

Fallon, H. & O'Brien, A. (2015) *The Librarian and the Media Producer: Creating an Audio-Archive based on a Unique Collection* IN Eden, B.L (ed) *Enhancing Teaching and Learning the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Academic Library: Successful Innovations that Make a difference*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 79-91

## **Introduction**

The Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive is one example of how libraries can develop and extend the understanding of Special Collections, in this case a collection of death-row letters. Librarians need to give more thought to how to add value and understanding to Special Collections, and audio archives provide one possible route. There were extensive learning for both of the authors in the process; for the librarian, it was a journey of discovery into the world of sound; for the media producer, it was a journey through the sometimes complex area of Special Collections and Archives. Through collaborations, such as the one described below, libraries can maximise the visibility and use of their archives and special collections. Increasing visibility of such resources may help to acquire funding for new special collections, and may also encourage people to donate collections knowing that the library is open to exploring avenues to widely promote such collections.

In November 2013, Dr Owens Wiwa, brother of the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigerian writer and international environmental rights activist, launched the Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive in the Library at National University of Ireland Maynooth (NUIM). The launch of the audio archive and a book of letters by Ken Saro-Wiwa<sup>1</sup> marked the eighteenth anniversary of the execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight others (the Ogoni Nine) by the then Nigerian military government. The audio archive, created by NUI Maynooth Library and Kairos Communications, contains extensive recordings of people connected with Ken Saro-Wiwa. This chapter recounts the experiences of the two authors – a librarian and a media producer – in creating the audio archive. Following background information, it goes on to discuss the making of the recordings, hosting the audio archive in SoundCloud, and subsequent marketing and promotion. It concludes with a reflection by the two authors on the process.

## **Background**

### **An Irish Missionary**

In November 2011, Sister Majella McCarron, a member of the religious congregation Our Lady of Apostles (OLA), donated a collection of 28 letters and 27 poems written by Ken Saro-Wiwa, artefacts and ephemera relating to Saro-Wiwa to the NUI Maynooth Library. McCarron had corresponded extensively with Saro-Wiwa during his two years in military detention, prior to his execution.

McCarron grew up in rural Fermanagh, in Northern Ireland. An avid writer from an early age, as a young girl she wrote away for books and a violin, sent letters with money for the 'black babies,' and aged twelve wrote to a religious order in response to an advertisement for religious vocations. After completing a science degree in University College Cork, she went on mission to Nigeria in 1964; she was to remain there for thirty years, teaching science at a secondary school and later teaching education at the university. She first met Saro-Wiwa in 1990. Nigerian Universities had frequent strikes at that time, and during one such period she was asked by her Institute (Our Lady of Apostles) to identify activities by European businesses that were having an adverse effect on Nigeria. The Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN) – of which our Lady of Apostles was a member – offered to lobby on behalf of such groups at the European Union (EU) level. McCarron was aware of the oil pollution problem in the Niger Delta caused by the activities of the international

petrochemical industry and Saro-Wiwa's non-violent campaign against Royal Dutch Shell, and began to discuss the issue with him.

### **Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)**

Saro-Wiwa was a well-established businessman, writer and television producer when he met McCarron. He had authored children's books, novels, plays, poetry and articles/books on political/environmental issues. He produced and directed *Basi and Company*, a television sitcom that ran from 1985 to 1995 on Nigerian television, and which was later syndicated to stations across Africa.

Saro-Wiwa was a member of the Ogoni ethnic group. Ogoni is in the Niger Delta in south-western Nigeria, an area with extensive oil reserves. While the then Nigerian military regime received massive revenues from the petrochemical industry, in Ogoni there was no piped water, no electricity, no hospitals, and schools were almost non-existent. Alongside this, the environmental impact of the unchecked oil exploration had devastated the land. Water was contaminated, fish stocks depleted, the atmosphere poisoned with carbon dioxide and monoxide, farmland lay crusted in crude oil, and rain fell as acid rain. Against this background, Saro-Wiwa began a peaceful campaign against Royal Dutch Shell and the Nigerian government to challenge the state of affairs in Ogoni. He established the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990, and began a peaceful protest to highlight the issues. McCarron worked with him on planning leadership training programmes based on the psychosocial method of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian adult educator. Within 3 years of the establishment of MOSOP, on January 4<sup>th</sup> 1993 over 300,000 Ogonis, from a total population of half a million, protested in marches across each of the six kingdoms that comprise Ogoni. A small ethnic group managed, through peaceful protest, to defy one of the largest armies in Africa and force one of the most powerful corporations in the world to withdraw from Ogoni.

### **Government Backlash**

But there was a price to pay. Following the marches the Nigerian government, led by then military dictator Abacha, began to take Saro-Wiwa's campaigning seriously, afraid that MOSOP's protests would spread to other areas of the Niger Delta and threaten oil revenue. Saro-Wiwa was harassed, detained, and arrested on a number of occasions. In July 1993 Ogoni was blockaded by military checkpoints, villages were surrounded and attacked; hundreds were slaughtered. The government blamed the violence on local ethnic conflict. McCarron was active in the relief effort, helping to secure funding from Trócaire (an Irish-Catholic Church Aid Agency), who worked with Irish sisters from the Daughters of Charity in Port Harcourt running refugee camps to feed, clothe and house the thousands of displaced survivors and to subsequently rebuild the devastated villages. The first letter in the collection is a letter from Saro-Wiwa thanking her for her efforts, and lending his support to funds being channelled through the Catholic Church (NUI Maynooth Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive).

### **Detention and Trial**

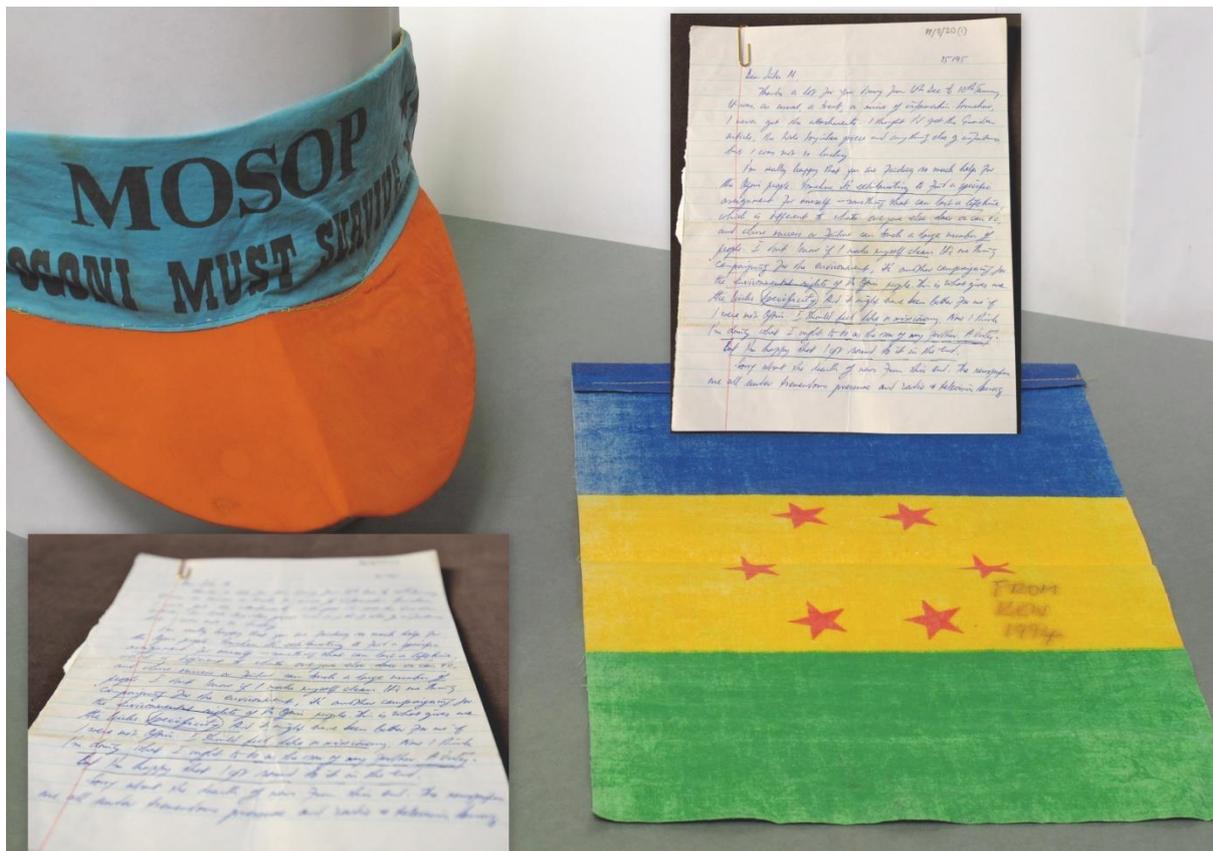
Following the murder of four local chiefs in May 1994, Saro-Wiwa was arrested and accused of encouraging the killings. He and fourteen others were placed in military detention and held without charge. He continued to run MOSOP from detention, writing letters that were smuggled out in food baskets.

In August 1994, McCarron returned to Ireland for a sabbatical, having decided not to renew her contract at the University of Lagos where she had taught for thirteen years. She planned to work on the Northern Ireland conflict. The conversations begun in Nigeria continued on paper, and 26 of the 28 letters written by Saro-Wiwa to Sister Majella date from

1994-1995. In these letters Saro-Wiwa writes about family, the Ogoni struggle against Royal Dutch Shell, and his conditions in detention. In an interview with the authors McCarron commented:

*Ken saw me as a contact with the outside world; a way of getting his ideas and ideals out to a wider audience.*

Back in Ireland, McCarron campaigned actively to save the lives of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others (the Ogoni Nine). Despite her efforts and international protest, he was hanged with eight others on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1995.



**Image: A cap that belonged to Ken Saro-Wiwa, an Ogoni Flag with Ken Saro-Wiwa's signature, two letters written by Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sister Majella McCarron**  
**Copyright: Maynooth University. Photograph by Alan Monahan**

### The Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive

Following the deaths of the Ogoni Nine McCarron continued to work on environmental justice issues, as a table observer of the Northern Ireland Garvaghy Road conflict and the Irish Shell to Sea Campaign, a movement that opposes the construction by Shell, of an overland gas pipeline and the establishment of an oil refinery in Erris, a coastal district in county Mayo in the west of Ireland. In 2010, NUI Maynooth student John O'Shea interviewed McCarron while working on his MA thesis, which related to Irish media coverage of the Shell to Sea Campaign. She told him about the Saro-Wiwa letters and poems, and expressed an interest in finding an appropriate home for this material, knowing the value it would have for present and future generations of scholars and activists. He contacted the library, who acquired the collection. Shortly after its receipt and processing, Dr Íde Corley, a lecturer in Post-Colonial Studies at NUI Maynooth, this author, the Deputy University Librarian and Dr Laurence Cox, a lecturer in social movements at NUI Maynooth edited the

letters, publishing them alongside the poems and contextual essays as “Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa” (Corley, I. et al., 2013). While this was ongoing, the NUI Maynooth Library was approached by Kairos Communications – an Irish media company - with a view to creating an audio archive relating to Saro-Wiwa. The company is located near the NUI Maynooth Campus, and is involved in delivering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in media studies. They offered to do the recording on a pro-bono basis.

### **Producing the Audio Archive**

While the archive of letters and images that McCarron donated to the library is immensely valuable, and the book ‘Silence would be Treason’ offers an astute analysis of Saro-Wiwa’s work from a variety of perspectives, neither the archive nor the book entirely tell his story. The audio archive was designed to set out a more detailed and direct account of that story. Usually the hardest part of creating an audio archive is deciding on where the story is to be found. This was not the case with the Ken Saro-Wiwa audio archive, as the people who had the story were quite obvious, available, and willing to participate. In this case the story was most closely observed, from an Irish perspective by McCarron, and from a personal perspective by Saro-Wiwa’s brother, Owens Wiwa. The audio archive also contains an interview with Dr Íde Corley on post-colonial African literature; Helen Fallon talking about the importance of the letters and other materials in the collection, and Dr Laurence Cox addressing the environmental issues. Their recordings complement their input to the written volume of letters and poems.

Arguably, it is the unique contribution of the audio archive that two of the people who worked most closely with Saro-Wiwa were given the opportunity to speak for themselves, directly and in as unmediated a manner as was possible. Both of these people had so often had their version of Saro-Wiwa’s story told on their behalf, that it was important for them to have the opportunity to speak for themselves in an unconstrained manner. The absence of intervention in the telling of their versions of Saro-Wiwa’s story became a guiding principle for the production of the audio recordings. This allowed the contributors to maximise their imprint on the story, centrally guiding the subsequent editing process.

The key freedom involved in creating the audio archive, as opposed to working to the format, genre and scheduling constraints of broadcast documentary or feature programming, was that it offered as much ‘space’ as is required to tell the story in the fullest detail possible. While broadcast programmes limit the on-air time allocated to a programme and so limit the amount of material recorded at source, this was not the case with an open-ended time allocation. Seven hours of audio were recorded with McCarron. This was free-ranging in the topics covered, from her Irish childhood, her education, her missionary work in Nigeria, the events that brought her to Saro-Wiwa, and all that passed subsequently. Hearing her story told in her own voice offers an insight into her personality and character that was not always as immediately conveyed in the written word. Moreover, hearing her voice first hand, with the intimacy this creates in recounting events in Nigeria leading up to Saro-Wiwa’s death, provokes a compelling intellectual and emotional awakening to the horror of the environmental abuse and destruction of Ogoni that she experienced first hand.

Similarly with Dr Owens Wiwa there was as much time available as needed to account for events in Ogoni and to tell the story of what had happened to his brother. Again, editorial intervention was minimised by recording the interviews as if they were being broadcast live. The interview with Owens Wiwa was recorded in a studio and there were no ‘retakes’ on any of the questions posed or answers offered. The interview as it exists in the archive is identical to that recorded in studio. This gave control of the final product, the archived version of the story to Owens Wiwa, rather than to an outside editor at a later point

in time. In this way, by avoiding the possibility of editing, the audio archives can offer a safe 'home' to a story, a place where despite exclusion or misrepresentation in wider media, a story can be told and held with a minimum of editorial interference.

As to the mechanics of producing the audio archive, it is in essence a series of recorded interviews. Many were recorded on location. The two authors visited Rossport in Mayo with Sister Majella for the reinstatement of commemorative crosses for the Ogoni Nine at the Bellinanboy Shell terminal in November 2012. Others were recorded from the comfort of McCarron's home, or in a car when nowhere more conveniently quiet presented itself. The aim in deciding the location for interview recordings was to make sure the sound was as 'clean as possible' to minimise distractions from the trajectory of the story itself. The interviews with Dr Owens Wiwa were recorded 'as live' in studio, when he came to NUI Maynooth to launch his brother's book. The interviews are, on first encounter, deceptively simple. They seem to meander through the story as if it is being told for the first time. This impression belies the volume of research that underpinned the detailed understanding of the story that the producers had acquired, the work involved in formulating and reformulating questions, and the care and time taken in conducting the interview on the day.

The recordings with Owens Wiwa attempted to follow best practice for interviews. There was no discussion of his brother or the 'story' prior to the recording, so that he did not feel he had already told the story, and might perhaps gloss over details in the interview. The session started with easy warm-up questions, such as childhood memories of his brother. This allowed the interviewee to settle into the interview and to get a feel for the right pace and tone of questions. From there the questions emerged from the chronology of events in Ogoni, leading up to Saro-Wiwa's final detention. All the time, the interviewer needed to keep Owens Wiwa on the trail of the story while watching and reading how far he was able and willing to relive the detail of the destruction of Ogoni and in particular his brother's death. As the events recounted became more brutal and savage, the questions got shorter and simpler, relating to specific places and violent incidents - what happened at Biara? What happened in Kaa? Tell me about Oloko? These are simple questions that drove the narrative and were, for Owens Wiwa, the key turning points of the story; they shaped the topics that were discussed in the interview and gave the archive a route through a detailed and complex story that was coherent and manageable for non-expert listeners. Without thorough research and close listening, interviews don't always yield the kinds of key personal insights that Owens Wiwa so generously offered. Despite close research, it is not unusual for an interviewer to be surprised by answers, for instance when questions don't reveal the kind of insider tragedy or intimacy that was expected. When asked about the last time he had seen his brother he gave quite an everyday answer, as if there was nothing of sentimental significance for him in the last meeting with his brother. In that case the unexpected answer is a useful reminder not to impose too much meaning or significance on events before the interview, but to remain alert to the dialogic exchange and possibilities that arise in the live telling of a story.

The archive required work in the pre-production phase, to gather as much information as possible on the story of Owens Wiwa and McCarron's relationships with Saro-Wiwa, and to formulate questions that allowed for broad and wide-ranging responses, while still carrying the story forward in a manner accessible to non-experts. In production the recordings involved long sessions, so that the final archive would offer unlimited space to the contributor's testimony. In post production the editing was minimised, so that even apparently unrelated material was retained and valued as offering insights to McCarron's character and presence. Hopefully, the archive can become a place in which a story can be 'laid to rest,' where it can reside indefinitely. McCarron commented that the archive could act

as an overall record of her life and what had happened to Ogoni and to Saro-Wiwa. To that end, it is important that the audio archive is publicly available and accessible.

### **Hosting the Audio Archive**

In order to provide access to readers/users, the library decided to host the audio archive in SoundCloud via a link from the library website. This was an interim step in providing access while work is underway to develop *The Digital Repository of Ireland*, where the archive is planned to be stored in the future and in perpetuity. The Digital Repository of Ireland will be a national repository for social and cultural data, and will provide a central access point for data held by Irish institutions. The authors of this chapter were keen to launch the audio archive alongside the book of edited letters, which Owens Wiwa came to Ireland to launch in November 2013, and opted for SoundCloud as an interim, inexpensive solution.

SoundCloud is the world's leading audio platform for creating and sharing sound files. It was initially created for musicians to share recordings across the Internet, and later expanded into a full publishing tool. Individuals/groups can create a SoundCloud account and upload and share originally-created sound files. While a limited amount of recording time is available free of charge, the scale of the Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive necessitated an annual subscription to SoundCloud. This costs less than two hundred dollars per year and includes unlimited audio space. SoundCloud was seen as a good solution to making the audio archive available in a user-friendly way as quickly as possible. It is compatible with all major browsers and mobile devices and supports all audio file formats. Listener statistics give geographic location and most frequently played recordings. Users can post comments, like, repost and share tracks and can embed tracks directly into web pages.

Each recording has approximately ten tags (keywords), increasing access possibilities during web searches. These tags were created by the authors. Some tags, such as the name of the person being recorded, the creators of the recordings (in all cases both authors), Kairos Communications, NUI Maynooth, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Ogoni, are used as standard across all recordings (as of May 2014, there are fourteen individual recordings). Additional tags indicate the content and focus of the recordings.

SoundCloud allows for the inclusion of an image, effectively an album cover. The images used were primarily from the archive: letters, a cap that had belonged to Saro-Wiwa, a MOSOP flag, and photographs. On the front of the album, details such as the number of the recording, the title of the album, the NUI Maynooth logo, and image copyright details are included.

It was agreed from the outset with Sister Majella McCarron and Owens Wiwa that NUI Maynooth would hold copyright of the recordings and that requests to broadcast extracts from the audio archive would go to the library. The copyright of the images on the recording covers belongs to individual copyright holders, primarily NUI Maynooth. The University's legal representatives were briefed about the archive (as they had been about the book). They drafted a disclaimer for the website, which users must agree to before entering the audio archive.

The link to the Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive on the NUI Maynooth library website is currently via the "Electronic Resources" link. In the future there may be more access points from the homepage.

The archive is freely available worldwide via the Internet. The authors hope it will be a valuable resource in telling the story of Ken Saro-Wiwa and those connected with him, perhaps becoming a place of public engagement around Ken Saro Wiwa's life and work.

### **Usage and Promotion of the Audio Archive**

Between the launch on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013 and May 2014, the audio archive has been played almost 600 times. This however doesn't accurately reflect the listenership. While only fourteen hits are recorded from Nigeria, the University of Ibadan (where Ken Saro-Wiwa studied) requested permission to play the audio archive on their Community Radio Station. The university has approximately 20,000 students, so potential listenership is very significant. It has also been broadcast on Newstalk 106, an Irish national radio station.

The audio archive and the edited letters have been widely promoted. International Human Rights Day on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2013 was marked with a talk by the two authors on the audio archive, and a visit to see the letters in the Special Collections area of the library. Groups of schoolchildren have visited the Library to see the letters and to hear the story of Ken Saro-Wiwa. A local public library requested a talk on Ken Saro-Wiwa, and a number of other lectures and presentations have also taken place. At lectures and presentations on the audio archive, the audience never fail to be moved by the sound of Owens Wiwa's voice, reading Ken's poems *Ogoni! Ogoni!* or *For Sister Majella McCarron*. While academics and activists have spoken about Ken Saro-Wiwa in their research, through their publications and in their teaching, it is in the timber and accent of Owens Wiwa's voice that Ken Saro-Wiwa really comes to life.

## **Conclusion**

The Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive provides an opportunity for students and the public to engage meaningfully with a complex and controversial topic that may seem very removed.

There's an old saying that 'the pictures are better on radio.' In the case of the Ken Saro Wiwa audio archive, that saying holds true. People listening to the recordings can construct mental images of the lives of the key protagonists in Ken Saro-Wiwa's story and understand better the roles that Sister Majella McCarron and his brother Owens played in his life. There are no actual pictures to distract the imagination and so the listener can create their own landscape in an imagined Ogoni. But listeners don't just think in terms of pictures; audio allows the user to access the part of the mind that generates dreams, to conjure more than a three-dimensional picture of Ogoni. Audio allows the listener to smell, feel and taste the world it creates. Listeners to the Ken Saro Wiwa audio archive can smell the gas flares, taste the polluted water and the touch the oil-encrusted, infertile spoiled land. In so doing they can clearly understand why Ken Saro-Wiwa created the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. The audio archive brings home the fact that it was, and is, the survival of the people that was at stake.

Beyond Ogoni, the audio archive helps the listener to understand other issues too. In the immediacy of the first-person accounts and the intimacy of listening to another human voice, the passing of time collapses, the relevance and reality of events from decades ago become immediate. The audio archive, in this way, offers an insight into religious formation and convent life in 1950s Ireland. It gives an insider account of the thoughts and feelings of young missionaries travelling to Nigeria in the 1960s. Through Majella McCarron's and Owens Wiwa's recounting of their time with Ken Saro-Wiwa, particularly in the 1990s until his untimely death, the users are allowed to 'see' Ken Saro-Wiwa, not just as an activist who paid the ultimate price for his beliefs, but also as a friend and brother. Listening to the recordings, the users come to an understanding of the invisible ties that bind Sister Majella's work in Nigeria with her activism today, against Shell in Erris, Co Mayo, in the West of Ireland. Somehow sound allows the listener to see very clearly the strong threads that connect the orator to the listener; the threads that also connect Ogoni to Ireland.

While recording that track of poetry for the archive, Owens Wiwa was asked if he would read from his brother's letters. He refused, explaining that he felt to do so would be

inappropriate as it would be to speak in his brother's voice. On reflection, the most poignant aspect of the audio archive is the silence that lies at the heart of it, the listener doesn't get to hear Ken's voice. Throughout his life Ken fought for the rights of the Ogoni, and proclaimed that silence, in the face of their plight, would be treason. The stark fact remains, however, that Ken Saro Wiwa was silenced. That silence is in evidence amongst the voices of his 'Sister Majella' and his brother, Owens. It is a silence that offers testimony to the injustice and plight still suffered by Ogoni.

In a letter dated 1 December 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa urged Sister Majella McCarron:

*Keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how we can use them in future. The Ogoni story will have to be told!*<sup>2</sup>

Creating the Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive is, the authors hope, a way to ensure the Ogoni story is not forgotten.

---

<sup>1</sup> Corley, Í., Fallon, H., Cox, L. (2013) Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Dakar: Daraja/CODESRIA.

<sup>2</sup> NUI Maynooth Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive PP/7/1