

# SILENCE WOULD BE **TREASON**

LAST WRITINGS OF  
KEN SARO-WIWA

**NEW AND EXPANDED EDITION**

Edited by  
Íde Corley • Helen Fallon • Laurence Cox  
*with a foreword by Nnimmo Bassey*

## *Praise for the book*

“This is a testament to the bravery of my father, Ken Saro-Wiwa. His words are an inspiration to anyone fighting against tyranny, and a reminder to oppressors the world over that the human spirit can never be broken.”

—**Noo Saro-Wiwa**, author of *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* (2012), and Ken Saro-Wiwa’s daughter.

Here is a remarkable book of the correspondence from one of the greatest leaders of our time to a strong and gentle Catholic sister living half-way around the world. Ken Saro-Wiwa, enduring harsh treatment and facing certain death, writes from detention in Nigeria about justice and honour and sets the bar for courage for the rest of us. Struggles for indigenous justice in the face of corporate tyranny continue to this day. Everyone engaged in these struggles will be moved and inspired by these haunting letters written by a legend.

— **Maude Barlow**, author, activist and National Chairperson of Council of Canadians.

Very much present in the struggles for justice in Nigeria, the life and work of Ken Saro-Wiwa has been largely forgotten in North America. This moving book of his writings from detention brings Saro-Wiwa back to life, reflecting a person of extraordinary integrity and courage, helping the reader grasp his role as a social revolutionary in post-colonial Africa.

— **Bill Fletcher Jr**, writer, activist and senior scholar at Institute for Policy Studies,  
editorial board BlackCommentator.com

A poignant collection that unveils a remarkable friendship as much as it animates the memory of Saro-Wiwa’s indomitable spirit. It is

perhaps one of the the bitter ironies of his life he had to feed the soldiers who guarded him as well as witness army captains fight over who should be his jailer.

— **Brian Chikwava**, write and winner of the 2004 *Caine Prize for African Writing*,  
Associate Editor, *Wasafiri Magazine*

More fully than any biographical essay would have done, the letters and the poems reveal the mind of the campaigner for justice while he is under arrest, courageously planning and prompting, writing and keeping himself informed, keeping his cause alive, but they also show Ken Saro-Wiwa as the anxious father worrying about his children and as the man alone thrown on his resources. The three lucid essays which frame the letters prove an excellent and informative guide to the events behind the letters and add to the importance of this publication.

— **Abdulrazak Gurnah**, novelist, Booker Prize nominee 2004,  
winner of the French dTémoin du Monde Prize 2006  
and Professor of English at the University of Kent

The letters and poems collected in this volume show with great eloquence that Saro-Wiwa confronted Abacha's darkness, and the darkness of the international oil conglomerates, especially Shell, with anger, sadness, wit and humour. In nearly every letter and poem in the volume there is suffusing light and uncommon grace. I confidently expect that in time, this slim volume will take its rightful place among the most important works of prison writing and environmental activism in the world.

— **Biodun Jeyifo**, Harvard University

Following Ken Saro-Wiwa's second arrest in 1994, Sr Majella McCarron approached Trócaire for help. His release became a priority campaign for us, and we engaged with Shell, the media and Government to try and commute the death sentences for him and the eight co-accused Ogoni leaders. I remember the despair in

Trócaire's offices on 10th November 1995 when we learned that all nine had been executed. The struggle of the Ogoni people is a part of Trócaire's history, and the writings in *Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa* are a testament to Ken Saro-Wiwa's spirit and courage, demonstrating that, even in the darkest of times, love truly can conquer fear.

— Éamonn Meehan, Executive Director of Trócaire



*Silence Would Be Treason*



*Silence Would Be  
Treason*

Last writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa

Ken Saro-Wiwa

Íde Corley, Helen Fallon, Laurence Cox

Daraja Press

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But while the land is ravaged  
And our pure air poisoned  
When streams choke with pollution  
Silence would be treason...

Ken Saro-Wiwa

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## *Foreword to new edition*

HELEN FALLON, ÍDE CORLEY & LAURENCE COX

Much has happened since Sr. Majella Majella McCarron (OLA) donated her collection of material relating to Ken Saro-Wiwa, including letters, poems, artefacts and recordings, to Maynooth University in November 2011. Work on the conservation, preservation and cataloguing of the archive has been completed. The letters were digitised and are now available on [open access](#) as part of the Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI). Links to the letter and other materials, including photographs, YouTube videos, articles, blog posts and other records from various events, can be accessed via the [Maynooth University Library Ken Saro-Wiwa Library Guide](#).

In 2013, we had the privilege of welcoming Ken's brother, Dr Owens Wiwa, to the university to launch the first edition of *Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa*. During his visit, he viewed the archive in the Library Special Collections Reading Room and was deeply moved to read the letters and see the MOSOP cap his brother had worn.

In November 2015, to mark the 20th anniversary of Ken Saro-Wiwa's untimely death, the university also hosted a visit by his daughter, the renowned travel writer, Noo Saro-Wiwa. While at Maynooth, she presented a reading from her award-winning book, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria* to a large audience and was interviewed for the [Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive](#), an innovative sound archive which is described in a new chapter in this volume.

Funds from the sales of earlier edition of this book have contributed to the establishment of a research award in Ken Saro-Wiwa's name. On the 10th November 2015, Noo presented the inaugural Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Postgraduate Award to history PhD candidate Graham Kay. His PhD thesis will explore the role of oil in Anglo-German geopolitical competition in the lead-up to the First World War – a context which has continued to shape Nigerian, and Ogoni, history.

That history has not stood still. Since the first edition of these letters was published, agreement has been reached with Shell and other oil companies, on a five-year programme cleaning up areas in Ogoniland devastated by oil spills, with controversy raging as to why the programme has not of yet (2017) taken place. In Ireland, Shell's pipeline in Mayo has been completed, but popular pressure has forced a legal ban on onshore fracking. In the wider world, the political and economic centrality of oil has come under question as never before, with declining prices, the growth of renewables and increasing recognition of the reality of climate change. The role of the Ogoni struggle in this historical transition makes these letters an important document far beyond the borders of Rivers State or Nigeria itself.

It was with great sadness we learned of the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa's son, Ken Wiwa Junior, in October 2016. Maynooth University is indebted to Ken Jr. for his support for both this book and our other endeavours to highlight the issues his father and eight colleagues (the Ogoni Nine) campaigned and died for.

In the same month as Ken Jr.'s sudden death, the first international exhibition of material from the collection opened at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, USA. This was one of many initiatives to create awareness of the collection and the issues it embodies. Similarly, at Maynooth University, items from the collection have been regularly exhibited to mark key events and coincide with conferences and seminars with an environmental or conflict resolution theme. A local public library selected *Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa*

as their reading club book and children from nearby schools have visited the library, viewed the letters and discussed the issues surrounding the conflict over natural resources in class. In July 2016, 25 school children with Nigerian backgrounds visited the Maynooth Special Collections to learn about Ken Saro-Wiwa and the issue of environmental rights. The children were intrigued to learn that his letters to Sister Majella were smuggled out of military detention in breadbaskets. Commenting on the event, Sister Majella remarked:

*I wanted the archive to be available to activists and researchers. This the Library is doing very well. Making it available, in an accessible way, to the schoolchildren today, is another great way of ensuring the Ogoni story is told; and it was all great fun too!*

In a letter dated 1st December 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa had advised her:

*Keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how we can use them in future. The Ogoni story will have to be told!<sup>1</sup>*

In this new and expanded edition of *Silence Would be Treason: Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa*, we continue to tell the Ogoni story and publicise Ken's cause. We are particularly pleased that this digital edition will be available on open access and thank our publisher Firoze Manji and Daraja Press for facilitating this. Maynooth University is particularly indebted to Firoze for his valued contribution and ongoing dedication to this project.

## Notes

1. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive PP7/2

## *Notes on contributors*

**Nnimmo Bassey** coordinates Oilwatch International and also directs the Health of Mother Earth Foundation – an environmental justice think tank. He served as the executive director, Environmental Rights Action/ Friends of the Earth, Nigeria, 1993-2013 and chaired Friends of the Earth International, 2008-2012. Bassey has authored books on the environment, architecture, management and poetry. His poetry collections include *We Thought It Was Oil But It Was Blood* (2002) and *I Will Not Dance to Your Beat* (2011). *To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa* (2012) published by Pambazuka Press. His latest book, *Oil Politics: Echoes of Ecological Wars* is published by Daraja Press. He was named as one of Time magazine’s Heroes of the Environment in 2009 and was a co-recipient of the 2010 Right Livelihood Award also known as the “Alternative Nobel Prize.” In 2012 he received the Rafto Human Rights Award.

**Íde Corley** is a Lecturer in English at Maynooth University where she directs MA programmes in Postcolonial and World Literatures and in Irish Literature and Culture. Her research focuses primarily on twentieth-century literary engagements with the politics of black unity associated with tri-continental Pan-African nationalism, African socialism and modern African identity. She was the Principal Convenor of an ESF-funded workshop entitled “Multiple Modernities of Same-Sex Sexuality in Nigeria” in 2010 and has published articles and reviews in *Modern Language Studies*, *Interventions* and *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*.

**Laurence Cox** co-directs the MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism at Maynooth University. He is co-founder of the international, open-access social movement journal *Interface*, co-editor of *Understanding European Movements:*

*New Social Movements, Global justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest, Marxism and social Movements* and author of *Buddhism and Ireland*. He is currently part of an international team researching the life of U Dhammaloka, an Irish migrant worker who became a Buddhist monk and anti-colonial activist in early 20th Century Burma. Dr Cox has been involved in a wide range of social movements in several countries for over quarter of a century.

**Helen Fallon** is Deputy University Librarian at Maynooth University. She has worked in libraries in Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Namibia and Saudi Arabia. Her professional interests include libraries in developing countries, African women writers, staff development, academic publishing, creativity, and the leadership and marketing of academic libraries. She has published extensively and runs workshops on academic publishing and maintains a blog for library staff who wish to write for publication at <http://academicwritinglibrarian.blogspot.ie/>

**Sister Majella McCarron** was born in Derrylin, County Fermanagh. She joined the Missionary Institute of Our Lady of Apostles in 1956. After graduating with a science degree from University College Cork, she taught for thirty years in Nigeria, in secondary schools and at the University of Lagos. She worked closely with Ken Saro-Wiwa on issues of justice and the environment and was compelled to campaign for the lives of the Ogoni 9, hanged on the 10th of November 1995. She now lives in Ireland, continuing her work on environmental justice. In 2011, she donated letters she received from Ken Saro-Wiwa to the Library at Maynooth University.

**Dr. Anne O' Brien** is a lecturer with the Department of Media Studies at Maynooth University. She has published a number of articles on the representation of women in radio and television, on women workers in screen production industries and examined on-going gender inequality in media production and representation. She has also undertaken research on community media, examining its social benefit and governance needs. Her book, 'The Politics of Tourism Development, Booms and Busts in

Ireland' (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) examines the role of the state in the development of Irish tourism. She has produced a number of documentaries and series for Irish national broadcasters, RTE and TG4 as well as the Ken Saro-Wiwa audio archive for Maynooth University.

## *Acknowledgments*

Our thanks go first of all to Sr. Majella McCarron for this generous donation which reflects so much of her own life's work. Thanks too to John O'Shea who formed the connection between Sr. Majella and Maynooth University. In Maynooth University, thanks are due to Cathal McCauley, University Librarian, for much support with the project and to all the library staff who assisted in various ways. Sincere thanks to Dr Ciara Gallagher, postdoctoral scholar in the English Department, for transcription and other work on the manuscript. The publication of this book was made possible with the support of Maynooth University and Trócaire.

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And thanks to Kenny Dessain and Maggie Dessain for their help with copy-editing, and Paul Riordan for proofreading, the first edition.

## *Foreword by Nnimmo Bassey*

THESE LETTERS AND poems are invaluable fragments of a living conversation that portrays the indomitable power in humans to stay alive in the face of certain death — to stay alive even in death. Reading through the treasure trove of the letters and poems compiled here as *The Last Writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa* evoked such intense memories of his resolute struggles against an oil behemoth and a deaf autocratic government. His crusade frames one of the most tumultuous periods of Nigeria's history; his tragic story evokes anger and demands action to resolve the crises that first led the Ogoni people to demand that Shell clean up Ogoni or clear out of the territory. It was his leadership, in great part, that forced Shell out of Ogoni in January 1993.

These letters are a testament of hope. Being one side of robust conversations between two persons that many would find unlikely as close friends, we learn the lessons that indeed 'friends love at all times and brothers (and sisters) are born for adversity', as a proverb in the Bible states. This is where we must applaud Sister Majella McCarron for preserving and making public these letters that Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote to her between 20 October 1993 and 14 September 1995.

As I read through this collection I felt a sense of awe at the positive disposition of this saint—as aptly described by his son, Ken Wiwa Junior. The harshness of his prison conditions could not kill his strong sense of duty to his people and indeed, as the reader will find, his acerbic sense of humour. Never did the pressures of the tyrannical government dent his vision for an Ogoni free of pollution, oppression and exploitation. He worked assiduously to secure the dignity of the Ogoni and by extension, I would say, of other oppressed Nigerians and of all humanity.

The letters reveal to us a well-rounded man. His love for his family



and concern for each individual in that close circle come through very strongly. His love for the Ogoni people and his readiness to invest as many resources in the struggle as he could muster must challenge our commitment to the causes that we support. His vulnerable position comes through when he states, in one of the letters, "I'm not particularly protected, although I have great faith in God, in the justness of my cause & in the belief in eventual VICTORY. But the pain which we all have to endure! Would to God it had been lighter!"<sup>1</sup> In the same letter he states, "But I'm in good spirit, undaunted, as convinced of my cause as ever. My real worry is the devastation of Ogoni villages, the destabilization of the area & the harassment & killing of the people." This letter tells us much more: "I'm not worried for myself. When I undertook to confront Shell & the Nigerian establishment, I signed my death warrant, so to speak. At 52, I think I've served my time and, come to face it, I've lived a charmed life. A few more books, maybe, & the opportunity to assist others would have been welcome. But it's okay."

The letters reveal to us that being a keen student of current history helped to keep him in high spirits while held in the dungeon. His letter of 29/10/94 informs, "...do not forget that I've been here only 23 weeks now. Mandela & Sisulu were there for 26/27 years. How can I complain?"<sup>2</sup>

Repeatedly, Saro-Wiwa bemoaned the fact that MOSOP (Movement for Survival of the Ogoni People) had not adequately prepared the generality of the Ogoni people for the struggle. This is a signal for all who are engaged in mass mobilisations and movement building.

At a time when my nation is mired in extreme cases of corruption and where security is assured mainly for those who follow the deviant path, we see in Ken Saro-Wiwa a different breed—a man who did not hesitate to spend his resources but was also keen to stay transparent and accountable to his people. Could it be that this irked the corporate and state gangs that relentlessly pursued him and eventually dropped the noose around his neck?

A man of letters, no pun intended, Ken Saro-Wiwa challenges us in his strong eye for details. His care to check grammatical errors in documents prepared by others, even while in the *gulag*, is stunning. Why would a man, literally in the belly of the beast, care about spelling errors in other people's writings, in statements—even newspaper reports?

When Wale Okediran reviewed Ken Saro-Wiwa's book in *On a Darkling Plain* in 1993 and suggested that he was too hard on the erstwhile leader of Biafra, Saro-Wiwa responded in a letter to Okediran that in "considering what Ojukwu had done to my people the Ogonis, I was actually very mild with him." According to Okediran, what really surprised him when he met Saro-Wiwa in person was that "he had the effrontery to point out some grammatical mistakes he said I made in the review." He acknowledges that Saro-Wiwa was "never shy of controversy, ever ready for a good argument and always finical with tiresome editorial details like punctuation marks and typos. Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa is one hell of a human maelstrom who leaves you breathless with his stamina and dexterity for discussions on every conceivable subject under the sky."<sup>3</sup>

The fact that he was concerned with details and aimed for perfection in his own writing can be seen in his requests to McCarron to help edit some of his drafts, such as his acceptance speech when he won the Right Livelihood Award—also known as the Alternative Nobel Prize—in 1994.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and Sister McCarron both influenced my life and growth as an environmental justice advocate. In addition, Saro-Wiwa challenged me as a fledging writer who thought I would find a niche as a poet and short story writer. His pioneering work in building a virile environmental justice movement as well as those for the rights of minorities in Nigeria remains outstanding and continues to inspire campaigners around the world. I recall his visit to my humble home in Benin City when he came to lead a conference of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) in 1994. It was a memorable occasion and I

heartily drank from his spring of wisdom on a variety of topics. We veered to issues of the rights of minorities in Nigeria. When I made the claim that I was also from a minority ethnic nation, he laughed and stated firmly that I could not be right because, with a population of close to three million, the Ibibio could not claim the minorities tag. Arguments on that led us nowhere and I knew better than to get trapped in it. There was so much to learn, and, as it turned out, there was very little time left.

November 10, 1995: that date has come to stay with us. It is a date that is both frozen and unforgettable. On that day, few gave any thought to the Port Harcourt Prisons and the diabolical plans of General Abacha and his henchmen. The Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) was holding its annual conference at the University of Lagos, and by this time I was the General Secretary and Odia Ofeimuna was the President. Saro-Wiwa's tenure as ANA president ended in 1993. One of the issues of critical concern at that 1995 conference was the statement ANA was to issue concerning the death sentence passed by the kangaroo tribunal that had tried Ken Saro-Wiwa, Saturday Dobee, Nordu Eawo, Daniel Gbooko, Paul Levera, Felix Nuata, Baribor Bera, Barinem Kiobel, and John Kpuine.

We debated over the tenor of the statement. Should ANA denounce the arrest, detention and sham trial/verdict passed on its past president, Ken Saro-Wiwa, or should the statement be a politely worded plea for leniency, with nothing said to ruffle the feathers of the dark-shaded despot, Abacha? It was while we were locked in this debate that the news filtered through that Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other eight Ogoni leaders had been executed. The execution was carried out days before the appeal period set by military decree was to expire. This cruel and unjust act confirmed the rigged nature of the entire affair.

The world and environmental justice activists in the grassroots networks, such as the Friends of the Earth International, were numbed by this bloodletting; November 10 has become a day of remembrance of the martyrs of resistance

against mining, oil and gas. The lesson that this sends is a confirmation that killing the messenger merely throws up more messengers. The message cannot be killed.

Sister McCarron watered my activist roots through books and other resources that she donated to the then very young Environmental Rights Action. The books all showed strong links between social justice and human dignity. They all stressed that the heavenly focus is not genuine if it negates our humanity and our need to be concerned with the state of the planet and the people. It is no surprise that she forged a strong connection with Ken Saro-Wiwa and was a strong supporter of the Ogoni and wider Niger Delta struggles.

Meeting Sister McCarron in Leitrim, Ireland at a campaign stop against fracking in August 2012, brought a new spark of inspiration to me, seeing that her commitment to securing and preserving a sane environment is a lifelong affair. The campaign in County Leitrim was against fracking in Ireland. From there I moved to Erris in County Mayo on a solidarity visit with the people organised by Friends of the Earth, Ireland. Sister McCarron has worked with the people in this county, supporting their struggles against the building of gas pipelines and a refinery in the area by Shell. That struggle, epitomised by the existence of the Rossport Solidarity Camp and the nine white crosses (for the Ogoni nine) opposite the entrance to the refinery at Ballinaboy, has gone on for over a decade, in the face of intimidation, beatings and jailings.

In the poem, *For Sr. Majella McCarron*, written in June 1995, we read the pointed question and answer:

*What is it, I often ask, unites  
County Fermanagh and Ogoni?  
Ah, well, it must be the agony  
The hunger for justice and peace  
Which married our memories  
To a journey of faith.*

Ken Saro-Wiwa was a man of peace. As these letters clearly show, his struggles were built on the platform of non-violence through the mobilisation of the mass of Ogoni people using socio-cultural and educational tools. His disdain for violence can be seen in some of his writings, especially in the novel, *Sozaboy*.

He was a prolific writer, and is even said to have engaged in writing anonymous letters to editors of newspapers while he was in the secondary school. His books such as *On a Darkling Plain* focused on his Biafra-Nigeria civil war experiences and ruffled the feathers of those who do not agree with his interpretation of the events. Saro-Wiwa's works included children's books as well as the highly successful satirical television series, *Basi & Co*. One of his short stories, *Africa Kills Her Sun*, first published in 1989, foreshadowed his execution and denial of a decent grave. The book, *The Politics of Bones*, written by J. Timothy Hunt about Owens Wiwa, Saro-Wiwa's brother and comrade in the struggle, fittingly captures the struggle for a decent resting place for Saro-Wiwa.

Saro-Wiwa captured the hearts of many through his writings and showed that enduring change required fundamental reorientations to ensure that his people worked for the good of the collective rather than for self-aggrandizement.

Perhaps the letters set out in this book provide a partial completion of his diaries from an earlier period of detention, *A Month and a Day*. The final part may not be known until we know the contents of the letters that Sister Majella wrote in reply to these.

Perhaps one of the most critical contributions of Ken Saro-Wiwa to the struggle for the salvaging of the Ogoni environment and by extension the larger Nigerian environment was his participation in the production of the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990) by MOSOP. That bill of rights remains the cardinal articulation of the demands for holistic justice for the Ogoni people. The Bill pioneered the way for the formulation of bills of rights by other ethnic nations in Nigeria, including the Kaiama Declaration

by Ijaw youths (1998), the Oron Bill of Rights (1999), the Aklaka Declaration (1999) of the Urhobo Economic Summit and others.

We do not exaggerate if we say that Ken Saro-Wiwa was prescient, even prophetic, in his writings. A recent assessment of the Ogoni environment by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) clearly vindicates the complaints of the Ogoni that their environment had literally been killed by the polluting activities of the international oil companies led by Shell, as well as by their Nigerian counterpart, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. According to UNEP, it would take about 30 years of focussed and robust clean up efforts to restore the Ogoni environment. A year and a half after the publication of the UNEP report, the Ogoni people and all watchers of the territory are scandalised that the Nigerian government has not declared a state of environmental emergency in the area.

The chapters prefacing the letters and poems provide excellent analyses that help us understand the person of Ken Saro-Wiwa as a selfless, dogged fighter, who did not project himself as a hero but rather fought for the collective Ogoni nation. Laurence Cox's chapter on "Ken Saro-Wiwa in Political Context: Social Movements in the Niger Delta" brings up the interesting discourse on "the curse of oil." He shows how the struggle against Shell in County Mayo, Ireland, and the use of security forces to counter dissent draws strong parallels between Ireland and Nigeria.

Cox also calls for caution when Norway is presented as an exception to the rule of oil not being of benefit to local populations in countries where it is extracted. The vital point here is that Norway was different at the onset of oil activities there, not by the benevolence or brilliance of government or oil sector players but by the efforts of popular movements that were determined to ensure that oil wealth benefited all. Analysts also show that a strong workers movement ensured that technology was bent to ensure safety rather than merely profits. As Norwegian oil begins to peter out, the country's oil sector players

are seeking to drill in fragile ecosystems, including in the Arctic regions—a possible harbinger of fracturing of the image that the Norwegian nation has built and that has lured nations across Africa to think that the Ogoni experience cannot be replicated in their territories. The thinking of nations that change can come about without robust resistance is nothing but a pipedream.

The last speech that Ken Saro-Wiwa made, before the rigged tribunal that condemned him, reads like a letter to the world; his challenge to everyone remains valid. Here is what he said:

I repeat that we all stand before history. I and my colleagues are not the only ones on trial. Shell is here on trial and it is as well that it is represented by counsel said to be holding a watching brief. The Company has, indeed, ducked this particular trial, but its day will surely come and the lessons learnt here may prove useful to it, for there is no doubt in my mind that the ecological war that the Company has waged in the Delta will be called to question sooner than later and the crimes of that war be duly punished. The crime of the Company's dirty wars against the Ogoni people will also be punished.

On trial also is the Nigerian nation, its present rulers and those who assist them. Any nation which can do to the weak and disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has done to the Ogoni loses a claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence. I am not one of those who shy away from protesting injustice and oppression, arguing that they are expected in a military regime. The military do not act alone. They are supported by a gaggle of politicians, lawyers, academics and businessmen, all of them hiding under the claim that they are only doing their duty, men and women too afraid to wash their pants of urine.<sup>4</sup>

This collection is a unique gift, a treasure to humanity. The letters provide strands that can be woven into manuals for popular struggles. In places, their humour is quite hilarious. And revealing. Happily, rather than being moved to despair, they will help the reader make up his or her mind on whether to raise a voice or stay silent in the face of tyranny. This publication is a

fitting tribute to this gentle but strong leader, and it is hoped that it will help clarify his enigmatic personality and inspire positive action against oppression and ecocide anywhere and everywhere. Our struggles may be in different locations, but they are one and the same. We are all Ogoni. And in the words of Ken Saro-Wiwa, “the Ogoni story will be told.” We are happy to say that this book tells a critical part of that story.

## Notes

1. MU archive PP/7/3
2. MU archive PP/7/14
3. Wale Okediran, “Ken Saro-Wiwa at 50”. *Guardian* (London). 19th October 1991, p. 11
4. “Ken Saro-Wiwa’s Final Address to the Military-Appointed Tribunal.” *Earth Island Journal*. 11.1 (Winter 1995): 25



PART I

*SECTION 1:  
INTRODUCTORY*



Ogoni flag signed by Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1994. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

# 1



## *THE KEN SARO-WIWA COLLECTION AT THE LIBRARY, MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY, IRELAND*

HELEN FALLON

ON 10TH NOVEMBER 2011, Sr. Majella McCarron (OLA) presented a collection of personal correspondence and 27 poems she had received from Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa to the Library of Maynooth University. The date marked the sixteenth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's execution. Professor Philip Nolan, President of Maynooth University, accepted the gift from Sr. Majella on behalf of the University, saying, "the collection cast a very human eye on what was one of the late 20th century's most troubling geopolitical issues".

The collection comprises 28 letters to Sr. Majella, 27 poems,

seven video cassette recordings of visits and meetings with family and friends after Saro-Wiwa's death, a collection of photographs and other documents, including articles, reviews, flyers and maps relating to Saro-Wiwa's work and the work of Sr. Majella on the cause of the Ogoni people, both in Nigeria and Ireland.



Letters from Ken Saro-Wiwa Archives. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

The letters were mainly handwritten between 20th October 1993 and 14th September 1995. The two earliest, dating from 1993, are from the period before Saro-Wiwa was taken into military detention: the first having been sent from his office in Port Harcourt, the second from Lagos. In May 1994 Saro-Wiwa and several other activists were placed in military detention in Port Harcourt. The letters written between July 1994 and his execution in November 1995 were smuggled out of detention in food baskets.

The letters cast light on Saro-Wiwa as a political activist, a writer, a family man and a personal friend to Sr. Majella. He wrote other letters during his captivity; apart from those to family and friends,

he corresponded with Ethel Kennedy, Anita Roddick, Nelson Mandela, novelist William Boyd and other international figures. What makes the collection of letters to Sr. Majella unique is the relatively large number (28) and the combination of both personal and political content. Saro-Wiwa's letters to Sr. Majella paint a picture of a well-educated and articulate Nigerian writer and illuminate his efforts to help the Ogoni people, who number less than 500,000 and live in the south eastern part of the Niger Delta.

Sr. Majella,  
 I read your notes with great pleasure. I'm sorry to hear about the illness of your man. I hope she recovers. Please keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how we can use them in justice. The Ogoni story will have to be told!

Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

While the letters tell a story of Ken Saro-Wiwa, we do not have the letters Sr. Majella sent to him to gain a more complete picture of this nun who left her rural home in Derrylin, County Fermanagh, to join the Missionary Institute of Our Lady of Apostles (OLA) in Cork in 1956. From there, armed with a science degree from University College Cork, she travelled to Nigeria. She initially taught science in a secondary school. Later, she completed postgraduate studies both in the University of Lagos and the University of Ibadan. Indeed, there is a possibility that she was teaching at the University of Ibadan while Ken Saro-Wiwa was there as a student. In 1990, she was asked by the Missionary

Institute of Our Lady of Apostles to do some work in Nigeria on its behalf. The Institute, a member of the Brussels-based Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN), which lobbies the European Union on behalf of communities adversely impacted by European business, asked Sr. Majella to identify such communities in Nigeria. AEFJN offered to speak on their behalf at the EU. The oil problem in the Niger Delta region of South Eastern Nigeria was severe at the time, with major environmental damage being wrought by oil extraction. Saro-Wiwa, the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), was organising a non-violent campaign against the environmental destruction of the Ogoni area of the Niger Delta. Sr. Majella brought the Ogoni complaint of environmental destruction by Royal Dutch Shell to the attention of AEFJN. He would eventually visit their office to offer his appreciation. Today AEFJN continues to monitor oil and gas impact throughout Africa.

When Sr. Majella selected this project, she had no idea how big it would become or of the strong relationship she would develop with Saro-Wiwa. She was initially introduced to him by Lynn Chukura, a prominent member of the Association of Nigerian Authors of which Saro-Wiwa was once president. Now deceased, Chukura, who was from Philadelphia, had lectured at the University of Lagos, the University of Ibadan and the University of Legon, Ghana. She was to give shelter to the wife and child of Ken's brother Owens Wiwa in Lagos while he was avoiding arrest.

Sr. Majella was lecturing in Education at the University of Lagos when she met Saro-Wiwa. Academic institutions in Nigeria had frequent strikes and during one such period, she researched Ogoni issues. She visited Saro-Wiwa's office in Lagos to consider with him how best to advance the Ogoni concerns. When Ogoni villages were destroyed in September 1993, Sr. Majella worked with the Daughters of Charity in Port Harcourt and Trócaire in Dublin to obtain a European Community grant for village relief. The first letter in the collection is Saro-Wiwa's grateful response

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

to her and offers MOSOP's goodwill for the Church administration of this grant.



Letter from Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sr. Majella McCarron, 20/10/93. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

The collection contains photographs taken by Sr. Majella recording the destruction of the Ogoni villages, an act that was locally explained as a reactive punishment by unexplained forces to the campaign undertaken by MOSOP.



Ogoni villagers survey destroyed canoes at Kaa, 5th January 1994. Photograph by Sr. Majella McCarron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.



Destroyed buildings at Kaa Market in Ogoniland, 1994. Photograph by Mary Sweeney. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.



Some Ogoni inhabitants survey the impact of violence along the waterfront at Port Harcourt, 5th January 1994. Photograph by Sr. Majella McCarron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Another set of photographs records the efforts of Trócaire and the Daughters of Charity in the Catholic diocese of Port Harcourt to reconstruct houses in ten of these villages by means of the EC emergency aid she had helped to secure.

The collection also includes a third set of photographs which she received from a refugee camp set up in the Republic of Benin for fleeing Ogoni people. She was to keep in contact with this group and many other refugees in Europe and the US for several years.

Towards the end of 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa discussed his concerns about developing the leadership potential of MOSOP with Sr. Majella. From her lecturing experience, she was familiar with a programme which used the psychosocial method of Paolo Freire, a Brazilian adult educator. His approach had spread through many grassroots communities internationally. In Nigeria, it had helped to shape the Development Education and Leadership Service administered by a team within the Catholic Church. Sr. Majella





Relief workers rebuild Ogoni villages with the EC emergency funding that was released to the Diocese of Port Harcourt through Trócaire in Ireland. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

sought the assistance of one of its members, St. Patrick's Society priest Tommy Hayden, and arranged a planning meeting with Saro-Wiwa in early October 1993. The first of a five-phase programme took place in 1993. While a second phase was planned for 1994, this was cancelled amid an outbreak of hostilities, turmoil and destruction.

It was an extremely dangerous time in Nigeria, with the Biafran war (1967-70) and the expulsion of missionaries still very prominent in people's minds. The special security forces were very active and to be seen visiting the office of Saro-Wiwa was dangerous for Sr. Majella and others. "Anyone protesting in a military dictatorship places themselves in a dangerous position," Sr. Majella commented in conversation with the author. She wrote observations on the Ogoni Movement, while Saro-Wiwa gave her regular updates, seeing her as a contact with the outside world—a way of getting his ideas and ideals out to a wider audience. "Ken and I used to talk at length about the problems



Ogoni Refugee Camp in the Republic of Benin, 1997. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

concerning the Ogoni people. He appreciated my analysis and thoughts. I think he felt I was a benign, spiritual presence. I was a trusted witness,” Sr. Majella remarked.

In May 1994, Saro-Wiwa and other members of MOSOP were arrested. The twenty six letters dating from this time until his death were written in military detention. In a letter of 13th July 1994, he tells Sr. Majella he has managed to get a computer smuggled in so that he could continue with his writing. The urge to write is not just tied to the ideological conviction of the writer; for centuries, the commitment to write, despite expense and logistical difficulties, speaks of the pressing need for human contact. From military detention, Saro-Wiwa shared with Sr. Majella his thoughts on the Ogoni cause, his love for his family and friends and his passion for writing. On 13th July 1994, he wrote:

Have you been able to go through my essays: I wonder if they can be made into a book or should I take just the central ones and

put them alongside the newspaper articles which I have collected? Seems to me that would be a better idea.<sup>1</sup>

In August 1994, Sr. Majella returned to Ireland for a sabbatical, having decided not to renew her contract at the University of Lagos where she had taught for 13 years. On 30th July, prior to her departure, Ken writes simply,

“I will miss you in the year you are going to be away!”<sup>2</sup>

The conversations that had begun in the Lagos office continued on paper; the high esteem in which Saro-Wiwa held Sr. Majella, and the value he placed on their contact as a window on the outside world, shines through in his letters. On 15th August 1994, he wrote to her in Ireland: “A million thanks for your letters. They are so entertaining, so encouraging, & they give me those intimate details of my family which no one else gives. God bless you & keep you for us!”<sup>3</sup> There is poignancy in his reference, in a letter dated 16th September 1994, to Sr. Majella’s visit to his family in London and her introduction to his newborn son: “It’s hard to think you’ve been away for a whole month! How fast does time fly? I saw your picture holding my young son Kwame whom I’m still to see.”<sup>4</sup> A fortnight later, on 1st October, he writes again, stressing her role in helping the Ogoni people:

I long to see you back in Nigeria, helping, among others, to guide the Ogoni people through the wilderness. You don’t know what help you have been to us and to me personally, intellectually. God grant that you do return to us. I’m counting the days.<sup>5</sup>

Sr. Majella did in fact return to Nigeria, on a short visit at the request of Trócaire, to finalise paperwork relating to various grants she had secured. She was not allowed to visit Saro-Wiwa during this period, but continued to correspond with him. The value of the correspondence in breaking his isolation was noted by Saro-Wiwa in a letter of the 24th October:

It was, as usual, most informative and made me miss you more than ever. You are the only one who gives me an almost complete picture. Had you gone to Ogoni, I’d have got a complete

picture—local, national and international. It can be terrible here when one cannot phone or discuss with others.<sup>6</sup>

In October 1994, Saro-Wiwa was awarded the Right Livelihood Award, a Swedish prize presented annually, to honour people who make a significant contribution to solving modern-day challenges. He wrote his acceptance speech from his detention centre and Sr. Majella reviewed it for him. His request to attend the award ceremony, recorded in a letter of the 29th October, was refused by the military authorities. In December, Sr. Majella travelled to Stockholm for the ceremony. Photographs from the event are part of the collection donated to the Library. There is also an Ogoni flag which Saro-Wiwa listed among items for Majella to take to include in an exhibition in Stockholm to coincide with the presentation of the award. On Christmas Eve 1994, Saro-Wiwa wrote to her:

Dear Sr. M,

Thanks a million for your diaries of August, November and early December. It was really wonderful to hear all about the Stockholm Award Ceremony from your careful observant pen.<sup>7</sup>

Sr. Majella devoted her sabbatical year to saving the lives of the Ogoni Nine through campaign work in Ireland. This led to the establishment of Ogoni Solidarity Ireland. Trócaire gave her the use of a phone and helped her to publicise the case of Saro-Wiwa and the eight others who were to be tried by a military tribunal. Photographs are included in the collection from this campaign. Her efforts offered some comfort to Saro-Wiwa, who wrote on the 21st March 1995:

I have seen your work & your pictures in the *Irish Times* and I think you yourself might be surprised how far those Ogoni bells are ringing now, and how you yourself have become the bellman. I thank God for your presence among us.<sup>8</sup>

In the last letter before his execution, dated 14th September 1995, he wrote of her letters:

[...]I believe that I've got everything you have sent thus far. Some of them come rather later and out of sequence, but I do get them. Because I keep them around me just to read and re-read them, I've had two of them seized lately. I hope that I will get them back, anyway, some day.

I expect that you have now started your new assignment and am really happy for you. It is hard to think that you will no longer be with us here in Nigeria, but it may well be that we shall be better served by your being away.<sup>9</sup>

She received this, his final letter, on 10th October, from his son, also named Ken, when he arrived in Belfast to receive a Nobel Peace Prize nomination secured by Mairéad Corrigan of the Peace People and supported by Amnesty International Northern Ireland, Trócaire Northern Ireland and the Bodyshop. The nomination was planned for Saro-Wiwa's fifty-third birthday and was intended as a public appeal for the lives of the Ogoni Nine. One month later, their lives were taken at the behest of a military tribunal. It is very fitting that the collection now contains an e-mail from Mairéad Corrigan, herself a Nobel laureate, sent to Sr. Majella on reading newspaper coverage of the donation to Maynooth:

Dear Majella,

This is wonderful news that the life and writings of Ken Saro-Wiwa will be held at National University of Ireland Maynooth <sup>10</sup>. His life is a great testimony to the human spirit of love and compassion and self-sacrifice for others.

I had the great honour of having breakfast with Ken Saro-Wiwa during a Conference of UNPO in The Hague some years ago. He spoke with such love and passion about the plight of his people and also with love of his family particularly his son, who then was working as a journalist in London.

Ken would be pleased that you, his dear and faithful friend, have placed this material in the National University of Ireland Maynooth.

It's amazing how things like letters remind us of our own connections and I am reminded too that you wrote to the Peace People about Ken and his Movement, so thank you Majella for all your work in supporting, during his lifetime, Ken and his people.

Ken Saro-Wiwa is considered to be one of the great environmental activists of the late 20th century and his letters reflect his passion for peace and justice around the world. Sr. Majella—an Irish female missionary charged with keeping Saro-Wiwa briefed and acting as the carrier of his message globally—is vital to this correspondence, having called the letters into existence. In his captivity, Saro-Wiwa must have drawn comfort from knowing the lengths to which Sr. Majella would go to ensure the delivery and protection of his written words. At a time when communications technology decreases the habit of traditional letter-writing, the enduring value of the letter in disseminating the voice of the oppressed remains. As a well-established writer, it is likely that Saro-Wiwa knew the letters were going to be read and considered in different contexts.

In gifting these letters to the Library at Maynooth University, Sr. Majella is ensuring the Ogoni story will continue to be told in many different contexts. These letters will be studied by students and researchers from a wide range of disciplines—Anthropology, Education, History, Economics, Geography, Sociology, Politics, Development Studies, African Studies, Archival Studies and Literature—all of which are represented in the courses offered at Maynooth University.

For this reason, the editors of this volume are grateful to Maynooth University sociology student, John O'Shea, who created the initial link between Sr. Majella and the University Library. In 2010, O'Shea interviewed her while working on his MA thesis. She told him about the Saro-Wiwa material she held and expressed an interest in finding an appropriate home for it,

knowing the value this collection would have to present and future generations of scholars and activists. He contacted the Library and we immediately set about acquiring this unique collection. The Library already holds significant archives of writers, social and political figures, and missionaries and this collection will prove a most valuable addition in this area. The Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection complements our extant African holdings which comprise, among other works, a major collection of bibles representing 298 African languages, including Khana, Saro-Wiwa's native tongue. Both on its own and in the context of broader themes which it so deftly illustrates, this donation marks a major new addition to our collections.

It is very timely that this donation has come shortly after the establishment of the Edward M Kennedy Institute for Conflict Intervention at Maynooth University, specialising in research on conflict resolution, leadership and civic engagement. The Saro-Wiwa correspondence will bring the lessons of the need for open dialogue around conflict to a wider audience— something the author was prevented from doing by his execution. Research of this nature needs to be happening at university level, where there are structures to support it and opportunities to share the findings globally. It is particularly appropriate that this research should be carried out in Maynooth University which has a long-standing commitment to equality and social justice.

The collection is now available in the Maynooth University Library for consultation. Archival and conservation work has been carried out, including cleaning and repairing documents that require attention, cataloguing each item and transferring the letters to acid free packaging materials. Future exhibitions will offer the opportunity for people to view the collection and the Library will provide a neutral space for people to become actively involved with Saro-Wiwa's thoughts and experiences through his letters and other writings. Journal articles, research papers, theses and other work carried out on the Saro-Wiwa archive by staff and

students of Maynooth University will be available—not just to the international research community but also to those involved in social movements all over the world. [The letters have now been digitised and are available on open access.](#)

The videos, which form part of the gift, record Sr. Majella's visits to and meetings with the family and with the traditional authorities in Ken Saro-Wiwa's home village of Bane as well as with members of the Methodist Church. There is an interesting Irish link here in that this was the earliest Christian missionary church in Ogoni and its missionaries were from the Kingston family of Cork, Ireland. This missionary family coordinated the translation of the Bible into Khana. The videos have been converted into more modern media to allow continuing access to the contents.

After the November 1995 executions of the Ogoni Nine, Sr. Majella continued to campaign on behalf of twenty more Ogoni detainees who were freed six years later. Much of the publicity material from this period is now with the collection.



Dublin protest. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.





Gabriel Byrne and others at AFri-Famine Walk, NW Ireland. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

These efforts were supported in Ireland by Trócaire, Action from Ireland, Amnesty International, the Bodyshop, the Peace People, many local groups from Cork to Donegal, a school in Dunboyne, and Belvedere College in Dublin. Ogoni Solidarity Ireland provided the essential focal point and Saro-Wiwa's letters to Sr. Majella from May 1994 to July 1995 informed the Irish campaign before, during and long after the deaths of the Ogoni Nine. The material has been a source for the annual Saro-Wiwa Memorial Seminar organised by Sr. Majella in different venues every year since 1995, to consider the impact of multinational business on local communities in Ireland and elsewhere. Photographs from the collection, particularly that of a large mural remembering Ken Saro-Wiwa and his eight companions erected on the tenth anniversary of their death, record the connection between Ogoni



Majella McCarron at Shell-to-Sea protest in Ireland. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

and Erris in Mayo, Ireland. There are also photographic records of nine white crosses, situated opposite the Shell terminal at Ballinaboy, which were carried in campaigns. The letters informed Irish engagement with Shell in Nigeria and Ireland.

The letters, videos and other items are important historical



Ogoni Solidarity Ireland protest outside Shell Headquarters in Dublin, 1995. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive

and cultural artefacts, coming out of specific historical circumstances and specific human activity. The collection is part of the heritage of Saro-Wiwa, part of the heritage of Nigeria and particularly the Ogoni, and part of the heritage of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles as represented by Sr. Majella in Nigeria. This wonderful donation comes at a particularly appropriate time. Our major new library extension has a purpose-built Archives and Special Collections area where material can be maintained, exhibited and consulted in the best possible environment.

In a letter of the 1st December 1993, Saro-Wiwa urged Sr. Majella: “Keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how we can use them in future. The Ogoni story will have to be told!”<sup>11</sup> In gifting this material to the Library, Sr. Majella is ensuring that the Ogoni story will be told.

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON



Protest outside Nigerian Embassy, Dublin. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Brother Majella,  
I read your notes with great pleasure. I'm sorry  
to hear about the illness of your man. I hope she recovers.  
Please keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how  
we can use them in justice. The Ogoni story will have to be  
told!

"Ogoni Story will have to be told"- Ken Saro-Wiwa. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

## Notes

1. MU archive PP/7/4
2. MU archive PP/7/6
3. MU archive PP/7/7
4. MU archive PP/7/8
5. MU archive PP/7/9
6. MU archive PP/7/12
7. MU archive PP/7/20
8. MU archive PP/7/23
9. MU archive PP/7/28
10. since renamed Maynooth University — Ed.
11. MU archive PP7/2



*KEN SARO-WIWA AND  
WEST AFRICAN  
LITERATURE: THE  
POLITICS OF  
LANGUAGE*

ÍDE CORLEY

IN A LETTER WRITTEN from his detention cell in Port Harcourt in July 1994, part of which now forms the Preface to his memoir, *A Month and A Day* (1995), Ken Saro-Wiwa regretted that he did not have time to include an account of what had happened in Ogoniland<sup>1</sup> between his release, after his first detention, on 22nd July 1993—when *A Month and A Day* ends—and his re-arrest on 22nd May 1994: “[T]he events of that period would have enriched this book even more”.<sup>2</sup> The 28 letters in this volume addressed to Sr. Majella McCarron date from 20th October 1993, roughly three months from the time that *A Month and a Day*

ends, to 14th September 1995, just under two months from the date he was executed. They were accompanied by 27 poems which he enclosed over the course of the correspondence. One of the poems dedicated personally to McCarron and two of the letters, including the very last—which, as Helen Fallon has noted here, is the author’s last recorded letter—have previously appeared in an addendum to the second edition of *A Month and a Day* (published as *A Month and a Day and Letters*) in 2005. This volume places them into the broader context of the two-year correspondence, giving us a better picture of their extraordinary friendship and shared concerns. It also sheds new light on the chaotic period 1993-1995, which the author sadly perceived that he might not live to relate.

The narrative generated by these documents extends the published record of Saro-Wiwa’s life but it is necessarily partial and shaped to a certain extent, as can only be expected, by the disposition, interests and activities of the addressee. It reveals his ongoing participation in and reactions to contemporary events alongside his plans for the future but, as a series of letters, does not provide the kind of supporting ethnographic and historical information that characterize his more formal political statements in texts such as *Genocide in Nigeria* (1992) or *A Month and a Day*. Saro-Wiwa has often been described as a contradictory figure: an Ogoni ethno-nationalist who upheld federalism during the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970; a democrat who appeared, at times, to have embarked upon “a drive for personal authority”<sup>3</sup>; a proponent of non-violent protest whose execution was arranged on charges of incitement to murder. Many of these apparent contradictions stem from the efforts of his enemies to discredit him for their own private gains and circulate in the context of a poor general understanding of his complex, interstitial positioning as a representative of an ethnic minority group in postcolonial Nigeria. In this short essay, I aim to situate his work within a longer tradition of Nigerian political thought and writing. I characterize Saro-Wiwa as a “pragmatic nationalist”<sup>4</sup>

whose actions were ultimately informed by his “desire to live in a just society”<sup>5</sup> rather than by any deeply held belief in the intrinsic identity or separate destiny of the Ogoni people.

In West Africa, both at the time Saro-Wiwa was writing and earlier, literary activity had been crucial to the formation and articulation of oppositional projects and politics.<sup>6</sup> Although indigenous, oral cultures remained relevant and vibrant during the colonial era, the anti-colonial nationalist movements which arose alongside, and in protest against, colonial regimes in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century heavily depended upon the establishment of African-owned, europhone newspapers and printing presses.<sup>7,21</sup> The importance of europhone print cultures to anti-colonial nationalisms in West Africa related, in part—as any student of West African history well knows—to the colonial re-distribution of territory on the continent by European powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5. At this conference, the modern political boundaries of African states were drawn up by European technocrats; they were determined not, as in Europe, by the shared identities, languages and cultures of indigenous social groups but by the commercial interests and needs of European empires and their desire to prevent imperial conflicts over strategic territories and resources.<sup>8</sup> In practical terms, this meant that indigenous populations who shared common languages, traditions and cultural practices were often divided among colonial states which imposed different and distinct languages, systems of administration—and, effectively—histories upon them.

As the most populous colonial state in Africa, the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria (established in 1914) contained the most heterogeneous and diverse population. While home to three majority language groups—the Hausa-Fulani of the North, the Yoruba of the South-West and the Ibo of the South-East—collectively the populations of the territory speak over 250 distinct languages. During and after the colonial era, as Saro-Wiwa’s writing attests, many Nigerian language groups



recognized and maintained pre-existing local and translocal ties with kin, locality and ethnic nation over and above any obligations to the state. The colonial project was further complicated by the rise of new vernaculars among urban migrants as they creatively adapted to new and ever more severe conditions of survival.

Within this fractured social environment, a minority group of Western-educated indigenous elites began to use English language in the early twentieth century both to challenge colonial authorities and to negotiate ethnic conflicts and differences. Because decolonization was never simply a domestic issue, the Anglophone leaders of multi-ethnic Pan-African nationalist movements in Nigeria creatively engaged with the leaders of other Pan-African nationalist groups in neighbouring countries in West Africa, as well as in East and Southern Africa, Britain, France, the Caribbean and North America, to promote the project of decolonization globally.<sup>9</sup> Modern Pan-African political movements aimed to promote unity among black social groups and to project an ideal of African unity to an international audience. In doing so, they frequently diminished or underplayed the historical tensions and conflicts among indigenous African groups.<sup>10</sup>

Nigeria was one of the most resource-rich colonies and the political situation there was complicated further by the federal structure designed by the exiting colonial administration to secure British commercial interests after independence. Once the Atlantic Charter—which upheld the right of all people globally to self-determination—was recognized after World War II, the British Parliament quickly moved in 1946 to approve the Richard's Constitution for the territory with a view to blocking the evolution of multiple national polities in favour of a centralized administration. The Richard's Constitution helped establish a federation of artificial regions—Northern, Western, and Eastern—which, as Saro-Wiwa repeatedly complained,

generated, within each region, “a dominant and dominating ethnic group”<sup>11</sup> to which a number of smaller ethnic nations were politically subjugated.<sup>12</sup> It gave rise to the troubling contradictions which later came to characterize the postcolonial state; in Saro-Wiwa’s words, “there was ‘unitarism’ at regional level and ‘federalism’ at the centre”.<sup>13</sup>

Saro-Wiwa was an Ogoni, one among the many smaller ethnic nations (sometimes described as “micro-minorities”<sup>14</sup>)—also including, for example, the Annang, Efik, Ekpeye, Ijaw, Ikwerre, Etche, Odual, Sankwala, Ukele, Uyanga and many more—who inhabit the Niger Delta in the Eastern region and who came to be known during the colonial era as the “Rivers People”. The Ogoni comprise just over one per cent of the total population of Nigeria which today stands at over one hundred and thirty million and speak four related, but mutually unintelligible, languages—Khana, Tai, Gokana and Eleme. They inhabit an oil- and gas-rich coastal area where the Ibo majority of the Eastern region has secured economic and political dominance.

Like many other Nigerian writers, Saro-Wiwa primarily used English rather than his first language, Khana, to make his views known both nationally and internationally—producing a total of twenty-seven books alongside numerous shorter pieces, such as poems, essays, speeches and newspaper articles, during his lifetime.<sup>15</sup> Before his involvement in environmental movements, he was best known in Nigeria as the creator of the hit comedy TV series, *Basi & Company*, which aired weekly on prime-time television between 1990 and 1995 to an estimated audience of 30 million viewers and out of which he also generated a popular series of children’s books;<sup>16</sup> outside Nigeria, he had already garnered considerable attention within literary circles for his anti-war novel, *Sozaboy* (1987), and his short story collection, *A Forest of Flowers* (1987), both of which were first published in the Longman African Writers Series.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike other more internationally-renowned Nigerian writers,

including, for instance, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka or Ben Okri, however, Saro-Wiwa cannot easily be placed into the critical categories often used to describe West African writers and their preoccupations.<sup>18</sup> He came a little late to the literary scene to be counted among the “first generation” writers of the 1950s and ’60s who were largely preoccupied with “writing back” to, and countering, colonial texts and traditions which had denigrated African cultures and populations—often by dramatizing the devastating consequences for indigenous populations of the colonial encounter (Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is the classic example). But neither can he be accused of the alienation and detachment which is held to characterize the writing of the “second generation” as they faced the certain failures of African nationalist projects in the aftermath of decolonization in the 1970s. If he did not fall prey to the fearfulness and cynicism which the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o attributed to the latter cohort of writers in his classic polemic, *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986),<sup>19</sup> it was probably because he wrote primarily for local audiences rather than for a world market—as his son Ken Wiwa once put it in an interview, “what [Saro-Wiwa] was interested in as a writer was reflecting the social conditions of Nigeria for Nigerians”.<sup>20</sup> Despite considerable successes in education, politics and business which allowed him to transcend the relatively humble circumstances of his birth and social background, he remained throughout his life informed about, and connected with, the material and social conditions and predicaments facing ordinary Nigerians. His commitment to making a public contribution in Nigeria even led him to establish his own publishing company there—Saros International Publishers—in 1973, when he became impatient with the slow pace of publishing in the West.<sup>21</sup> Rather than allow his success as a writer to depend upon the caprices of the Western market in educational books, self-publishing—sometimes at a financial loss—allowed Saro-Wiwa to pay more concerted attention to the difficulties endured by the Ogoni and other smaller ethnic nations

whose position within the postcolonial state was persistently precarious.

In his memoir of the Nigerian Civil War, *On a Darkling Plain*, published by Saros in 1989, for example, Saro-Wiwa explains his opposition to secession and support for the federal government during the Civil War with reference to the relationships that obtained between the Ibo elite and the ordinary Ibo and other smaller ethnic nations, including the Ogoni, who inhabited the seceding Eastern Region, Biafra. Before the war began, he observes, “[a]lmost 94% of the Region’s crude oil production[...]came from the non-Ibo sections of the Region”<sup>22</sup> and, as a result, there had been considerable Ibo investment within the region outside Iboland and especially in the coastal cities of the Niger Delta. Ibo economic dominance in the oil-producing areas had also been consolidated, Saro-Wiwa maintains, by their control in the East, under the federal system, over offices within the civil service, government boards and corporations.<sup>23</sup> And while it was clear that the Ibo elite were disadvantaged by the Hausa-Fulani monopoly over government at the level of the state, he contends that they were not averse to using the numerical advantage of their ethnic group within the Eastern region to secure undemocratic gains there. In fact, he construes the greed of the Ibo elite as a key factor in the 1967 secession of the region from the federal state.

To say that the politics of the civil war were complicated would be an understatement. Numerous biographical, historical and fictional accounts have been produced but the causes and consequences of inter-communal conflict and violence—from the September massacre of 80,000-100,000 Ibos in 1966 to the end of the siege of Biafra in 1970, during which approximately 2.5 million Biafrans died—still merit further exploration.<sup>24</sup> While it has become clear, for instance, that Federal forces could not have laid siege to Biafra without the support of the British government and military—who, by the end of the war, had supplied 97% of

federal arms— disagreement persists regarding the decision for the East to secede.<sup>25</sup> Some commentators continue to regard it as a visionary effort by the Ibo leadership to throw off the compromised state system bequeathed by colonial powers.<sup>26</sup> Others, including Saro-Wiwa, deplored the decision, characterizing General Odumegwu Ojukwu, who led the secession in 1967, as a short-sighted megalomaniac and gambler. “He was on a naked quest for power” Saro-Wiwa wrote in *On a Darkling Plain*, “and Ibo suffering at the time was his ladder to that power”.<sup>27</sup>

While Saro-Wiwa did not hide his disdain for the Biafran leaders, however, his stance on the war in his memoirs, fiction and poetry is less stalwartly federalist than unfalteringly anti-war. As literary critic Charles Lock has convincingly argued, it is the seductive fervour of the Ibo leadership’s self-righteous, war-mongering rhetoric more than the events of the war itself that forms the subject of his most acclaimed literary work, the experimental novel, *Sozaboy*.<sup>28</sup>

The interest of this novel for postcolonial literary critics first lay in its defiant use of a dialect, which Saro-Wiwa, in his prefatory “Author’s Note” called “rotten English”<sup>29</sup>, not simply in the dialogue between characters—or within what literary critics call the “inner frame” of the text—but throughout it, and even, as Lock points out, within the para-textual elements of the novel such as chapter headings.<sup>30</sup> However, while Saro-Wiwa was initially celebrated for granting an unofficial, spoken language the status and dignity of a literary one, upon closer examination of the text, the critical response became more cautious. There was no real attempt in the novel to mirror the language of everyday life nor to represent accurately the speech patterns of a particular population group. While Saro-Wiwa’s “Author’s Note” explains, for example, that the “rotten English” of his narrative comprised “a mixture of Nigerian pidgin English, broken English and occasional flashes of good, even idiomatic English”, his protagonist Sozaboy [Soldier-boy] did not appear to engage in

code-switching (where his choice of words, whether pidgin or standard English, could have been expected to vary depending on his audience or location).<sup>31</sup> Rather, the language of the narrative seemed as arbitrary and inconsistent as the process of decomposition announced in the word “rotten” itself.

Taking by way of example, however, an announcement by Shell—which appeared in many of the major English-language newspapers only eleven days after Saro-Wiwa’s execution—in which the corporation presented itself as a body that is “Clear Thinking in Troubled Times”,<sup>32</sup> Lock has convincingly argued that the author’s rhetorical goal in *Sozaboy* was to expose the links between a modern “aesthetics of linguistic and stylistic purity” and “a technology of pollution”.<sup>33</sup> For Lock, it is the “ethical confusion or pollution [of the political context] that accounts for and is reflected by”<sup>34</sup> the shifting and unpredictable language of the novel. What is under investigation in the novel, he argues, is less the realism or accuracy of any given account of the war and more the “order and rationality we [mistakenly] ascribe to *language* [Lock’s italics]”<sup>35</sup>; what Saro-Wiwa seeks to convey are its fragility and limits.

For Lock, this point is delivered quite persuasively in the comical scene where *Sozaboy* first hears a military officer call for support for the war:

The man with the fine shirt stood up. And begin to talk in English. Fine fine English. Big big words. Grammar. “Fantastic. Overwhelming. Generally. In particular and in general”. Haba, god no vex. But he did not stop there. The big grammar continued. “Odious. Destruction. Fighting”.

I understand that one. “Henceforth. General mobilisation. All citizens. Able bodied. Join the military. His Excellency. Powers conferred on us. Volunteers. Conscription”. Big big words. Long long grammar.<sup>36</sup>

Coming quite early in the narrative, Lock argues that this scene

quickly alerts the novel's readers to the fact that Sozaboy "associates war with grammar"<sup>37</sup> so much so that, by the end, the "linguistic impurities" of the protagonist's informal, oral narrative themselves come to feel "cleansing" to the reader, from an ethical point of view.<sup>38</sup>

Of course, the broken-ness of this passage—its fragmentary sentences, absurd conjunctions and *non sequiturs* ("In particular and in general.")—also gives a literal quality to the broken relationship between the break-away military elite and the urban population of the Eastern region, subverting the claims of the officer in this scene to authority and legitimacy. Perhaps more than any other in the novel, the passage demonstrates the almost complete exclusion of the urban masses from the Biafran project of Afro-centric national self-development. Although he is located in some of the war's most dangerous theatres, much of the tragicomic hilarity of Sozaboy's story derives from his efforts to make sense of his wartime experiences with reference to the oral narratives of World War II that were conveyed to him by an African ex-serviceman in his hometown Dukana; he continuously confuses Biafra with Burma, Gowon with "Hitla" [Hitler].<sup>39</sup>

Since Saro-Wiwa's writings demonstrate such a cautious approach to leadership, it is perhaps ironic that, towards the end of his life, he found himself watching his own image assume a disembodied and iconic quality akin to the images of other political leaders who had been martyred for black nationalist causes, including Patrice Lumumba, or Malcolm X. Already in *A Month and a Day*, Saro-Wiwa expresses unease regarding the dehumanizing effects of his repeated appearance in the media—"I had been very much in the news lately and, as often happens to those who have the misfortune, was considered more as a news item than as a living being with flesh and blood".<sup>40</sup> And, in the following letters to Sr. Majella McCarron, we see him reject the static image of himself as hero or martyr in favour of the more active and open-ended figure of self as voice.

Doubting, for instance, that he will be released on time to attend the Right Livelihood Foundation ceremony planned in his honour in December 1994, he concludes: “There or not, my words will ring through all the places”;<sup>41</sup> just over three months later, some discussion of his trial on the BBC World Service and The Voice of America prompts him to remark that he has heard a version of himself reflected back on the airwaves: “The radio waves were full of the trial on the 6th February. The BBC World Service made it the first item in their news bulletins[...]The Voice of America also carried it fully. I heard myself described as ‘renowned writer and environmentalist’”.<sup>42</sup> Then again, when Shell, under pressure from MOSOP (acting in co-ordination with UNPO and other indigenous rights organizations), agreed in 1995 not to renew their operations in Ogoniland without the consent of the local population, he rejoices: “I hope also that other oil-bearing areas are listening. If they are, that should introduce a new situation into the Nigerian equation”.<sup>43</sup>

The poignant sense Saro-Wiwa conveys in these letters—while confined, ill, and enduring harsh restrictions on his interactions with his family, friends and supporters—of having a voice that resounds globally echoes some of the grandeur of the rhetoric of much earlier twentieth-century Pan-African nationalists, including, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois or C.L.R. James, who often conceived themselves, in quasi-messianic terms, as the agents of a new and more just global social order.<sup>44</sup> But as Ato Quayson cautions in an important essay on the Ogoni crisis “African Postcolonial Relations Through a Prism of Tragedy”, Saro-Wiwa’s appeals to global frameworks should neither be regarded either as arrogant nor as perpetuating an out-of-date, Enlightenment era, universalist doctrine. In his essay, Quayson acknowledges that the Ogoni leadership had to operate within and contend with a social environment which had become “heavily over-determined by the ethos of Nigerian politics” and, in particular, by the “system of political patronage” established during the Babangida dictatorship 1985-1993.<sup>45</sup> He also recognizes



that Saro-Wiwa frequently draws upon lofty and sublime genres, such as tragedy and epic, to characterize the Ogoni situation. (One of the more striking examples is the Ogoni Bill of Rights drawn up by Saro-Wiwa in 1990 which, in echoing the American Bill of Rights and the French Rights of Man, aimed to endow the Ogoni cause with a world-historical, or global, rather than simply local or domestic character.<sup>46</sup>) But Quayson urges us not to view these rhetorical strategies as either self-aggrandizing or evidence of a desire on Saro-Wiwa's part "to assume the mantle of leadership [of MOSOP] as irrevocably his".<sup>47</sup> For him, Saro-Wiwa's disagreements with the more conservative members of MOSOP's leadership in the early '90s constituted a pragmatic response to what would later prove to have been a clear understanding of the likely conduct of the military regime rather than "a drive for personal authority".<sup>48</sup> The appeals Saro-Wiwa makes to global reference points and frameworks should not be interpreted as evidence of any faith in the idea of "natural leadership" or in universal principles but as efforts to re-configure and re-calibrate class arrangements within the historically short-lived state with attention to transnational and international processes.

In his letters here, Saro-Wiwa continues to use world-historical and sometimes planetary metaphors and language in order to give the Ogoni situation a recognizably international character. But it is worth noting that, when referring to universal or global frameworks and paradigms, he characteristically thinks "outside the box"; he repeatedly gestures, that is, towards what has been excluded or escaped. "Remember Hamlet?", he once gently reminds McCarron (when she appears to have become concerned about a possible threat he has made to practice juju against his captors), "There is more in Heaven and Earth than is compounded in your philosophy, Horatio."<sup>49</sup>

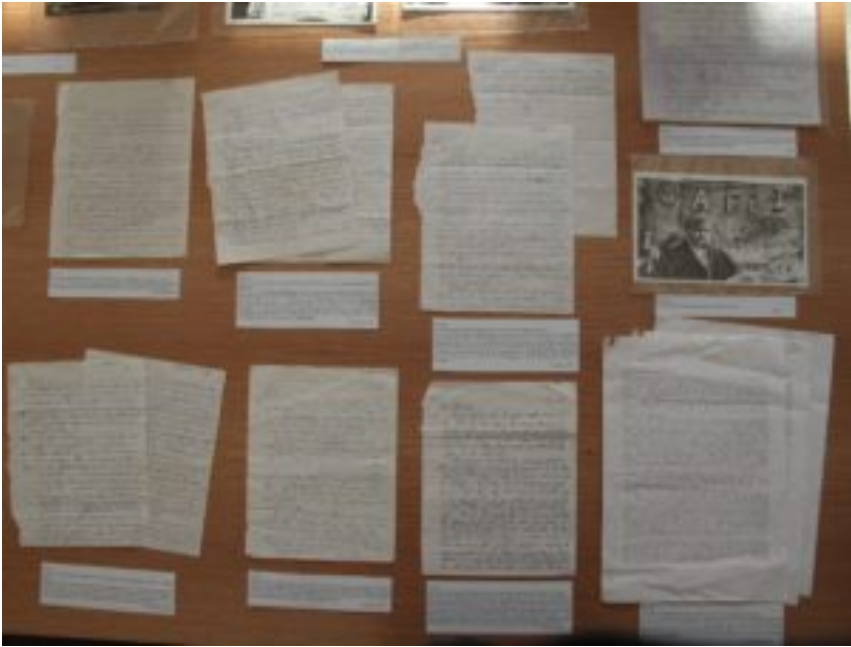
Indeed, even as he begins to recognize that his death is approaching, he resists the temptation to conceive himself as heroic and portrays himself, in a manner more in keeping with

the language of *Sozaboy*, as self-divided or incomplete. There is, at times, a harrowing sense of self-dividedness here, that alternatively produces gallows humour—when, for example, he professes glee in anticipation of the “belly laughs”<sup>50</sup> that he expects state prosecutors will raise as they adopt absurd measures to bypass juridical process in order to convict him—and sadness—as when he first holds his youngest son Kwame and recognizes “I was not important to him”.<sup>51</sup> And yet, somehow this sense of dividedness and incompleteness also provides Saro-Wiwa with a rhetorical basis for thinking about his relationships with others and how the Ogoni might rethink and reconfigure their relationships with other minority populations both within Africa and around the world.

Consider, for example, the autobiographical lyric poem “I Lie Alone At Night”, probably addressed to Hauwa Maidugu dated 3rd June 1995, where, in the absence of the face of his beloved, the speaker is forced to consider the blank face of the moon. It begins with the stanza “I lie alone at night /And think all of one year’s gone/Since I held you in my arms/In the bed we know so well.” Six stanzas later, the speaker is still plaintively regretting his absence from his beloved’s bed. Here though, the blank face of the moon strangely takes on the capacity to capture and reflect back something of the beauty of her far-away face: “I lie alone at night/ And think of the stranger moon/The stars beyond my gaze/Your beauty like moons and stars.”

In *A Month and a Day*, Saro-Wiwa had observed that:

In virtually every nation state there are several ‘Ogonis’—despairing and disappearing people suffering the yoke of political marginalisation, economic strangulation and environmental degradation, or a combination of these, unable to lift a finger to save themselves. What is their future?<sup>52</sup>



Letters and poems from Ken Saro-Wiwa. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Here, as if in partial answer to that question, the idea that the blank, mirror-like face of a “stranger moon” viewed from a detention cell might reflect something of the beauty of a loved one’s distant face is now extended to others, and in particular to the strangers, or anonymous individuals and populations, whose personal and intimate relationships have similarly been broken by greed, totalitarianism and war, who anonymously endure “[b]roken hearts, breaking souls/[e]mpty dreams and lonely beds”.

By conceiving the blankness of the moon as the reflection of the anonymity of others (who are nonetheless like himself), Saro-Wiwa, alone in his cell, then begins to conceive himself as one among many—perhaps hundreds of thousands, or even millions of people—and, in doing so, to discover the courage he needs to renew his contribution to the struggle for social change in Ogoniland and also in the more general pattern of power relations between other small ethnic nations in Africa and the global social



Letters and poems from Ken Saro-Wiwa. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

order: “I lie alone at night/And dream a great new dawn/Without boots and knives[...]”. The poem then ends with a new nocturnal vision, one of a night that, while still captured, is now “captured by peace”. Saro-Wiwa’s characteristic awareness of the fragmented, broken and incomplete character of imagery and words keeps language active and “alive” and prevents it from hardening into bureaucratic orthodoxies; it allows him to turn language inside out and to reverse it in order to chart new “cartographies of struggle”<sup>53</sup>, new connections and relationships among human groups, new and more reciprocal relations of power among minority populations and the states they inhabit.

## Notes

1. Saro-Wiwa preferred to use the term “Ogoni” in preference to



Letters and poems from Ken Saro-Wiwa. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

“Ogoniland” because, as he wrote in *A Month and a Day* “to the Ogoni, the land and the people are one and are expressed as such in our local languages”. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day and Letters*, Foreword by Wole Soyinka, (Oxford: Ayebia Clark Publishing Limited, 2005) p.3. I use the term “Ogoniland” here to clarify issues for readers who are unfamiliar with the Nigerian contexts of his writing.

2. Ibid. p.2
3. See Ato Quayson, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003) p. 70
4. See Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark: The Philosophical Foundations of Black Solidarity*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005) p. 28
5. Ibid. p. 28
6. See Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading*, Oxford

- Studies in Postcolonial Literatures, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) especially pp. 19-20
7. Ibid. p. 19
  8. See Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa: White Man's Conquest of the Dark Continent 1876-1912* (New York: Avon Books, 1991) pp. 239-256
  9. Vincent Bakpetu Thompson, *Africa and Unity: The Evolution of Pan-Africanism* (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1969); Immanuel Wallerstein, *Africa: The Politics of Unity* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967); Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, England and Maldon, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2001) pp. 217-274
  10. Ato Quayson, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 30-55; Eileen Julien, "The Extroverted African Novel" in Vincent Moretti Ed. *The Novel*, Volume 1, History, Geography and Culture, (Princeton and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 667-700
  11. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War*, (London, Lagos and Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1989) p. 51
  12. It may be worth noting that at the time of independence, the smaller ethno-national groups collectively formed a significantly larger population than the largest majority group, the Hausa-Fulani.
  13. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, p. 131
  14. See, for example, Rob Nixon, "Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice and Micro-Minority Rights" in Craig W. McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist* (Boulder, Colorado and London, England: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 109-125
  15. For a comprehensive bibliography of Saro-Wiwa's published work, see Craig W. McLuckie and James Gibbs, "Appendix 3: An Annotated Bibliography" in McLuckie and McPhail Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, pp. 245-284
  16. See Nixon, p. 113
  17. In 1987, *Soxaboy* had received an honourable mention in the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa and, in the same year, *A Forest of Flowers*

- was short-listed for the Commonwealth Writers Prize. See Laura Neame, "Appendix 1: Chronology of Ken Saro-Wiwa's Life" in McLuckie and McPhail Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, p. 234
18. 32 See Newell, pp.22-23
  19. See Ngūgī Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Oxford: James Currey; Nairobi. East African Educational Publishers; Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1997), p. 22
  20. See Laura Neame, "Saro-Wiwa the Publisher" in McLuckie and McPhail Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, p.160
  21. Ibid. pp. 153-156
  22. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War*, p. 53
  23. Ibid. p. 54
  24. In 1987, Craig McLuckie prepared a "checklist" of primary and secondary sources on the literature of the Nigerian Civil War which includes many works by Nigerian leaders (e.g. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Odumegwu Ojukwu) and major authors (eg. Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, J.P. Clark, Flora Nwapa, Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka). See Craig W. McLuckie, "A Preliminary Checklist of Primary and Secondary Sources on Nigerian Civil War/Biafran Literature", *Research in African Literatures*, 18:4 (Winter, 1987): 510-527. The war continues to preoccupy Nigerian writers in the contemporary moment. See, for instance, Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's prize-winning novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006) and Chinua Achebe's memoir, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012)
  25. See Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, *The Biafran War: Nigeria and the Aftermath* (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellin Press, 1991), p. 94
  26. 40 Ibid. pp. 120-121
  27. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *On a Darkling Plain*, p. 85
  28. See Charles Lock, "Ken Saro-Wiwa, or 'The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger'" in McLuckie and McPhail Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist*, pp. 3-16

29. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (Essex, England; New York; Mississauga, Ontario: Longman Publishing Group, Tenth Impression, 2006)
30. 44 Ibid. p. 9
31. See Doris Akekue, "Mind-Style in *Sozaboy*: A Functional Approach to Language" in Charles Nnolim Ed. *Critical Essays on Ken Saro-Wiwa's Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (London: Saros International, 1992), pp. 22–23. See also Michael North, "Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*: The Politics of 'Rotten English'", *Public Culture*. 13.1 (2001): 97-112
32. See Lock, p. 13
33. Ibid. p. 15
34. Ibid. p. 13
35. Ibid. p. 8.
36. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy*, pp. 46-47
37. See Lock, p. 9
38. See Lock, p. 14.
39. General Yakubu Gowon, who was Head of State in Nigeria from 1966-1975 and led the federal forces during the Civil War.
40. See Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, p. 5
41. Letter dated 24th October 1994. MU/PP7/12
42. Letter dated 7th February 1995. MU/PP/7/22
43. Letter dated 2nd May 1995. MU/PP/7/25. Shell had suspended their operations in Ogoniland in 1993.
44. See, for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* [1903] (New York: Penguin, 1989); W.E.B. Du Bois. *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* [1919] (Minneola, New York: Dover, 1999); C. L. R. James. *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution* (London: Allison and Busby, 1977)
45. See Ato Quayson, *Calibrations: Reading for the Social*, p. 69
46. Ibid. p. 69
47. Ibid. p. 70



48. Ibid. p. 70
49. Letter dated 27th October 1994. MU/PP/7/13
50. Letter dated 21st March 1995. MU/PP/7/23
51. Letter dated 15th January 1995. MU/PP/7/21
52. Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*. p. 123
53. See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism" in Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres Eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) pp. 1-46



*KEN SARO-WIWA IN  
POLITICAL CONTEXT:  
SOCIAL MOVEMENTS  
IN THE NIGER DELTA*

LAURENCE COX

**International solidarity between Africa and Ireland**

THESE REMARKABLE LETTERS, from their writing to their publication, trace a history of international solidarity. Their origin lies in the relationship between Ken Saro-Wiwa, the wider Ogoni movement and Majella McCarron's solidarity work, well-documented in Helen Fallon's piece above. The letters themselves show Saro-Wiwa in action, mobilizing international support for himself and his co-defendants.

As he was only too aware, the situation of the "Ogoni Nine" symbolised the struggle between MOSOP, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, on the one side, and the Nigerian

military government, together with the energy multinationals, on the other. To raise awareness and seek international solidarity for one was also to build support for the other. This strategy developed Saro-Wiwa's earlier internationalisation of the conflict through participation in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization and other fora.

When she returned to Ireland, Sr. Majella engaged closely with the Shell to Sea campaign of the equally remote community in Erris, County Mayo—the “Bogoni” as they sometimes called themselves—once again resisting Shell activities. As she made clear at the presentation of the letters, her choice of Maynooth University as a suitable repository for this historic collection is a result of the connections built up by Maynooth students working in solidarity with the campaign in Mayo, particularly John O'Shea, who suggested the donation; Jerrie Ann Sullivan, who recorded Irish police joking about the rape and deportation of protestors; and Terry Dunne, one of the original founders of the Rosspoint Solidarity Camp. Social movements can respect students and academics who take a stand on the basis of their own study and ethical choices; this engagement strengthens both civil society and intellectual work.

In turn, this publication would not have seen the light of day without the connection with Firoze Manji<sup>1</sup>, the founder and former editor-in-chief of Pambazuka News, the pan African website and e-newsletter, who saw the significance of the letters at once and whose commitment to the project of publishing these letters has been exemplary. With this publication, the connection between African and Irish social movements comes full circle. But why should these movements exist in the first place?

### **The curse of oil: between Norway and Nigeria**

The Norwegian specialist on oil and gas, Helge Ryggvik, speaks of the “curse of oil”. Finds of gas and oil only rarely benefit the

local population. More commonly they lead to greater social and economic inequality, the corruption of the state apparatus and increased violence, as the rich and powerful use their existing advantages to monopolise the benefits of the new wealth.<sup>2</sup>

Norway, with all its complexities, is a rare exception to this rule. This is not because of any natural facts but because popular movements were determined that oil and gas wealth would be used for the benefit of society as a whole. In particular, civil servants who had been part of the resistance to fascism during the Second World War, an assertive trade union movement and popular commitment to social equality were crucial in pushing through the “Norwegian model” against the resistance of conservative elites and threats from the energy companies.

The essence of this was a productive model which gave multinationals limited access in the early phases in return for skill and technology transfer, which enabled Norway to build up its own industry, along with ownership and tax regimes which led to the Norwegian state’s petroleum fund becoming one of the world’s largest pension funds and financial investors.

Ireland and Norway both became independent from neighbouring powers in the early twentieth century; but Irish politics took different routes to the Norwegian, leading to the country becoming one of the most unequal in western Europe, with notoriously high levels of state corruption and clientelist power relations. It is this, rather than (as government ministers sometimes claim) some unique physical disadvantage vis-a-vis Norway, which has shaped Ireland’s response to oil and gas: a long-standing political commitment to enticing multinationals at any cost, coupled with the determination of local elites to secure small-scale advantages as middlemen in what has recently been called a “meet-and-greet” capitalism,<sup>3</sup> and the defeat and subordination of popular social movements.<sup>4</sup>

As the Navy is used to force through the Corrib pipeline in Mayo, further exploration rights are given away off the west coast, fracking is threatened across the west Midlands, and oilfields are

announced off Dublin and Cork—all against a backdrop of IMF- and EU-mandated austerity and media cheers—the Irish future seems likely to be closer to Nigeria than Norway.

## **The Niger Delta and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People**

The people of the Niger Delta have suffered massively from their location on top of Nigeria's oilfields. Their history, as Ken Saro-Wiwa wrote, has been one of a massively accelerated colonisation—the first British policemen arrived to impose imperial control as late as 1901 and conquest was only complete in 1914—tied to the then-crucial palm oil trade.<sup>5</sup> Following the start of oil exploitation in the 1950s, multinational companies led a partial industrialisation, intertwined with internal colonisation by the newly independent Nigerian state.



MOSOP protest in Ogoniland. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Indigenous groups, in particular, suffer massively from their location in what are often strategic areas for extractive industries.<sup>6</sup> Ogoni are only one of several affected populations in this large and ethnically complex area. Such populations have truly been cursed by oil and gas: the vast bulk of Nigeria's GDP and virtually all of its export revenue is generated here, where less than a quarter of the population live, and they are thus caught between the multinational energy companies—some of the world's most powerful actors—and the national state.

The inequalities of high-tech industrial development side-by-side with rural poverty, the environmental devastation of blowouts, oil spills and the world's largest flaring of natural gas, political marginalisation and police and military brutality have been the norm rather than the exception for indigenous groups in the Delta. From the Biafran war through to the current militarisation of the Delta, struggles for the control of the vast wealth represented by oil have taken place at the expense of local populations.<sup>7</sup>

As the newly independent African states' pursuit of national economic development produced increasingly uneven distributions of wealth, repression of popular movements and ultimately acceptance of the "adjustment" packages of International Monetary Fund / World Bank austerity, poor rural groups and ethnic minorities suffered disproportionately from the deregulated economy. In the 1980s in particular, environmental movements revolving around the key resources of land, water, forests and so on challenged the state and multinational capital and connected this to the wider struggle for a people-centred democracy.<sup>8</sup>

MOSOP—the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People—was unusual in the history of resistance to this process in that it was determinedly democratic and non-violent; a truly popular mass movement aiming to secure popular control of this wealth, which did not simply reproduce the state's own practices of violence.<sup>9</sup> As a federation of Ogoni organizations, including

women's and youth groups, churches and traditional leaders, students and teachers, it had particular legitimacy. In early 1993, something like 60% of the entire Ogoni population joined a coordinated day of protest—a virtually unheard-of level of participation.



MOSOP cap and flag. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

## The Ogoni Nine

The military response by the then dictatorship was one of characteristic brutality: demonstrators were shot, roads were sealed and villages were destroyed.<sup>10</sup> The trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the other members of the “Ogoni Nine” was part of this process. In 1994, four Ogoni chiefs were killed under circumstances which remain unclear.<sup>11</sup> Fifteen Ogoni men were charged with the murders, including Saro-Wiwa, who had been refused entry to Ogoniland on the day of the murders.

As the letters show, it was clear to Saro-Wiwa from early on that the court was rigged<sup>12</sup> and the intention was to execute MOSOP’s leaders in the belief this would end the movement. In fact, nine of the defendants, including Saro-Wiwa, were hanged, but the movement did not come to an end.

Instead, it was the dictatorship which fell in 1999.<sup>13</sup> State violence, it turns out, does not always win, and international outcry can make a difference.<sup>14</sup> Nor did Shell win; it was declared *persona non grata* by MOSOP in 1993, subsequently left Ogoniland and eventually saw its operatorship handed over to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in 2011. A somewhat greater share of oil resources now go to Ogoniland, and the Ogoni movement continues.

Saro-Wiwa’s family, meanwhile, together with that of the other executed men, spent years pursuing Shell through the courts until they settled for over \$15 million dollars. Court documents which have since become available make clear the extent to which Shell funded and instigated military operations against Ogoni activists in the Delta.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Wikileaks documents show Shell leadership boasting of their staff placed within Nigerian government departments and of exchanging intelligence with the US about militant activity in the Delta.<sup>16</sup>



## Ken Saro-Wiwa and the letters

Ken Saro-Wiwa's prison letters, like his son's critical account<sup>17</sup>, show him to be a genuinely remarkable figure and a social movement leader of great stature, who could draw on a breadth of political experience and historical vision. It is not too much to say that they bear comparison with the prison letters of the Italian anti-fascist leader Antonio Gramsci, which for decades have been staple reading for Italian schoolchildren.

At Gramsci's trial, the prosecutor famously stated that "we" (fascists) must keep this brain from working for twenty years. Saro-Wiwa's letters show his brain working at full speed, directing the campaign to halt the executions, developing strategy for MOSOP, and discussing the weakness of the Nigerian dictatorship. There is not only a clear analysis of the situation but also a hugely energetic activity directed not to saving his own life but to making sure that a death—which he in part expected—would serve the Ogoni movement and the end of dictatorship—as indeed it did.

Like Gramsci's letters, Ken Saro-Wiwa's prison letters deserve a wide readership. They are immensely readable, hugely enlightening and inspiring for all those who struggle for social and political justice. They show that even the world's largest energy companies can be defeated; that even the most brutal and corrupt regimes do not necessarily win; and that even the smallest and most marginal populations, when they have their backs to the wall, a commitment to organising themselves and allies from other social movements, can find reasons to hope and act.

## Your Ogoni, my Fermanagh

One of Saro-Wiwa's poems, for Majella McCarron, sums this analysis—and his internationalism—up perfectly: "... *reach out to*

*the grassroots/ Of your Ogoni, my Fermanagh*". Ogoni's situation is ours, and our situation is theirs; we can learn from each other.

The struggle for the democratic control of oil and gas resources, to ensure that when extracted their use is to benefit society as a whole and that only when appropriate ecological considerations prevail, is as global as the energy multinationals. Oil and gas go hand in hand with corrupt states, thuggish police forces, judges who do what they are told and a bought media.

They do not only bring out the worst in people, though; communities standing on their own land and fighting for their future existence often show extraordinary courage in the face of this intimidation, great generosity towards similar struggles elsewhere, a poetic vision of how we *should* live and a clear perspective of the realities not only of power but of the longer timescales in which we have to think if we want to have grandchildren and not simply bank accounts.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, in the letters collected here, exemplifies what human beings can be, in a standing reproach to the short-sighted, the vicious and the corrupt and a lasting inspiration to the wise, the decent and the brave.

## Notes

1. Firoze Manji, founder and former editor-in-chief of Pambazuka News, was head of CODESRIA's Documentation and Information Centre <<http://www.codesria.org>>. He project-managed the publication of this volume on behalf of Daraja Press.
2. Helge Ryggvik, *Norway's Oil Experience: A Toolbox for Managing Resources?* Oslo: Centre for Technology, Innovation and Culture, University of Oslo, 2010. English translation available at <<http://tinyurl.com/norwegianoil>>
3. Conor McCabe, *Sins of the Fathers: Tracing the Decisions that Shaped the Irish Economy* (Dublin: The History Press, 2011)

4. Laurence Cox, "Gramsci in Mayo: a Marxist Perspective on Social Movements in Ireland", Paper to New Agendas in Social Movement Studies Conference, Maynooth (2011) <<http://eprints.nuim.ie/2889/>>
5. Sanya Osha, "Birth of the Ogoni Protest Movement", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 41.1/2 (2006): 13-38
6. Declaration of the International Conference on Extractive Industries and Indigenous Peoples, Manila, 2009
7. For an overview, see John Agbonifo, "Territorialising Niger Delta Conflicts: Place and Contentious Mobilisation", *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* 3.1: 240-265 <<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Interface-3-1-Agbonifo.pdf>>
8. Cyril Obi, "Environmental Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa: a Political Ecology of Power and Conflict", UN Research Institute for Social Development, Civil Society and Social Movements programme paper 15 (2005), online via <[www.unrisd.org](http://www.unrisd.org)>. For wider overviews of social movements in Africa, see the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* special issue, "Political Subjectivities in Africa" 47.5; Peter Dwyer and Leo Zeilig, *African Struggles Today: Social Movements Since Independence* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2012); Miles Larmer, "Social Movement Struggles in Africa", *Review of African Political Economy* 37.125: 251-262; Nikolai Brandeis and Bettina Engels, "Social Movements in Africa", *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 20: 1-15, <[http://www.univie.ac.at/ecco/stichproben/20\\_Einleitung.pdf](http://www.univie.ac.at/ecco/stichproben/20_Einleitung.pdf)>; and Michael Neocosmos, "Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)Possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today", *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements*, 2.1: 263-334, <<http://interfacejournal.nuim.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Interface-1-2-pp263-334-Neocosmos.pdf>>
9. Michael Neocosmos, "Transition, Human Rights and Violence: Rethinking a Liberal Political Relationship in the African Neo-colony", *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements*, 3.2: 359-399, <<http://www.interfacejournal.net/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Interface-3-2-Neocosmos.pdf>>

10. Elwyn Corby, "Ogoni People Struggle with Shell Oil" (2011), Global Nonviolent Action database, <<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/ogoni-people-struggle-shell-oil-nigeria-1990-1995>>
11. *The Independent* (London), "Ken Saro-Wiwa was Framed, Secret Evidence Shows". 5th December 2010
12. See the highly critical report on the trial for the Article 19 human rights NGO by Michael Birnbaum QC, "Nigeria: Human Rights Denied. Report of the Trial of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Others". Article 19 (1995) <<http://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/publications/nigeria-fundamental-rights-denied.pdf>>. This notes among other things that the two principal witnesses subsequently swore affidavits claiming that they were bribed to give false evidence.
13. On the wider relationship between ethnic movements and democratisation, see Kehinde Olayode, "Ethno-nationalist Movements and Political Mobilisation in Africa: the Nigeria Experience (1990-2003)", *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien*, 20: 69-93, <<http://www.univie.ac.at/ecco/stichproben/20.Olayode.pdf>>
14. Marie-Emmanuelle Pomerolle, "The Extraversion of Protest: Conditions, History and Use of the 'International' in Africa", *Review of African Political Economy*, 37. 125: 263-279, rightly notes that internationalisation has costs as well as benefits; but few movements facing repressive regimes anywhere in the world have failed to appeal to movements and opinion abroad.
15. *Guardian* (London), "Shell Oil Paid Nigerian Military to Put Down Protests, Court Documents Show", 3rd October 2011
16. *Guardian* (London), "Wikileaks Cables: Shell's Grip on Nigerian State Revealed", 8th December 2010
17. Ken Wiwa, *In the Shadow of a Saint: a Son's Journey to Understand his Father's Legacy* (London: Black Swan, 2001)



*THE MAYNOOTH  
UNIVERSITY KEN  
SARO-WIWA AUDIO  
ARCHIVE*

DR ANNE O'BRIEN AND HELEN FALLON

Kairos Communications, under the direction of Dr Anne O'Brien, filmed the handover of the Ken Saro-Wiwa collection to Maynooth University in November 2011. From this and subsequently conversations the concept of an audio archive took root.

This is the story of the Ken Saro-Wiwa Audio Archive, which was created by Dr Anne O'Brien and Helen Fallon. The archive is freely available online. It has been accessed over 2,000 times since its creation and continues to be a living archive of people and events related to Ken Saro-Wiwa and his ideals.

## Recordings

As of August 2017, there are 15 recordings in the audio archive:

[Recordings 1-8](#) — The story of Sister Majella McCarron, from her childhood in rural Fermanagh to her work on social justice issues today.

[Recording 9](#) — Dr Íde Corley discusses Ken Saro-wiwa's position in post-colonial African literature and his role as a popular novelist and the creator of an award winning television sitcom.

[Recording 10](#) — Helen Fallon discusses the Maynooth University acquisition of the Ken Saro-Wiwa collection.

[Recording 11](#) — Dr Laurence Cox discusses Ken Saro-Wiwa's legacy in terms of conflict over natural resources and the importance of the archive for both researchers and activists.

[Recordings 12-14](#) — Dr Owens Wiwa talks about growing up in Ogoni, the environmental destruction of his homeland and the deaths of his brother and his colleagues. In recording 14, he reads two of his brother's poems.

[Recording 15](#) — An interview with Noo Saro-Wiwa.

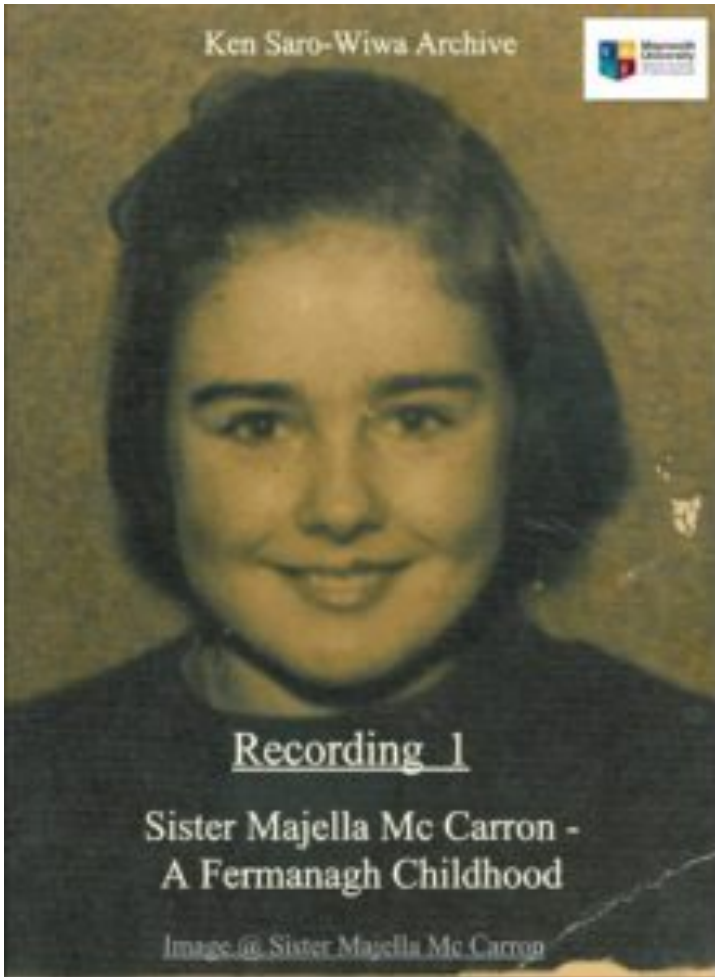
While the archive of letters and images that McCarron donated to the library is immensely valuable, and the book *Silence would be Treason* offers an astute analysis of Saro-Wiwa's work from a variety of perspectives, neither the archive nor the book entirely tell his story. The audio archive was designed 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, Dr Laurence Cox addressing the environmental issues and Noo Saro-Wiwa speaking about her father and life in Nigeria and London. These 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 – Sister Majella and Owens 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



Majella McCarron, courtesy of Sister Majella McCarron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

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





Sister Majella McCarron, courtesy of Sister Majella McCarron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

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.

The interview with Noo Saro-Wiwa was recorded in a studio on her visit to Maynooth University on the 20th anniversary of her father’s execution.

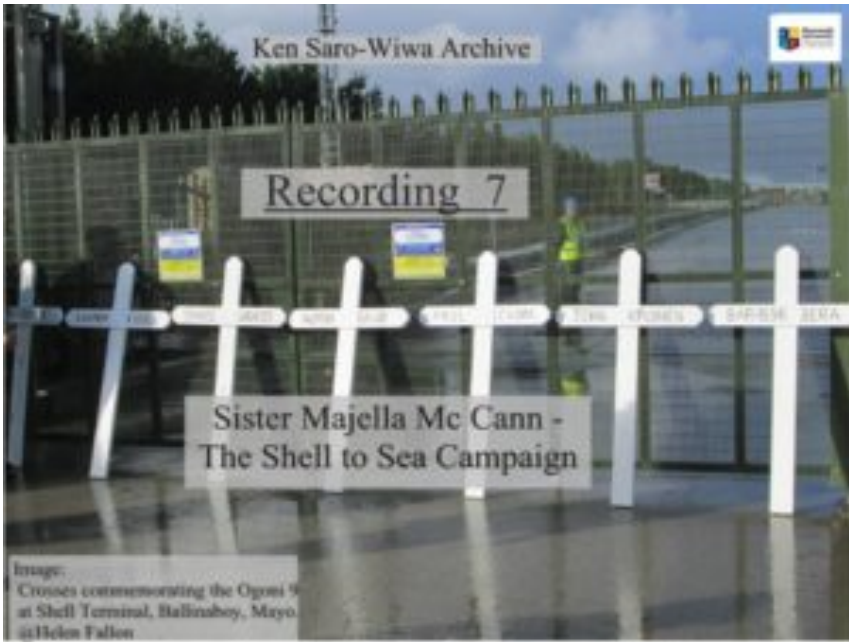
She movingly told the story of how she found out about the death of her father:

I was a second year university student at King’s College London and he was sentenced to death – my father and his colleagues – on October 31st. So that came as a real shock, but then the international community really rallied round, so come November 10th it was just another day within that particular period. I must have attended classes, and then I went and did some shopping and I came back to the house I was living in in North London and my housemate had left a message, just a handwritten note on the table saying ‘call your mother’ and so I called my mother and she was the one who told me. I just put down the phone, which was the same reaction I had when I was told that my little brother died two years previously, I just put down the phone. And then went home immediately to my mother’s house and spent the evening with the family – my cousins and my aunt and uncle came over.”



Noo Saro-Wiwa and Sister Majella Mc Carron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

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.



Sister Majella McCann – The Shell to Sea Campaign. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Other interviews 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 Maynooth University to launch the book of his brother’s letters.

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.



Dr Owens Wiwa views his brother's letters at Maynooth University Library. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

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 Owens Wiwa 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.

The Ken Saro-Wiwa audio archive, which was launched by Dr

Owens Wiwa, alongside *Silence Would be Treason*, can be accessed [here](#).

Between the launch on 7th November 2013 and 31 August 2017, the audio archive has been played over 2,000 times and has been widely promoted. 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.

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



5



*A DYING VILLAGE*

MAJELLA MCCARRON



Sr. Majella. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

No piercing siren to rise you,  
No flaring light to guide you,  
No nearby neighbour's love to reach you,  
Dying village.

No caring friend to conceal you,  
No towering soldier to defend you,  
No rushing firemen to quench you,  
Dying village.

No speeding ambulance to ferry you,  
No humble priest to bury you,  
No Red Cross pennant to fly for you,  
Dying village.

No urgent phone to ring for you,  
No loud-pitched radio to plead for you,  
News is blocked in fear of you,  
Dying village.

No strong one comes to hold you,  
As children are torn from you,  
A stranger's voice to wail for you,  
Dying village.

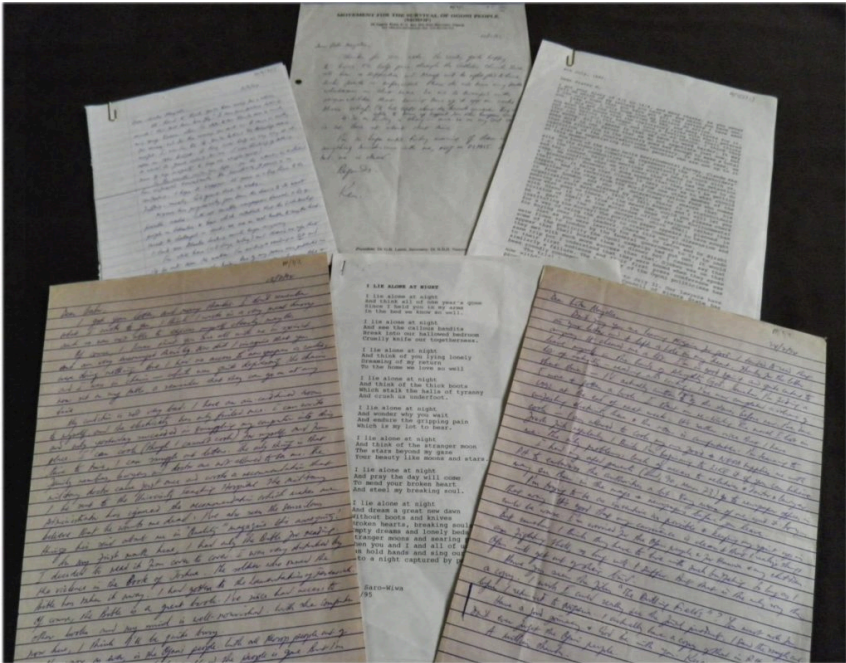
Dawn comes late for you,  
Vultures chuckle over you,  
Our deepest human shame is you,  
Dying village.

Too few prophets spoke for you,  
Years of scribes and Pharisees denied you,  
Evil powers abandoned and beggared you,  
Dying village.

The world turned its back on you,  
May God himself be good to you,  
And hope renew in you,  
Dying village.

## PART II

# SECTION 2: LETTERS TO SISTER MAJELLA



Selection of letters and poems from the Ken Saro-Wiwa Archives.



## *Editors' Note*

WITH THE EXCEPTION of the letters dated 8/7/1995 and 16/9/1995 which were typed, the letters transcribed in this volume were handwritten. They inevitably contain idiosyncrasies such as contractions, distinctive choices of spellings (e.g. “gaoler” rather than “jailer”), and occasional slips of the pen. In places also, the format of a letter has been complicated by Saro-Wiwa’s emendations including, for instance, notes in the white space or margins.

The editors have aimed here to transcribe what was written as it was written, or, in other words, to reproduce in typescript as accurate a version of each letter as possible. In doing so, it has sometimes been necessary to make strategic decisions to provide a clear text. For clarity, we list these decisions here. The reader should note that the Maynooth University Library is eager to facilitate any person who, for research purposes, seeks access to the original letters held in the archive.

When a note or other emendation was intended by Saro-Wiwa to be integrated into the text, we have done so. Where the appropriate place for a note is less obvious, it has been included in full in the footnotes instead.

At Majella McCarron’s request, five sentences in total have been deleted from the entire text of the letters to protect the personal information of tangential individuals. These deletions are indicated within the text by three dots inside square brackets.

Since Saro-Wiwa's own deletions (or cancellations) are frequently illegible, they are not signalled here.

Throughout the typescript, we have retained Saro-Wiwa's contractions, underscores and choice of spelling. In the cases of contractions, we have added editorial emendations within the text to clarify their meaning. These are signalled by square brackets and include, for instance, the full spellings of names or words and the full forms of acronyms. Other authorial emendations are also signalled by square brackets.

To facilitate fluent reading, we have made a small number of silent emendations where slips of the pen resulted in the occasional misspelling of ordinary words or obvious minor errors in punctuation.



*October 20, 1993*

KEN SARO-WIWA

MOVEMENT FOR THE SURVIVAL OF Ogoni PEOPLE  
(MOSOP)

24 Aggrey Road, P.O. Box 193, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Tel: 084-331763/335658 Fax: 234-84-331763

20/10/93

Dear Sr. Majella,<sup>1</sup>

Thanks for your note. I'm really quite happy to have EC [European Commission] help pass through the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> You've all been so supportive and MOSOP will be right glad to have such friends or supervisors. Please do not have any doubts whatsoever on that score. We are so swamped with responsibilities that having some of it off our necks is sheer relief. I'll tell UNPO [Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization]<sup>3</sup> about the Brussels connection. They will be able to drum up support from other European countries.

4.30 on Sunday is okay—more so as my last rally is at Bori at about that time.

I'm in Lagos until Friday morning. If there is anything to discuss with me, ring on [telephone number provided]. The other tel. no. is dead.

Regards,  
Ken.

PP/7/1.

A.F. Con  
Ja.

**MOVEMENT FOR THE SURVIVAL OF OSONI PEOPLE  
(MOSOP)**

24 Aggrey Road, P. O. Box 193, Port Harcourt, Nigeria  
Tel: 084-331763/335658 Fax: 234-84-331763

20/10/93

Dear Sister Majella,

Thanks for your note. I'm really quite happy to have EC help pass through the Catholic Church. You've all been so supportive and Mary will be right glad to have such friends or supervisors. Please do not have any doubts whatsoever on that score. We are so swamped with responsibilities that having some of it off our necks is sheer relief. I'll tell UNPO about the Brussels connection. They will be able to drum up support from other European countries. 4:30 on Sunday is okay - more so as my last rally is at Bori at about that time.

I'm in Lagos until Friday morning. If there is anything to discuss with me, ring on 837955. The other tel. no is dead.

Regards -

Ken.

President: Dr G.B. Leton, Secretary: Dr B.B.B. Naanen

Letter from Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sr. Majella McCarron, 20/10/93. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive

## Notes

1. McCarron was working as a lecturer at the University of Lagos when asked by the Vatican to act as an observer for the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network (AEFJN). Her activities with the AEFJN led her to make Saro-Wiwa's acquaintance and when the university personnel were on strike, McCarron often spent time at his business office in Lagos to learn from him about the Ogoni situation. The AEFJN describe themselves as "a Faith-based International Network present in Africa and in Europe, established in 1988. [They] promotes economic justice between the European Union and sub-Saharan Africa so that the poor of Africa may look toward a better future". For more information, see <<http://www.aefjn.org/index.php/about-us.html>>.
2. When Ogoni villages were destroyed in September 1993, McCarron made a successful application for EC humanitarian aid to provide village relief. It was an EC requirement that a European non-governmental organisation would co-operate with a local non-governmental organization to manage and deliver the funds. McCarron contacted Niall Tobin in Trócaire, an Irish non-governmental development agency, to secure their support.
3. An international democratic and non-violent organization dedicated to promoting the rights of populations who are not represented at major international fora, such as the UN. Its membership includes indigenous peoples, minority populations and the populations of unrecognized or occupied territories.





*December 1, 1993*

KEN SARO-WIWA

KEN SARO-WIWA

---

Tel: 832218,  
83795

63, Tejuosho Street  
P.O. Box 696  
Surulere  
Lagos, Nigeria

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1/12/93

Sr. Majella,

I read your notes with great pleasure. I'm sorry to hear about the illness of your mum. I hope she recovers. Please keep putting your thoughts on paper. Who knows how we can use them in future. The Ogoni story will have to be told!

Can I please prevail on you to send the attached envelope through your special courier to London? I'll be most grateful.<sup>1</sup>

There's a lot for us to discuss. I'm in Lagos again next week Wednesday. We must please meet either Wednesday evening or early Thursday. I expect to return to Port Harcourt on Friday.

God's blessing,  
Ken Saro-Wiwa.

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

PP/7/2.

①

KEN SARO-WIWA

Tel: 832218, 837955

63, Tejuosho Street  
P. O. Box 696  
Surulere  
Lagos - Nigeria.

1/2/93

Sister Marijella,

I read your notes with great pleasure. I'm sorry to hear about the illness of your man. I hope she recovers. Please keep putting your thoughts on paper. God knows how we can use them in future. The Opini story will have to be told!

Can I please prevail on you to send the attached envelope through your special courier to London? I'd be most grateful.

There's a lot for us to discuss. I'm in hopes again next week Wednesday. Let's meet either Wednesday evening or early Sunday. I expect to return to West Hammet in London.

God's blessing.

Ken Saro-Wiwa

## Notes

1. McCarron often asked friends who were travelling to post letters from outside Nigeria as the Nigerian postal system was sometimes unreliable.



## *Undated letter*

Dear Sr. Majella,<sup>1</sup>

Greetings in God's name. Well, you know the whole story. They are getting closer to me—Shell and the Nigerian establishment that is. I'm not particularly protected, although I have great faith in God, in the justness of my cause & in the belief in eventual VICTORY. But the pain which we all have to endure! Would to God it had been lighter!

My current detention is sheer torture. I'm a private prisoner of the Lt-Col Komo<sup>2</sup> and his Internal Security Task Force. This is a lawless situation. I'm not being held under Decree 2 for all I know, and if I were being held under the Criminal Code over the homicide of the 4 Ogoni men, I should be in the hands of the Police. [UNHRC have a mandate on the condition of prisoners. Can the rep in Lagos do something about me?]<sup>3</sup> Now here I am, in a private house, denied access to lawyer, doctor, family, other visitors and not allowed to have the special diet which I have been on. I am not allowed to read newspapers, listen to radio or read books. It's mental torture. The living condition is okay—there is electricity & air conditioning, but I'm alone with two armed guards, 24 hours a day. I've asked Bishop Makozi [Catholic Bishop of the Port Harcourt Diocese] to intervene with the Governor so I'm properly fed & taken to hospital. No dice. You should see me. I've lost weight! For the first 10 days here, I was on bread, water & bananas alone. But I'm in good spirit, undaunted, as convinced

of my cause as ever. My real worry is the devastation of Ogoni villages, the destabilization of the area & the harassment & killing of the people. With MOSOP Steering Committee members on the run or under arrest, the Ogoni are not protected at all. And the international scene is quiet, taken up with Abiola.<sup>4</sup> Only Divine intervention can help the Ogoni.

I'm not worried for myself. When I undertook to confront Shell & the Nigerian establishment, I signed my death warrant, so to speak. At 52, I think I've served my time and, come to face it, I've lived a charmed life. A few more books, maybe, & the opportunity to assist others would have been welcome. But it's okay. Of course, I & MOSOP had nothing to do with the death of the 4 gentlemen. We are struggling for justice, not for power and, in any case, they were of little consequence in a highly mobilized and conscious Ogoni population. They were no threat in any way at all. Komo has just succeeded in masking the government's role in the unfortunate & brutal deaths. And the Orages<sup>5</sup> were my in-laws. My children are cousins of the Orages. Elizabeth is from Bane & is the elder Sr. [sister] of my estranged wife, Maria. And I did have a lot in common with Edward Kobani.<sup>6</sup> We continued to discuss & chat even in recent times. We always got together again after he'd have strayed to his heart's content.

Well, Sr., I hope you do get this letter. I hope I'll get another opportunity to write you. I'm spending my time writing short stories—I lock my door & do not allow my gaolers [jailers] to see me at it.

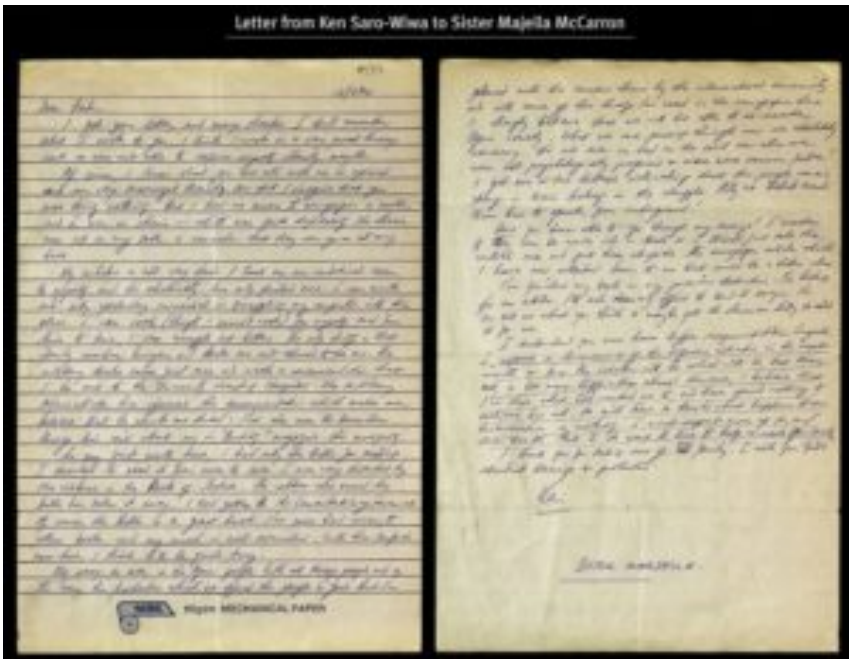
If we meet again, we'll smile. Till then, it's good luck & God bless you.<sup>7</sup>

## Notes

1. The following letter was not dated but McCarron believes it was written in June or July 1994. On 21st May 1994, four Ogoni elders—Albert Badey, Edward Kobani, Samuel N. Orage and Theophilis B. Orage—were murdered at Giokoo in Ogoniland. Saro-Wiwa and three other MOSOP activists were accused of conspiring in the murders, arrested on 22nd May and detained without charge.
2. Colonel Duada Musa Komo, Military Administrator of the Internal Security Task Force which was set up to deal with the Ogoni campaign. For more information, see Timothy Hunt, *The Politics of Bones: Dr Owens Wiwa and the Struggle for Nigeria's Oil* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2005).
3. The bracketed sentences were added in a column along the side of the paragraph.
4. Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola (M.K.O. Abiola) ran for the office of President in June 1993. He is widely presumed to have won the election which was annulled by the presiding military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, before an official result was announced. A political crisis ensued, allowing General Sani Abacha to seize power some months later.
5. A reference to Samuel N. Orage and Theophilis B. Orage, two of the four Ogoni chiefs who were murdered at Giokoo in Ogoniland on 21st May 1994.
6. Another of the four Ogoni chiefs who were murdered on 21st May 1994.
7. This letter is unsigned.



*July 13, 1994*



Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

13/7/94

Dear Sr.,

I got your letter, and many thanks. I don't remember what I wrote to you, I think I wrote in a very great hurry and so was not able to express myself clearly, maybe.

Of course, I know that you are all with me in spirit and am very encouraged thereby. Nor did I imagine that you were doing nothing. But I have no access to newspapers or radio, and I was in chains—which was quite depressing. The chains now sit on my table, a reminder that they can go on at any time.

My condition is not very bad. I have an air-conditioned room to myself, and the electricity has only failed once. I can write and only yesterday succeeded in smuggling my computer into this place. I can cook (though I cannot cook) for myself and from time to time, I can smuggle out letters.<sup>1</sup> The only thing is that family members, lawyers and doctor are not allowed to see me. The military doctor came just once and wrote a recommendation that I be sent to the University Teaching Hospital. The Military Administrator [Lt.-Col. Duada Musa Komo] has ignored the recommendation which makes me believe that he wants me dead. I've also seen the scurrilous things he's said about me in *Quality* magazine. It's annoying!

In my first month here, I had only the Bible for reading. I decided to read it from cover to cover. I was very disturbed by the violence in the book of Joshua. The soldier who owned the Bible has taken it away. I had gotten to the lamentations of Jeremiah. Of course, the Bible is a great book. I've since had access to other books and my mind is well-nourished. With the computer now here, I think I'll be quite busy.

My worry, as ever, is the Ogoni people. With all MOSOP people out of the way, the protection which we offered the people is gone.<sup>2</sup> But I'm pleased with the concern shown by the international community and with some of the things I've read in the newspapers here. I strongly believe that we will be able to re-create Ogoni society. What we are passing through now was absolutely necessary. It's not even as bad as the civil war when we were not psychologically prepared & were mere cannon fodder! I get one or two letters indicating that the people remain strong in their belief in the struggle. Pity we didn't teach them how to operate from underground!





Relief workers rebuild Ogoni villages with the EC emergency funding that was released to the Diocese of Port Harcourt through Trócaire in Ireland. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.



Some Ogoni inhabitants survey the impact of violence along the waterfront at Port Harcourt, 5th January 1994. Photograph by Sr. Majella McCarron. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

Have you been able to go through my essays? I wonder if they can be made into a book or I should just take the central ones and put them alongside the newspaper articles which I have now collected. Seems to me that would be a better idea.

I've finished my book on my previous detention. I'm looking

for an editor. I'll ask my office to send it to you. You can tell me what you think & maybe get the American lady to edit it for me.<sup>3</sup>

I understand you now have bigger responsibilities. Congrats. I expect a denouement of the Nigerian situation in the next month or two.<sup>4</sup> My situation will be solved with it, but there are a lot more difficulties ahead. However, I believe that I've done what God wanted me to, and have spared nothing to achieve his will. He will have to decide what happens to me. Incarceration is nothing. I must expect more of it, and even death. But I do want to live to help re-create Ogoni society.

I thank you for taking care of my family. I wish you God's abundant blessings & protection.

Ken.

## Notes

1. Family members were required to supply food as was the norm in Nigerian prisons. The letters were smuggled in and out of the detention cell in food baskets.
2. Following the arrests and violence, many MOSOP members went into hiding. Some including the author's brother, Owens Wiwa, had fled the country; a number received shelter at a refugee camp in Benin.
3. The book in question is *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary* first published by Penguin books in 1995. The "American lady" to whom Saro-Wiwa refers is poet Lynn Chukura who came to Nigeria from Philadelphia to lecture in Lagos and Legon. As it turned out, she did not edit the manuscript.
4. On 12 June 1993, there was an attempt to restore civilian government. Abiola was elected but prevented by the military regime from taking office. Sani Abacha's dictatorship continued until he died in 1998. Abiola died the same year.



*July 24, 1994*

24/7/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

Don't say you are leaving Nigeria for good. I tended to read that in your letter and it left a hole in my heart. Thanks for the letter anyway. It cheered me a lot. I'm in good spirit and quite content to leave myself in the hands of almighty God. Somehow, I'm finding a lot of activity—reading and writing. I've now completed a volume of short stories. I've actually written five of the stories before now. I've done 5 more & gotten a book [probably *A Kind of Festival and Other Stories*]. I start on re-writing the novel I lost in 1992 [*Lemona's Tale*] at the end of next week. It's rather nice that I have unfailing electricity here & the room is comfortable. I'm learning to cook—I am allowed to cook my own food & NEPA [National Electric Power Authority] supplies me with fresh fish regularly. I think I'm beginning to LIKE it if you can believe me. The only problems: lack of access to relatives & doctor & lawyer.

I had my aged parents (Dad 90, Mum 73) go to newspaper offices in PH [Port Harcourt] to embarrass the authorities a bit. Very mean of me, isn't it. So you may see them in the mags & newspapers before you leave.

I'm trying to be as inventive as possible & keeping my spirit up in that way. It's good that my conscience is clear & that I realise things could be worse. I'm worried for the Ogoni people & for

Hauwa<sup>1</sup> & my children. But somehow, I think they have to live with such buffeting. So long as I am fighting Shell, so long will I suffer. But that is the only way the Ogoni will get out of their bind.

Have you seen the film *The Drilling Fields*?<sup>2</sup> You must ask for a copy.

I wish I could really see the final product. I saw the rough cut before I returned to Nigeria. I actually have a copy of that in P.H. [Port Harcourt] or Lagos.

Have a good journey & God be with you. Keep me in your prayers & don't ever forget the Ogoni people.

A million thanks.

Ken.

## Notes

1. Hauwa Maidugu, Saro-Wiwa's partner at the time of his detention and mother of his youngest son, Kwame.
2. A 50-minute documentary film examining the activities of Shell and other oil and gas corporations in the Niger Delta. It was directed by Glen Ellis, produced by Poonam Sharma for Catma Films and first shown on Channel 4 London on 23rd May 1994.



*July 30, 1994*

30/7/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

I got your papers this morning & was I excited! You probably have not got the letter I sent through Barika.<sup>1</sup> Should be waiting for you in Lagos.

I will miss you in the year you are going to be away! Your letter was the first really good intimation I had of the goings on in Ogoni. I've always realized that we have not prepared the generality of the Ogoni people adequately for the struggle. The march of January 3 should have come after the organizations were properly in place.<sup>2</sup> But it was difficult to organize anybody or anything in Ogoni without such a bold public statement. It was like grabbing the place by the scruff of the neck and thrusting it forward.

In spite of this, I remain optimistic. The military government should collapse shortly after you leave Nigeria. That will open another chapter. The need now is to get the military out of the place. I hope that Ogoni is used to cudgel the military culprits who may do a deal with Abiola & so escape the charge of treason. But they must not escape a charge of genocide which they probably will not be thinking about. As Claude Ake<sup>3</sup> said, we need an international inquiry to go into it.<sup>4</sup>

Aid cannot be properly channelled into the area until the

military are gone & we begin to re-organize the people. What happens during your absence?

I'm including a letter for the Bodyshop<sup>5</sup> & UNPO, along with their fax and telephone numbers.

I write fiction, think about Ogoni & pray to God. I'm also trying to direct Ogoni affairs from here. It's not easy, but I'm doing my best. The scattering of the MOSOP committee is sad. But we have to learn to operate from the underground. We need training in too many areas! I'm happy you met Ben Naanen.<sup>6</sup> He is a fine fellow.[...]God bless you & travel safely.

Ken.

My telephone no. in London is [number provided]. Speak to my daughter Zina.

My son's number is [number and address provided]

I haven't heard from the children & that's worrying. I and my wife [Maria], as you probably know, have not been at one. And the family has been wracked by illness & tragedy[...]. My first son underwent heart surgery last year<sup>7</sup> & the Orages who were murdered were in-laws. Sam Orage brought up my wife (he's married to her elder Sr. [sister]). So the tragedy grows. I've tried to keep this personal aspect away so that it does not interfere with my public responsibilities. The girls (twins) are fine though, and Zina is especially a delight & very clear where she wants to go to. She needs guidance, though, & I've not been able to provide that.

P.S. By the way, I was sent here when it was found that I was sending messages from the Bori Camp Guardroom<sup>8</sup> through the food basket sent by my family. The military introduced Ogoni moles into the Guardroom. We knew them well. When one of them told on me, it was time to move me out. It has proved to be a blessing. At last, I'm writing & am able to think clearly in good

conditions. And, sorry to say, am still communicating with the outside world, in the absence of the food baskets!

Ken.

By the way, I don't consider Birabi & Leton a problem as such.<sup>9</sup> There is no negotiating with them because they do not even want to negotiate & they will not accept the democratic decisions of the majority. Really, all of it is based on jealousy & frustration. The people will have to decide what to do about them. Invariably, I find that the younger chaps want to fight them to a standstill. They matter only when the authorities side with them. So let's see how national politics go. If a Sovereign National Conference gets held & the Ogoni obtain self-determination, then the political education the majority have received will reduce dissenters to an insignificant opposition, incapable of frustrating the people.<sup>10</sup> MOSOP have 90% support in Ogoni And that's okay, by any standards. There was a beautiful essay in *Daily Sunray*<sup>11</sup> of Thursday 28. Did you see it?

Ken

## Notes

1. Probably Barika Idamkue, a fellow activist and member of MOSOP.
2. The author is probably referring to the first mass public rally held in Ogoni on 4th January 1993. 1993 was the UN-declared "Year of Indigenous People".
3. A prominent Nigerian political scientist.
4. Dozens of people were killed when Ogoni villages were destroyed in violence that took place during September 1993.
5. A British-based company, founded by Anita Roddick in 1976, which works on the ethical sourcing of beauty products. Saro-Wiwa had met with Gavin Grant who was head of corporate communications and public affairs for the Body Shop International in 1992.

## SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

6. A fellow activist and member of MOSOP. He was Professor of History at the University of Port Harcourt and has collaborated with the UN Research Institute for Social Development on a project investigating Identity, Power and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2006-08. He is now Acting Head of MOSOP.
7. Following the death of Saro-Wiwa's son Tedum at the age of fourteen, the family were tested for heart problems. Ken Jr. was required to undergo heart surgery.
8. An Internal Security Task Force centre in Bori, Ogoniland. The guardroom was similar to a cell in a police station where people may be held before being charged. Bori is the main urban centre in Ogoniland.
9. Bennet Birabi and Garrick Barile Leton, both members of the conservative Ogoni elite. Leton had been a former President of MOSOP but testified against Saro-Wiwa at the military trial. According to a report by Human Rights Watch, he "alleged that Saro-Wiwa had sought complete control of the organization and encouraged his supporters to employ 'militant tactics.'" But, in fact, the report continues, Saro-Wiwa had "repeatedly avowed his commitment to non-violence" and "criticized the actions of violent Ogoni splinter groups". See <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a7d8c.html>
10. There were plans afoot for a conference to take place in Abuja in 1994 on behalf of all of the ethnic nations of Nigeria but they did not materialize.
11. A Nigerian newspaper based in Port Harcourt.





*August 15, 1994*

15/8/94

12 noon

Dear Sr.,

A million thanks for your letters. They are so entertaining, so encouraging, & they give me those intimate details of my family which no one gives. God bless you & keep you for us!

And you cannot imagine the relief I got from the money you sent. I was at my wits end. My resources are not limitless. They've begun to flounder. I've spent ever so much on the Ogoni. Runs into millions of naira. And now, something will have to happen. Otherwise I'll begin to sell my property. Just too bad for the youngest Saro-Wiwa [Kwame] whose birth am so happy about! I know that my daughters are the ones who will perpetuate my memory (apart from the books, of course,) but I have a sense of balance & am not willing to increase the number of disadvantaged in the world—women being so, most unhappily & something we must sort out too! More battles to fight!

So thanks for the cash. God bless the giver(s).

I don't know if you did see *Sunray*. The girl, Meesnan Akekue whom I trained—she worked with me for 2 years & I gave her a bursary for an MA at Uniport [University of Port Harcourt]. She has been writing some good pieces on the soldiers in Ogoni villages. Which solves your problem since I could not well know what's going on from here.

After my piece in the *Sunday Guardian* [the *Guardian*, Nigeria] of 31st July—did you see it?—the Administrator had my computer and radio confiscated. I was happy the piece rattled them so much. I miss the computer, but I feel really good that they've been so miffed!

The newspapers and magazines have been most supportive & am really happy about that too. The power of print! As a result of Rogerson Ake's article (a second, more devastating one is due soon), the beating of Nick Ashton-Jones<sup>1</sup> & probably my article, the ISTF [Internal Security Task Force] & Major Okuntimo<sup>2</sup> have been queried by Army HQ. I hope he gets it this time round. The Sadist!

There are rumours that we might get charged to court this week & remanded in prison custody. This will be much better than the present brutal detention where I remain incommunicado.

I hope you did get the letter of recommendation to UNPO & the Bodyshop. I'll be expecting you to carry the Ogoni banner in Europe in the next week.<sup>3</sup>

It's going to be a difficult battle, this Ogoni struggle. But I've not had any doubts at all of success. I've recently gotten even more confident as incarceration has drawn me nearer to God. He works in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform. What doubt can there now be of the Ogoni angst in Nigeria? I've even begun to think of Ogoni asking for a UN Protectorate status so that we can be protected against Shell & the other Nigerian groups. A line I may pursue if only to scare Nigerian rulers.

I hope that Ogoni presence in Geneva this month will yield some attention from the UN Human Rights Commission. That should be good for us.

I expect this letter to get to you in Europe. Please take care of yourself and do contact my eldest boy. He's a fine fellow—well educated but in the mould of an English gentleman (pity). He's slow & deliberate & cannot really understand what the barbarians are doing down here. He'd like to know how else he can

help. International Pen<sup>4</sup> might find you of value before literary audiences so contact them.

I'm having to write a dozen or more notes & letters to my staff etc. Wherever you may be, please remember that there's someone here who appreciates your goodness, your works. I'm sure my daughter Singto will always remember you too. She's really intelligent. I'm not surprised she was watching you so carefully. Three or four years back, she wrote a beautiful 20 page book on computer on her dog. It's a literary masterpiece which I hope to publish. She's observant & thinks for herself. I'm proud of her. As of her Sr. [sister] Adele who lives in England. She's extremely gentle and sweet—not as clever as Singto but gentility is a great asset. With Zina (the first of the twin girls), I have a real team of capable women, if they do not meet & get enslaved by some mean men!

Keep writing Sr. M & God bless you a million times.

Sincerely,

Ken.

## Notes

1. British environmentalist and co-author with Susie Arnott and Oronto Douglas of *The Human Eco-Systems of the Niger Delta* (1998), a handbook of Environmental Rights Action (ERA). He conducted an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in the Niger Delta area for the Africa Development Bank and Federal Environmental Protection Agency in 1994.
2. Major Paul Okuntimo of Rivers State Internal Security Task Force.
3. McCarron was due to return to Ireland the day after this letter was written. She had not renewed her contract at the University of Lagos where she had been teaching for 13 years.

## SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

4. International PEN is a global community of writers who promote freedom of expression in literature.



*September 16, 1994*

16/9/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

It's hard to think you've been away for a whole month! How fast time does fly! I saw your picture holding my young Kwame whom I'm still to see. Thanks ever so much for caring, and for the money you sent us. It came in really useful. I wonder too if you're behind The Bodyshop asking after our 1994 Budget. If they could help in any way at all, it would be great relief for me. I was thinking of selling some of my property to keep the struggle going!

In the month since you left, I see the situation in N. Ireland has improved tremendously. The possibility of peace is so comforting. I hope it happens. 25 years is a long time to be fighting, surely. God grant that it works.

Nigeria has progressively gone down the drains to its worst possible nadir. With all sensible newspapers barred, a lot of people in detention & laws which establish that the dictatorship cannot be challenged in court, we are in real trouble, to say the least. I don't see Abacha<sup>1</sup> lasting much longer anyway.

I'm still here (118 days today) and there's no sign that I'll be out soon. No matter. I'm writing and reading a lot and making good use of the time. One of my poems was published in the *Independent* of London on 8th September. And Professor Ake & Wole Soyinka<sup>2</sup> have done excellent essays on Ogoni. That by Wole Soyinka appeared in the *New York Times* and probably sent

the Nigerian Ambassador to the U.S to Ogoni. He came here to see me; unfortunately, we could not really discuss meaningfully because the military upset me by remaining with us. I also wore a MOSOP singlet to ensure that they did not get a photo opportunity! They had a video camera along & the *Sunray* photographer smuggled himself into the team. Later, the *Sunray* films were confiscated, the editors of the newspaper manhandled, and the MOSOP singlet seized from me! But I had made the point.

The published essays by Ake, Soyinka & myself have lead to an upsurge of confidence in Ogoni. I now receive a stream of encouraging letters from the activists, including those of them who are underground. The sense I have is that they will “fight” to the end. Barika is off to the U.S., after his stay in Geneva, to speak on the Ogoni issue & Professor Ake tells me the Europeans & Americans are doing a lot on the Ogoni issue.

The British chapter of International Pen made me an honorary member & they have written to ask how they can get me out of jail. I asked them to appeal to Shell & to use the British media as much as possible to keep my case on the front burner.

The government keeps saying we are to be charged to court “soon”. But they’ve been saying that for about 2 months. I doubt that their investigations led to much, but they are probably looking for the judges who will agree to do their bidding. I’ve seized upon their statement to suggest that the Ogoni people set up a “Saro-Wiwa Legal Defence Fund” as a rallying point. I’m told the launch of the same will take place at the Roman Catholic Church at Garara on the 18th.

Abacha’s Constitutional Conference<sup>3</sup> is thinking of tinkering with the creation of nine states—and a Forum in Rivers State recently suggested the split of the state into 4, including an “Ogoni” State. I hear Shell are pressing for the creation of “Ogoni State” which was one of the things I told Emeka Achebe [Executive Director for Shell]<sup>4</sup> unofficially that they might do if they wanted peace with the Ogoni people. I don’t have faith in

Abacha's regime anyway and I doubt that much will come of his Conference. After the collapse of the oil strike, there has been quite some despondency in pro-democracy circles, but everyone still believes that the desperation of the regime signals the beginning of the end. I can't wait for that end.

All in all, I'm in high spirits and my time is well used, the physical conditions have been quite good. Had my computer not been confiscated, I should have written a lot more than the 5 or 6 books I've now either finished or completed anew. And somehow, I remain immensely confident that the Ogoni cause will be won.

I hope that you meet your family in good health and that you are resting as you should.

Please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Ken.

## Notes

1. General Sani Abacha, Military Dictator of Nigeria 1993-1998.
2. Major Nigerian author, the first African winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986.
3. The conference referred to as the Sovereign National Conference in the final addendum to the letter dated 30/7/94. See MU/PP7/6.
4. Executive Director for Shell from 1981-1996. He was General Manager of Shell's operations in Nigeria at the time of Saro-Wiwa's detention and later appointed Senior Corporate Adviser to Shell in London. "Emeka" is a short form of "Nnaemeka" and Saro-Wiwa uses both iterations alternatively in his letters here.



*October 1, 1994*

01/10/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

Thanks a lot for your letter starting from 3rd September & the only communication I've got from you since you left. I have, on my part, sent two letters and doubt now that you got any of them. I'll check what has been happening at the Lagos end, where there has been quite some confusion and lack of funds has stymied movement. Fundwise, I got a respite from the banks which have seized my funds invested with them—just one bank. I've got money to keep going for two months.

Keeping MOSOP operational has been quite a problem. With all the Steering Committee members in jail or declared wanted by the police, we have been in trouble. People like my brother who was helping have themselves become a liability. Those who were in jobs have had their salaries stopped. They, too, have become my responsibility. And keeping things moving in present-day Nigeria has become very expensive—and one is living on savings—earning nothing new for now. I did mention in my last letter that the Bodyshop had asked for our budget. If they can chip in something, it will help a great deal.

You probably know that one of my aims has been to take the Ogoni people on a journey. Even what is happening now is, and please don't think me sadistic, helpful. For one, they are able to see me battling from prison— from the very jaws of the lion. A



number of them have stuck it out in Ogoni and are still able to work in cells. And there are those who went off to Lagos and have done marvellous work with the Press. The activists write me, and from them, I have a sense that the Ogoni people are holding out bravely. They are not fighting—because I did not even prepare them for physical combat—but they are holding out psychologically. And that, in spite of massive government propaganda, aided by renegades like Birabi And Leton.<sup>1</sup>

However, we have won the propaganda war. I hope that you have seen the writings of Professor Ake and Wole Soyinka—the latter appearing in the *New York Times*. Locally, the support of the non-government press has been tremendous. And Yoruba leaders meeting on August 31 sent solidarity messages to the Ogoni and called for my release.

The Rivers State Government have put out films which I have not seen but they are recognized for what they are—propaganda—and in any case, it's always difficult to sell a bad case. More so when the opponent has had a head-on start. Nor can they match us internationally.

I thank you for your thoughts on the *Ogoni Review*. I have been wanting to keep it going. Funds have been the problem. If you can raise money abroad for it, we can do all the work, including printing here. Barika has been to Switzerland, and then went off to the U.S. I have not heard of him since then. I have, all the same, had a new employee who's working on copies. I'm sending back copies with this letter in the hope that it will help you raise funds. Three hundred pounds (£300.00) sterling a month should be enough to produce 1500-2000 copies monthly & mail them free to the right people and organizations. If such funding becomes available, all you need do is pay it into my a/c no. [number provided] at [name and London address of bank provided]. I'll then arrange to repatriate the funds through the unofficial market which will make the naira equivalent even better.

I'm happy that Bodyshop were able to stop the bad publicity

which I'm sure was engineered by Shell. They may be made to realize that what we are doing in Ogoni helps to expose Shell as well and they should lend us support. It's a shame that MOSOP have not been able to get help except from the World Council of Churches (cash) and UNPO (kind).

You will have known that the strike in Lagos was called off after 2 months. It was a great effort, but the British Govt. helped with it. The oil companies too. These organizations find it easier to exploit Nigeria through the military dictatorships. Predictably, Abacha has gone on a spree, trying to prove that he can out Amin Idi Amin. But I expect that he will fail, ultimately.

Yes, I do have a radio. Two have been seized from me, but I've got a third. If they seize that, I'll get another. It's the only way I can keep up with events. I get the newspapers too, but all the good ones—*Guardian*, *Punch & Concord*—are proscribed. But the radio has been most useful. Since I have time on my hands, I'm able to follow a wide variety of programmes. I get overseas magazines once in a while—through Prof. Ake—and I do have access to the novels in my library. I've written quite some—novels, Mr. B books & the collection of short stories. At least the first draft is finished and that's some comfort. My time is well used. Getting all these things in has meant paying money out to my guards—quite a sum of money, Nigeria being Nigeria. But that's okay. I can put it down to “business expense”. Freedom can be quite expensive or cheap depending on how you look at it. To those who have freedom, it's cheap; those of us who lack it, pay a lot to get just a bit.

Hauwa was here for a fortnight or so but could not get to see me so I was not able to see my son, Kwame. That the authorities refused to allow it shows the depth of their wickedness. But in Ogoni custom, to refuse a child the favour of seeing his parent is godlessness and a crime. So I'm expecting the Ogoni God to punish the criminals. Once when Edward Kobani, now deceased, treated me in a dastardly fashion, my father predicted that he would not die well. That duly came to pass. My dad did see and

bless the child along with my mother. He gave them a lot of happiness, I hear, and am satisfied. I've also had a guard here (a soldier) who saw my parents in good health.

I'm pleased that you met Father Mashevran.<sup>2</sup> I don't think I've ever been "street-wise". Bull-headed, yes. You have to be to take on Shell and the cabal that rules Nigeria.

The advice for Ogoni people not to co-operate with the military came from you, of course. Did you think I wasn't hearing from you?

And now to yourself. I hope that your medicals prove you fit. And that you are well, and happy. I long to see you back in Nigeria, helping, among others, to guide the Ogoni people through the wilderness. You don't know what help you have been to us, and to me personally, intellectually. God grant that you do return to us. I'm counting the days. I may still be in detention when you come back. But I'm not worried about that. Since the physical conditions are not bad, I'm keeping myself mentally busy and doing a lot of those things which I may not have done as a free man. Has it not been said that God moves in a mysterious way/His wonders to perform? When I think how I came to be here, and to succeed in internationalizing the Ogoni issue on a slim budget, I cannot but see God's fingers in it all. And evidence is now getting out to the effect that I might have been the one to be assassinated on 21st May but that what had been planned for me went askew, thanks to God. Not that death would have mattered to me. It would have carried more harm to those still alive. However, I do want to take the Ogoni people as far on the journey to re-vitalization as is possible—until other leaders are bred.

My brother, Owens,<sup>3</sup> is lying low in Lagos. But he's doing a tremendous job with the Press and the embassies. He's very clear and conscientious, thank God.

I've dealt with all the issues you raised in your letter and as I

sent a letter earlier, I've probably gone over some of the issues I raised in that letter.

Let me end by wishing you and yours the very best and God's abundant blessings.

Ken.

## Notes

1. See n. 26 with the letter dated 30/7/94
2. Saro-Wiwa's handwriting is indistinct here and it has not been possible to verify the spelling of this name.
3. Dr Owens Wiwa, medical doctor, a fellow member of MOSOP and global human rights activist. He is also currently Nigerian Country Director of the Clinton Foundation.



*October 11, 1994*

11/10/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

Welcome back to Nigeria and to Ogoni.<sup>1</sup> I hope you did receive all my letters. I do not appear to have been so lucky. Anyway, you can write me all you want. You might even try to see me through the Military Administrator. The meeting will give you an idea what the wretched fellow thinks of me. It will help me assess what they're up to.

There's a flash point in Ogoni right now. The gas pipeline. The Govt refused to give visas to our own consultants who were to help us review the EIA [Environmental Impact Assessment] which we had insisted on, and which is required under Nigerian laws. Govt. had already paid for the study as we demanded, and I did everything to convince the Govt. to issue the visas. I spoke to the Nigerian High Commissioner and to the Minister of Petroleum. And then I was arrested.

What we have to do is to stop Saipem<sup>2</sup> (the Italian Contractors) from walking over Ogoni dead bodies for their profit. I've written to Mr. Ohlsen<sup>3</sup> and we are going to lobby all EU Embassies in Lagos & the EU itself.

I was told to apply for some relief funds from the EU (regardless of whichever else we had previously applied for). Alfred Ilenre<sup>4</sup> brought the news, but I don't know whether this is correct. We have applied anyway. You may check this out.

All the best, and let me hear from you soon. I think you might be able to see me if you try hard enough.

Regards,  
Ken.

## Notes

1. McCarron had returned to Ireland on 16/8/94 and planned to stay there in the longer term to work with issues related to the Northern Ireland conflict. While visiting the Trócaire office, she was asked to return to Nigeria to facilitate a review of the application to the EU for humanitarian aid for Ogoniland. On her brief visit there, she was prohibited from visiting Saro-Wiwa in detention but they continued to communicate by letter.
2. An oil and gas industry contractor.
3. Gerald Ohlsen, Acting High Commissioner for Canada in Nigeria.
4. General Secretary of the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF).



*October 19, 1994*

19/10/1994

Dear Sr. Majella,

I got your diary which ended on 13th October. And considering that up to yesterday, there was no news of you having got to PH, I'm hopeful that this will get to you before you return to Europe.

Thanks a lot for your letter and for all the information which you gave me. It was most cheering indeed, and brought home to me the loss which I feel at your being so far away. I wonder if you have checked with [initials] if all that you sent me did get to Lagos. Because I don't appear to have received anything from you since you left Lagos. And I wonder if you did receive my own letters. You do not appear to have indicated so in your recent communication.

There isn't much to write since I think I wrote you less than a week ago. I hope to hear from you before you return to Ireland. I haven't heard from my son or daughters and I'm worried about that. Particularly about the girls' A-level results.

I'm in good spirits. I hope that the Court of Appeal tomorrow at least orders these goons here to allow me visits by family, doctor and lawyer. I don't expect anything better until the Govt are able or are unable to build the gas pipeline for which they are holding me.

Cheers, Sr. and God bless you.

Ken

P.S. I did receive a message after my devotional hour on Tuesday 11th October of coming good news. I hardly thought it was going to be the Right Livelihood Award<sup>1</sup> which has cheered me a great deal. The message I got spoke of a wider role for me in which my MOSOP and Ogoni experiences would come in handy. The Award has raised the morale of the Ogoni people and is a psychological defeat for our enemies.

By the way, you might take away the recent NTA [National Television Authority] Port Harcourt propaganda film done to discredit me. The most important bit is the point where the Commander of the Task Force [Paul Okuntimo] describes how he tortures Ogoni people. Europeans should see that clip.

## Notes

1. The Right Livelihood Foundation is a Swedish-based charity which promotes education, research and practical activities that contribute to global peace and justice. The annual award offered by the Foundation has become known as “the Alternative Nobel Prize”. It was established in 1980 following a failed attempt by journalist and philatelist Jakob von Uexkull to have the Nobel Foundation create new prizes in the areas of ecology and poverty elimination. For more information, see <http://www.rightlivelihood.org/>.





*October 24, 1994*

24/10/1994

Dear Sr. Majella,

A million thanks indeed for yours of 14th Oct-21st. It was, as usual, most informative and made me miss you more than ever. You are the only one who gives me an almost complete picture. Had you gone to Ogoni, I'd have got a complete picture—local, national and international. It can be terrible here when one cannot phone or discuss with others. I spend a lot of money keeping the lines of communication open because I need every bit of information on time. As the Ogoni people learn to fight from the underground, not many of them realize the value of detailed information to those of us in detention. And we do not have a culture of writing. But because I reply to letters as soon as I get them, they are now learning to write to let me know what is happening. No one in London has written me—even my son did not write after his first letter—and my cousin who heads MOSOP in the U.S. has not written either. I only hear from him on the pages of newspapers.

The RLA prize [Right Livelihood Award] was most welcome. It encouraged the Ogoni people a great deal, legitimized MOSOP as a non-violent, and environmental and human rights organization, and the prize money will ease things a great deal for me. I don't see Shell and the government allowing me to travel—they must dread what bombs my presence will drop in

Europe as I'm supposed to address the Swedish Parliament, the European Parliament in Strasbourg and another meeting in London. There or not, my words will ring through all the places. If I can't make it, I intend to ask my son to represent me. But somehow, I'm hopeful that I'll be there. If I'm not, then it is in Ogoni interest that I should not be. God's will.

As the days go by, I get the more convinced that the cause will win. I remember your encouraging me in the early days of our meeting, saying how because I had a certain independence of means, I might well be the only activist capable of giving Shell a run for their money. When I think how far we've gone on very thin resources, I have cause to be grateful to God. And no matter what Shell does or says, they've been in rough waters since July 1992 when I advised the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples<sup>t</sup> in Geneva. I am grateful to all those of you who have rallied round the Ogoni cause—UNPO, Greenpeace, International Pen, etc. And there must be better news on the way. I should mention the Bodyshop, of course. You probably know that they nominated me and MOSOP for the RLA Award. I have sent an appeal to President Carter asking him to intervene and resolve the conflict. Someone of his reputation would make quite a difference. My cousin in America has been quoted as saying the MOSOP (USA) would sue Shell. Exxon had to pay 5 billion USD for the oil spill from one tanker in Alaska. By the time we've created sufficient awareness internationally, it should be possible for us to find assistance should we wish to sue.

Sr., I don't know if my wish is father to the next thought. But somehow, there is hardly a thing which I have undertaken which has not been successful. I see the hand of God in it all, and am grateful to Him all the time. My preparation for this struggle was a long one and it was made simple by the fact that I did not know that the Divine Hand was preparing me all the time. It is only now when I look back and begin to put the pieces together that I can see the progression from Administrator for Bonny, Commissioner in Rivers State, businessman (of some success),

television producer, publisher, writer to activist as preparation for a task that would have been daunting if I had, for one moment, stopped to think or analyse its implications. And believe you me, I did not ever plan any of these things. They just happened to me. Only the decision to be a businessman after I had been sacked from the Rivers State Cabinet in March of 1973 was, consciously taken—but I didn't have much of an alternative!<sup>2</sup>

Yes, God has been very good to me. I've lived a charmed life. Consider that my 90 year old father and 73 year old mother go to court each day my case comes up; that you suddenly turned up to do the work among the diplomats & others in Lagos which we could not have done; that the Ogoni people have been so entirely supportive and have borne the pain of the struggle without complaint, that my brother Owens is right there always—he even had the wisdom of leaving Port Harcourt in time; that I have family members like Barika and Komene<sup>3</sup> (whom I trained through secondary school, by the way) and other relatives who are extremely loyal and hard working, and you will agree with me that the finger of God is in it. And the struggle was really quite inevitable. The Ogoni would have perished otherwise. Even if they were to perish now (and it's not possible), it would not have been without a fight! Oh, how proud the Ogoni people now feel! And not without justification. The RLA Award, I'm afraid, has even won them the envy of their neighbours and other Nigerians. A bad thing, but we'll get over it in due course.

We need your prayers, and your endeavours and I keep praying that you remain in good health to work for us! And find some other fulfilment. God bless you.

I am ashamed to say that I do not know the full details of the 3 projects being funded by the EU. I did see, by chance, a fax from Trócaire to the Bishop and that's how I knew about ECHO [European Community Humanitarian Aid Office]. What are the others? Please do not worry that you are being shunted aside after all that you have done. God uses us in his way and it may well be that your assignment was to bring the projects about.

I dare hope that many more projects and other assistance will be forthcoming. I hope that we can work for these other ones. After all, the Ogoni need a million projects. That is why I have not been worried about who is handling it or not. The important thing is that help should get down. You did warn me, anyway, about the politics of aid. What I wonder is, does the Diocese have the expertise to handle it all? My brother and Ben probably do not realize that MOSOP was not to be touched with a barge pole. Legitimizing the organization, given the enmity of Shell and the Nigerian Government was always going to be a problem. We do not even have a bank account! And they have to realize that we will have to fight for a long time. Why worry about these early pains? We will now begin to assemble the atrocities as required by Amnesty International. But to what purpose? Just to keep the statistics?

I will write the Ecumenical Committee for Corporate Responsibility as you advised—through you. I have some ideas which they may find useful.

Did the court grant Shell the injunction they have requested on *The Drilling Fields*? I'd like to know.

As far as I am concerned, Shell should lose its mining lease in Ogoni. They may be pretending that they do not want to return to Ogoni. The fact is that they have 500 million barrels of oil on secondary drilling at K. Dere;<sup>4</sup> they only last year awarded a 550 million USD contract to some organization to design the gas collection throughout Ogoni and the K. Dere field was to help in the natural gas plant at Bonny. No, Shell are merely hoping that the government will succeed in “pacifying” the Ogoni and then they will move in proudly and calmly to continue to steal. They are in for a fight they will never forget. Luckily, I'm no longer alone. Several Ogoni youth are now learning the ropes, and if only they could get further exposure, they would be able to continue the struggle even in my absence.

I'm happy that the question is being raised in the Irish parliament.<sup>5</sup> The more air it receives, the better.

I did hear the BBC broadcast. The lady travelled in the delta with Oronto Douglas<sup>6</sup> who helped Nick Ashton-Jones prepare his report. Oronto is a lawyer and committed to the Niger Delta—his home is one of the six places studied.

I'm sorry that I did not get to see you when you came to Port Harcourt.

I had hoped I might, even though I know how impossible it was. But we'll certainly meet again, and I hope it's soon.

I'm not going into partisan politics. What I meant is that I would be taking a wider role in the nation's affairs—expanding the Ogoni struggle to other parts of the delta and beyond. I could never be a part of whatever Abacha is planning for the future. What I want to see, and what I will always argue for is ERECTISM — ethnic autonomy, resource and environmental control. If this comes to pass, then Ogoni will be free and it is to them that I wish to dedicate the rest of my life. And I hope that that can be an example to other ethnic groups. The translation of my dreams into reality. Nothing to do with partisan politics.

I don't know if this letter will get to you before you leave for Dublin. Whatever the case, take good care of yourself and may God bless you.

Ken.

P.S. The programme for Sweden is as follows:

December 5. London. A meeting possibly in the Houses of Parliament.

December 6. Travel to Stockholm. Informal Reception for Recipients and RLA representatives.

December 7. Press Conference.

December 9. Award Ceremony, Swedish Parliament.

December 10. Seminar?

Thereafter, possibility of meeting European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Video presentation of recipients to be organised by

Robin Sharp [London address provided]—Film materials, video, photos or posters to the above-named.

Terry Ndee<sup>7</sup> might be requested to contact Greenpeace for photos and I wonder if *The Drilling Fields* will be useful.

## Notes

1. The author is referring to the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations.
2. Saro-Wiwa was Commissioner for Education and later Commissioner for Information and Home Affairs in the Rivers State Cabinet between 1968 and 1973. After the Civil War (1967-70), he became increasingly vocal in opposing the appropriation and misuse of the state's petrodollars by the nation's military elite under General Yakubu Gowon. This resulted in his expulsion from government in 1973.
3. A member of Saro-Wiwa's extended family who was in Rome undertaking a course on research and documentation when Saro-Wiwa's arrest took place. He did not return to Nigeria. McCarron helped him to acquire a scholarship to undertake an MA programme in Dublin jointly at University College Dublin and Kimmage Centre for Development Studies.
4. 132 A village in the Gokana district, Ogoniland.
5. The September attacks on Ogoni people and their property by members of the Nigerian armed forces were raised in the Irish parliament [Dáil Éireann] on 18/10/94. The then Tánaiste [Deputy Prime Minister] and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring stated that he had supported a proposal, made by EU representatives in Lagos, for a fact-finding mission to be sent to Ogoniland to assess the situation. The crisis in Ogoni was discussed on numerous occasions from then until 1998, when it appears more intermittently in the parliamentary records. For more details, see <<http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie/>>.

6. A leading Nigerian attorney and human rights lawyer who was among the team of lawyers representing Saro-Wiwa during his trial. He is co-founder of Environmental Rights Action and of Friends of the Earth Nigeria, co-author with Nick Ashton-Jones of *The Human Eco-Systems of the Niger Delta* (1998), a handbook of Environmental Rights Action (ERA) and co-author with Ike Okonta of *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in the Niger Delta* (New York: Sierra Club Books, 2001).
7. An Ogoni member of MOSOP who was based in London.



*October 27, 1994*

27/10/94

Dear Sr. Majella,

Thanks for your diary of 22-26/10. Don't be surprised at the paper I'm using. There has been a crisis here. I "lost", on Tuesday evening, all my writing paper, books, photos etc. and, unfortunately, two or three letters to Major Okuntimo, Commander of the Ogoni Murder Squad. I was the victim in a struggle between two Army Captains—the departing one (who had not wanted to leave) and an in-coming one (who badly wanted to be here). It's a long story, but in the end, the in-coming one used the "lapses" of the outgoing jailer in allowing me certain things to outwit his former classmate. I rescued my pen in the last minute—my radio too. But Nick's beautiful report went and much else. Fortunately, I always return letters within 24 hours so that it was only those sent on Monday and one other from Mon's father-in-law that were seized.<sup>1</sup> I just hope those ones are not now in trouble. I've got to remind Appolos [Dr Appolos Bulo]<sup>2</sup> not to receive letters which bear addresses. We all have to learn how to work in the "underground".

Thanks for coming back. And please do not be in a hurry to return to Lagos. We need you. I had not gotten down to writing anything for the [RLA] Award because I'd not known precisely what was to be expected. When I finally got it, I'm now under stress with the events of Tuesday 25/10. I now need a copy of the



Award letter (I wonder if you or the office have it), and you have to stay around to read and correct what I write—the view from the Prison can be quite jaundiced and illiterate, and I have no reference books from which I could quote—before you take them away.<sup>3</sup>

It may be possible to keep the lines of communication open—if Appolos can find the money to pay the new jailer. I was just about to give the man a bit of the stuff I'm made of and refuse to accept his attempt to extort money from me. But the Award Statement might make me mellow—how can one accept evil? Or co-operate with it? Or am I just getting it out of the way—“stepping it aside”? One is so very vulnerable here!

Don't worry about the Ogoni jujus. That bit was meant to frighten the Nigerian soldiers. I understand their mentality. And quite a number of other Nigerians—including the Ogoni people. I really had a good chuckle when I inserted that bit as an afterthought. The Born-Again Xians [Christians] have been worried—I read something like that in a fun-column of the *Sunray* newspaper. But it's O.K. Remember Hamlet. “There's more in Heaven and Earth, than is compounded in your philosophy, Horatio”. I'm using every non-violent weapon to face very violent people. Break your ribs.<sup>4</sup>

Read some of the letters I receive here—which I always return to the office—they will give you an idea how the faithful feel. Appolos has them all.

I'm asking President Jimmy Carter to intervene in the Ogoni situation.<sup>5</sup> I'll be keeping it in the quiet for now and the Lagos office should be advised not to talk about it to anyone. You may look at the letter—for your information. I cannot make any emendations now so don't worry if it's not perfect.

Don't expect anything from the court. This matter is political, and the military do not care for the judicial system. The only thing that can save the Ogoni people is the conscience of the West. If the embassies in Lagos pressure Abacha, yes, anything can happen. I fired off a challenging letter to the National Security

Advisor (Asmaita Guarzo) weeks ago. Ask Appolos for a copy. I understand Komo is doing a tour of the local government areas. I hope it is a “goodbye” tour. He has really goofed and presented me with a bonus. I intend to call, in my Award Speech, for an International Rescue Mission to save the Ogoni people and environment.

Just remember this. The embassies in Lagos are very important. No EU project can succeed if the Nigerian Army are still around. They will loot the place. Their soldiers are hungry! What do you think a Nigerian soldier earns?—800.00 naira a month. And that’s after 27 years in the force. I’ve had to feed the soldiers who guard me! The officers are even more ravenous and thieving. They’re all armed robbers. So the thing is to get them out of the area so that some peace can reign. You only have to remember that all we’ve had has been state-violence. The Ogoni people have been quite calm. I even suspect that Kobani and others were murdered by the security agencies in order to justify some of the reports that had been submitted by the security people in support of the Constitutional Conference. We (Ledum Mitee<sup>6</sup> and I) have met soldiers who are prepared, if they have the protection, to talk about what instructions they had, who looted what, who killed whom. The EU & the Americans must strive to get the Nigerian soldiers out!

Did Barika’s letter to the EU Delegate go to other embassies? It should. (He spelt “psychopath” wrong). I’ll wait to hear from you.

Ken.

## Notes

1. Owens Wiwa is also known by the familial name Mon probably because he was born on a Monday.
2. An Ibo assistant to MOSOP working in the Port Harcourt office.

3. McCarron brought Saro-Wiwa's acceptance speech and other items to Stockholm for the RLA Award ceremony.
4. A Nigerian equivalent of the expression "split your sides [laughing]".
5. Jimmy Carter and other international figures had intervened in Nigeria in March 1994 when the Army Chief of Staff, Olusegun Obasanjo, was arrested and threatened with execution for involvement in a failed coup. An outspoken critic of military rule, Obasanjo had been the first Nigerian military ruler to hand over power to an elected civilian government in 1980. At Carter's behest, he was released but imprisoned again several months later that year. He remained in detention until Abacha's death in 1998. Saro-Wiwa understood the power of international pressure to protect critics of the dictatorship and hoped to mobilize international support to protect himself and other MOSOP members. McCarron does not know whether or not he received a reply from Carter.
6. A MOSOP leader who was arrested with Saro-Wiwa. He was ultimately spared execution due, in part, to the pressure of international lobbies.
7. Barika Idamkue had been lobbying Western embassies to pressure Abacha to release the MOSOP activists.



## *October 29, 1994 (1)*

29/10/94

Str. M,<sup>1</sup>

Thanks a lot for the corrections to the Speech.<sup>2</sup> I'm also sending the 5-minute address. The third one—the 30-minute paper should be ready by the end of today. I must appeal to you to wait and take them all with you. Please!

I may still need to correct them before the 14th of November because I will ask Professor Claude Ake to look all three over. I rely on his judgement a lot. If it be the case that some changes are required, they will be made, and you will be duly informed—before 14th November.

You are very kind in the way you commiserate with me. But you must know that I'm quite tough. Writing a speech of this nature is normally a joy to me and I was not exhausted after writing it. I was, on the contrary, quite elated.

The fact that the physical conditions here are quite good, that I know there's a host of Majellas & the ordinary Ogoni people caring, praying for me, my belief in my mission and God's purpose for me in that mission, these have buoyed me considerably. My moments of depression have had more to do with the political situation in the country, worries over the Ogoni and such-like, than the fact of my confinement. I miss my family, of course, but as I say, it is a fitting price to pay for the joy of others.

This may not sound very nice, and most people around me

do not want to hear it (so don't tell Hauwa), but I have assumed for quite some time that death cannot be very far away from me. The period of confinement has helped me to "a closer walk with God". I was always religious, but the spiritual side of me was not properly developed. I am developing it now. Somehow, I do feel that God is in charge and that all I need to do is work hard, take advice and train & encourage the younger Ogoni to carry on from wherever I may stop. Sr., I'm at peace with myself. My guards are on my side, and the Asst. General Manager of the NEPA station (an Igbo of the name Godwin Oboli) has been wonderful. Replying to the letters I get keeps me busy and those letters give me pleasure too.

Yes, I have everything to be thankful for, and do not forget that I've been here only 23 weeks now. Mandela & Walter Sisulu were there for 26/27 years. How can I complain?

I'm going to ask to be allowed see you so we can pray together on Sunday, even if it's for ten minutes or so. Keep smiling.  
Ken.

## Notes

1. A note added to the top of this letter states: "I've made photocopies of the 'To Whom It May Concern' available to the Lagos office for transmission to the Johnstons etc." It referred to letters publicizing the Ogoni cause which McCarron had agreed to send. The Johnstons were a Scottish couple who had lived in Nigeria for many years and were sympathetic to the MOSOP cause.
2. Saro-Wiwa's Acceptance Speech for the RLA award ceremony in Stockholm on 9th December 1994.



## October 29, 1994 (2)

29/10/94

Sr. M,

1. I almost forgot this! For the London meeting of the RLA as demanded, it would be well worth it contacting Glen Ellis of Oxford who made *The Drilling Fields*.<sup>1</sup> He has a load of material which he has not used, including me reading from *A Forest of Flowers*. Kweku also has a film of Ogoni women of FOWA [Federation of Ogoni Women's Association] at work. Appolos has the address and telephone number of Glen Ellis.
2. <sup>2</sup>The flag and poster of MOSOP are also available in the office and you should please take a number of each.
3. MOSOP singlets are also available—there are probably some in my house. Elfreda will assist you get them.<sup>3</sup>
4. The Rivers State Govt's "MOSOP" film has a section where the Commander of the Internal Security Task Force [Col. Duada Musa Komo] describes his methods. I asked that a clip of this be made. You should please demand it. There's also a place where he accuses me (falsely, of course) of misusing funds donated from abroad. That clip may be useful.
5. Greenpeace Communications Ltd. have those photographs of the

devastation of Ogoni.<sup>4</sup> I have asked for colour reproductions of the ones we have in black and white. You may renew the demand for them. I will be prepared to pay for them. I heard on radio this morning that they are cash-strapped, and have had to lay off some staff. They owe me £700.00 which they've refused to pay since January 1993. But that does not matter. The RLA Foundation may be willing to pay, I don't know. In any case, I'm desirous of having these photographs for the exhibition in Sweden. I'll send a cheque to cover costs. The Award money can be used for it.

6. For the same exhibition, we need a single copy of each of my books (25 in all published as of today—7 are in MS [manuscript] stage). Between PH [Port Harcourt] and Lagos, they should all be available. Whatever is not available (*Transistor Radio* may not be), ask Deebii<sup>5</sup> to collect from Heinemann (Lagos Branch). Collect the pamphlets too.
7. There is a wretched film of me in the Civil War days done by a German Company. A “poor” copy is in my house here. Ask Elfreda for it. Some clips may be found useful.
8. It is possible that the Swedish Embassy will willingly put all we need for the exhibition in a diplomatic bag and send it all to Sweden. The Americans did it for me the last time I went to the United States at their invitation. This could save us all the embarrassment & weight carrying these things around.
9. In case I'm not able to attend the ceremony, a team of 2 will be leaving Nigeria for it. But I'll ask my son to read the Acceptance Speech and collect the prize on my behalf while those coming from Nigeria will be on hand to attend press conferences and do whatever else.<sup>6</sup> The last I heard of the young man he was in the U.S. He may not have sent letters to me because I had said I would let

- him know the best way of doing so. If you find him, please introduce him to the [initials] route. It will help us all a great deal. I'm sending him a letter as to how he'll get to Sweden (money for travel, hotel etc.)
10. I will also be asking my cousin Vincent<sup>7</sup> to see if he can make the journey to Sweden. The London Ogoni as well. It would be wonderful if we could get a small Ogoni crowd in Stockholm. There's only one Ogoni man in Sweden. I expect he'll be there to assist.
  11. I hope that you can make it. Speak to the Bodyshop. They may be willing to provide a ticket & hotel accommodation
  12. This is a load of work, but I expect you, as usual, to do it all and even better. I'm sure you have other ideas that will enrich the Stockholm exhibition on which I lay great store. Glen Ellis, if he's in Oxford (pray God he is) will be of great assistance because he also has some good photographs. (By the way, some of his photographs are in my briefcase—large ones—ask Elfreda—I saw them the other day when I had the briefcase brought here for a moment.) You have seen them in Lagos.
  13. I don't know if some of the magazine covers dealing with the Ogoni situation will be useful. A number of them are available as well as pen-portraits of my happy self—both local and overseas. They are there in the file.
  14. We certainly will need a map showing the relative position of Ogoni in Nigeria and Africa. The newspapers in the U.K. often provide that quite easily, if we cannot get it locally.
  15. In case Glen Ellis is not available, I wonder if Robin Sharp [of] the RLA<sup>8</sup>Research Section in London will be able to use *The Drilling Fields*?
  16. My mind is dashing about the place, so if it's not orderly, don't worry. I'm taking a chance to write to General Oladipo Diya—Chief of General Staff—to ask him to get



me out of here and enable me to go to the Award Ceremony.

Regards,  
Ken.

## Notes

1. McCarron had agreed to meet representatives of the Right Livelihood Foundation in London to hand over Saro-Wiwa's Acceptance Speech and other materials for the award ceremony in Stockholm on 9th December 1994.
2. Enumeration in the original letter starts at 2. There is an indistinct number 1 alongside the first paragraph which appears to have been added as the list of items grew.
3. Elfreda Jumbo, a friend of Saro-Wiwa in Port Harcourt.
4. Copies of these photographs are held in the Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection at the National University of Ireland Maynooth.
5. Deebii Nwiado managed Saros Publications in Lagos.
6. Saro-Wiwa ultimately decided to assign the task of reading his speech to a member of MOSOP. McCarron believes that he changed his mind because he wished to demonstrate the relevance of the award to the Ogoni people rather than to just himself or his family. Simeon Kpoturu of MOSOP read the acceptance speech in his name in Stockholm on 9th December 1994. See <<http://www.rightlivelihood.org/saro.wiwa.speech.html>>.
7. Vincent Ideyemore, President of MOSOP in the U.S.A.
8. Probably a mixed acronym: Right Livelihood Award Foundation.



*October 30, 1994*

30/10/94

Sr. M,

You did ask if you could “contact” my London family? The answer is “Yes”. I think they will value it.

I am sending you a letter for Robin Sharp, formally introducing you to him as acting on my behalf. You did indicate that you might find it necessary.

I envy you the meeting with our people. They must have been pleased with the song of praise in *Tell* magazine listing the Ogoni as the most politically aware in Nigeria. The article was good, although it had many grammatical errors. The *Newswatch* report was probably more “in-depth”—as regards my person.

The big essay [for the RLA Award Ceremony] is sent here in long hand. I hope that you can wait to have it word-processed. It need not come back to me. You can correct it and take it along. Please watch out for typos. Emeka tends to make mistakes on crucial words. In the Acceptance Speech, “Ogoni Woman” was typed “Ogoni Women” which altered the meaning radically. “Wasting Storms” came off as “Washing Storms” an entirely different thing.

I had expected Appolos here last night when I would tidy up plans for meeting with you with my jailers. He failed to turn up. I hope he has given you the long letter I wrote yesterday asking you to please do a million things for me.

Have a good, safe journey back to Dublin and may God bless you and keep you. I hope to see you soon. Did you see my poem, “A Walk in the Prison Yard”? I’ve asked Deebii to give you £20.00 for stamps for any postages you have to make on my behalf in U.K.<sup>1</sup>

Ken.

P.S. The cheque for the photographs from Greenpeace is included herewith. Also a cheque for my daughters. They are to split the money equally. I need a new cheque book. There may be one in the house but a request note is included herewith. There is need for them to look through my mail, pay cheques which may have arrived into my a/c. There is, I believe a cheque for £2000+ meant for the a/c of Saros International from my book distributors. All book orders to be re-directed to African Books Collective in Oxford. Ken Junior should be able to attend to all these if he is in London. The insurance for the house may have run out. It should be renewed—the bank should be requested to pay all premiums. The same could apply to the car—possibly.

## Notes

1. This sentence was added in note form alongside the signature.



*22 November, 1994*

22/11/94

Dear Sr. M,

Greetings. I hope you did get back safely with all that load of work I inflicted on you. You can see how much needed you were in Nigeria! You are truly a God-send. I had hoped that you would leave behind a few thoughts for me before your departure, but you must have been very busy.

In the continuing Ogoni Saga, you must have heard of the setting up of a military tribunal to try us—under a brand new Decree which we have not yet been able to see. The 3-man Tribunal has been named and were to have been sworn in yesterday (Monday 21/11). It's really a hangman's work. Our only hope is that the international community may be able, diplomatically, to frighten Abacha out of any mischief as they did with the Treason and Treasonable Felony Decree 1993 which was aimed specifically at me and the Ogoni people. This is terribly sickening. Shell are finally succeeding, it would appear, in shutting me up. But that will surely not be the end of the matter.

I understand Glen Ellis is in Oxford at this time. I hope that you have been able to make contact with him in regard of the Right Livelihood Award function. Barika [Idamkue] and Batom Mitee will be going for us, since I and Ledum Mitee cannot get there. I expect that my cousin, Dr Vincent Idemyor, who's head of MOSOP in the U.S.A., will be there with his Sr. [sister], Bridget

and that some of the people in London will be able to go too, along with my children (if they desire to travel). One of the activists (probably Godwin Poi from London) should read the Acceptance Speech—and not my son as I had earlier indicated.<sup>1</sup>

I hope that you have been able to put the things for the exhibition together and that all will go well. I wish you the very best and in case I do not get to you before Xmas, wish you a Merry Xmas, & a Happy New Year.

Sincerely,  
Ken.

## Notes

1. See n. 59 with the letter dated 29/10/94



## *December 24, 1994*

24/12/94

Dear Sis M,

Thanks a million for your diaries of August, November and early December. It was really wonderful to hear all about the Stockholm Award Ceremony from your careful, observant pen. Before I forget, I do not know who G is, and the connection with Channel 4. What's he supposed to be doing? Could he be Godwin Poi (formerly OCA/UK [Ogoni Community Association/United Kingdom] Resident?) And what films is Glen now producing? I expect there's the one for Canada, but for whom is the other one?

I may have missed it, because I have had my radio seized for some time now, but the RLA ceremony was not reported by the BBC African Service. I did hear Barika on the World Service *Outlook* programme but I had expected the African Service to talk about it.

I think that we've done pretty well with the NGOs. The thing now is to get the support of some governments. My brother tells me the Swedish Govt is pliable and so seems the Irish Govt. I believe that effort should now be concentrated on this. Govts. can raise the matter at the UN and at other fora. They can also assist us set up offices and provide funding. The Swedes & the Swiss are quite good at that sort of thing. You should also find time to visit Rudy Drummond who sits on the Nigerian desk and the

Foreign & Commonwealth Office in London. These governments can also encourage the media to support us—as they can discourage them. The British have been cool towards the Ogoni cause (and supportive of various military dictatorships in Nigeria). Junior Saro-Wiwa appears to have reached Prince Charles (through Olivia<sup>1</sup>) and since the monarchy has shares in Shell, his intervention could help. He (Prince Charles) was in school with William Boyd<sup>2</sup> and the latter might be prevailed upon to drop a note to the former?

I'm happy that you've met up with the family at Epsom. Maria [Saro-Wiwa's estranged wife] was always a good "Catholic" girl and may easily have taken to Holy Orders if she had had the encouragement. I could have been a better husband to her if my life did not get caught up in so many wars. I was always very proud of her and anxious for her happiness. She has passed through a lot that is not pleasant (deaths, illnesses etc.), and what comfort you can give her will be very much appreciated by me. I'm happy that you are finding Zina pleasant. I wish her Sr. [her sister Noo] were not so withdrawn but I'm happy that she's now at King's College.[...] Yes, Tedum was a gem. The memory of him hurts me deep, real deep. May his soul rest in peace.

We've decided to challenge the setting up of the Tribunal in court. We may, we will lose the case, but it will serve to delay the kangaroo trial and win us the sympathy we need. Govt are aware of this and are already talking of a secret trial. Whatever the case, locking me away for some time will not solve the Ogoni problem. I'm sure that we will win in due course and that my ideas on the structure of Nigeria will supervene.

Your letter did not worry about your health, so I must presume that everything is alright with you, and rejoice with you on that score. I'm happy that you are able to give so much time to the Ogoni cause.

I'm surprised that any Ogoni person should be worrying about where funds [RLA prize money] are to be paid to. None of these can take care of a huge sum of money. The only one who can use it

properly for the proper cause is myself and I will definitely oppose anyone else, or any group tampering with whatever money comes to MOSOP. I think they all ought to know that I've funded and will continue to fund the struggle from my resources. And I'm the only one who can produce a properly audited account that will satisfy everyone. So if the matter ever arises, you should ask them to rely on my sense of probity, my reputation, and the fact that I have enough money of my own not to fool around with a common purse.

We may be requiring your assistance to get some U.S. dollars into Nigeria from my account in London. IF this need arises, my brother will contact you and please let him know if you can do it for us.<sup>3</sup> The fact is that we need to get proper naira value for any hard currency we have. We may have to bend the laws; after all, the laws are being bent to drive us to extinction.

Best wishes for the New Year.

From me,

Ken.

## Notes

1. Olivia Burnett, English girlfriend of Saro-Wiwa's eldest son, Ken Wiwa. They married in 1996.
2. British novelist and screen-writer, author of six novels, including *A Good Man in Africa* (1981), as well as numerous short stories and screenplays. He was born in Accra, Ghana in 1952 and grew up there and in Nigeria. He corresponded with Saro-Wiwa while the latter was in detention and composed the Introduction to the Longman 1994 reprint of *Sozaboy*.
3. McCarron notes that this need did not arise





*January 15, 1995*

15/1/95

Dear Sr. M,

Thanks a lot for your diary from 6th Dec to 10th January. It was, as usual, a treat, a mine of information. Somehow, I never got the attachments. I thought I'd get the *Guardian* article, the Wole Soyinka piece and anything else of importance but I was not so lucky.

I'm really happy that you are finding so much help for the Ogoni people. Somehow, it's exhilarating to find a specific assignment for oneself— something that can last a lifetime, which is different to what everyone else does or can do, and whose success or failure can touch a large number of people. I don't know if I make myself clear. It's one thing campaigning for the environment, it's another campaigning for the environment rights of the Ogoni people. This is what gives me the kicks. Specificity. And it might have been better for me if I were not Ogoni. I should feel like a missionary. Now I think I'm doing what I ought to do as the son of my father. A duty. But I'm happy that I got round to it in the end.

Sorry about the dearth of news from this end. The newspapers are all under tremendous pressure and radio & television being govt. controlled are useless to us. There's not much happening anyway. Just the old stone-age dictatorship strutting about the

stage like a blasted peacock in dark goggles. Such a walking insult to the Nigerian! I feel so ashamed to be Nigerian.

Ogoni Day was a success here at home in spite of the blandishments of the military. FOWA [Federation of Ogoni Women's Association] played a very impressive role. 15 of them ended up in detention in the military camp at Kpor.<sup>1</sup> There were processions and dances in individual villages as I had ordered. In Bori, the vulture who acts as chairman of the Local Govt. Council who ordered the women arrested was driven by the women from church when he went the following Sunday to read the first lesson on Army Remembrance Day. The resilience of Ogoni women is admirable. My mother continues to host, each week, meetings of Ogoni women from fourteen surrounding villages. I've seen her twice since I got to Bori Camp here. She lost one of her 2 Sr.s [two sisters] a month ago or so. But she's bearing up well. My father had a surgical operation recently. But I'm told he's now okay. There's a video of Ogoni Day & we'll be sending it on once it has been edited. I sent a speech which has been published locally in part. It was read to applause at one of the centres.

Tomorrow, we go to the Tribunal. I know it's a kangaroo court and I know they'll be shutting me away for a time if not forever. But I'm not worried about that. I believe that it will give point to my cause and give it the world-wide publicity which we so badly need. Troops have been sent to Ogoni to stop the people from turning up in large numbers at the trial which is to be held in Government House. Government House! That is like holding the trial in the bedroom of the hangman. My younger Sr. [sister] who's a lawyer in Zaria has come down and I expect my parents to be there, as usual. I've seen a handout asking all people in the oil-producing areas to protest the trial. I asked Gani [Fawehinmi] (who's our lawyer) to go to the Lagos High Court to Challenge the Tribunal. He finally did, rather late. So the trial will go on, but he can argue his suit on the 26th in Lagos. A pity we could not delay the start of the Trial as I had wanted to do.

We've got an incriminating document belonging to the Rivers State Govt which I'm asking to be sent to you. I hope it gets published and I'd like to know what is the public reaction to it. UNPO appears hesitant to use it, doubting its authenticity. But I think it's authentic, as Govt. has followed the plan absolutely. So, we'll be at the Tribunal singing the MOSOP marching song.

B [probably Barika Idamkue] brought me a copy of Mandela's autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* and I really enjoyed it over the New Year Holidays. I felt very energized by it. It's so fictional in quality. And it's very well written. Short chapters in various sections. You must get a copy.

I'm going to try to get the Tribunal to move me either to prison or to hospital. The Nigerian Army is brutal, greedy for power and money. I'd like to be rid of them forever. If I don't get that, I'll be really mad. I need to get to a place where I can write or at least use my computer.

Your diary did not say a word of my daughters. I hope they remain close to you. I miss them a lot. Also my daughter, Adele, who's with a friend of the late mother at Derby. She's really sweet, younger than Singto who was here over the Xmas. She came to see me in prison and was I glad to see her! I hadn't seen her for almost eight months. She had grown much taller and slimmer. And she's as enthusiastic as ever. Hauwa was also here throughout December with young Kwame (who looks so very much like me). I was able to hold him in my arms twice or thrice. I was not important to him, though. I'll write again as the trial progresses. I'll be having quite some fun in court. You have my love & admiration.

Ken.

Notes

1. A village in Ogoniland.



*February 7, 1995*

7/02/95

Dear Sr. M,

Greetings. And thanks for your information sent by phone through the Lagos office. That came through two days ago. And I was pleased to hear about the interviews you've done and that Trócaire have taken over the publicity of the Ogoni issue. What do you spend your time doing now?

We were at the Tribunal yesterday. Had the distinction of riding in a Black Maria. Only five of us were charged. I, Ledum Mitee & B. Kiobel<sup>1</sup> who were said to have procured & counselled 2 others (charged with us) to murder the four people. 4 charges, 1 charge each death. The Ogoni people were kept far from the trial room. They massed along the road somewhere and made sure that we heard them singing and cheering. My father and mum & wife were allowed into the room. Somehow, I enjoyed the dramatic aspects of it. The prosecutor was not very ready and we were to filibuster. We've made up our minds to drag the trial out for as long as possible. Gani Fawehinmi, Femi Falana and Olisa Agbakoba are representing us. Ledum will represent himself. It's going to be some fun.

Shell have at last accepted publicly the responsibility for devastating the delta (they prefer the word, "polluting"). And have set aside 2m USD for a massive study of the area. The sum

8/1/210)

2-2-95

Dear Sirs,

Greetings. And thanks for your information sent by phone from the Info. office. That came through two days ago. But I was pleased to hear about the interview you've done and that someone has now taken over the publicity of the affair. You were asked to you spend your time doing so?

As was at the Tribunal yesterday, that the distribution of witness is a Black Mass. Only you of us was charged. I, John Nutter & B. K. Nofal who were said to have prepared & counselled 2 others (charged with us) to murder the two people. To charge, I charge each death. The other people were kept far from the trial room. They moved along the road for about an hour. That we heard them singing and cheering. Another judge and man & wife were allowed into the room. Another, I enjoyed the dramatic aspects of it. The prosecutor was not very ready and he was like the job: master. He's made up an effort to keep the trial out for as long as possible. You know, Ben: balance and then Agbalaba are supposed to be. John will represent himself. He's going to be here soon.

There's been at least accepted publicity for responsibility for demanding the better (they prefer the word "jollifying"). But I have not said. I'm not for a moment sorry of the case. The two

Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

is too small, & is to be administered by a Steering Committee headed by Gamaliel Onosode—a man of honour, Chairman of both Dunlop & Cadbury of Nigeria. MOSOP will be responding to all that. In their press release, Brian Anderson [Managing Director of Shell Petroleum Development Company]<sup>2</sup> says, "It is important to have a comprehensive and independent survey on Nigeria's delta region. Recent politicised and emotive

campaigning has clouded some very important issues concerning the development of this region". I consider this development a victory for the Ogoni people & MOSOP.

You may have heard of my having won the 1995 Goldman Prize awarded by the Goldman Environmental Foundation of California and worth 60,000.00 USD. Quite a welcome development. It will be officially announced on April 17.

An aspect of the trial is, we're trying to obtain bail or at least to move from Bori Camp to the wretched PH [Port Harcourt] prison so at least to be away from the control of the military. That comes up on 21st February.

I hope that you can send or fax me any articles which appear in the dailies out there. I understand that there have been 2 things in both the *Observer* & the *Guardian* of London. The radio waves were full of the trial on the 6th of February. The BBC World Service made it the first item in their news bulletins from 1pm till 10pm or so and there was an interview on the *NewsHour* programme that night and the following morning. The Voice of America also carried it fully. I heard myself described as "renowned writer and environmentalist". Very supportive, I think, and I hope it goes on that way. When do you return?

Best wishes. And let me hear from you.

Ken.

## Notes

1. Barinem Kiobel, one of the "Ogoni nine" who were executed by the Nigerian military government on 10th November 1995.
2. Since 1994, he has also been Chairman of Shell Nigeria.



*March 21, 1995*

21/3/95

Dear Sr. M,

Seems like ages ago since I last heard from you. I have seen your work & your pictures in the *Irish Times* though and I think you yourself might be surprised how far these Ogoni bells are ringing now, and how you have become the bellman? I thank God for your presence among us. Ledum keeps asking if you'll be able to return to Nigeria. And I say "yes" because I'm certain that the present regime will fall and it will also be because people like you did so much to alert the world to the danger it has been to the ordinary people of Nigeria.

I have never really felt I was in danger. The sure knowledge of my innocence gave me that feeling. I thought that I'd remain in captivity until God should have used that fact to make the Ogoni cause better known and pave the way for solving some of the many problems which confront the Ogoni people and similar groups in Nigeria, if not the African continent. Big thought. Big assignment. But I have not wavered in my belief. Now, seeing how things are going, I'm even stronger in my belief and in my faith in the ultimate success of my dreams.

It would appear that the British and the Americans are at last waking up to the danger posed by Abacha and his men. Really, Nigeria has not had it so bad. The denigration of the people is unimaginable. We have to be thankful that Wole Soyinka and his



(10/3/2001) ①  
21.8.88

Dear Peter M.,

Some time after sunset I last heard from you. I have  
seen you work - you produce in the "last time" though  
and I think you yourself might be surprised how far those  
Ogoni bells are ringing now, and how you have become  
"the bellman." I thank God for you passage among us.  
Kehnum keeps asking if you'll be able to return to Nigeria  
and I say "yes" because I'm certain that the present  
regime will fall and it will also be because people like  
you did so much to alert the world to the danger it has  
been to the ordinary people of Nigeria.

I have never really felt I was in danger. The  
some knowledge of my innocence gave me that feeling.  
I thought that I'd remain in captivity until God should  
have used that just to make the Ogoni cause better known  
and pave the way for solving some of the many problems  
which impact the Ogoni people and similar groups in Nigeria  
of our African continent. Long thoughts, long assignments  
but I have not wavered in my belief. Now, seeing how  
things are going, I'm even stronger in my belief and in  
my faith in the ultimate success of my dreams.

It would appear that the British and the Americans are

Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

friends went abroad to alert the rest of the world. And that people like you are also out there to bear testimony independently. Ogoni bells. I'm in good shape. A touch of the flu now and again but otherwise, nothing serious on the health side which is a good thing. The "trial" is on, although no one is in doubt that the

judgement has been written. What will ruin their plan is the fall of the Abacha regime, although one has to be careful then what Shell does next. I did let you know that Shell are represented by Counsel holding a “watching brief” at the trial. When that got embarrassing, they got the Counsel who is also Chairman of the Rivers State branch of the Nigerian Bar Association to publicly withdraw from the Tribunal while secretly representing them through the Bar Association which can legitimately be at the Tribunal.

The one problem I’m now facing is financial. I’ve had to take responsibility for everyone of the 36 people held. And also the MOSOP men and women who are underground. Gani Fawehinmi and his team fly into Port Harcourt for the trials and have to be accommodated in a hotel. And that has increased costs dramatically. He is not charging fees but there are two other Port Harcourt lawyers who are charging fees. One cannot object to that seeing that the Tribunal is so time-consuming. I did obtain permission from the Right Livelihood Award Foundation to use the prize money for our defence. I regret this a lot as I had hoped to spend the money on Ogoni women. The annoying thing is that it does appear that all the Prize money will be spent, along with even the Goldman Environmental Prize money (47,000 USD). The fact of these prizes has sent everyone to my doorsteps and imagination is running wild as to what money I can spend on even the most minor of errands etc. I feel terrible about this sometimes. I have sent word abroad that we need funds for our legal defence so it’s possible either Glen or my son will have gotten in touch with you in this regard. If you can assist to raise funds, it will help.

You’d be amazed at the level of harassment and extortion that Ogoni people are facing at the hands of the military. The point is that the Internal Security Force is an illegal body. So there is no limit to what it can or cannot do. And when Nigerians get this sort of carte blanche, it is sure to drive them to bestial levels. The surprising thing is that the Ogoni are holding out so well. We

need funds to continue to organise them for the resistance and to shore up their morale. As usual, the women have been wonderful.

I should also mention that a plus factor of the trial is the presence of Ledum Mitee who is not only a very good lawyer, but knows the story better than anyone else except perhaps myself. He was able to rubbish the testimony of Dr G.B. Leton<sup>1</sup> and Miss Priscilla Vikue<sup>2</sup> and to show them up as liars. Two other witnesses have also sworn to affidavits confessing that they were bribed to testify against me. In normal circumstances, that should have ended the trial. But ours is an extraordinary “Nigerian” situation and so the hangman must wait at the door for the man whose neck is wanted! Last week, the same charges were filed in two batches of 5 each against the other detainees. Each batch of 5 was accused of having committed the murders at the instigation of “Ken Saro-Wiwa, President of the Ogoni nation”. You haven’t seen such a farce. My lawyers insisted that

I should be included in the charge and the prosecution found themselves in a quandary. Since there are going to be six batches, it would mean that I would be charged 7 times for the same “offence”! Indeed, under the law, I could be found guilty behind my back, if any of the suspects is found guilty. Besides, the same Tribunal could not try me and also all the others, using the same prosecution witnesses. Now we’ll see how the Nigerian in these judges gets over these legal obstacles. I’m really in for the belly laughs! If only it were not so tragic.

I find the proceedings of the Tribunal boring or farcical or tedious. Often, I read newspapers. Sometimes I write letters — I actually was caught by Mr Mitee writing to Hauwa. A love letter when you are in a Tribunal facing a death sentence? It seemed incredible. He has been teasing me no end. Yet I do feel contempt for the Tribunal and there’s no better way to express it than what I’ve done. I’d rather not have appeared before it. That was my gut feeling from the beginning, but it was felt that the lives of

younger people were at stake and that we should give them a fighting chance.

We challenged the jurisdiction of the Tribunal. Under the law, there should have been an Investigative Committee preceding the setting-up of the Tribunal. This was not done. Yet the Tribunal felt it had a right to proceed.

In rejecting our application for bail, the Tribunal actually said that we had killed the deceased. This is going to serve as a basis for challenging the right of the Tribunal members to continue the trial at all. I expect they will also throw out the motion. Then we'll go on to make a "No Case Submission" after the prosecution shall have concluded their case.

And so the farce goes on. I'm trying to perfect some of the manuscripts I've completed during my incarceration. The pity is my computer has been seized and my work is therefore stymied. However, I hope to complete the diary of my first detention and to send it off to the U.K. in the hope that I might find a publisher. Also a collection of short stories *A Kind of Festival & Other Stories* which I believe to be the best of the three collections I've done so far. I don't know if my new-found "fame" or notoriety translates to the sale of my books. Anyway, my books are badly distributed in the U.K. and elsewhere. I'm not so sure that I should have allowed Longman to reissue *Soxaboy* and *A Forest of Flowers* in their African Writers Series. They tend not to distribute well and their advertising is rather below the mark while their main interest is in educational publishing.

I don't know if I've told you about Shell's "Major Environmental Survey" of the Niger Delta for which they've put up 2 million USD. How that amount can conduct a "major" survey is to be seen. Gamaliel Onosode is said to be the Chairman of the team in charge of the survey. He has said some good things about me in the past. I wrote him, including *The Drilling Fields* and my other publications and asking him not to allow himself to be

used by Shell. I'm yet to hear from him. But Owens will be looking him up next week.

Richard Boele of UNPO was here and has done a report which should be of interest to you. African Watch<sup>3</sup> were also down here. One of them, Melissa,<sup>4</sup> is said to have stumbled on a report by military intelligence absolving me of all suspicion. Melissa took up the matter with Philip Umeadi, the prosecutor. The latter is reported to have said, "Nigeria is a primitive country" so innocent people can be charged before a kangaroo court and sentenced to death.

I expect I've done a run-down of the situation as it is. Oh by the way, I understand Bodyshop have given us fifteen thousand pounds for our defence. A group of Nigerians in Australian have also sent a token sum. The Goldman Environmental Prize<sup>5</sup> is to be awarded April 17. I'll be sending Meschack Karanwi who handles MOSOP publicity to represent me. I hope that Ken Jnr. can also go down there at my cost. I hope that some publicity follows it in the U.S. and helps to embarrass the Abacha Govt.

I hope that your health is holding out and that we'll be able to see you again in due course.

God bless you.

Ken.

## Notes

1. See the letter dated 30/7/94, n. 26.
2. Director General of the Ministry of Education in Port Harcourt.
3. Human Rights Watch Africa: Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a nongovernmental organization which monitors and promotes the observance of internationally recognized human rights in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East and among the signatories of the Helsinki accords.

## SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

4. Probably Melissa Crow who was a Sophie Silberberg Fellow at HRW from 1994-95.
5. The world's largest prize honouring grassroots environmentalists. Founded in the U.S.A., the recipients are selected by an international jury. The prize money amounted to 47,000 USD.



*March 24, 1995*

Sis M,

Just a quick note to say I've got your diary of 7th Feb—45 days late! But it's brought joy to my heart, as usual. I've read it twice now. Sent me back to the short story "The Resurrection" —not one of my best; I wonder what you find in it.

My brother was at St. Patrick's Day in Lagos and found time to speak with a number of ambassadors, he tells me. The French Ambassador is reading *Darkling Plain*. I'm trying to perfect my first Detention Diary *A Month and a Day* and I've completed the corrections on my latest short story collection *A Kind of Festival and Other Stories*. I think this collection my best so far. I'll be sending both to Junior Ken & asking him to see if he can get a publisher in the U.K. My newly-acquired fame might just help.

Did I mention the Goldman Environmental Prize in my earlier letter? The Hunger Project<sup>t</sup> wrote me about this year's prize. Could you nominate me again? My particulars are already on file. All they need is a letter before May 15 re-nominating me. Thanks.

Keep smiling. God loves you.

Ken.

## Notes

1. A global non-profit organization which works to promote the sustainable end of world hunger. See <<http://www.thp.org>>.





*May 2, 1995*

2/5/95

Dear Sr. M,

Greetings. I hope you are well. It's taken some time since I sent you letters through Julia. I expect you will have received them. Somehow, I feel I'm going to hear from you in the next few days but since Claude Ake is travelling, I'm seizing the opportunity to brief you as to recent events.

I'm supposed to be in hospital—the military hospital here in Port Harcourt. The Tribunal made the ruling on the 28th. Then it transpired that the place was in a mess and had to be painted and equipped to receive me. The doctor in charge, Lt-Col Agada (he's a Catholic) came to see me yesterday and confirmed that the room is ready. We are now waiting for Lt-Col Okuntimo to release me. I hope I can find rest there if nothing else for I'm mentally exhausted.

That apart, I'm in good spirits. My brother Owens has had a breakthrough in Lagos. He had an hour-long recorded conversation with the British High Commissioner who assured him Shell was on the side of the Ogoni. Thereafter, the High Commissioner arranged a 45-minute discussion for him with Brian Anderson. Brian said he did not trust me although he recognised that I had the full support of the Ogoni people. Then he asked what he could do for us. My brother asked him to get the Tribunal stopped. He said he couldn't do that; that Abacha's

owing Shell a lot of money which he refuses to pay. Then my brother raised the matter of my being sent to hospital. He thought he could do that. The Managing Director of Mobil and the British Deputy High Commissioner were present in each half of the conversation. To cut a long story short, Brian gave Owens his office and home telephone numbers, thus signalling they could hold further discussions. I've since given Owens the go-ahead for further talks and asked him to ensure Mitee & I are out of this place since we are the only ones who can negotiate anything on behalf of the Ogoni people.

Shell have now gotten their decision, declared in their recent paper *The Ogoni Issue* widely publicised in Nigeria: that they will not return to Ogoni until & when the local community is in harmony with them. I hope that that gives the requisite signal to the Government—that they have to accede to the demands of the oil-bearing areas and not visit them with violence in order to silence them. Because silencing them does not mean that oil production can go on as usual. I hope also that other oil-bearing areas are listening. If they are, that should introduce a new situation into the Nigerian equation. That is if they can organize as the Ogoni have done to demand their rights in a peaceful manner.

At the local level, there are moves towards reconciliation as everyone seems tired of the problem. When Dr Agada (Lt-Col) came to see me yesterday, he asked if I do pray. He said I should have more faith in God than in the legal. He has access to both the Military Administrator and the Chairman of the Tribunal and both did not seem to be seeing their way through the Tribunal. The Mil. Administrator thought he had been acting to save his administration which we were threatening. But then he had found no peace this year. He appeared to be wanting some face-saving way out, more so as his tenure seems to be coming to an end. I advised that Lt-Col Agada get Mr. Mitee to speak to the Chairman of the Tribunal and the Military Administrator so a way out can be devised. Whether anything comes of that remains

to be seen. But if I get into the military hospital, I'll be seeing Dr Agada quite a lot and may be able to nudge him on.

In Ogoni itself, the vulture chiefs seem to be wanting a resolution of the problem. They've made overtures to us and some of our men are beginning to speak to them. Even the prosecution witnesses want to be paid to alter their testimony same as they were paid to bear false witness. Ledum Mitee is handling that.

I doubt that my being allowed to go to the hospital owes itself to Shell. Before that, we had made all arrangements ourselves with the doctor from the Teaching Hospital who was sent to examine me. Whatever the case, I'm sure that the pressure from abroad is biting. With the Goldman Prize, a lot of publicity has been generated in America. The Human Rights Watch Africa Report was very damning and Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of HRWA [Human Rights Watch Africa] did write an open letter to Abacha asking him to allow me medical care, disband the Tribunal and set all the Ogonis now held free. I expect that the British QC, Mr Birnbaum<sup>t</sup> who watched the trial for a week will have made a report to the British Law Society. The British High Commissioner has said that his report could influence the British Govt. And he left us in no doubt that he did not think the trial fair.

My son has been in Canada and I understand he had some airtime on CNN during his recent trip to America to receive my prize. It's been good for him. I heard him on Voice of America and he sounded quite good.

All in all, the outlook seems hopeful. The suffering in Ogoni is quite depressing. The goon soldiers are still around and are still extorting money from people. And at the national level, the economy is in a big mess. Abacha is still playing tough and stupidly so. The people cannot dislodge him; only foreign pressure will do that. I'm hoping that the TransAfrica initiative from the US bears fruit. In any case, we live in expectation of the collapse of the govt. one of these days.

I must stop here until I hear from you again. My warmest wishes.

Ken.

## Notes

1. Michael Birnbaum, a British lawyer appointed to the Queen's Counsel in 1992.



*June 19, 1995*

19/6/95

Dear Sr. M,

Just a quick note to confirm that I received your letter of late May. And many thanks. I'm having to get used to the fact that you will not be returning to Nigeria and that I may not see you for some time. I hope that it does not take too long before we can meet again.

The contact with Shell has dried up, thanks to the very useful and necessary demonstration at the Shell AGM of 18th May. I hope it resumes, since we need to dialogue. I know they will do everything to resist us and that they may still want me out of the way. I am not careless of my safety, but I do recognize and have always recognized that my cause could lead to death. But as the saying goes, how can man die better/than facing fearful odds/ for the ashes of his fathers/and the temple of his Gods? No, one cannot allow the fear of death to dent one's beliefs and actions. I only wish there were more Ogoni people on the ground. However, the cause cannot now die. There are people like you, Anita Roddick and even my son Junior has seized the gauntlet. Then there are the resilient Ogoni on the ground. You should see how Ogoni women have seized the gauntlet. My mother supervises a weekly meeting of Ogoni women from all of 40 villages (nearby ones) and they are really a joy. She tells me that to escape military attention, they operate under the banner of the

19-6-75

Dear Sister M,

I got a quick note to confirm that I received  
 four letters of late May. And many thanks. I'm  
 having to get used to the fact that you will not be  
 returning to Nigeria and that I may not see you for  
 some time. I hope that it does not take too long  
 before we can meet again.

The contact with Shell has been dealt with, thanks to  
 the very useful and necessary memorandum of the Shell  
 Mgmt of 11th May. I hope it remains, and we need  
 to dialogue. I know they will do everything to convict  
 us and that they may still want us out of the way.  
 I am not inconsiderate of my safety, but I do overestimate  
 and have <sup>always</sup> recognized that my cause could lead to  
 death. "But as the saying goes, how can man die better,  
 than giving fearful odds, for the ashes of his fathers (and  
 the temple of his gods)." No, one cannot allow the fear  
 of death to shut one's beliefs and actions. I only wish  
 there were more Ogoni people on the ground. However, the  
 cause cannot wait here. There are people like you, Paul  
 Hordijk and even my son Timon who have stayed the ground.  
 Now there are the persistent Ogoni on the ground. In the end

Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

National Council of Women's Societies [NCWS]. (A few years back, she was honoured by the NCWS as one of seven women achievers in Rivers State).

The so-called trial is proceeding slowly. Our lawyers should be pulling out any day now, since the whole thing is a charade

and the Tribunal Chairman has left no one in doubt that he has written the judgement in advance. We'll see how things proceed thereafter. I see them shutting me up for the period Abacha is in power. But I'll be stronger in prison than out of it. It's a price I'm not afraid to pay.

I've done a few poems recently. They're still in the rough but you may savour them.

All my love,  
Ken Saro-Wiwa.



## *July 8, 1995*

8th July, 1995.

Dear Sr. M,

I got your diary of 5/5 to 16/6, and many thanks. As you never tell me which of my letters you have got and which you have not, I can only hope that you have got all the letters I have sent you. Like you, I only hope that my letters do arrive.

I did get the book, *GETTING TO YES*,<sup>1</sup> and many thanks for it. You must have known that the exploratory talks with Shell petered out even before they began. I have a feeling that Shell thinks they can sit all this out and carry on as before. I think they are wrong. All it means is that we have to work harder. It may even work in our favour that we do not negotiate just now, but that the situation in the country goes bad enough to make a total resolution of the contradictions necessary. In which case, we will also be negotiating for other peoples who are not up to it at this moment.

You know of the Niger Delta Environmental Survey. Claude Ake sits on its Steering Committee, representing the “stakeholders” i.e. the local communities. He is constantly in touch with us, and has, indeed, held two meetings with us here in the detention camp. He confirms what we all knew: that Shell had wanted to do a “greenwash”. However, it does appear that they won’t be getting their way, it being that Claude is very clear as to what should happen, and is receiving support from one



other member of the Committee—the chap from the World Conservation Fund who comes in from London and who is determined to ensure that his organization is not misused by Shell. There is a stakeholders meeting in Port Harcourt, 24th to 26th August and I will let you know what goes on there. In the meantime, could you please check with Glen if it's true that the Head of the Environmental Division of Shell at the Rotterdam office resigned rather than be a part of the grand deception which Shell planned in instituting the survey? The position paper appears to have sought for a way of using the survey to create communal dissension and for buying over local leaders. Check this out please.

Just as you were leaving for Rome, Dr Leton and Dr Birabi were flown to London by the federal government to try to undo some of the publicity the Ogoni campaign had put out. It would appear that Shell hosted them to dinner but I cannot say that they met with much more success than that. Ojukwu<sup>2</sup> was on that same trip but I understand that they were booed when they spoke to their first audience and their first press conference was similarly a failure. The behaviour of the Ogoni politicians has been roundly condemned at home.

The trial has been adjourned to July 31. Our lawyers have now withdrawn and the Legal Aid Council of Rivers State has provided a lawyer for each of us.<sup>3</sup> They now need to obtain all the proceedings and study them before the trial can recommence. We expect that they will get the proceedings from the Tribunal but we are not giving them any of our own papers. In short, we will not be co-operating with any of the defence counsel. We would like it known that the State are judge, prosecuting and defence counsel all rolled into one so that the true intent of the State is no longer masked.

Our lawyers withdrew after the Tribunal ruled that the failure of government to produce a video-cassette and transcripts of a press conference addressed by the military administrator and one of the prosecuting witnesses a day after the murders, was

“reasonable”. The government said they had wiped all the tapes for lack of funds. But they had in fact distributed the same throughout Nigeria and their embassies abroad in an attempt to calumniate me. So much for the trials.

The situation around us in the detention camp is a lot more relaxed now. “Delta Force” forced Okuntimo out of his positions as Camp Commandant and Commander of the Internal Security Task Force and he has now been thrown to a harsh position in Minna. Consequently, we are now in ostensibly more civilized hands, although this is only relatively speaking. For a greasing of palms (you cannot avoid that in Nigeria— everyone’s trading), people have access to us and can spend thirty minutes to one hour. This has been most relieving.

We have met with the youths and the women of Ogoni, and have been able to get more accurate pictures of what is happening at home. The military harassment has been most frightening, and most people are scared to death. It has been impossible to hold meetings, and it does appear that the only meeting that is currently being held once a month is that summoned by my mother. She is patron of the organization—*BLAKA (GLORIOUS WOMEN)*—and the last meeting was attended by 200 women from all over Ogoni. The next meeting holds on August 1 and I will be arranging for a video of that. I will also encourage them to watch *Delta Force* and *Drilling Fields*. They are surely in the vanguard of the resistance. I feel so proud of my mother! And she does it all so naturally! She’s always at the Tribunal. So also my father who spent more than an hour with me here in prison a few days ago.

The men and the youth who seem to be the target of the military are more wary, but I expect that now that they have access to us, we will be able to motivate them. It is sad that all those whom we were training are now underground or in detention. This has left the people leaderless and am worried that should this go on much longer, we may lose momentum. However, we are now trying to encourage a new leadership, but this is not going

to be easy. The harsh economic condition has placed too many burdens on people and resistance in the circumstances, especially where government is so very powerful, is a clear difficulty. We need a lot of money to organize the people, support those who are underground or are detained and pay legal fees. I must tell you that I've been under considerable pressure but I'm soldiering on with great faith in God and in my ultimate destiny.

I believe that a settlement will come with the resolution of the national crisis. In that sense, the recent coup trials which have outraged the international community are welcome. The point, though, is will the world watch hands akimbo as they did in Idi Amin's Uganda while the best men are murdered? I fear that that might be the case, as the people in government who should act on these things are normally moved by every consideration but the preservation of human rights. More so when the crimes are being committed against people in the Third World and commercial and industrial interests are involved. Zaire comes readily to mind.

I did receive a laptop computer from Junior through my younger Sr. [sister], Comfort, the Zaria-based lawyer who was in Britain for a fortnight or so. This has eased my pain a great deal, and am beginning to write again, after a lull of seven months. Seven wasted months! I'm encouraging Ledum and John Kpuinen<sup>4</sup> to also learn how to use the computer so they can keep themselves busy.

You will be telling me about your month-long stay in Rome in your next letter, no doubt. And also let me know how you settled into your new situation. I can't just reconcile myself to the fact that we will not be seeing you in Ogoni again, at least not in the foreseeable future. But then, I'm not in Ogoni either. What is comforting is that you are well and that you will always be in touch, quite apart from the fact that spiritually, we are together.

I got the photographs of the march, and was very pleased to see your seraphic person looking tense in one or two of them.<sup>5</sup> Some lawyer from Ledum's chambers grabbed them to make

photocopies, so as I write, I've not really had time to look at them closely. I'll do so in due course.

Please give my regards to members of Ogoni Solidarity Ireland and say how grateful we are for their care and concern. Also give my thanks to Mairéad Corrigan.<sup>6</sup> I cannot believe that anyone should think me fit to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace. I also hate to think that I've not been able to travel to receive any of the prizes I've won save the Fonlon-Nichols award.<sup>7</sup> The joy lies in the recognition. To think that I should be the Nigerian with the greatest number of international awards. And that I should be an Ogoni! What's that about the stone rejected by the builders? God is good, as we say over here.

I must stop here and wish you the best of luck. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,  
Ken.

## Notes

1. Roger L. Fischer, William L. Ury, Bruce Paton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In* (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.; London: Penguin, 1982).
2. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, military governor of the Eastern region who led the break-away Republic of Biafra during the Nigerian Civil War 1967-1970. At the end of the war, he received political asylum in Côte d'Ivoire but returned to Nigeria in 1982. Although imprisoned for a period between 1983-84, he was eventually released and held various political roles in Nigeria until his death in 2011. Saro-Wiwa characterized him as misguided and opportunistic in his memoir, *On a Darkling Plain: An Account of the Nigerian Civil War* (London; Lagos; Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1989).
3. The lawyers for MOSOP withdrew because of the unconstitutional way

in which the trial was being conducted. The state then appointed lawyers to each of the nine accused but they decided not to co-operate.

4. Deputy President of MOSOP's youth wing, the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP). He was among the "Ogoni nine" who were hanged in November 1995.
5. Most likely, this refers to the annual Afri Famine Walk which McCarron attended in Mayo, Ireland, in 1995. Afri is an Irish Non-governmental Organization whose activities revolve around human rights and peace and justice issues. Photographs of this walk are held in the Ken Saro-Wiwa Collection at the National University of Ireland Maynooth.
6. A Northern Irish peace activist and co-recipient with Betty Williams of the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1976. The two women co-founded Community of Peace People, an organization dedicated to finding a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Corrigan nominated Saro-Wiwa for the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1995.
7. An award conferred annually by the U.S.-based African Literature Association for work promoting human rights.



*September 14, 1995*

14th September, 1995.

Dear Sr. Majella,<sup>1</sup>

Many thanks for your letters up to the end of July or thereabouts. I believe that I've got everything you have sent thus far. Some of them come rather late and out of sequence, but I do get them. Because I keep them around me just to read and re-read them, I've had two of them seized lately.

I hope that I will get them back, anyway, some day.

I expect that you have now started your new assignment and am really happy for you. It is hard to think that you will no longer be with us here in Nigeria, but it may well be that we shall be better served by your being away. God works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

You have heard of the raid on my office of July 29. That was followed by a raid on our cells in the prison a week or so later. Since the departure of Okuntimo on July 1, and indeed long before then, for Okuntimo suddenly lost interest in punishing us, thanks to the education we gave him, security had eased a great deal and we were able to receive a host of visitors from Ogoni and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> I'm sorry to say that we became lax ourselves and so when the new man struck, we "lost" quite a bit of property.

Back to business. The trial is being speeded up. Which means that every rule is being broken in order that it might end. I expect that it will end before you get this letter. I have information that

(1/1/81)

14th September, 1981.

Dear SISTER MARYWILL,

Many thanks for your letters up to the end of July on Ikerekehinia. I believe that I've got everything you have sent (has I). Some of them come rather late and out of sequence, but I do get them. Because I keep them around me just to read and re-read them, I've had two of them stolen lately. I hope that I will get them back, anyway, some day.

I expect that you have now started your new assignment and am really happy for you. It is hard to think that you will no longer be with us here in Nigeria, but in my mind by that we shall be better served by your being away. God works in mysterious ways his wisdom is profound.

You have heard of the raid on my office of July 29. That was followed by a raid on our villa in the prison a week or so later. Since the departure of Obasanjo on July 1, and indeed long before that, for months suddenly last January in particular so, thanks to the attention we gave him, security had about a great deal and we were able to receive a host of visitors from abroad and elsewhere. I'm sorry to say that we became too careless and we were the one man down, we "lost" quite a lot of property.

Back to business. The trial is being speeded up, which means that every trial is being broken in order that it might end. I expect that it will end before you get this letter. I have information that judgement will not be delivered, which will mean that we will remain in prison for as long as the authorities please, keeping us out of circulation for as long as Okacha is in power.

I am not detaining myself. I will want to make a statement. I have already filed the statement at the HIGH COURT here and a copy is available with my son in London. If you want to read it, it is possible that the Judge will not allow me to read it, but it is already a public document and the press can see it.

About a week ago, Major Olu Osofisan (as I know) who now commands the 1ST AF came to me and asked what he could do to secure peace in Ogoni. I asked him to release the three Ogoni activists who were arrested after the raid on my office, and ask them to speak to the Ogoni people. He promptly released them from detention at Allen the next day and brought them to my cell. He then sought my blessing of the peace effort he went to launch. I gave that blessing after drawing his attention to the fact that there are three parties involved in the matter: the Ogoni people, Shell and the Government (State and Federal). I did not mind where he started from, I said, so long as he realized that peace could only come when justice is done.

As of now, a new group of "moderates" is being put together, preparatory to the group being allowed to include the disaffected politicians. The hope, I gather, is that the Ogoni people can be made to come together to discuss Ogoni interests. I don't know that anyone has considered the shoddiness of Lofe and Nisibi with the rest of the people. My assumption is that

Ken Saro-Wiwa's last letter (page 1). Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

judgement will not be delivered, which will mean that we will

PP/1800 (last page)

- 2 -

Government are preparing the ground for the conviction of Oduka and myself - to ensure that the Ogoni do not win when the inevitable verdict has been decided upon in Abacha's court.

Yesterday, the ground was cleared for that conviction when the innocent victimisation made by the legal aid lawyers was dismissed. The Tribunal said: 'The prosecution adduced evidence of the killing of 3 chains of workers at Ogoni through civil disturbances there by riotous mobs. There is evidence of the leadership of Oduka who by speeches, rallies, provocations and instigation procured the killing of the 3 men that produced the remaining events of 21/7/94 at Obasanjo Palace, Olofin, Whoever was in Ogoni knows about the Tribunal is hearing to. The stories below are for your enlightenment.

On July 1, Oduka and I were at Dugbesi House. I believe I was finally seen through the hole he had appointed to supervise the derivation of the Ogoni and knew that he had made costly mistakes. As usual with the military, he could not apologise to us; in any case, his career was already on the line. All he could do was persist to evil.

The Federal Government were shown at the last meeting of the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) attended on our behalf by Oduka and on the Government side by a team which included George Okonjo (an economist), the legal adviser to Abacha, a Professor Fashola (Oshoni) and Ambassador Arising (second son of the great Oba). The Government delegation declared me guilty of murder(!) and the Committee felt that since they were denying all the restrictions made by the various Ogoni rights groups, they might as well go to Ogoni to see things for themselves. I doubt that they will be coming, but I wish it would happen.

A newspaper here published an item stating that Oduka has been pressuring the government to create an Ogoni State and give the oil communities 10% of all revenues. Oduka has not denied this item, and there may be some truth in it.

Oduka is having work with all sorts of evidence, all sorts of expectations. The first meeting aimed at reconciliation was held yesterday (18th) the date on which our defence opened. I believe that government will be told that peace in Ogoni depends also on all those who hold in detention or served underground being free. They won't listen to that. I can only hope that our conviction does not lead to more trouble. I have tried to bring home to all the examples of Christ which you, as our people, followed. I quote. They are now going to leave a hard record and I hope they take in quiet.

I will keep you posted as events unfold. The way of this struggle has been an unprofitable. I don't know what to say. There is an unseen hand at work. We are just not in control, and we seem to be. It's amazing the things which do happen!

I must thank you and all those who have done so much work for us abroad. It's nice to know that people who have worked so hard in Ogoni are now turning up and finding assistance in various ways. The commitment of Anita Kuffner is a great

Ken Saro-Wiwa's last letter (page 2). Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

remain in prison for as long as the authorities please, keeping me out of circulation for as long as Abacha is in power.





Ken Saro-Wiwa's last letter (page 3). Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

I am not defending myself. I will want to make a Statement. I have already filed the Statement at the High Court here and a

copy is available with my son in London, if you want to read it. It is possible that the Judge will not allow me to read it, but it is already a public document and the press can use it.

About a week ago, Major Obi Umahi (an Igbo) who now commands the ISTF [Internal Security Task Force] came to me and asked what he could do to ensure peace in Ogoni. I asked him to release the three Ogoni activists who were arrested after the raid on my office, and use them to speak to the Ogoni people. He promptly released them from detention at Afam the next day and brought them to my cell. He then sought my blessing of the peace effort he meant to launch. I gave that blessing after drawing his attention to the fact that there are three parties involved in the matter: the Ogoni people, Shell and the Government (State and Federal). I did not mind where he started from, I said, so long as he realized that peace could only come when justice is done.

As of now, a core group of “moderates” is being put together, preparatory to the group being widened to include the disaffected politicians. The hope, I gather, is that the Ogoni people can be made to come together to defend Ogoni interests. I don’t know that anyone can reconcile the skulduggery of Leton and Birabi with the rest of the people. My assumption is that Government are preparing the ground for the conviction of Ledum and myself—to ensure that the Ogoni do not riot when the inevitable verdict, long decided upon, is handed down.

Yesterday, the ground was cleared for that conviction when the no-case submission made by the Legal Aid lawyers was dismissed. The Tribunal said: “The prosecution adduced evidence of the killing of 4 chiefs of Gokana at Giokoo through civil disturbances there by NYCOP youths.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence of the leadership of MOSOP who by meetings, rallies, provocative and instigative pronouncements light(sic) the fuse that produced the consuming events of 21/5/94 at Gbenemene Palace, Giokoo.” Whoever was in doubt knows where the Tribunal is heading to. The stories below are for your entertainment.

By July 1, Okuntimo and Komo were at daggers drawn. I

believe Komo finally saw through the brute he had appointed to supervise the decimation of the Ogoni and knew that he had made costly mistakes. As usual with the military, he could not apologize to us; in any case, his career was already on the line. All he could do was persist in evil.

The Federal Government were shamed at the last meeting of the UN Committee for the Eradication of Racial Discrimination (CERD) attended on our behalf by Barika and on the Government side by a team which included George Kobani (as consultant), the Legal Adviser to Abacha, a Professor Yadudu (Yahoo!) and Ambassador Azikiwe (second cousin of the great Zik<sup>4</sup>). The Government delegation declared me guilty of murder (!) and the Committee felt that since they were denying all the assertions made by the various human rights groups, they might as well go to Ogoni to see things for themselves. I doubt that they will be coming, but I wish it would happen.

A newspaper here published an item stating that Shell has been pressuring the government to create an Ogoni State and give the oil communities 50% of oil revenues. Shell has not denied this item, and there may be some truth in it.

Ogoni is buzzing with all sorts of noise, all sorts of expectation. The first meeting aimed at reconciliation was held yesterday (13th) the date on which our defence opened. I believe that the government will be told that peace in Ogoni depends also on all those now held in detention or driven underground being free. They won't listen to that. I can only hope that our conviction does not lead to more trouble. I have tried to bring home to all the example of Christ which was, to our people, fictional, I guess. They are now going to learn a hard lesson and I hope they take it quietly.

I will keep you posted as events unravel. The ways of this struggle have been so unpredictable, I don't know what to say. There is an unseen hand at work. We are just not in control, and no one seems to be. It's amazing the things which do happen!

I must thank you and all those who have done so much work

for us abroad. It's nice to know that people who have worked or visited Ogoni are now turning up and lending assistance in various ways. The commitment of Anita Roddick is a great blessing. It has nettled the Nigerian High Commissioner in London, for one!

I am in good spirits, expecting the worst as usual, but hopeful for the best. My parents are always in court, and my father believes that I will be free at the end of the case. I've tried very hard to dampen his optimism but the old man won't budge. I just hope he does not get a rude shock.

One source of worry is what will happen to our struggle when Ledum and I are put away. We had not had enough time to train the cadres or put alternative leaderships in place. And putting members of the Steering Committee on the police wanted list has deprived us of a lot of hands. I have been able to direct things and even contribute to the publicity war from detention. I don't know if I'll be able to do so from prison. We have no funds, not even a bank account. Everything had hinged so much upon my resources that my absence will cause a lot of problems. We'll have to get around that somehow.

Don't be embarrassed by my ocean of ink. I am not. I'm only tired now and must go to bed, to rise early and prepare for the boredom of the Tribunal.

Regards.

Ken

## Notes

1. This is the last recorded letter written by Ken Saro-Wiwa. It was hand delivered to McCarron in Belfast by Saro-Wiwa's eldest son, Ken Wiwa, after his death.

2. Okuntimo was transferred to another area
3. The National Youth Council of Ogoni People. Saro-Wiwa had prompted the formation of NYCOP as well as other grassroots organizations.
4. Nnamdi Azikiwe, one of the leading figures of anti-colonial Nigerian nationalism. Prior to independence, he led the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons—a party of the Eastern region with a primarily Christian support-base which espoused Pan-Africanist principles. He was the first independent President of Nigeria from 1963-66.

PART III

*SECTION 3: POEMS*



Ken Saro-Wiwa. Courtesy of Noo Saro-Wiwa. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.



*I LIE ALONE AT  
NIGHT*

I lie alone at night  
And think all of one year's gone  
Since I held you in my arms  
In the bed we know so well.

I lie alone at night  
And see the callous bandits  
Break into our hallowed bedroom  
Cruelly knife our togetherness.

I lie alone at night  
And think of you lying lonely  
Dreaming of my return  
To the home we love so well

I lie alone at night  
And think of the thick boots  
Which stalk the halls of tyranny  
And crush us underfoot.

I lie alone at night  
And wonder why you wait



And endure the gripping pain  
Which is my lot to bear.

I lie alone at night  
And think of the stranger moon  
The stars beyond my gaze  
Your beauty like moons and stars

I lie alone at night  
And pray the day will come  
To mend your broken heart  
And steel my breaking soul.

I lie alone at night  
And dream a great new dawn  
Without boots and knives  
Broken hearts, breaking souls  
Empty dreams and lonely beds  
Stranger moons and searing pain  
When you and I and all of us  
Can hold hands and sing our love  
Into a night captured by peace.

Ken Saro-Wiwa  
3/6/95



## *FOR ANITA RODDICK*

Had I a voice  
I would sing your song  
Had I a tongue  
I would speak your praise  
Had I the time  
I would live for you  
But here, gagged and bound  
To the floor and injustice  
And waiting for death  
I can only wonder  
How you have breathed life  
Into the thought that we give  
Meaning to being  
Only when we share and care.

Ken Saro-Wiwa  
20/6/95



*FOR SR. MAJELLA  
MCCARRON*

Sr. M, my sweet soul Sr.,  
What is it, I often ask, unites  
County Fermanagh and Ogoni?  
Ah, well, it must be the agony,  
The hunger for justice and peace  
Which married our memories  
To a journey of faith.  
How many hours have we shared  
And what oceans of ink poured  
From fearful hearts beating together  
For the voiceless of the earth!  
Now, separated by the mighty ocean  
And strange lands, we pour forth  
Prayers, purpose and pride  
Laud the integrity of ideals  
Hopefully reach out to the grassroots  
Of your Ogoni, my Fermanagh.

Ken Saro-Wiwa  
20/6/95



## *THE CELEBRANTS*

They are met once again  
To beat drums of confusion  
Tattooes of mediocrity  
They are met once again  
The new cow to lead  
To the cyclic slaughterhouse  
Where the blood of the last  
Yet stinks to skies  
Awash with the stench  
Of decay and corruption.

So they come and go  
Bad dreams, phantoms  
In the morning mist  
Meteors of a dark sky  
Offal at the desecrated shrine  
Still they come and go

We welcome them from rooftops  
Raucous at each approach  
And departure, praise-singing now  
Cursing loudly later  
Impious votaries of an alien sect  
At whom damnation shrieks with wild delight.



## *FIRE*

There is a fire in me  
Burns all night and day  
Flares at injustice  
Leaps at oppression  
Glow warmly in beauty.



## *PRISON SONG*

Bedbugs, fleas and insects  
The howl of deranged suspects  
The dark night bisect  
Rudely breaking my nightmare  
And now widely awake  
I'm reminded of this crude place  
Shared with unusual inmates.



## *MAMA CAME CALLING*

She came visiting today  
The lovely little lady  
In her hand a dainty meal  
Of nutless palm fruits  
A long-forgotten delicacy  
From my childhood days  
Into which I dug my teeth  
As my baby gums her breasts  
And found therein once again  
The milky sweet of a mother's blessings.



## *VICTORY SONG*

You have raped my land  
Black brother, silenced my song  
Upon my wholesome breath—  
Condemned to a gas dungeon  
I suffocate, shriek in pain  
Into cold, stone-stuffed ears.  
Your fingers drip with my blood  
Staining your nails black and crude.  
Vampire, tyrant, rapist  
Black brother of the same womb  
But cruel as the flares that burn  
Poisonous gases into our skies.

I lie manacled in chain  
In caves of your callous care  
But the day will come when I will  
break your hard bones  
With my claws tear your brain  
Consume you in wrathful fires  
To the wild winds expose you  
Paint the cruel marks of your sin  
On the walls of history.

Then shall I, triumphant



Return to our hapless mother  
With bright bouquets of peace.



## *OGONI! OGONI!*

Ogoni is the land  
The people, Ogoni  
The agony of trees dying  
In ancestral farmlands  
Streams polluted weeping  
Filth into murky rivers  
It is the poisoned air  
Coursing the luckless lungs  
Of dying children  
Ogoni is the dream  
Breaking the looping chain  
Around the drooping neck of a shell-shocked land.



## *MOSOP*

Mosop is marching on  
Ogoni must survive  
Mosop will never stop  
Till Ogoni is free

Mosop keeps marching on  
Mosop is an arm of peace  
Mosop stands for justice  
Mosop will never stop  
Till Ogoni is free  
Mosop keeps marching on!

Mosop is for hard work  
Mosop stands for success  
Mosop will never stop  
Till Ogoni is free  
Mosop keeps marching on!

Mosop is for our land  
Clean water and pure air  
Mosop will never stop Till Ogoni is free  
Mosop is marching on!

Mosop is all our life  
Ogoni must survive

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

Mosop will never stop  
Till Ogoni is free  
Mosop goes marching home!



## *OGONI HYMN*

Creator of Ogoni  
Land of glory and wealth  
Grant us thy peace and lasting love  
Plant justice over our land  
Give us thy wisdom and the strength  
To shame our enemies.

Creator of Ogoni  
Land of glory and wealth  
Grant everlasting blessings Lord  
To people of Gokana  
Khana, Eleme, Tai and Babbe  
Glorious Ogoniland.



## *GENEVA*

Two rivers  
And a lake  
Shimmering  
In summer sun  
Glittering  
Antiseptic  
Twixt hills  
And prices high  
Hosting nations hostage.



## *AROUND THE COURT OF ABUJA FAME*

Around the court of Abuja fame  
Sit grand professors we dare not name  
So clever they in politics  
They sure do truck a lode of tricks.

The praise of their deaf listening king  
From morning to cursed night they sing  
Blaming hapless politicians  
For cheating on their ambitions.

Around the court of Abuja fame  
Propounding great theories crude and lame  
Our professors rant chant and dance  
Their rank ceevees they do enhance.

Around the court of Abuja fame  
National service is just a game  
They mouth and dribble all about  
While people starve and die and rot.



## *BABANGIDANCE (1)*

A little to the right  
A little to the left  
Watch your step shake your waist  
Dance to time watch your tilt  
Don't be slow don't be fast  
Sing a song watch its lilt

A little to the left  
A little to the right  
A bit of that a bit of this  
Bite a bait but don't be bit  
Don't dare demand what it is  
**Makes Babangidance such a hit!**





## *BABANGIDANCE (2)*

A little to the left  
And nothing can be right  
One step forward  
And five backward  
And stand at ease  
Babangidance.



## *CHARRED WOMAN*

The boiling hale of gas fumes  
Have burnt Zora's hand and body  
The callous hand of cruel neglect  
Her wretched soul destroyed  
She's mere ash and burning misery  
Charcoal of human greed.



## *FOR ZINA*

I have raised the questions, daughter  
Which you and your kids must ponder  
I feel guilty I did not sooner  
In my lifetime urge them stronger  
And now, ere I answers provide  
I may in cold blood lie buried  
Have I your futures compromised?



## *STONE DEAF*

Tired  
of the questions  
bored  
by the din  
of the lone voice  
piping  
to ears hearing  
only  
the sounds of their choice.



*FOR TEDUM (B.8.7.78)*  
*WHO DIED AT ETON*  
*COLLEGE (15.3.93)*

But one brief flash and he was gone  
The young tree, growing e're so fast  
Planted in the joy of summer  
Watered through a mellow autumn  
And cut in a brutish field  
In the harshness of despairing winter  
Lending a personal meaning altogether  
To Shakespeare's ides of march.

Oh my lovely young oak,  
Could I but see you once again  
E'en in my dreams forlorn  
Life would become a season of blossoms  
Beautiful, promising and sensuous  
Enlivening this languishing prison.



## *MORNING SONG*

This morning is sheer poetry  
as from my detention cell  
my heart sings with the red  
freshness of hibiscus flowers  
the vivid colour of the ixoras  
shooting out of the green abundance  
of a heart which resists surrender  
to a garden of rank weed and mush.



## *WHORE*

The midnight knock on my bedroom door  
Has turned me into a notorious whore  
Open to every ugly steel penis  
Pouring forth bullets of solid sperm  
The sight of which I dare not resist  
Lest I earn the right to choose my lover.



## *TOWN-CRIER*

Take these cuffs from my legs  
And set me free  
Pick the lies from your teeth  
And let me be  
Town-crier, proud gong  
Calling the lame and deaf  
To defend their blasted land.





## *NIGHT TIME*

The breep of insects  
The hoo-hoo of bullfrogs  
And the croak of toads  
Companion of a night  
When nightmares burgle our sleep.



## *THE CALL*

Hear the call of the ravaged land  
The raucous cry of famished earth  
The dull dirge of the poisoned air  
The piteous wail of sludged streams  
Hear, oh, hear!  
Stunted crops fast decay  
Fishes die and float away  
Butterflies lose wing and fall  
Nature succumbs to th'ecological war.



## *KEEP OUT OF PRISON*

'Keep out of prison,' he wrote  
'Don't get arrested anymore.'  
But while the land is ravaged  
And our pure air poisoned  
When streams choke with pollution  
Silence would be treason  
Punishable by a term in prison.



## *DETENTION HAIRCUT*

I had a haircut today  
After a long delay  
My prison hair had grown so long  
I thought it was full of lice  
It looked thoroughly unkempt  
A barber my jailers refused  
So I did it just my way.

And oh, when I was done  
You'd think I'd been visited  
By a carpenter rude and crude  
Or that an army of mice  
Had raided my lovely head.

I could not stand the mirror  
It told a tale of horror  
But what I most feared  
Was my aged mum would dream  
I'd had this grisly haircut  
As once before she had  
And came upbraiding me  
'Cause I looked like a convict  
A disgrace to her proud womb.



*ON THE VISIT OF THE  
DOCTORS TO MY  
CELL*

The doctors are coming,  
this odd, mystic morning  
to cart our corpses to the ruling  
magician at whose bland bidding  
hospitals become clinics become  
mortuaries and surgeons morticians  
dancing with military politicians  
to band hits of a cruel symphony  
makes of a crude cacophony  
finetuning physicians phoney.



## *TALL LOVE*

Nesting one tender morning  
In cool, scented, pillowed sheets  
I ran lost over your warm hips  
Suddenly tear drops like petals  
Cascaded down your flowery cheeks  
And you were sad as a voyage.

Your sigh was the wind  
Hurtling past dumb cliffs  
On a troubled starless night  
Still your arms of flowers wrapped me fondly round.

Oh love, love, tall as the wind  
Oh slender elegance of the palm  
Let me sip the milky sweetness  
Of your tender breasts  
Then safely lost in the soft warmth  
Of your mango laps I'll steep  
All sorrows in love's sweet endeavours.

Ken Saro-Wiwa.

## *Appendices*



Ogoni flag signed by Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1994. Maynooth University Ken Saro-Wiwa Archive.

*CHRONOLOGY OF  
KEY EVENTS OF KEN  
SARO-WIWA'S LIFE*



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10-Oct-41	Born in Bori, Ogoni
1958	Shell starts oil production in the Niger Delta
1961	Graduates from secondary school, Umuahia (SE Nigeria)
1962 – 65	BA (English) at University of Ibadan (SW Nigeria)
1964	First plays performed
1965 – 67	Teaches in Port Harcourt, Umuahia and Nsukka (SE Nigeria)
1967	Republic of Biafra declares independence; KSW moves to Lagos
1967	Administrator of Bonny Province (Rivers State) after Nigerian reconq
1967 – 73	Teaching at University of Lagos
1968 – 73	Rivers State commissioner and member of Executive Council
1970	Nigerian Civil War (Biafran War) ends
1970	Ogoni chiefs petition against Shell-BP operations
1972 – 3	Commissioner for Ministry of Information and Home Affairs; remove
1973	First two books (Tambari and Tambari in Dukana) published
1973	Sets up Saros International Limited
1985	Sets up Saros International Publishers
1985 – 90	Writes and produces Basi and Company
1986	Sozaboy published
1987 – 92	Accepts government appointments during supposed transition to dem
1989 – 93	President of Ogoni Central Union
1989	On a Darkling Plain published
1990	MOSOP present Ogoni Bill of Rights
1990 – 93	President of Association of Nigerian Authors
1992 – 93	Repeated arrests
1993 – 95	President of Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People
1993 – 95	Vice-chair of Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization
04-Jan-93	First Ogoni Day mobilises up to 60% of all Ogoni
1993	Military occupation of Ogoni
12-Jun-93	General elections; annulled by General Babangida
21-Jun-93	Arrested and detained until 22nd July; this is the period chronicled in

SILENCE WOULD BE TREASON

1994	Awarded Right Livelihood Award and Fonlon-Nichols Prize
22-May-94	Arrested on trumped-up charges of involvement in death of 4 Ogoni leaders
1995	Awarded Goldman Environmental Prize
10-Nov-95	Executed with eight others following military-appointed tribunal
1996	Nominated posthumously for Nobel Peace Prize
1998	Death of General Abacha
1999	Return to civilian rule in Nigeria
2009	Shell settles out of court for \$15.5 million on lawsuit brought by relatives

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This bibliography is intended as an introduction to the published work of Ken Saro-Wiwa. For more detailed bibliographic information, see Craig McLuckie and James Gibbs “An Annotated Bibliography” in Craig W. McLuckie and Aubrey McPhail. Eds. *Ken Saro-Wiwa: Writer and Political Activist* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 2000), pp. 245-284.



Some of Ken Saro-Wiwa's books

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*Note: A Month and a Day* is a memoir recounting Saro-Wiwa's political activism and involvement with MOSOP up until his release from his first detention on 22nd July 1993. It was published during the year of his execution in 1995. A 2005 reprint entitled *A Month and a Day and Letters* includes the full text of *A Month and a Day* supported by other documents. These include some letters written by Saro-Wiwa during his second detention from 22nd May 1994 to 10th November 1995 as well as poems and tributes to Saro-Wiwa by writers and statespeople from around the world. One of the letters in that volume is reprinted in this volume. It is the author's last letter to Sr. Majella McCarron. Dated 14th September 1995, it is recognized as his last recorded letter. This volume places it into the context of the author's two year correspondence with McCarron which covers the period 20 October 1993 to 14 September 1995 that was not documented by the author in *A Month and a Day*.

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*Key to the Maynooth  
University Ken  
Saro-Wiwa Archive*

Letters from Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sr. Majella McCarron have been classified by Maynooth University University Library as follows:

PP/  
7/1 October 20, 1993

PP/  
7/2 December 1, 1993

PP/  
7/3 EXACT DATE OF LETTER IS UNKNOWN. MCCARRON  
BELIEVES IT WAS WRITTEN IN JUNE OR JULY 1994

PP/  
7/4 July 13, 1994

PP/  
7/5 July 24, 1994

PP/  
7/6 July 30, 1994

PP/  
7/7 August 15, 1994

PP/  
7/8 September 16, 1994

PP/  
7/9 October 1, 1994

PP/  
7/10 October 11, 1994

PP/  
7/11 October 19, 1994

PP/  
7/12 October 24, 1994

PP/  
7/13 October 27, 1994

PP/  
7/14 October 29, 1994

PP/  
7/15 October 29, 1994

PP/  
7/16 PHOTOCOPY OF THE FIRST TWO PAGES OF PP/7/15

PP/  
7/17 October 30, 1994

PP/  
7/18 November 22, 1994

PP/  
7/19 PHOTOCOPY OF PP/7/18



PP/  
7/ December 24, 1994  
20

PP/  
7/21 January 15, 1995

PP/  
7/ February 7, 1995  
22

PP/  
7/23 March 21, 1995

PP/  
7/ March 24, 1995  
24

PP/  
7/25 May 2, 1995

PP/  
7/ June 19, 1995  
26

PP/  
7/ July 8, 1995  
27

PP/  
7/ September 14, 1995  
28

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# *THE ARCHIVES AT MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY*

MAYNOOTH UNIVERSITY (formerly National University of Ireland Maynooth) is located 20 kilometres west of Dublin in Ireland's only university town. Irish universities are small by international standards, and the University has approximately 8,500 students and 26 academic Departments. There are two main library buildings—the John Paul II Library and the Russell Library (which holds the rare book and manuscript collections). The campus has recently undergone a major phase of expansion in research, teaching and service facilities. This expansion includes a major extension to the John Paul II Library, completed in 2013.

With a dedicated team of librarians, archivists and conservators, Maynooth University is ideally positioned to preserve, conserve and make available archives and special collections. The major extension to the Library means there is now custom-made space for the accommodation, consultation and exhibition of important archival collections, which conforms to best international standards. The conservation unit has attracted visitors nationally and internationally to view the conservation processes and to gain insights into best practice. Archival work on various collections has generated a great deal of interest in the holdings of the Library and the research opportunities that they offer. By cataloguing and preserving important

archival collections, both print and electronic, researchers are now able to access material that had previously very limited availability. Collections are promoted via the library website; through a range of social media including Facebook, Flickr and the Russell Library blog and an ambitious programme of exhibitions. Many of the library exhibitions are open to the public and the University has a strong ethos of community engagement.

Both the John Paul II and Russell Libraries are shared with St. Patrick's College which was founded in 1795 (with the abolition of anti-Catholic penal legislation) as the headquarters of Ireland's Catholic hierarchy and its leading seminary. This makes Maynooth's libraries a key resource for the history of religion in Ireland in particular. Collections in the Russell Library span ten centuries and include medieval manuscripts, early printed books (the earliest printed in 1468) and works published by leading scholars across Europe from the 16th to the mid-19th century, providing a superb treasury for scholarly research. The Maynooth University Library also has a central role in the Office of Public Works (OPW)-Maynooth University Archive and Research Centre at nearby Castletown House, Ireland's largest Palladian style house. This centre was established to facilitate the preservation and study of archives and other sources dealing with the history of Irish estates, their houses and inhabitants.

Recent significant archives donated to the Library include a selection of letters from Irish writer Seán Ó Faoláin to Brazilian academic Munira Hamud Mutran over a fourteen-year period; the literary papers of Teresa Deevy, one of the most prolific writers for the Irish Abbey Theatre in the 1930s. An exhibition of her work hosted by the Library in 2013 and the digitisation of the collection will go some way to re-establish Deevy alongside world-renowned Irish dramatists such as Sean O'Casey and J.M. Synge.

It is against this rich background that the letters of Ken Saro-Wiwa to Sister Majella McCarron join the holdings of Maynooth University. This is a particularly appropriate donation because of Maynooth University's long involvement with social movements

in Ireland and abroad. St Patrick's College, for its part, has been central to the history of Irish missionary activity abroad. Like Sister Majella, many Irish missionaries worked in solidarity with local movements, or acted as development workers, particularly in health and education. It is to be hoped that this archive will be the first of many donations reflecting and recording this history.

To discuss donating archival material to the Library, please contact the University Librarian Cathal McCauley at [Cathal.mccauley@mu.ie](mailto:Cathal.mccauley@mu.ie)

More information about the Library can be found at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/library>.

# *RESOURCE TOOLKIT*

These are just some of the very wide range of online resources available for campaigners. Those listed here have very different themes and perspectives and are included here to help those new to the area to orient themselves.

## **News and information on development, environment, human rights, global justice**

New Internationalist magazine <http://newint.org/>  
Choike – A portal on Southern Civil Society <http://www.choike.org/>  
Le Monde Diplomatique (in English) <http://mondediplo.com/>  
ZNet progressive communications <https://zcomm.org/znet/>  
Red Pepper magazine <http://www.redpepper.org.uk/>  
Indigenous Environmental Network <http://www.ienearth.org/>  
Rabble.ca news <http://rabble.ca/>  
Daraja Press <https://darajapress.com>

## **Materials and discussion for campaigners**

Trócaire campaigning resources <http://www.trocaire.org/resources>  
into-ebooks NGO e-publisher <http://www.into-ebooks.com/>  
Grassroots Global Justice Alliance <http://ggjalliance.org/>  
Interface social movements journal <http://www.interfacejournal.net/>

Movement / Media Research Action Project <http://mrap.info/>  
Comm-org online conference on community organising  
<http://comm-org.wisc.edu/>  
MA in Community Education, Equality and Social Activism blog  
<http://ceesa-ma.blogspot.ie/>

## Toolkits for effective movements for change

Activist Trauma Support <https://www.activist-trauma.net/>  
Alliance of Community Trainers <http://trainersalliance.org/>  
Learning for Sustainability <http://learningforsustainability.net/>  
Message in a Box tactical tech  
<http://messageinabox.tacticaltech.org/>  
Organizing for Power <http://organizingforpower.org/>  
Seeds for Change resources for activists  
<http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/>  
Tools for Change training project  
<http://www.toolsforchange.net/>  
Training for Change <http://www.trainingforchange.org/>  
TRAPESE popular education collective  
<http://trapese.clearerchannel.org/resources.php>