

## Forgetting Pio Gama Pinto

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to situate the figure of Pio Gama Pinto within the context of racial politics between India and Africa in the 1950s and 60s. It suggests that the emerging contexts of anti-colonial nationalism and the practices of internationalist socialism that Pinto espoused were embedded within notions of race and ethnicity that eventually led to the erasure of this interesting figure from the histories of Goa, India, and Kenya.

While combing through a catalogue in a library, I came across a slim book published in East Africa: *Pio Gama Pinto—Independent Kenya's First Martyr*, which carried a picture of a young Pio Gama Pinto on the cover. While there was nothing unusual about the presence of a Goan in Kenya, it was surprising to find one who had earned a place of such emotive and political significance in Kenya's national history. Pinto had played a prominent role in strengthening anti-colonial movements, and was the only non-African in the Kenyan government.

A further search for information on Pio Gama Pinto, however, revealed scarcely any material, and little that was published in Goa. In fact, the man who had participated in anti-colonial activities in Goa and Bombay before leaving for Kenya had scarcely any place within Goan history. This was a figure that was visible only within thin histories of the Goan and Indian diaspora, within global accounts of anti-imperial struggles, and within personal

memories of his family and contemporaries. A website offering a chronology for a pan-African anti-imperial history ([www.ckln.fm/almdates.html](http://www.ckln.fm/almdates.html)) lists Pio Gama Pinto as an activist who was killed three days before Malcolm X, in the same year that Fidel Castro assumed leadership of Cuba. It is perhaps appropriate that Pinto is neighboured by Castro and Malcolm X as he espoused and is remembered for an internationalist anti-colonial aspiration rather than a national one. It is this political location that this note attempts to capture—a location constructed through the racialised politics of Portuguese colonialism, the internationalist hope evoked by socialism in the colonies, and the absorption of this impetus into new independent nation-states. While the individual histories of anti-colonial activists have frequently enough been absorbed and regurgitated through nationalist narratives, Pio Gama Pinto is distinctive for his comparative disappearance from the national (since histories of Goa are predominantly seen as extensions or aberrations of the history of India) histories of Goa and, to a lesser extent, Kenya. This disappearance is partially explained by the eventual distancing of both independent nation-states from the agenda of socialism. However, Pinto's negligible place in Goan history, I suggest, also results from the necessity of erasing the memory of racial contact with Africa from ethnically defined national histories.

The Portuguese colonial policy of transferring colonial populations across colonies to administer, police, doctor and Christianise explains the presence of substantial numbers of Goans in administrative positions in Portugal's African colonies. By extension, this educated fringe of predominantly Catholic Goans was desirable as well in lesser administrative posts in British territories in both India and Africa. Pio Gama Pinto's personal and political movements between Kenya, Goa and Bombay were produced by this economy.

To retrace some of the pertinent details of Pinto's life—he was born in East Africa to Goan parents, attended school in Goa and college in Dharwar in India, associated himself with anti-Portuguese activities in Goa, left for Bombay to evade arrest, and was involved in trade union activities in Bombay. He departed for Kenya when threatened by the Portuguese government in India and as a conscious desire to be part of the movement there ([http://awaazmag.com/feature\\_story.asp](http://awaazmag.com/feature_story.asp)).<sup>1</sup>

The political life of Pio Gama Pinto, at its most vigorous in the 1950s and '60s, until the moment of his death in 1965, marks the decades of intense political redefinition for Goa and for Portugal's African colonies. It is possible to see Pinto's life as a crucible of that hope, carried with care up to the moment

of national liberation in Goa and Kenya. The quick subsumption of such energies into the requirements and realpolitik of nationalism forms part of a familiar narrative of the failures of nationalism. The erasure of racial contact with Africa from the dominant political memory of Goa accompanied the vanquishing of hope for a trans-national political solidarity. The span of Pinto's life may be recalled as part of a precarious and important political moment prior to the absorption of race into the certainties of national ethnicities.

In his essay, "The Aryan Model of History and the Oriental Renaissance," Vasant Kaiwar argues that the adaptation of an Aryan historical model within Indian anti-colonial and nationalist discourse had a range of repercussions. One of these was that "all traces of maritime influences on subcontinental cultures were either wiped clean or rendered into marginal, that is, coastal phenomena." In an introduction to their collection of essays, Kaiwar and Sucheta Mazumdar contend that the reluctance to discard the orientalist insertion of India into a continuous history of Aryan genius has allowed for a firm inscription of identity politics within the constructs of race, orient and nation. It is interesting, however, for the purpose of my research, that their elaboration of the myth of European and Indian antiquity usually features the works of English Orientalists and German romantics. While the writers emphasise that the flexibility of this framework lent itself to various uses, Portugal's history of insertion into this narrative may provide a history on its own.

The construction of Portugal's reluctant encounter with the Enlightenment is as inherent to accounts of European modernity as is the devaluing of Egyptian and Arabic cultures. While it participated quite fully in the deployment of race and notions of the orient, Portugal's negotiation with the daily challenges of racial and colonial politics reveals the tenuous hold of lessons learnt predominantly from northern Europe. This is glaringly evident in the kind of elite produced in Goa and exported through Portuguese and British colonies in Africa. A different conceptualisation of race within the ambit of Portuguese colonialism allowed for degrees of political and economic ascendance of indigenous elites while subordinating them within a broader definition of civilization and capping their ascendance to protect the upper echelons of administrative and ecclesiastical power. The transition of Goans from being relatively self-fashioned adventurers in the Indian Ocean's Portuguese territories to more strictly stratified racial hierarchies and roles in British East Africa also plots a transition from the realities of mixed-race encounters, of inhab-

iting widely fluctuating racial categories, to the relatively fixed contours of country, nation and citizenship.

This transition was also the ground on which Portugal demonstrated its absorption of the emergent scientific discourse of race, by attempting to read the racial categories produced within its colonies in terms of the criteria for racial categorisation prevalent in northern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Accounts of East Africa that were produced by Goans demonstrated their own anxiety to be racially and politically associated with the coloniser. Augusto E. Xavier Soares' *Descrição da Villa de Sofalla* of 1857 was published in Goa, and indicates the emergence of interest among a Goan readership in the accounts of those who had returned from Africa. The enumeration of races and the uniformly derogatory account of the uses and customs of what are termed as the aborigines of Sofalla were framed within an overarching and explicit celebration of Portuguese achievements. Soares' description shared certain similarities with other contemporary publications, such as the absolute othering of either "aborigines" or "tribes." Among the listing of races other than Portuguese and African, a prominent place was occupied by Gujarati traders. The *Descrição* also included a list of Indo-Portuguese employed in administrative positions from the eighteenth century in Sofalla. This was a somewhat nebulous racial category, which could have included colonial-born Portuguese as well as Goans. Accounts produced by Goans tended to foreground the presence of Goans and Gujaratis against a homogenised backdrop of categories for white and black populations.

The eventual herding of those who inhabited the interstices of racial and colonial categories into suitable nationalities could only be incompletely achieved in the case of Goans, whose union with India was more fraught with contradictions than their existence as an Asian minority within Kenya or Uganda. Portugal's relaxed grip on the certainties of Europe's foundational cultural narratives produced a population that inserted itself cynically and easily into racial hierarchies—inferior to whites, superior to blacks. This was, however, a population that at home, in Goa, and implicitly, in India, could not easily inhabit the dominant Indian extension of the Aryan historical model. In fact, it could not but be marginal to it.

This is a possible context for the historicisation of Pio Gama Pinto. Once in Kenya, Pinto nursed hopes of both, an Afro-Indian, or perhaps Afro-Goan unity against the Portuguese, as well as a Pan-African alliance. Towards this end, he made preliminary moves towards setting up organisations in Mozam-

bique and Zimbabwe. In a meeting with Nehru, he was given funds to set up an anti-colonial press in Kenya, with the understanding that he keep it a secret.<sup>3</sup> Soon after the liberation of Kenya, Pinto was assassinated in his own driveway in 1965. The alleged assassin was released in 2001, having spent 36 years in prison, still claiming that he had not killed the Kenyan nationalist (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1424276.stm>).

If in the course of these years Pio Gama Pinto was erased from national histories, he had reappeared in histories of the Indian diaspora who traced their own trans-national movement impelled by political transformations. The foregrounding of connections with Africa therefore has a fractured presence in history, with the Goan diaspora in East Africa remembered at different moments in colonial history, even while racial difference was erased from the construction of a modern Goan identity. Various aspects of Pinto's life and death become significant based on the occasion that necessitates remembering him. A publication generated soon after his death bemoaned the passing of Independent Kenya's first martyr, which is one of the ways in which Pinto is most often recalled. Kenyan nationalist history, unsurprisingly, is the terrain in which Pinto is most frequently cited. Behind the various denunciations of his assassination, which claimed that the killer was an enemy of the Kenyan people and the Kenyan movement, is a story that complicates the moment of Kenyan decolonisation.

It is through histories that are necessarily disaffected from Kenyan post-colonial governments that Pinto's socialist identity is foregrounded. As part of a group that had socialist aspirations for Kenya, Pinto had emerged from union struggles in both India and Kenya alongside the support he extended to the Mau Mau rebellion. Jomo Kenyatta, President of independent Kenya was not inclined to follow any of the policies that had spurred the group of socialist anti-colonial activists (see Good). A political coup to force Kenyatta to adopt socialist policies or resign had allegedly been planned by a group that included Pinto. Most writings on Pinto suggest that he was killed by the party he had helped set up, without the facts of the case ever emerging (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1424276.stm>). It is predominantly socialist histories that recall this aspect of Kenyan nationalism.

To be able to historicise Pinto as a representative of the Goan presence in Africa, a host of other categories, temporal moments and geographical locations also demand inclusion. Among these are the existence of Punjabi and Gujarati anti-colonial activists, some of whom moved to the UK when post-



colonial politics in Kenya threatened to turn hostile. The Goan presence in mid-twentieth century East Africa is linked to the presence of other Indians in Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar, and to the phenomenon of the “twice-migrant” diaspora from Africa to the UK. A Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora in East Africa mentions the diverse economic and cultural histories that had endured the experience of migration. Most migrants had either arrived as indentured labour, free traders, or, as in the case of Goans in Mozambique, as soldiers, priests and clerks. This report, which focused mostly on British East-African colonies, was drafted from the vantage point of post-Independent India. It therefore divided the Indian diaspora into NRIs and PIOs—Non-resident Indians and People of Indian Origin. PIOs were those who had either assumed citizenship of African countries or were older migrants to East Africa. Pio Gama Pinto for instance, along with other Indians who formed anti-colonial associations in the early twentieth century, feature as PIOs. The report mentions the friction between Africans and Asians that resulted from the visible economic success of the Asian community that continued after the independence movements in most countries. Friction was also instigated, according to the report, by the British, to try and stem the formation of political solidarities between Indians and Africans. One particular statistic, however, indicates how the formation of national identities in Africa was a moment that threatened the continuing presence of the Indian population in East Africa. The suspicion of the economic and political interests of the Indians by Africans, as well as the perception among Indians that their political and economic privileges would be threatened, led 82,000 PIOs to obtain British passports, while less than 50,000 became Kenyan citizens (<http://indiandiaspora.nic.in/contents.htm>).

After these moments of colonial and post-independence crisis, the Indian diaspora in Africa seem to have been successfully pushed away from national memory, and embedded as a minority in various African countries. Pio Gama Pinto ceased to feature in Goa’s retelling of the colonial past. It is only in the accounts of colleagues, or in memoirs published at the time of his death, that we recall that this was an effort to speak of the fortunes of Goa, Kenya and Mozambique together. Fitz de Souza, deputy speaker of the Kenyan National Assembly and a colleague of Pinto’s, had worked on the anti-colonial publications brought out during the pre-independence movement. In a personal recollection of Pinto, he says, “one day Pio suggested that we should do something in East Africa to assist in 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 of the rest of the world, I thought that we were East Africans and should confine our activities to East Africa" ([www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html](http://www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html)). Pinto urged him that, as socialists, their duty was to assist in all liberation struggles. "Pio had already started a Konkani paper in Nairobi, the *Uzwod*, to arouse feelings against Portuguese imperialism [...]. [H]is brother Rosario formed the East Goan National Association in 1954. Contacts made with organizations and individuals in London, Bombay and Goa flourished. As usual, we were labelled as 'communists' as that was the easiest way to get us suppressed."

The disappearance of Pio Gama Pinto from Goan history makes it difficult to recall that up to the moment of incorporation into the Indian state, the mental geography of Goa was substantially porous. In contrast to British India, racial mixing not only facilitated Portuguese colonialism but was also a terrain that was not necessarily policed or a cause for scandal for the coloniser. While it may have been a fraught terrain for people of Goan origin, there is sufficient evidence to indicate the reality of racial intermixing among Goans and Africans. Further, the structure of colonial administration required Goans to circulate within the colonies, indicating that re-entry into Goa was not uncommon, particularly once their working years were done. This porosity is housed in family histories, where the narration of the lives of male members often included accounts of years spent aboard ships or in countries stretching from Aden, Macau or Zanzibar.

In his report on the Public Library, the *Bibliotheca Publica* for the year 1892-93, the librarian Ismael Gracias said that he "thought it would be convenient to have the *Boletim Oficial* of the government of the province of Mozambique, where many sons of Goa held office, or were artisans or in other professions," so that their family here could keep track of events there (3). Other records indicate that Indian soldiers were occasionally sent to other Portuguese colonies to quell rebellions and that it was a common practice for the Portuguese to call for racially alien troops to thwart rebellions in their different colonies (Gastão de Almeida de Eça). A relatively important rebellion of 1895 in Goa, for example, began when a group of soldiers mutinied against the government, refusing to be sent to Mozambique (Kamat).

Emergent studies on the evidence of slavery in the Indian Ocean focus on the involvement of Indians in the slave trade, and on abolition legislation and the manner in which it was thwarted or followed by the Portuguese

(Machado). Hebbe Mattos' study of racial categories in Brazil and in Portugal also indicates the wide range of categories that emerge in Portugal's various colonies, some of which designate a particular racial combine, others which merely denote mixed-race entities with varied skin-tones, and others which specify distinctions between colonial and metropolitan born people of European descent (Mattos).

Portugal's improvisation of military and racial strategy seems to have contributed hugely to the changing fortunes of mixed race people throughout its colonies. Without doubt, European ancestry assured degrees of mobility that no other kind did, and black ancestry probably thwarted ambitions, but at no point did it deter the formation of independent fortunes and ascendancy in military hierarchies. This policy probably did ensure the appearance of Africans within Indian society as exceptions. A population statistic for 1810 for the Old Conquests of Goa lists 1065 people under the category of "Negros" and 479 as "*pardos*," or slaves of mixed descent (Xavier). The government news bulletin of 1821 mentions a revolt by *pardos* in Goa and the fear that the introduction of liberalism would prompt similar such revolts (*Boletim Oficial*).<sup>4</sup> Other categories that appear within census reports sometimes replace the term *pardo* with the term *mulatto*, usually used to denote those of Mozambican descent. Later statistics distinguish between free and captive slaves. Of the various other marginal references to contact with Africa is the fact that rebels who were captured could be deported to Timor or to Africa. The use of another racial space as a penal colony seems to characterise Portuguese rule—European convicts, for instance, were conscripted as soldiers in India, and Malaysian slaves were imported into India (Walker). Race also surfaced as an explicit trope among the Portuguese at times of crisis. Though in the course of everyday realpolitik Goan factions could include both *descendentes* and Goans in one faction, when colonial interests were opposed to metropolitan ones conflicts were instantly represented through race. For this reason the Portuguese, despite the enforcement of abolition laws by the British, repeatedly petitioned Mozambique to send African troops, so as to be able to subdue any rebellion likely to erupt in Portuguese India (Gastão de Almeida de Eça).

In contrast to Gujarati traders, who were also in a dominant position vis-à-vis the indigenous East Africans, Goan officials were invested in the historiographical value of the Portuguese presence in Africa. Goan officials experienced the threat of the historiographical erasure of Portugal's position as the first colonial power in various parts of the world as a threat to their own



identity. Their accounts of Africa therefore ensured that they wrote themselves into the history of colonisation to prove their indispensability to the fortunes of Portugal. It was to fulfil this purpose that C. M. Ribeiro's *The Indo-Portuguese Within the History of the Colonisation of Mozambique* homogenised the wide range of positions that Goans had occupied in Mozambique from the eighteenth century on. The Pereira family, whose marriage alliances with the family of an African king had won them a substantial empire in the Zambezi valley, scarcely shared the same identity as a Goan military doctor or priest. Yet this family, who had at times contested Portuguese claims on their possessions, were enumerated alongside Maratha troops, reluctant defenders of Portuguese interests, as also with priests, governors and doctors who had, in his words, defended the "national patrimony" (Ribeiro xii). From the eighteenth century on, he asserted, Goans had abandoned themselves to the African hinterland, "in the heroic and holy mission of converting the black, bringing him closer to God, and nationalizing him for the glory of Portugal" (xvi).

This elucidation of the place of the Goan within racial discourses was intended to indicate the shifting tenor of racial politics on which Pio Gama Pinto's location on the crossroads of socialist internationalism, nationalist consolidation, and the interests of two colonial powers rested. This does not sufficiently indicate, however, how racial politics impacted the colonial Goan within the recently decolonised Indian nation. The positioning of the Portuguese and the Goans is made visible through the variable racial categories that Goans occupied within other texts produced in British colonies, in which they were represented as a census category. The fluctuating racial status for all those other than black populations within the Portuguese colonial context provides a contrast when juxtaposed with the racial load of the term Indo-Portuguese in censuses produced by British governments. The category of the Indo-Portuguese, which in British colonies combined both Goan labour and the Goan elite, represented what was for the British the distasteful fact of racial miscegenation. Within Portugal's African colonies, however, where they often produced or collaborated in the production of racial slots, the term Indo-Portuguese could be read as almost white.

In addition, the emerging authority of the disciplines of history and anthropology in the early twentieth century was threatening for those whose racial identity could potentially be delegitimised by association or proximity with a devalued racial category. As the categories of race seemed to crystallise into scientific certainties, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also

saw a consolidation of caste identities as a parallel phenomenon to anti-colonial articulations. These processes by which identities were clarified around political boundaries framed the context of mid-twentieth-century politics. Pio Gama Pinto's declaration of pan-colonial unity was a declaration of the possibility of unity across these growing bifurcations. An appeal to support an internationalist political category could therefore only be directed toward newly emergent nation-states, though their emergence had accompanied the strengthening of bifurcations of race and caste, and though their activity in bolstering nationalist movements would lay the ground for the historiographical subordination of cross-racial political alliances.

Though this paper attempts to trace the moment when racial difference was erased from public representations of ethnicity and society in Goa, the fact of racial difference did not structure Goan politics outside of conflicts between the Catholic elite and the state. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a range of disputes centralised around the indissociable questions of land, village and caste. Goanness, anti-colonialism and land rights, among lower-class and lower-caste groups, were defined predominantly against the Goan elite. In numerical terms, Goa was neither the recipient of plantation, military or domestic slaves on the scale that African countries were, nor was it an alternative home for white Portuguese, in the way that Brazil was. Racial difference therefore, had no distinct presence in non-elite politics. The moment of liberation, then, was a quick and uncomfortable collapsing of Goan politics into a nationalist framework. Unlike earlier theorisations of Aryan invasion, racial invasion could not be mapped onto caste hierarchies in Goa. As a reverse move, the intensification of caste struggles ensured the irrelevance of any discourse on race.

Pinto's aspiration for unity across Portuguese colonies could never have succeeded, as the strengthening of nationalism in India and Goa was inevitably a moment when racial difference was submerged. It is symptomatic of the overarching category of nation then that Pinto appealed to Nehru for solidarity, and that the Bandung conference was the site for the expression of solidarity with Kenyan nationalists (Mwangi). From being symptomatic of the Portuguese pattern of colonialism, the figure of Pio Gama Pinto was instantly turned into that of a misfit minority. Marginal to India, and to a lesser degree, Kenya, it was ironically from these two dominant entities that Pinto and other members of the diaspora would ask for recognition.

For the Goan diaspora in Africa, home could be either Africa, Goa or, in the case of a few, Portugal. Firmly excluded from any collective or pub-

lic notion of Goanness, yet inextricably yoked to Goa and its insertion into colonialism, these were connections kept alive only through family histories. Within Goa, after the fact of liberation, certain sections of Catholic Goans continued to profess an identification with Portugal and in fact asserted that they were Portuguese. At one level this is no more than an aspiration to continue to inhabit a metropolitan sphere of circulation, enabled by a Portuguese passport, and a refusal to be identified as either Indian or Kenyan or Ugandan. The privileged mobility of Portugal's colonial elites was fundamentally challenged by nationalism in both Africa and Asia. For long, a certain aristocracy among upper-caste Goans could implicitly enjoy racial privilege if they wore visible markers of whiteness.

The fact of having a range of other races intermingled with the Goan population was organically subsumed within divisions of caste and religion. It is also an unspoken assumption that only upper-caste Goans inter-married with white Portuguese, or at least this was the only segment where perhaps respectable genealogies could once be produced. Little of this is, however, a matter of historical fact. What is of interest is the manner in which possible intermingling of white and Goan is still admissible, while the fact of a range of other racial contact is invisible as public discourse or as national memory. Remembering Pio Gama Pinto is therefore an exercise in recalling categories and political imaginations that seem increasingly irrelevant in their refusal to fit within the boundaries of nationalities and sub-nationalities. Though Pinto's own conception of political freedom was vested in the nation-state, this is an attempt to point to the intricacies that in fact underlay an apparently simple appeal to independent nations to support an anti-colonial socialist movement. It was these imbricated locations that would be excluded from a liberated Goan identity and contributed to the forgetting of Pio Gama Pinto.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In addition to interviews with Seigne Athaide, Pinto's sister.

<sup>2</sup> Roque traces this within the growing authority of the discipline of anthropology in Portugal.

<sup>3</sup> See [www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html](http://www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html).

<sup>4</sup> See [www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html](http://www.goacom.com/culture/biographies/gamapinto/index.html).

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