a few social functions after his release from detention and even though several men forward to hear about his “detention” there was little evidence of their sympathy for the detainees.

When the Portuguese anthem was played at the end of an occasion, Pio could guess where their allegiance lay. He had painted a sketch of Kenya's road in the struggle for freedom and left it to them to pursue a course. Mr J. M Nazareth Q.C. and a few others were already on the road.

Later we did not attend Goan functions, so I was not aware of the view they had of Pio. **Even after Pio's assassination I did not feel that I belonged to the Goan community.** I do not fault the community –it is just that we had other interests and concerns. I was happy with an Asian who understood and helped Pio's work.

Goa: Pio and a small group of Kenya politicians including Tom Mboya and Joe Murumbi flew to India around 1961 and met with Pandit Nehru. The agenda included the liberation of Goa as well as funds for a printing press in Kenya (to provide the African political viewpoint). Funds were granted, and Pio went on to set up the Pan African Press. Subsequently, Pio and Fitz De Souza attended Goa's liberation celebrations. There are some Goans who applaud Pio's small contribution for Goa.

A friend of mine sent me the following note:

He never met Pio Gama Pinto personally, but offered his observances from the sidelines.

He left Kenya in 1964 after graduating from Royal College, Nairobi.

These young grads were told by their professors that there were no jobs for Asian grads.

"We were young and somewhat callus then. No point in crying in one's beer. Off to Ulaya (UK) where jobs were plentiful.

One painful memory remains. In Dec 1963 (year of independence) Royal College students, were pressed into service as aide-d-camps to visiting dignitaries at Uhuru time and hence were at the flag raising. After the event there was somewhat chaos in the parking lot searching for the limos. The place was dimly lit, but looking over his shoulder for a second take he noted Pio walking alongside with Tom Mboya and several others.

While in the UK, where most of us were then, we heard the news of their assassinations over the radio and grieved in isolation.

Sometime in the late 1950s or early 60s, the Goan Voice in Nairobi, published a letter from his father, pleading to the Governor Patrick Renison for the release of his son. My friend is convinced it evoked tears for many who read it.

He asked those who were connected with the family whether the letter was still available, but was told that after his death, the papers and documents pertaining to his life and activities were destroyed. This to forestall reprisals. It is possible that the Colonial Archives - located in Kew UK has copies of the Goan Voice featuring this letter, but would be like looking for a needle in a haystack..

He has somewhat vivid memories of Pio as: a mid-distance athlete. Watched him at the GI sports. He flopped on the ground after winning the 440 yards. Don't think he captured the Victor Ludorum, Stanley Braganza had a tight hold on this trophy for many years.

He reckons Pio owned a Peugeot 203 -- hum drum compared to the 403 -- a long time Coronation Safari winner!

He used to see him sitting in the last pews of the Holy Family Church, looking quite bored and reading a religious paper left in the racks. This must have been a weekday Mass, which his mother attended. You could say he was a dutiful son, driving her to church.

My friend does not think he was ostracized by the Goan Community. "Goans were apolitical. Our parents held Portuguese passports. We were non-judgmental, accepting the quirks and foibles of those around us. He was a member of our community. We respected what he tried to do and will forever be saddened by the brutal manner he was struck down.

Mervyn Maciel: I knew Pio quite well and often 'bumped' into him on my official trip to Nairobi, firstly from Machakos and latterly, Njoro. He was a very modest man. His brother(Rosario) and I were close friends both in Kenya and latterly here in England. Once, when he heard I was recovering from flu, he sent me a whole parcel of tonics and some delicious eats too. He too was very

generous. I know the family well.

I have a photo of Emma and her young children when they visited us at Njoro long after Pio was assassinated.

Cyprian Fernandes is a former Chief Reporter of the Nation and knew Pio Gama Pinto and most of the people mentioned in this book. He is also the author of *Yesterday in Paradise*, and *Stars Next Door*. You can read more of his stories at www.headlinesofmylife.today

Vita Books P.O. Box 62501-00200 Nairobi. Kenya

Website: <http://vitabooks.co.uk>

email: info.vitabkske@gmail.com

Distributed Worldwide by: African Books Collective

Oxford, OX1 9EN. UK

orders@africanbookscollective.com

www.africanbookscollective.com

ISBN 978-9966-1890-0-4 (Paper) ISBN 978-9966-1890-4-2 (eBook)

at [October 16, 2018](#) 

[Email This](#)[Blog This!](#)[Share to Twitter](#)[Share to Facebook](#)[Share to Pinterest](#)