

## **Silence Would be Treason**

*i.m. Ken Saro-Wiwa, executed 1995*

by Helen Fallon

### **1. Elegy for Ogoni**

Poison in the air, poison in the rain,  
poison in the yams, poison in the soil.  
Flamingos, kingfishers, hawks, weaver birds  
shriek *poison* through mango, guava, lemon,  
orange, papaya and whistling palm trees.

Sunlit slicks of swirling oil paint rainbow  
swirls on lakes where people swam, splashed, laughed, washed,  
fished for crab, cockles, sole, shrimp and mussels.  
Rigs, angry beasts, punch wounds in ancient earth.  
Pipelines crack, leak, oil seeps through mangrove creeks,  
blue sky cowers beneath death's smoke black cloak.  
Tiny lungs rattle rasping coughs, rashes stain soft skin.  
We weep for the lives its children might have lived.

### **2. Letters from the Breadbasket**

*Port Harcourt 1995*

Detained at the pleasure of a puppet president,  
armed with pen, he sifts words into letters.  
They escape through heavy doors in breadbaskets.  
Abacha, talons stained with oil and blood,  
dismisses Clinton's call for clemency,  
crushes Saro-Wiwa's slender bones to dust,  
not knowing his legacy of letters, to a Sister  
from Fermanagh, will free his shackles, fan the flame  
for justice around the globe.

### **3. Open Access**

*Maynooth 2023*

Beneath glass in temperature controlled cabinets,  
his slanting script, captioned, lies captive,  
in the university library.

Letters scanned, metadata - words to find words - added,  
digitised, free to roam and tell the story  
of Shell's destruction of the Niger Delta.

We listen, hear the rustle of paper, the scratching of a pen,  
the clanking of chains, a voice whispers  
*Silence Would be Treason.*