

# Pio Gama Pinto: some facts about the life of a great leader and a patriotic journalist

by Shiraz Durrani (1984)

THE STANDARD, Monday, September 17, 1984. 7

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FEATURES... FEATU

## GAMA PINTO: A KENYAN FREEDOM FIGHTER

FEBRUARY 25, 1985 will mark the 20th anniversary of the murder of that great patriotic Kenyan leader, Pio Gama Pinto. The following tribute to Pio Gama Pinto is an extract from a survey on the history of publishing in Kenya. It shall mainly look at his contribution in the publishing field. It should, however, be realised that mass media have played a very important role in our struggle against imperialism and were used as an organizing and uniting tool by the patriotic forces fighting for liberation.

Pio Gama Pinto was at the centre of the publishing activities of the freedom fighters. This publishing role did not limit his contribution to the struggle for land and freedom in Kenya. He stood foremost as an activist who clearly saw the danger posed to the young Kenyan nation from imperialism and their local allies. He devoted his whole life to the fight for a true independence for Kenya, in all spheres, economic, political and cultural. His sacrifice was too great for achieving this aim. He suffered economic hardships, detentions, and finally gave his life.

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**PIO GAMA** Pinto was a prominent person in publishing activities of between 1948 and 1965. As he was deeply involved in every aspect of the struggle for independence, Pinto was in a better position to serve national interests through his publishing activities. Oginga Odinga says of Pinto.

"Pio Pinto was assassinated outside his home early in the morning of February 24, 1965. Pio Gama Pinto was a great Kenyan patriot. He leaves a gap in our political struggle for full freedom that few men — none that I know — can fill. ... There is no phase of our struggle in which he did not play an invaluable part. When the repression was launched against KAU, Pio-to organized political defences. When fighting started from the

Journal Times and the Daily Chronicle. In 1954, five months after his marriage, he was rounded up in the notorious Operation Asani and spent the next four years in detention on Manda Island with the so-called "hard core" Mau Mau.

"He was kept in restriction from early 1956 until October 1959 at remote Kabaret. ... In 1960 he founded the KANU newspaper Sauti ya Kuu and later Pao African Press of which he subsequently became Director and Secretary.

In September 1965, Mrs. Emma Gama Pinto was invited to Santiago, Chile, to receive a posthumous prize awarded to her husband by the International Organization of Jour-

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**publishing and editing various newspapers, including "Daily Chronicle".**

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## **Gama Pinto: some facts about the life of a great leader and a patriotic journalist<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

This short tribute was compiled from existing literature in May 1984 at the invitation of the Editors of *Sauti ya Kamukunji*, a publication of the University of Nairobi Students Union. This article was part of a series written to bring people's history and culture to the attention of Kenyan youth. It is being reproduced without change in response to requests from a number of people.

The series of articles<sup>2</sup> was produced in view of the fact that the history of prominent anti-imperialist activists such as Kimaathi and Pio Gama Pinto was not being taught to a generation born after political independence. Historians who carried out research on Mau Mau were jailed or sent into exile. Research in social sciences has suffered from interference from the state which suppressed any views that contradicted the "official" position. Indeed, President Moi even ordered "an immediate stop to the Mau Mau debate".<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the real contribution of progressive South Asian Kenyans to the liberation of Kenya has also not been fully recorded. It is time for Kenyan historian and activists to begin to collect oral and written material before it is lost. There is an urgent need to form a

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<sup>1</sup> This is a reproduction of an article first published in 1984. Two versions of the article were published:

- *Pio Gama Pinto: Some Facts About the Life of a Great Leader and a Patriotic Journalist. Sauti ya Kamukunji* (Nairobi) Vol.1 No.8 (June, 1984).
- (a) *Gama Pinto: A Kenyan Freedom Fighter. The Standard* (Nairobi) September 17, 1984. p.7 (Part 1). (b) *Pinto Backed Nationalism. The Standard* September 18, 1984. pp.10-11. (Part 2).

<sup>2</sup> Articles included those on Kimaathi and Mau Mau, Makhan Singh, Pio Gama Pinto and the Maji Maji movement in Tanganyika.

<sup>3</sup> Moi, D. A. (1986): Stop Mau Mau debate - Moi. *The Standard* (Nairobi) March 22. p.1.

Pio Gama Pinto Research Centre, to organise a scholarship in his memory, to set up a Lumumba Institute-type organisation to train young people to become better organised to fight imperialism, and to name national monuments after him. There is ample support among progressive people in Kenya, as the selection below shows.

The article on Pio Gama Pinto is part of a political biography of Pio Gama Pinto being written under the title *Pio Gama Pinto; the assassinated hero of the anti-imperialist struggle in Kenya*.

Shiraz Durrani

London. November 14, 1998

[A contribution to the listserv discussion list Namaskar-Africana]

PIO GAMA PINTO: SOME FACTS ABOUT THE LIFE OF  
A GREAT LEADER AND A PATRIOTIC JOURNALIST\*

by

Shiraz Durrani

24th February, 1985 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the murder of the great patriotic leader of Kenya, Pio Gama Pinto at the hands of the enemies of Kenyan people. The conspiracy of silence surrounding the achievements of our patriotic leaders of the Mau Mau War of national liberation has also kept our new generation ignorant about the achievements of Pio Gama Pinto. This is a challenge to our institutes of higher learning, especially the University, not only to undertake research on our past leaders and their achievements, but also to disseminate the results to the Kenyan people.

The following tribute to Pio Gama Pinto is an extract from a survey on the history of publishing in Kenya. We shall mainly look at his contribution in the publishing field. It should, however, be realized that mass media have played a very important role in our struggle against imperialism and were used as an organizing and uniting tool by the patriotic forces fighting for liberation. Pio Gama Pinto was at the centre of the publishing activities of the freedom fighters. His publishing role did not limit his contribution to the struggle for land and freedom in Kenya. He stood foremost as an activist who clearly saw the danger posed to the young Kenyan nation from imperialism and their local allies. He devoted his whole life to the fight for a true independence for Kenya, in all spheres, economic, political and cultural. No sacrifice was too great for achieving this aim. He suffered economic hardships, detentions, and finally gave his life. His example can only fill our youth with a greater sense of dedication to the service to the people. Pio Gama Pinto was a prominent person in publishing activities of their period (1948-65). As he was deeply involved in every aspect of the struggle for independence, Pinto was in a better position to serve national interests through his publishing activities. Oginga Odinga comments on Pinto thus:

\*Pio Pinto was assassinated outside his house early in the morning of 24 February 1965. Pio Gama Pinto was a great Kenyan patriot. He leaves a gap in our political struggle for full freedom that few men - none that I know - can fill... There is no phase of our struggle in which he did not play an invaluable part. When the repression was launched against KAU, Pinto organized political defenses. When fighting started from the forests Pinto maintained political liaison and supplied

A shorter version of this paper was published in Sauti Ya Kamukani Vol. 1 No. 8 (June, 1984)

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24th February, 1985 will mark the twentieth anniversary of the murder of the great patriotic leader of Kenya, Pio Gama Pinto at the hands of the enemies of Kenyan people. The conspiracy of silence surrounding the achievements of our patriotic leaders of the Mau Mau War of national liberation has also kept our new generation ignorant about the achievements of Pio Gama Pinto. This is a challenge to our institutes of higher learning, especially the University, not only to undertake research on our past leaders and their achievements, but also to disseminate the results to the Kenyan people.

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When the (colonial) authorities caught up with his activities, he served his term of detention. When he was released and freed from restriction he devoted himself to the campaign for the release of other detainees and the support of their dependants. He was a brilliant organiser and resourceful political leader. He threw himself into helping KANU win the 1961 elections, into founding our independent press, into the campaign for East African Federation, into the struggle against imperialism.

Pio Gama Pinto was a journalist by profession and was deeply involved in all Mau Mau activities dealing with printing and publishing. Odinga explains further some of his later publishing activities (he had earlier on been involved in publishing and editing various newspapers, including *Daily Chronicle*) :

(in 1961) large sums were used to build our independent press. Pio Pinto had been released from detention on Manda Island and from restriction and he immediately plunged into work... and was the moving force in the acquisition a small press and the publishing of our weekly KANU paper *Sauti ya Kanu* and later, *Sauti ya Mwafrika*.

Pio Pinto was a moving spirit in the establishment of Pan-Africa Press which published a weekly in Dholuo *Nyanza Times*, a weekly in Kiswahili, *Sauti ya Mwafrika* and a bi-monthly in English *Pan Africa*; and in the formation of the Lumumba Institute.

Pio Gama Pinto's biography mentions his early publishing career and records the fact that the International Organisation of Journalists recognised his contribution to the development of committed journalism in Africa:

In 1949... after a succession of clerical jobs, (Pio Gama Pinto) became involved in the local politics aimed at overthrowing colonialism. He turned to journalism and worked with the *Colonial Times* and the *Daily Chronicle*. In 1954, 5 months after his marriage to Emma, he was rounded up in the notorious Operation Anvil and spent the next four years in detention on Manda Island with the so called "hard core" Mau Mau. He was kept in restriction from early 1958 until October 1959 at remote Kabarnet... In 1960 he founded the KANU newspaper *Sauti ya Kanu* and later Pan African Press of which he subsequently became Director and Secretary.

In September 1965, Mrs. Emma Gama Pinto was invited to Santiago, Chile, to receive a posthumous prize awarded to her husband by the International Organisation of Journalists

for his contribution in journalism to the liberation of Africa countries from foreign domination and exploitation.

THE STANDARD, Tuesday, September 28, 1964

# Pinto backed nat

PINTO'S publishing work ranged from drafting, writing, printing and distributing not only newspapers but memoranda, publicity materials, posters, Press and other statements. He also realised the importance of developing national language and cultures, as these were always anti-imperialist. He then presented his own national language and culture which was Gwan. He also published a paper "Crowd" ("spark") which took an anti-imperialist line. Dr. Feit De Souza comments on these aspects:

History will record that Pinto had a hand in the preparation of most of the memoranda and statements issued by S.A.U. in those days. He also used to sit up to 3 a.m. in the Congress office drafting political papers in the interminable case . . . . A couple of years later when he was the Editor of the Daily Chronicle, the Royal Com-

mission on Land asked for evidence and there was no one to put forward the African case for all the Nations were in detention for in the forest). . . . Pinto resigned his job and for three months read through the voluminous Carter Commission Report and other documents on the land issue and took notes from Gwan elders and others. He then wrote out and personally typed and cyclo-styled, always working into the early hours of the morning, the 200-page Memorandum as well as memoranda for other Members in the Central Province.

It was our duty, Pinto suggested, to avoid all liberation fronts, Portuguese colonialism was in fact in any other. The Gwan Organisation in East Africa was being used by the Portuguese whose constant propaganda was that Gwan enemies supported the regime and were happy with Dr. Portuguese. Pinto had already started a Kikuyu language paper in Nairobi, The United Front, being against Portuguese imperialism.

In 1960, only a few months after he was released from detention, Pinto formed the East African Gwan League

By Shirazi Darmani

. . . In May 1961, a delegation from the Gwa Advertiser arrived in Kenya. Largely under the pretence of singing Gwan songs and visiting Gwan institutions, they studied some forms of self-report and dignity and East African Gwan. They were amongst the earliest.

**MEMORU**

Pinto then went to New Delhi and discussed Gwan with Pandit Nehru and officials of the Indian Government. He took advantage of the opportunity to ask Pandit Nehru for assistance to start a national paper in Kenya. Pandit gave him funds with which Pinto began the East African Press Ltd., which published South East African, East Africa and the Nation Times.

Mungu Chetai Chokwe shows Pinto's contribution to developing national newspapers.

"Pinto joined the staff of a small newspaper organisation and started whipping up public opinion in favour of the African cause. He utilised the help of Mr. D. K. Shamba who had a small newspaper (Tribune Press) and got him to print various national papers. Shamba Kungu with his financial help strengthened the ranks of national language's opponents against the imperialist papers like the East African and the Kenya Weekly News."

Pinto added his name to the long list of activists on the publishing front who sacrificed much for the cause they




# onalism

"If the murder was to avenge the zeal against the imperialist forces, then there are many more of us willing to meet death."

Union Federation. Pinto also organised a number of Members of Parliament to back in what they too saw the need to have a new non-aligned Trade Union Centre committed to Africa's unity.

At the beginning of 1965 it became clear to the imperialists that we were determined . . . . In a desperate attempt to hold things back, Congress supporters were intimidated and vilified by employers and finally the cold-blooded imperialists laid their hand on Pinto. We were all shocked by the brutality of the imperialists, but far from discouraging or brightening us, if anything, this only strengthened us and made us even more determined. Imperialists and their stooges will never destroy Pinto's work. Pinto determined stand for the cause. The fact that he knew of the imperialist plot against him, but remained fearless, will not be forgotten. Pinto remains a great inspiration to us all.

Bismark Chanda, a journalist for the Daily paper New Age says up Pinto Pinto's contribution to the struggle in

dead by the agents of imperialism — the imperialists, to vanquish which Pinto dedicated his entire life.

"Every time we talked, he spoke of the need against the imperialists. Yes, he would say, we are marching forward, some will meet enemies on becoming independent, but he insisted, for the imperialists have not been liquidated — they are here, waiting to come back, to divide us.

Throughout his life, now too there was no compromise. The light went on his face, a momentary, as if he was speaking of something of great importance.

And precisely because of this refusal to compromise, his passionate crusade against neo-colonialism — the imperialists killed Pinto Pinto. They shot him dead at point blank range near his home.

before his execution by burning the former Gwan Road in Pin Gwan, Pinto Road. This however did not happen and the road was instead named "Lithanga Road." Elford however, has a town named after Pin Gwan Pinto.

Mr. Pinto (right) chats with Mr. J. Mureveni (left) and Dr. Wajaki.






Let us now examine what some prominent nationalists and publishing pioneers have said about Pio Gama Pinto's contribution to Kenyan publishing and achievement of complete economic and political independence for Kenya:

Bildad Kaggia has said: "I can never forget his help to me and other African politicians when we decided to run our own newspapers to fight the colonial newspaper monopoly. He did all he could to see that each and every small newspaper went forward. His advice and practical help in this work will never be forgotten."

Ramogi Achieng Oneko mentions Pio Gama Pinto's contribution to the development of oral tradition for communication purposes in detention camp:

.. During detention on Manda Island there came a time when the colonial authorities had began to engineer confusion in the camp in order to demoralise us. We realised that if we did not organise counter measures and propaganda many of us (numbering about two hundred) would be wrecked. We therefore started a counter propaganda move. Pio was one of the editors and played a big role in a well organised network. It was his job to dish out information to the lower camp by word of mouth to our own propagandists. To the astonishment and surprise of the Camp Administration the morale of the detainees was restored and we remained hard and unpenetrable.

J.D. Kali mentions Pinto's activities in poster and handbill production and distribution in later period:

Pinto had many friends among the present Members of Parliament, friendships which began years ago. He was appointed by them to act as their Secretary during the last general Elections Campaign. One of his main jobs was to draft campaign slogans and print them. Pio even took it upon himself to display them all over Nairobi. Most often he stuck the posters at the dead of night. One of the most interesting of those posters was the 'Congo' poster. He printed posters and pamphlets for KAU candidates all over the country.

Pio Gama Pinto was also very actively involved in trade union and worker movement, hence his close relationship with the struggle for independence. Trade unions played a major part in the struggle for economic and political independence. Pinto's publishing activities were not undertaken in isolation from the main struggles. Indeed they were a part

and a means of achieving the higher political goals. Nor were his publishing activities undertaken in isolation: he was working with the patriotic forces in various fields: trade union, military, political and social. It was publishing, however, which co-ordinated all these various aspects of the same anti-imperialist struggle.

Pinto's publishing work ranged from drafting, writing, printing and distributing not only newspapers but memoranda, publicity materials, posters, press and other statements. He also realised the importance of developing nationality culture and languages, as these were always anti-imperialist. He thus promoted his own nationality language and culture which was Goan. He also published a paper *Uzwod* ("Spark") which took an anti-imperialist line. Dr. Fitz De Souza comments on these aspects:

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It was our duty, Pinto suggested, to assist all liberation fronts. Portuguese colonialism was as bad as any other. The Goan Organisation in East Africa was being used by the Portuguese whose constant propaganda was that Goans overseas supported the regime and were happy with the Portuguese. Pio had already started a Konkni paper in Nairobi, *The Uzwod* to arouse feelings against Portuguese imperialism. In 1960, only a few months after he was released, Pio formed the East African Goa League. In May 1961, a delegation from the Goa Asleram arrived in Kenya. Largely under the pretext of singing Goan songs and reciting Goan literature, they instilled some form of self-respect and dignity into East African Goans. They were amazingly successful.

Pio then went to New Delhi and discussed Goa with Pandit Nehru and officials of the Indian Government. He took advantage of the opportunity to ask Pandit Nehru for assistance to start a nationalist paper in Kenya. Panditji gave him funds with which Pio began the Pan African Press, Ltd which published *Sauti Ya Mwafrika*, *Pan Africa* and the *Nyanza Times*.

Muinga Chitari Chokwe shows Pinto's contribution to developing national newspapers which were existed in contradiction to the imperialist press:

Pio joined the staff of a small newspaper organisation and started whipping up public opinion in favour of the African (cause). Pio enlisted the help of Mr. D.K. Sharda who had a small press (Tribune Press) and got him to print various (national) papers. Bildad Kaggia with his *Inoro ria Gikuyu* strengthened the armada of (nationality language) opinions against the imperialist papers like the *Comment* and the *Kenya Weekly News*.

Pio Gama Pinto added his name to the long list of activists on the publishing front who sacrificed much for the cause they believed in. His life and death showed clearly that there could not be truly free publishing unless the freedom is extended to every aspect of life, including the economic and the political. His life was devoted to the cause of a publishing sector in the service of people and to the creation of a society where basic freedom are recognised as a right.

Let us now look briefly at Pio Gama Pinto's trade union and worker activities and a final summing up on this great hero of Africa. J. Dennis Akumu provides information on Pio Gama Pinto's trade union work.

Pio was detained during the Emergency because of his nationalist support of the masses and because of the role he played in the formation of the anti-imperialist East African Trade Union Congress, which was later banned... We agreed with Pinto that the attainment of economic independence would be impossible as long as our Trade Unions remained dominated by the I.C.F.T.U. (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) which is an agency of the same power which dominated our country politically and economically.

In 1964... we decided to form our own Federation which was to be non-aligned but Pan-African in outlook. Our first Federation, the Kenya Federation of Progressive Trade Unions was not registered because the registering authority had a vested interest.

We therefore formed another organisation, this time we called it the Kenya African Workers Congress. By this time workers were supporting the Congress en mass and Pio had arranged for us to renew our friendship with... the Secretary General of the All African Trade Union Federation. Pio also organised a number of Members of Parliament to back us when they too saw the need to have a new non-aligned Trade Union Centre committed to Africa's unity.

At the beginning of 1965 it became clear to the imperialists that we were determined... In a desperate attempt to hold things back,

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Congress supporters were intimidated and victimised by employers and finally the cold-blooded imperialists laid their hands on Pio. We were all shocked by the brutality of the imperialists, but far from discouraging or frightening us, if anything, this only strengthened us and made us even more determined. Imperialists and their stooges will never destroy Pio's work. Pio's determined stand for the cause, the fact that he knew of the imperialist plot against him, but remained fearless, will not be forgotten. Pio remains a great inspiration to us all.

Romesh Chandra, a journalist for the Delhi paper *New Age* sums up Pio Gama Pinto's contribution to the struggle in Africa:

There is mourning in Kenya. One of the bravest of her sons is no more, one to the fighters who helped to win independence for Kenya lies buried under the soil he loved so dearly.

Pio had spent many years in British prisons for the cause of Kenya<sup>1</sup> a emancipation. He died too for Africa: he was shot dead by the events of imperialism, to vanquish which Pio dedicated his entire life.

Every time we talked, Pio spoke of the need against the imperialists. Yes, he would say, we are marching forward, more and more countries are becoming independent,

but be vigilant, for the imperialists have not been liquidated - they are here, striving to come back, to divide us.

As throughout his life, now too there was no compromise. The fight went on. No abandonment of principles, no weakening of resolve.

And precisely because of this tireless exposure of imperialism, this passionate crusade against neo-colonialism - the imperialists killed Pio Pinto. They shot him dead at point blank range near his home. The cowards who killed, fired in the dark.

But Pio's indomitable spirit lives. It lives in the work of the many brave young Kenyans, who had been inspired by his work, by the enthusiasm for the building of a socialist Africa which he always had.

M.C. Chokwe summed up: "If the murder was to avenge the zeal against the imperialist forces, then there are many more of us willing to meet death."

#### POSTSCRIPT

Soon after the death of Pio Gama Pinto, the Nairobi City Council had plans to honour his memory by naming the former Grogan Road as Pio Gama Pinto Road. This, however, did not happen and the road was instead named Kirinyaga Road. Elders however has a road named after Pio Gama Pinto. [Npov there is a Pio Gama Pinto Road in the Westlands, Nairobi].

#### **Selected reference & bibliography**

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*Shiraz Durrani*

**PIO GAMA PINTO**  
**the Assassinated Hero of the**  
**Anti-Imperialist Struggle in Kenya.**

“There is mourning in Kenya. One of the bravest of her sons is no more, one of the fighters who helped to win independence for Kenya lies buried under the soil he loved so dearly. Pio had spent many years in British prisons for the cause of Kenya’s emancipation. He died too for Africa: he was shot dead by agents of imperialism - the imperialism, to vanquish which Pio dedicated his entire life.” Thus wrote a contemporary journalist on the murder of Pio Gama Pinto on 24th February, 1965. This book examines the life and work of Pio Gama Pinto as seen through the eyes of those who worked with him and sets his achievements in their historical context.

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