

NAIROBI, KENYA · 1965 – 2025

THE FIRST BULLET



*The True Story of Independent Kenya's
First Political Assassination*

ONE MAN SERVED 36 YEARS. HE SWORE HE WAS INNOCENT.

GRAHAM KASINDO

THE FIRST BULLET



THE FIRST BULLET

*The True Story of Independent Kenya's
First Political Assassination*

GRAHAM KASINDO

Copyright © 2026 Graham Kasindo
All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the author, except for brief quotations in reviews.

This is a work of narrative nonfiction. Events, names and quotations are drawn from public accounts.

Cover design by Graham Kasindo

First edition, 2026

“Pinto’s killing was not an ordinary murder but a political one.”

— Bildad Kaggia

Contents

Prologue	8
CHAPTER ONE The Goan Boy	10
CHAPTER TWO The Pen and the Forest	11
CHAPTER THREE The Strategist	12
CHAPTER FOUR East and West	13
CHAPTER FIVE The Gate	14
CHAPTER SIX Two Young Men	15
CHAPTER SEVEN Thirty-Six Years	16
CHAPTER EIGHT The Truth Commission	17
CHAPTER NINE The Old Man in Court	18
CHAPTER TEN Emma	19
Epilogue	20
A Note from the Author	22

Prologue

WESTLANDS, NAIROBI. 24 FEBRUARY 1965. MORNING.

He had already dropped his wife at work.

Pio Gama Pinto was back at home, in the car, with his youngest daughter. **Tereshka** was a year old. He let her have what one writer later called a “pretend spin” down the driveway before he left for Parliament.

At the gate, the car slowed.

Two men appeared. Maybe more. Three shots came through the front window.

Pinto died at the wheel. His baby daughter was in the car beside him. An ambulance happened to pass, and it was already too late. The men who fired got away in a waiting car.

He was thirty-seven years old, a Member of Parliament, and one of the best political minds in the country.

Kenya had been independent for fourteen months. It had just had its first political assassination.

The police would arrest two young men that same day. One would spend thirty-six years in prison. He would say, until the day he died, that he had not done it.

THE FIRST BULLET

To understand who Pio Gama Pinto was, and why somebody wanted him dead, you have to go back to a boy sent across the ocean, and a colony that wasn't his own.

CHAPTER ONE

The Goan Boy

He was born in **Nairobi** on **31 March 1927**, into a Goan Catholic family. His father worked for the colonial government.

At eight, he was sent to Goa, then a Portuguese colony on India's west coast, for his schooling. He went on to study science at Karnatak College in Dharwar.

At seventeen, he was already fighting colonial rule, agitating against the Portuguese in Goa. He joined the Royal Indian Air Force as an apprentice ground engineer, worked at the Posts and Telegraph office in Bombay, and joined a general strike. He became a founding member of the **Goa National Congress**.

The Portuguese took notice. Facing arrest and deportation to the prison camp at Tarrafal, in about **1949** he went home to Kenya.

He had come back from one anti-colonial fight straight into another.

CHAPTER TWO

The Pen and the Forest

In Nairobi, Pinto went to work with words.

In **1951**, he helped found the **East African Indian Congress**. He wrote for the *Colonial Times* and the *Daily Chronicle*. He made anti-colonial broadcasts for All India Radio.

When the Emergency came and the war moved into the forests, Pinto was one of the few Asians in Kenya who openly took the African side. He worked with the independence movement and helped it reach the outside world.

The colonial government noticed.

June 1954. In **Operation Anvil**, the great sweep of Nairobi that emptied whole neighbourhoods into the camps, Pinto was arrested. He was held on **Manda Island**, off the coast, for four years. From **1958 to 1959**, he was confined at **Kabarnet**.

In **1954**, the year of his arrest, he married **Emma Dias**.

CHAPTER THREE

The Strategist

He came out of restriction and went straight back to work.

In **1960**, he founded the KANU newspaper, *Sauti ya KANU*, and set up the **Pan African Press**. In **1961**, he campaigned hard for KANU's election victory.

In **1963**, the year of independence, he was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly. In **1964**, he became a Specially Elected Member of the House of Representatives.

But his most important role wasn't on paper. He was the chief political strategist for the Vice President, **Jaramogi Oginga Odinga**.

That put him in the middle of the biggest fight in the new country.

CHAPTER FOUR

East and West

By 1964, two visions of Kenya were pulling against each other inside the ruling party.

On one side stood President **Jomo Kenyatta** and his minister **Tom Mboya**, aligned with the West. On the other stood Odinga, with links to the Eastern bloc, and his circle of radicals.

The arguments were about money and power and what independence was for. Should the new Kenya be capitalist? The government's **Sessional Paper Number 10** would soon answer yes.

Pinto helped set up the **Lumumba Institute**, a training college for party cadres, financed with Soviet money. Kenyatta and Mboya would shut it down. When the Soviet Union donated weapons, Kenyatta sent them back, calling them “second-hand and useless.”

The Cold War was watching too. Six months before Pinto died, the United States' Central Intelligence Agency filed a secret document titled *Leftist Activity in Kenya*. It named Odinga as the prime mover of the anti-Western campaign.

It named Pinto as his “close associate.”

CHAPTER FIVE

The Gate

24 FEBRUARY 1965.

That morning, Pinto drove his wife, Emma, to work at **Jogoo House**. Then he went home.

He took Tereshka for her ride down the driveway. He stopped at the gate.

Three shots came through the window.

The man who had helped carry Kenya's cause to the world, who had given four years of his life on Manda Island for its independence, died in his own driveway, fourteen months after independence came.

Emma was at work. Their three daughters were eight, four and one.

Bildad Kaggia, another veteran of the struggle, said what much of Nairobi was thinking: "Pinto's killing was not an ordinary murder but a political one."

The police treated it as an ordinary murder.

CHAPTER SIX

Two Young Men

The arrests came fast. The same day, police picked up two young men: **Kisilu Mutua** and **Chege Thuo**.

Mutua was about twenty-two. Some records say eighteen.

The story that came out went like this. The two men said they had been hired to “frighten” Pinto, not to kill him, and they pointed to a trade unionist, **Ochola Mak’Anyengo**, the secretary general of the petroleum workers’ union. A union quarrel, it was suggested.

Mak’Anyengo was arrested. Then he was released: the suspects said he didn’t match the description of the man who had hired them. He went on to become the Member of Parliament for Ndhiwa, and died in 1990.

The trial was heard by the Chief Justice, **Sir John Ainley**.

Chege Thuo was **acquitted**.

Kisilu Mutua was **convicted** and sentenced to death. The sentence was later commuted to life in prison.

One man convicted. The man who hired him was never identified. The question of who wanted Pinto dead, and why, was never answered in court.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Thirty-Six Years

Kisilu Mutua went into prison, into **Kamiti** and **Naivasha**, and he stayed there.

He said from the start that he had not done it. He said that a man called “**Sammy**” had asked him to “scare a certain Asian,” and he later claimed the man who recruited him was working for Special Branch. He said the police had tortured him into signing a statement.

Nobody listened.

Kenyatta died in office in 1978. Moi took over. The prisoner was forgotten.

4 July 2001. On the order of President Moi, Kisilu Mutua walked out of prison.

He had served **thirty-six years**. He was now almost sixty.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Truth Commission

In 2013, Kenya's **Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission** looked at the killing of Pio Gama Pinto.

It went further than any official body before it.

It found “sufficient circumstantial evidence, including the failure by the government to uncover the truth of who was responsible, to conclude that the government was involved in the killing of Pio Gama Pinto.”

And it found that Kisilu Mutua and Chege Thuo had been “scapegoats to divert attention away from the true motive.”

Nobody was charged as a result. The commission named no killer.

CHAPTER NINE

The Old Man in Court

Kisilu Mutua went to court himself.

He sued the state for the torture he said he had suffered in police hands in 1965. He described officers squeezing his testicles to force him to sign.

The judge, **Justice John Mativo**, believed him.

“How can the callous act of a police officer squeezing the testicles of a person in their custody be justified?” he asked. He awarded Mutua **2.5 million shillings**.

He was careful about what the award was for. “This award is for the torture subjected to the petitioner while in the hands of the police,” he said, “but not for trial and conviction.”

The conviction stood.

In his last years, Mutua said his life was in danger. On **15 September 2023**, he died, and he was buried in **Machakos**.

In **February 2025**, the Court of Appeal overturned his compensation award.

He never got the money. He never cleared his name.

CHAPTER TEN

Emma

Emma Gama Pinto had gone to work at Jogoo House that morning a married woman. She came home a widow with three small girls.

In **1967**, she took her daughters and left Kenya for **Canada**.

She lived there for more than half a century. She died in **2020**.

At home, the man she lost slowly came back into memory. In 1965, the International Organisation of Journalists gave him a posthumous prize. In **2008**, Kenya issued a postage stamp with his face on it.

The country had put him on a stamp. It still hadn't said who shot him.

Epilogue

Four months after Pinto's death, Oginga Odinga turned openly against Kenyatta. He left KANU and formed the **Kenya People's Union**. In 1969, the party was banned.

The man who had been his strategist wasn't there to see any of it.

Sixty years later, the pieces are still on the table. A secret CIA memo naming Pinto as a dangerous leftist. A young man convicted, whose torture in police custody a judge later confirmed. A trade unionist named and released. A truth commission that concluded the government was involved. And a gate in Westlands, where a father stopped his car with his baby daughter beside him.

It was independent Kenya's first political assassination.

It would not be the last.

THE RECORD

VICTIM	Pio Gama Pinto, MP, 37
KILLED	24 February 1965, at his gate in Westlands, Nairobi
IN THE CAR	His daughter Tereshka, aged one
ARRESTED	Kisilu Mutua and Chege Thuo, same day
VERDICT	Thuo acquitted; Mutua convicted, death sentence commuted to life
SERVED	Mutua, 36 years; released 4 July 2001
TJRC (2013)	“The government was involved”; the two men were “scapegoats”
TORTURE AWARD	Sh2.5m to Mutua (Justice Mativo); overturned on appeal, Feb 2025
MASTERMIND	Never identified

The first bullet. Not the last.

A Note from the Author

If this story stayed with you, you can buy me a coffee. It keeps the research going and helps bring the next one to you.

LIPA NA M-PESA	
PAYBILL	522533
ACCOUNT	8129965
CLICK MTAA TECHNOLOGIES	

Asante sana.

— *Graham Kasindo*