

THE NEXT GULF

*London, Washington and the
Oil conflict in Nigeria*

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CHAPTER ONE

A Span of Ten Years

'I'll tell you this, I may be dead but my ideas will not die.'

Ken Saro-Wiwa¹

Port Harcourt Prison, 10 November 1995

Bariture Lebee and his fellow inmates knew something was horribly wrong. Armed soldiers had arrived early and sealed off the bleak courtyard in the prison that had been their home for the past eighteen months.

Looking out over the black imposing concrete walls, they could see wardens had started cutting down the few straggling sugar-cane plants that the prisoners had been growing near the gallows. The sound of the wardens singing began to fill their squalid cells. When nine o'clock came and the inmates were not allowed out for their usual exercise, their fears mounted.

Two days earlier Nigeria's Provisional Ruling Council had confirmed the death sentences on nine Ogoni, including their leader, Ken Saro-Wiwa. Other Ogoni in prison, such as Bariture Lebee, still awaited their fate.

Ogoni is an area of some 400 square miles in the eastern part of the Niger Delta. It is small relative to the Delta as a whole, but densely populated. Shell-BP found oil there in the late 1950s and while the oil company had extracted vast profits from Nigerian

crude, the Ogoni lived in abject poverty, with many villages lacking clean water, electricity or basic health care.

For the last five years Saro-Wiwa had been leading the Ogoni's non-violent struggle to stop the ecological destruction that Shell and the Nigerian government had permitted in his homeland and to secure a greater share of the oil wealth that had been drilled from under their land. This homeland bore the marks of decades of oil extraction. Rows of rusting pipes snaked over farmland, and spillages of toxic oil were common. Children played in the tropical sun a stone's throw from gas flares.

Much has been written about Saro-Wiwa, who at different periods of his life was a businessman, author and activist. He had been born Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa on 10 October 1941. After a stint as teacher, he became Administrator of Rivers State following the Biafran War, Nigeria's civil war in the late 1960s, during which he had supported the Federal Government. By now he had started writing *Basi & Co.*, his soap opera about scheming Lagos lads that became a hit television series from 1985 to 1990.

In the early 1970s he set up Saros International, a publishing company, through which he published his many poems and novels, including his most famous *Sozaboy*, written in pidgin English. The novelist and Saro-Wiwa's friend, William Boyd, considers the novel one of the best anti-war novels of the twentieth century. Saro-Wiwa published what he considered his most important book, about his time during the Biafran War: *On a Darkling Plain*.

Saro-Wiwa was also a columnist for several Nigerian newspapers. In the last column he wrote before being sacked, 'The Coming War in the Delta', he said that the people of the Delta were 'faced by a Company – Shell – whose management policies

are racist and cruelly stupid, and which is out to exploit and encourage Nigerian ethnocentrism'. It was pulled from the second edition. Shell has repeatedly denied such allegations.

Coupled with his writing, Saro-Wiwa was instrumental in mobilizing the Ogoni in their non-violent struggle. He was one of the main leaders behind the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which called for 'political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people' and the 'right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation'. Signed in December 1990, it set the Ogoni on a collision course with the Nigerian military regime and with Shell. Saro-Wiwa became the spokesperson for MOSOP – the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People – which forced Shell to leave Ogoni in 1993. The company has never re-started production there.

As the Ogoni struggle against the oil companies became more radical, there were traditional leaders in Ogoni with whom Saro-Wiwa and MOSOP clashed. Like all good campaigners Saro-Wiwa was driven by an unnatural energy. But he was not a saint and it would be wrong to depict him as one. He had many enemies, both inside and outside Ogoni. To his detractors, Saro-Wiwa was 'the archetypal demagogue who exploited the real pain of his fellow Ogonis to feed an ego as big and complex as Nigeria itself.'²

Saro-Wiwa's increasingly vocal stance against the oil companies brought him into direct conflict with the Nigerian authorities. He was routinely imprisoned and tortured. The internal Ogoni conflict between conservative and more radical elements finally ended in tragic circumstances on 21 May 1994, when four Ogoni elders were attacked by a mob and killed. It was for these murders that Saro-Wiwa was later tried and judicially murdered. He was nowhere near the killings when they happened. He

always maintained his innocence, that he had neither sanctioned the murders nor ordered them.

But in November 1994, Saro-Wiwa, Ledum Mitee (who was arrested with Saro-Wiwa but later released) and Dr Barinem Kiobel, the Commissioner of the Ministry of Commerce and Tourism and member of the Rivers State Executive Council, were alleged by the prosecution to have ‘counselled and procured’ the murders. John Kpuinen, the Deputy President of MOSOP’s youth wing (NYCOP) and Baribor Bera, a farmer, were also charged with having been instructed to ‘inflict grievous harm’ on the four Ogoni chiefs.

The other Ogoni who would later be executed – Saturday Doobee, Nordu Eawo, Paul Levura, Daniel Gbokoo and Felix Nuate – were formally charged in April 1995.³ All nine were convicted in a trial described by Michael Birnbaum QC as ‘fundamentally flawed’, and that represented a ‘gross injustice and abuse of human rights’.⁴

Shell. Michael Birnbaum’s report into the trial noted that the two chief prosecution witnesses later testified that they had been bribed to testify against Saro-Wiwa.⁵ One, Charles Danwi, maintains that he was promised a house and a contract with Shell in exchange for his testimony. Shell vehemently denies the allegations, and says it has nothing to do with Saro-Wiwa’s death. The company argues that it ‘spoke out against the use of violence, and appealed for clemency for Saro-Wiwa and his fellow Ogonis’.⁶

Shell also maintains that Saro-Wiwa’s trial was nothing to do with them. At the time people wondered why they had a lawyer present with a ‘watching brief’ (a QC hired by Shell only to observe the proceedings) Recently released ‘restricted’ documents obtained from the Foreign Office note that the lawyer’s

presence 'sits unhelpfully with Shell's insistence that the trial does not directly concern them'.⁷

But this flawed trial ended with tragic consequences. On that fateful Friday morning, the Ogoni leader and the others had been woken at five in the morning to be moved from their cells to the Port Harcourt Prison. The day before, special executioners had been flown in from the North to carry out the gruesome act. They would wear robes of red.

Lebee and the other inmates crammed against their prison window. They could hear a siren. The dark green doors of the prison opened, and they watched horrified when a van carrying empty coffins arrived. It was quickly followed by a Black Maria that sped to a halt. 'We saw them coming out of the vehicle and listened in absolute horror as they were screaming, crying and shouting,' recalls Lebee.

Saro-Wiwa was not crying but in obvious pain, with his hands chained to his back, shuffling in leg-irons. His small frame – he was only five foot two inches – looked thinner. He had been considerably aged by his long incarceration, the effects of which were made all the worse as a result of his being starved for the last three days. He was wearing a white brocade gown. His request to see his wife for a final time had been refused. So was a request for his beloved pipe and a notebook to be given to his father.

Saro-Wiwa was still defiant. 'What have I done that I deserve death, other than that I spoke the truth, demanding justice for my poor people of Ogoniland?' he said. The first of the nine to be taken to the gallows, he began to shout, 'You can only kill the messengers, you cannot kill the message.' Saro-Wiwa's voice tailed off into a deadly silence.

Minutes passed slowly. But the gallows would not work for

Saro-Wiwa, as the trap door failed to open above the pit. The gallows failed for a second time. Saro-Wiwa was led away. 'We began to cry,' recalled Lebee, 'but there was no end in sight. The [Nigerian for 'Sir' – what the Ogoni called Saro-Wiwa] was taken back and hanged after the other eight.' Finally on the fifth attempt the gallows worked. Saro-Wiwa's final words were simple: 'Lord take my soul but the struggle continues.' It was 11.30 a.m.

'When the gallows worked and Ken died there was smoke everywhere. It was so quiet,' recalled Nyieda Nasikpo, another of the imprisoned Ogoni. 'We never thought they would do it.' But they had, and Saro-Wiwa and the others were dead.⁸ His friend William Boyd wrote simply: 'Ken was fifty-four years old, and an innocent man . . . I am bitter and dreadfully sad . . . the bravest man I have known, is no more.'⁹ He and the others were now officially classified as murderers.

Saro-Wiwa's death sent shock waves around the world. A UN Security Council debate on Liberia was interrupted; protests broke out in many European and American cities where Shell had a presence. Nigerian embassies were also targeted.¹⁰

Thousands of miles away, Saro-Wiwa's daughter Zina learned of her father's death whilst listening to a piano concert in Bath.¹¹ His younger brother, Owens, was hiding in Lagos. He too was being hunted by the military. 'I was devastated. Totally. I just asked where was God? How can you let an innocent man be killed in such a horrible manner?' he recalls.¹² Three days later Owens managed to cross the Nigerian border into Benin and then made his way to safety in Canada.

Saro-Wiwa's son, Ken Wiwa, was at the Commonwealth summit in New Zealand heading a desperate campaign to persuade Commonwealth leaders to do more to save his father's

life – to do more to persuade Nigeria’s detested military ruler, General Sani Abacha, to show a morsel of clemency. Restricted documents obtained by the authors show that British diplomats in Nigeria had warned the UK delegation in New Zealand that the executions were ‘quite likely to be carried out in the near future’.¹³ But the Commonwealth leaders appeared not to care. ‘We would go into meetings and it was very clear that they weren’t taking it seriously,’ recalls Ken Wiwa. ‘I didn’t know why they seemed so relaxed about the whole thing.’¹⁴

The summit was thrown into turmoil by the news of the hanging, and the Commonwealth appeared impotent and futile at a crucial time. Instead of heading off to play golf or jet ski, Commonwealth leaders had to deal with an unfolding international crisis. ‘I guess we thought Abacha was bluffing,’ conceded one contrite New Zealand official.¹⁵

The hanging was filmed for the pleasure of the Nigerian military and officials. A woman went up to one of the bodies: ‘Why can’t the international community come and help you now?’ she said as she put her foot triumphantly on top of the corpses, like a mountaineer on a conquered summit. Drinks were then served for the waiting dignitaries, whilst acid was poured on the bodies.

‘When it happened it didn’t sink in,’ recalls Ken Wiwa ten years later. ‘It was funny hearing about someone you know die in the news without actually seeing the body. Even now it seems like a bubble, like a dream.’¹⁶

Oil and Water

The Niger Delta is a land of water and the remains of what was once a tropical rainforest. It is a vast alluvial fan created by two

great rivers, the Niger and the Benue, that join far inland to form the Niger, which spills into the Atlantic Ocean. This fan is divided into four distinct ecological zones. Furthest from the sea are the lowlands, where the forest has been cleared for farming. Then comes the area dominated by fresh water, regularly flooded by the Niger and lush with vegetation – the heart of the former rainforest. Next are the myriad brackish creeks and mangrove swamps. Finally, bordering the ocean, the Delta is fringed by sand barrier islands. The Delta has one of the highest levels of biodiversity on Earth and is a vital organ in the planet's ecosystem (see Map 2). The fertility of the soil means that this region is often referred to as the bread basket of Nigeria.

Estimates of the size of the Delta vary, depending on whether geographical features or political boundaries are used to define the area. The World Bank has estimated it as 20,000 square kilometres, but defines this as river and coastal areas only. A recent study based on the political boundaries of the region expands the Delta to 112,000 square kilometres. Depending on which boundary is used, the population of the Delta varies between 12 and 27 million.

The Delta is also rich in cultural diversity. The area is densely populated with a dozen different ethnic groups across the region and some 50 languages. Along with the Ogoni, there are the Ijaw and Ilaje, Ibibio and Andoni, Itsekiri and Uruhobo, all communities that have faced the wrath of the oil industry (see Map 3). One reason for this conflict between oil industry and community is the fight over land, for the Delta is densely populated. In Ogoni, for example, population density is 1,250 per kilometre compared to a Nigerian average of 300.¹⁷

Beneath this rich and densely populated land of culture and diversity are billions of barrels of oil. Nigeria's current 'proven'

oil reserves stand at 35 billion barrels, which the Federal government plans to expand to 40 billion barrels by 2010. As it stands Nigeria currently accounts for over 50 per cent of the Gulf of Guinea's oil production and 70 per cent of its reserves. This equates to about a third of Africa's total reserves.¹⁸ Nigeria is around the tenth largest producer in the world.¹⁹

'Whichever way you look at West Africa, you always come back to Nigeria,' argues Jonathan Bearman, from Clearwater Research Services, an oil industry consultancy. 'There will be growth in Equatorial Guinea, some growth in Cameroon, there will be some growth in São Tomé possibly but no one really knows, but it always comes back to Nigeria. It is the giant.'²⁰

This giant produces desirable oil. First, it is light (in terms of gravity), which means less refining. Secondly, it is known within the industry as 'sweet' – its low sulphur content means it is highly desired by Western refineries. Thirdly, it is closer than the Middle East to the hungry markets of Western Europe and America, and close to easy shipping lanes. A tanker takes three weeks to reach the US from Nigeria, rather than the eight weeks it takes from Saudi Arabia. It is therefore not surprising that Nigeria is a major oil supplier to both Western Europe and the United States.²¹

This oil keeps Nigeria alive, accounting for more than 80 per cent of government revenues, 90 per cent of foreign exchange and 40 per cent of Gross Domestic Product. That is why oil is so important to the government, and why the fight to control the revenue from oil is so bitter.

One company is synonymous with oil in Nigeria: Shell. The Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd (SPDC) produces nearly half of Nigeria's crude oil, with average daily production of approximately 1.1 million barrels per day (bbl/d)

in 2004. Shell is the operator of SPDC, a joint venture agreement involving the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Shell, Total and Agip.²² But Shell is, and has always been, the powerhouse behind the consortium. Because of this, it has been the company that has had most conflict with the communities of the Delta, although there has also been a history of struggle with Chevron and Agip.

Even on a map the potential for conflict between Shell and the communities of the Delta is clear. The oil map of Nigeria (See Map 5) shows the natural curves of both coast and sea in the Gulf of Guinea segmented with square and rigid rectangular blocks. These are concession blocks, and each concession is a designated area where a company – or a consortium of companies – has been given the right to explore for oil and gas. The area is owned, but not by the people who live there. Shell owns concession areas of around 31,000 square kilometres, including both onshore land and the shallow offshore waters of the Delta.²³

The same map on which oil and gas fields are marked shows the whole of the Delta and its offshore waters covered with blobs. In those blobs are wells – thousands of them, producing oil. Shell itself has over 1,000.²⁴ The company has 6,000 kilometres of pipelines and flowlines taking this oil to market from the oil fields to the coast.²⁵ All this impacts on the people of the Delta. Along its journey the oil criss-crosses people's farmlands. The communities live with the underbelly of oil development: the gas flaring and routine spillage. In return they have received almost nothing. It is not surprising therefore that they blame the oil companies for their ills.

After the Hanging

Following Saro-Wiwa's murder Shell was under intense pressure to pull out of Nigeria, but within days of the Ogoni leader going to the gallows the company signalled its intention of staying by signing a \$4 billion deal for a new natural gas plant at Bonny, a deal around which a major corruption scandal has since developed.²⁶ Its press release dated 15 November 1995 said that the LNG plant was 'On Course', and argued that the 'people of the Niger Delta would certainly suffer' if the plan collapsed. The company was however on the point of investing in the largest industrial development in Africa. Irrespective of the pressure they placed on them, they were unlikely to pull out.²⁷

Although the then British Prime Minister John Major called Saro-Wiwa's execution 'judicial murder', one civil servant from the Foreign Office said simply: 'Whatever we think of the military regime – choke, spit – trade goes on.'²⁸ And so it did. That year Britain was the largest seller of industrial exports to Nigeria. The week after the hangings, there was a two-day trade conference in the Nigerian capital Abuja at which American, British, French, German and Japanese businessmen were all present.²⁹

The Nigerian military may have killed Saro-Wiwa, but they had not killed the spirit of the Ogoni or the other communities in the Delta, who have continued to protest against the industry to this day. In January the following year, thousands of Ogoni celebrated Ogoni Day, 4 January. The numbers were smaller in 1996 than in the previous two years, but the intimidation was greater. Nigerian soldiers and Mobile Police (known locally as the 'Kill and Go') fired tear gas and live ammunition, killing four youths and wounding eighteen.³⁰

Protests were held in London too, against Shell and the Nigerian High Commission. Ken Wiwa, wrapped up warmly against the January cold, addressed the crowd outside Shell's headquarters: 'I urge all of you here to keep the pressure on Shell to accept responsibility for what happened in Ogoni, and for what is still happening.'³¹ Shell refused point-blank to accept responsibility. The intimidation by the military continued. Two months later, in March 1996, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that 1,000 Ogonis had fled to Benin since Ogoni Day. The UNHCR called the rate of increase 'worrisome'.³² That month, the US State Department declared that Nigeria constituted a 'classic picture of human rights abuse',³³ but the US failed to act.

In March and April 1996 there was a UN fact-finding mission to the country, led by John Pace of the UNHCR. In Ogoni, hundreds defied the military to complain about their plight, but the UN too failed to act.³⁴ The European Parliament also condemned Nigeria's 'appalling human rights record' and called for an oil embargo, but that also failed to materialize.³⁵ In total, apart from the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth for a short period, the most the international community could muster was a few visa restrictions and token sanctions – an oil embargo was deemed unacceptable to the United States.

The same month, Saro-Wiwa was posthumously elected to the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Global 500 Roll of Honour for advancing the cause of environmental protection. 'At all stages of his campaign, Saro-Wiwa advocated peaceful resistance to the forces that would deprive the Ogoni people of a say in the development of their region,' UNEP said in a statement.³⁶

In May 1996, Shell offered a 'Plan of Action for Ogoni', in

which the company offered a range of measures to facilitate its return to Ogoni.³⁷ To effect this, Shell would need the support of at least some of the Ogoni traditional rulers, the chiefs. There then emerged a claim that the military were trying to force communities to accept Shell's return.

MOSOP, the organization at which Saro-Wiwa had been first spokesperson and then President, reported a dangerous turn of events. Major Obi, the head of the task force overseeing security in the State – the 'Rivers State Internal Security Task Force' – had held two secret meetings. MOSOP alleged that the chiefs in the villages of Kpor and Bori were forced to sign documents calling for Shell's return to Ogoni.³⁸ Two months later, Lieutenant Colonel Komo, the Military Administrator of Rivers State, was said to be in consultation with Shell over the company's return to Ogoni. Komo 'expressed pleasure that his talks with Shell have been positive, as the company will soon return to Ogoniland'.³⁹

The recurring allegations of military and oil industry collusion and possible corruption resurfaced later in the year. Shell held a meeting with the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force and certain groups in Ogoni, but not MOSOP. The latter accused Shell of employing 'divide-and-rule tactics',⁴⁰ and argued that Shell was paying Naira 50,000 for the signatures of village chiefs and community development committees on a Memorandum inviting the company back into Ogoni. In response Shell has stated that the company was 'not aware of any payment being made'.⁴¹

The First Anniversary, 1996–97: A Great Man of Africa

Everyone knew that the first anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death would make global headlines. Shell was desperate that the almost

universal condemnation it had received the year before should not be repeated, so it reverted to a public relations technique – get a ‘third party’ to be your voice. One of the issues Shell wanted to lay to rest was that the company was operating to double standards – one set for Nigeria and a higher set for its operations in the UK. The company was particularly sensitive to the accusation of ‘environmental devastation’ in the Delta, caused by spills and gas flaring. It flew numerous journalists over the Delta in helicopters.

It was not long before articles started to appear in the international press that dismissed the claims of the Ogoni and various human rights and environmental organizations.

As these articles appeared in the West, soldiers and the Mobile Police raided Ogoni communities and detained activists. The government had ordered them to arrest church ministers who mentioned Saro-Wiwa’s name. Despite this, thousands of Ogoni defied a heavy military presence to hold memorial church services at designated locations. But some were shot, and women were raped in Saro-Wiwa’s home town.⁴²

Nine days before the first Anniversary, on 1 November 1996, Claude Ake the Director of the Centre for Advanced Social Science in Port Harcourt and a UN advisor passed through London on his way back home to Nigeria. Ake was a man of great bravery and integrity, who has been described as ‘one of the great African thinkers of the twentieth century’.⁴³

It was Ake who had been asked by the government to chair a commission on the violence that had erupted between Ogoni and its neighbours in 1993. He had concluded that there was evidence to suggest that ‘broader forces’ such as the Nigerian military were involved ‘to derail the Ogoni agenda’. It was Ake who had been asked by Saro-Wiwa to serve on the Shell-

sponsored Niger Delta Environment Survey, although he resigned after Saro-Wiwa's execution.⁴⁴

Ake had been an outspoken critic of the close link between the oil companies and the military. He had called Shell's use of the military the 'militarization of commerce' and 'privatization of the state'.⁴⁵ In the interview, Ake was asked about new revelations that Shell had finally admitted that on two occasions it had paid the field allowances of the military. It was a significant admission because for 18 months the company had been denying it.

It was also significant because one of the payments had been to the notorious Colonel Okuntimo, who had headed the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force and who was personally responsible for the campaign of terror the military had inflicted on Ogoni in 1994 and 1995. In many ways Okuntimo was Ake's total opposite. Ake was an academic: a man of peace. Okuntimo was a soldier: a man of war.

It was Okuntimo who had written a memo just nine days before the murder of the four Ogoni in May 1994 that said: 'Shell operations still impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence'. To counter this, Okuntimo had recommended 'Wasting operations during MOSOP and other gatherings making constant military presence justifiable'.⁴⁶

Okuntimo had undue influence at Saro-Wiwa's trial. He had attended conferences for the defence lawyers, been close to the prosecution and probably had access to members of the Tribunal.⁴⁷

Ake said the new 'findings about the support of Shell to the Security Force confirms what we have been saying all along, that essentially Shell has been driving the violence by creating

excessive concern about security in the mineral producing areas'. He called the payment to Okuntimo 'a clear act of hostility against the people of the Niger Delta.'⁴⁸

At the end of the interview on that cold November evening, Ake let slip he was going to make a significant new announcement on the anniversary, but refused to be drawn on what exactly it was. He hinted heavily it was going to be dramatic. But he never made it. Ake's plane crashed on 8 November, just a few days later, on route from Port Harcourt to Lagos. It disappeared into a swamp that was then cordoned off by the military.

There was immediate speculation that Ake had been assassinated by the Nigerian military, which had a habit of murdering their critics. 'We believe it was sabotage,' said a prominent Delta activist. What happened to Ake will probably never be known, but another great man of Africa was dead.

The Second Anniversary, 1997–8: A Pan-Delta Resistance Movement

In January 1997 some 80,000 Ogonis (over 15 per cent of the population) celebrated Ogoni Day in spite of ongoing repression by the military. Four people suffered gunshot wounds whilst twenty were arrested, tortured and detained.⁴⁹ MOSOP said this 'frightening wave of state terrorism' meant that 'Ogoni stands in the threshold of complete extinction'.⁵⁰ The World Council of Churches issued a report confirming the dire situation in the Delta: 'A quiet state of siege prevails even today in Ogoniland. Intimidation, rape, arrests, torture, shooting and looting by the soldiers continue to occur.'⁵¹

It is worth comparing the despair of the Ogoni to the hope of Shell. An inter-office memorandum from Shell written three

days after Ogoni Day was circulated from SPDC in Port Harcourt. In the memo, entitled 'The Journey Towards Reconciliation in Ogoni', Egbert Imomoh, the General Manager of Shell Eastern Division, noted that 'Shell has held a series of discussions and meetings with many different communities and opinion leaders in Ogoniland . . . our discussions with the various groups have assured us that the time is now ripe to commence the implementation of our proposal.'⁵²

Despite Shell's attempts to persuade a select group of Ogoni elders to invite the company back, the grass-roots remained hostile. Just as Ogoni men had become active in the struggle against Shell, so too had the women. The Federation of Ogoni Women's Associations (Fowa), with some 57,000 registered members, set up in 1993 and affiliated to MOSOP, resolved in April 1997 that 'Shell cannot and must not be allowed in Ogoni . . . we say no to Shell as it remains *persona non grata* in Ogoni.'⁵³ Fowa's international representative was Diana Wiwa, the wife of Owens Wiwa, Ken Saro-Wiwa's brother. Diana had acted as a courier to get letters to and from Saro-Wiwa in prison; she and Owens were now living in exile in Canada, unable to return home.

Diana met some of the representatives later: 'The women were very concerned about the continuing military presence in Ogoni, particularly the rapes, beatings and murders, and disruption of markets, and the extortion of money by soldiers. They called on governments worldwide to help stop this reign of terror,' she recalls.⁵⁴ The gulf between the community and Shell was as great as ever. The company seemed oblivious to the plight of the people.

But by now protests were beginning to spread across the Delta, and not just against Shell but against other oil companies

too. It was what the oilmen and generals had feared all along: that other communities, inspired by Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni struggle, would rise up against the devastation of their environment.

In August 1997 over 1,000 people from across the Delta attended a rally at the remote Ijaw village of Aleibiri in Bayelsa State. The rally gave birth to the 'Chicoco movement', named after the organic soil found in the Niger Delta, on which mangroves grow. The Chicoco demands included, amongst others, an 'end to the ecological devastation of the Niger Delta by transnational oil companies and the Federal government; reparation and compensation to the peoples of the Niger Delta; and an immediate demilitarisation of the Niger Delta communities.' The main driving force behind Chicoco was an Ijaw, the environmental lawyer Orono Douglas, who called for the 'solidarity of all producing communities'.⁵⁵

If Saro-Wiwa had been the elder statesman of the Delta protest movement, Douglas, who had been a junior counsel on Saro-Wiwa's defence team at his trial, was one of the leaders of the next generation. He was committed to non-violence, with a long-standing belief that social justice cannot be achieved without ecological justice too. Douglas was both a lawyer and an environmental activist and was one of the founders of Environmental Rights Action (ERA), the Nigerian affiliate of Friends of the Earth. He comes from a village near Oloibiri, where Shell first found oil in the late 1950s.

'The Chicoco movement is a pan-Niger Delta resistance movement committed to reclaiming our humanity,' explained Douglas. 'Over the years we have been dehumanized, our environment has been plundered, our people raped, some jailed, others hanged, and we feel that the time has come that we

should put our hands together to struggle so that we can achieve justice together.⁵⁶

A month after the Chicoco movement had been formed, Douglas was as frank as ever. 'To us the last forty years have been forty years of sorrow, forty years of blood, forty of desecration of our custom and traditions, forty years of the total elimination of our livelihoods that we hold so dear – I mean our land, our air, and our water. Our fight today is a fight for survival,' he continued. 'We are being systematically wiped out by the multinational corporations in Nigeria, principally Shell. The issues we are raising are environmental. The issues we are raising are human rights. It does not matter where you are, whether London, Lagos, Amsterdam or Port Harcourt, we want Shell to direct its efforts not through public relations campaigns, not through propaganda, but directly to redress the ecological war they have waged on our land for forty years.'⁵⁷

The Third Anniversary, 1998–9: Killings and Kaiama

Like the Ogoni before them, the Ilaje community in Ondo State were fed up with living under the shadow of an oil giant, but in this instance it was the American company Chevron, not Shell. 'Over the years Chevron has consistently waged a war on our land, forests and water,' recalled one Ilaje, Bola Oyinbo, who later led a non-violent protest against the company. 'Everything there is dead: mangroves, tropical forests, fish, the freshwater, wildlife, etcetera. All killed by Chevron.'⁵⁸

Oyinbo argues that the community repeatedly tried to instigate a dialogue with the company, but it would not listen to their concerns. So in May 1998, 121 youths from the 42 communities of Ilajeland got into boats and canoes and set

off to occupy Chevron's Parabe platform, miles off-shore. Their demands, argues Oronto Douglas, were modest: 'Don't pollute our, water, don't destroy our mangrove forest, don't devastate our ecology. Come and listen to us, come and talk to our elders.'⁵⁹ Chevron Nigeria's Acting Head of Security, who accompanied the security forces, stated that the young men here unarmed.

What happened next, depends on who you talk to. According to George Kirkland, Chairman of Chevron Nigeria, the oil platform was attacked by 'belligerent youths' who 'forcibly occupied' the barge. When negotiations failed the company called in 'federal law enforcement agencies'. 'The officers arrived at the platform announcing that they had not come to effect any arrests, but to evacuate the platform peacefully,' argued Kirkland. However, 'some of the youths attacked the officers and attempted to disarm one of them. In the ensuing scuffle, two of the youths, regrettably, died, while another was injured.'⁶⁰

Douglas's group Environmental Rights Action collected a testimony from Oyinbo, who said that for four days they had occupied a barge tied to Chevron's rig. They were still awaiting a response from Chevron when early one morning, flying low in the African sky, three helicopters arrived. All were being flown by foreign Chevron pilots, but they were full of Nigerian military and navy and the Mobile Police Force. 'They came like eagles, swooping on chickens,' recalled Oyinbo.⁶¹

'We never expected what followed,' he adds. 'As the choppers landed, one after the other discharging soldiers, what we heard were gunshots and fire. They started shooting commando-style at us even before they landed. They shot everywhere.' Two youths were killed, thirty more youths were wounded, most with gunshot. Those who went to help the dying were shot too.

‘We were defenceless, harmless,’ argues Oyinbo. Eleven protestors, including Oyinbo, were arrested and held for twenty-two days before being released. On one occasion Oyinbo’s hands were cuffed behind his back and he was hung from a hook on the ceiling. His feet could not touch the floor, so he spun around and around.⁶²

It later transpired that Chevron had specifically called for the Mobile Police. In response to questioning from Human Rights Watch Chevron did not indicate that any attempt had been made ‘to prevent abusive actions by the security forces in advance of the confrontation. Nor did it state that concern had been expressed to the authorities over the incident or that any steps would be taken to avoid similar incidents in future.’ One of the helicopters had a Chevron security person on board who ‘apparently did nothing’ to stop the shooting.⁶³ In the eyes of the communities, another company now had blood on its hands.

Another Delta youth group – the Ijaw Ijawland – were also about to mobilize. While Ogoni is small in size, Ijaw is 56,000 square kilometres. If Ogoni signalled trouble for the oil companies, the Ijaw were potentially disastrous.

In December 1998, Ijaw youths from over five hundred communities in Ijawland met in Kaiama to ‘deliberate on the best way to ensure the continuous survival of the indigenous peoples of the Ijaw ethnic nationality’. The meeting place was symbolic: it was the home village of Isaac Boro, the Ijaw revolutionary who had tried unsuccessfully to declare an independent Delta State in the mid 1960s.⁶⁴

The delegates adopted the ‘Kaiama Declaration’, which demanded an end to oil production and to military operations in Ijawland. It also gave the companies a deadline by which to pull

out of Ijaw.⁶⁵ The Declaration started with an attack on colonialism: 'It was through British colonization that the Ijaw Nation was forcibly put under the Nigerian State.' It continued: 'We are tired of gas flaring, oil spillages, blowouts and being labelled saboteurs and terrorists. It is a case of preparing the noose for our hanging. We reject this labelling.' The deadline set by the Declaration was 30 December 1998. All oil company staff and contractors were to withdraw from Ijaw by this date, 'pending the resolution of the issue of resource ownership and control in the Ijaw area'.⁶⁶

Douglas was one of the organizers. By signing Kaiama he knew he might have been signing his death warrant. 'I and a few others who organized the all-Ijaw youth conference which resulted in the Kaiama Declaration are now marked persons,' he wrote in an email. 'We may or may not be arrested or eliminated as the 30-day deadline issued for the oil corporations to withdraw from Ijawland approaches.'⁶⁷ Where Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni had dared to lead, Douglas and the Ijaw were now following.

As the deadline approached in the region around Warri, SPDC evacuated its staff from front-line positions. Warri is the second most important oil town in the Delta after Port Harcourt and home to three ethnic groups: the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, and the Ijaw. The violence that Douglas had feared started. The Ijaw Youths managed to stop the flow of oil in ten places – but at a cost. The Military Administrator, Lieutenant Colonel Obi, declared a state of emergency. Some ten to fifteen thousand troops moved into the region.⁶⁸ On the bright morning of 30 December thousands of youths protested, wearing black and carrying candles. Their message was peace and justice. But soldiers were waiting for them, and opened fire.⁶⁹

According to the Ijaw Youth Council, 'Several people were shot dead or wounded . . . This was followed by widespread looting, senseless raping, and extra-judicial executions. Even men of God were not spared. Reverend Atari Ado was beaten, chained and prevented from taking water for three days. Chief Torumoye Ajako had his ears chopped off with a dagger. He was given his own ears to eat.'⁷⁰ Some 200 Ijaw men had limbs amputated, including hands and arms.⁷¹

The Nigerian military rulers may have been talking about holding democratic elections but their soldiers were still acting with the brutality of a despot. In the days after the Kaiama deadline expired, there occurred the deaths of 'possibly over 200 people; the torture and inhuman treatment of others; and the arbitrary detention of many more', as Human Rights Watch recorded. Girls as young as twelve were raped or tortured.⁷²

ERA reported that on 4 January 1999, soldiers arrived on speedboats owned by the oil companies to attack Opia and Ikenyan. The soldiers were ordered to 'shoot on sight'.⁷³ Four people were killed and 67 were subsequently found to be missing when Nigerian forces, reportedly paid by Chevron, attacked two small villages.⁷⁴

The Fourth Anniversary, 1999–2000: From Dictatorship to Democracy?

Over a decade of brutal military dictatorship came to an end as civilian rule was restored in May 1999 when former head of state and Nigerian war hero General Olusegun Obasanjo was elected civilian president. The task facing him was daunting. The military ruled during all but ten of the thirty-nine years since Independence in 1960. This meant Obasanjo 'assumed the helm

of an ailing ship of state almost lacking in morality or legitimacy, wrote Karl Maier in his book on Nigeria, *This House Has Fallen*.

As he was sworn in, looking splendid in flowing white Nigerian robes, Obasanjo promised to wipe out the cancer of corruption. 'After 15 years of military rule, today is a day of promise for a great future,' he told such visiting dignitaries as Nelson Mandela, Prince Charles and Jesse Jackson, who had come to witness the ceremony in the purpose-built Eagle Square Stadium. There was a festive mood.⁷⁵ Nigeria had reason to celebrate. Its people had supposedly been freed from military oppression.

For the people of the Delta, Obasanjo's promises were as depressingly hollow as the reality of the election. In Bayelsa State, as elsewhere, there was widespread ballot-rigging. In November 1999, as the fourth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death approached, the Nigerian military destroyed Odi, a town of 15,000 in Ijawland, demolishing every building except the bank, the church and the health centre. It was the largest deployment of troops since the Biafran war. As many as 2,000 people were killed.⁷⁶ 'I was in the house with my 90-year-old husband when the soldiers came,' recalled one terrified villager. 'They had already set fire around the house before I noticed their presence. As we came out, I was pushed aside and thereafter they shot my husband.'⁷⁷

A week after the massacre, Nigerian Senate President Chuba Okadigbo visited the town. 'The facts speak for themselves,' he said, visibly shocked. 'There is no need for speech because there is nobody to speak with.'⁷⁸ A town had been vaporised into submission. When Saro-Wiwa's brother Owens visited the scene where the Nigerian military had wreaked havoc, he was stunned. 'It is the same story, just what happened in Ogoni.'⁷⁹

The Fifth Anniversary, 2000–1: Some Things Never Change

In April 2000 Ken Saro-Wiwa was symbolically buried. The authorities had blocked the release of his remains on the grounds that his body still belonged to the state since he was seen as a murderer. Placed in his coffin were two of his favourite novels and his pipe, requests that he had made in his will. The day dawned bright as Ogoniland awoke to the sounds of drums, whistles and dancing. Saro-Wiwa's symbolic coffin was buried under the Ogoni flag, flapping defiantly in the breeze.

The Ogoni still hold Shell responsible. The main sign of the funeral had a picture of Shell's famous logo followed by 'killed Saro-Wiwa'. It then read: 'Shell is forever *persona non grata* in Ogoni.' The 'S' of 'Shell' had been crossed out, leaving 'Hell'. Over 100,000 Ogonis attended ceremonies during the week of events held to mark the occasion.⁸⁰ It was another four years before Saro-Wiwa's bones were finally returned to the family after a fight led by his brother Owens and son Ken.⁸¹

The symbolic burial was one of a number of issues covered in an article entitled, 'Some things never change' published in the *Guardian* newspaper in the run-up to the fifth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death. Its aim was to highlight the continuing plight of the Ogoni people, and the fact that so little had changed in the last five years. It noted that 'For millions of people, there is a daily struggle to gain access to basic necessities such as clean water, health care and education.' It quoted MOSOP's claim that 'Ogoni people still languish in poverty, deprivation, marginalization and environmental devastation.'⁸²

In a letter to the *Guardian's* Readers' Editor, the Vice President of External Affairs for Exploration and Production in

Shell International, Alan Detheridge, complained that the company had not been asked to respond to the allegation that 'Shell's activities have led to "devastation of the environment"'.⁸³ Detheridge then quoted from 'a number of independent respected journalists' who had 'visited the region'. He referred to six press reports. The majority mentioned 'flying in helicopters' or 'flying over the delta'. Shell was quoting journalists from the public relations campaign running up to the first anniversary, four years before.

But the public relations campaign backfired. Academic Jędrzej George Frynas found that 'on their return from Nigeria, many journalists presented Shell in a more favourable light than before and downplayed the environmental and social impact of oil operations on the ground.' Frynas notes that 'Shell's attempts to influence media coverage were exposed by Media Watch, a German non-governmental organisation which monitors journalistic reporting from developing countries.' One journalist from Media Watch was sued for defamation after accusing one of the Shell-sponsored journalists of undertaking 'journalistic prostitution for Shell'. However, 'the German court dismissed the defamation suit and confirmed the fact that Shell undertook expenses for the journalist.'⁸⁴

The company was still quoting these same 'independent' journalists in its defence five years later, in 2005, as part of its new public relations campaign 'Tell Shell' (see Chapter 5). One of the commentators wrote: 'Would it be too cynical to infer that the flight plans of the "Shell helicopter" might have deliberately avoided the less salubrious parts of the producing operations?'

The Sixth Anniversary, 2001–2: Towards Reconciliation?

While the Nigerian military carried on a murderous reign of terror, the politicians talked of peace and reconciliation. The new government set up a panel to examine human rights abuses under the military. Officially the ‘Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission’, it was known simply as the ‘Oputa Panel’ after its chairman Judge Chukwudifu Oputa. The panel also included the Reverend Kukah, named as the facilitator of the Ogoni reconciliation process when it was launched years later, in 2005. MOSOP submitted a fat file documenting 8,000 cases of human rights abuses.⁵⁴

When the Oputa Panel sat in January 2001, Saro-Wiwa’s father, Jim Beeson Wiwa, known as Pa and aged 96, refused to testify. ‘My mind is not peaceful. I will not appear before the Oputa Panel because that will not bring back my son for me,’ he said. It is Ogoni tradition that the eldest son looks after his parents in their old age, so Saro-Wiwa’s death had robbed them of their primary carer. The fact that his body had not been released meant that the long, process of healing and of coming to terms with his death could not even begin.⁸⁵

In February 2001 Egbert Imomoh, who is referred to further in chapter 3 in connection with the military assistance that he requested for Shell’s operations in Ogoni in 1993, was now Deputy Managing Director of SPDC. He told the Panel that Shell ‘completely rejects all accusations of the abuse of human rights’.⁸⁷

Imomoh had replaced Godwin Omene, the previous Deputy Managing Director of SPDC who had just been nominated by President Obasanjo to head the new ‘Niger Delta Development Commission’ that began sitting in 2001. Obasanjo had set up the commission in response to community demands for greater

ownership of oil resources, but its formation did not stop either the violence or the resentment felt by the communities.⁸⁸ Omene's appointment was a severe blow to the communities, who had thought an independent development organization might assist their plight,⁸⁹ and it illustrated the crossover between the company and the Nigerian state.

In May 2002 the Oputa Panel published its report: a 'lament' about the state of Nigeria. 'Oil, one of the greatest blessings God has showered on our nation, has turned out to be a curse,' the Panel concluded. It had become an instrument 'sounding the death-knell of such key principles of good governance as democracy, federalism, transparency, accountability and national growth'.⁹⁰ The curse of the Delta was the curse of oil. And oil was the curse of Nigeria.

Nothing seemed to change, as the conflict between communities and companies spiralled into a permanent vortex of despair and death. Five months later, in October 2002, the Commissioner for the Environment in Bayelsa State told Human Rights Watch that: 'The situation of Shell is abysmal. It has not changed and we do not believe there is a possibility of change . . . As far as relations with communities are concerned we have not seen any changes at all. The flow stations are protected by armed soldiers, they don't give any employment to the youth. As commissioner of the environment I have not seen any changes in corporate philosophy.' Some 23 Shell facilities had an armed security presence.⁹¹

The Seventh Anniversary, 2002–3: Rig Invasions

Rig invasions by communities and oil workers had now become common in the Delta and the international community was

becoming increasingly concerned about the protests. Four months after the seventh anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death, a 'Restricted' briefing note was written for Baroness Amos, then Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Now released under the British Freedom of Information Act, it concerns the take-over by oil workers of a rig owned by the American company Transocean.

The official who wrote the document took the side of the oil industry. It notes that the Delta 'has a history of inter-ethnic clashes, hostage-taking of oil employees for money and of antipathy to the oil companies, regarded (not entirely justifiably) as exploiters and polluters'. It went on to say that Alan Detheridge from Shell International had told the government that the situation could continue for 'some time'. Though not overtly concerned about the British situation, as 'Britain is not especially affected by the Nigerian closures', the UK was still worried about 'supply disruptions and rises in oil prices'. The country primarily affected was the 'US, which receives one-third of Nigerian production, some 6 per cent of US oil imports'.

An interesting paragraph indicates that the international community was relying on Iraq to take up any deficit caused by the Nigerian action: 'Were the disruption to be prolonged over several months, the impact on the oil market would partly depend on how production developed in Iraq.'⁹²

An even more interesting document than this briefing note is one that concerns hostage-taking; names have been blanked out to protect the people concerned. The list of recipients is also revealing: the document was sent from Lagos to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Defence – and to 'Snuffbox in Washington' (*Sic*). The message reads:

BLANK has thanked us for our role in helping to secure the agreement on down manning of the rigs. Transocean managers in Port Harcourt quizzed BLANK about the report that mercenaries were flying in at the request of a 'government involved in the dispute'. If they had arrived while negotiations were still in progress, the effect would have been disastrous. We were, of course, vigorously denying that the mercenaries were engaged by the British government.

The last sentence can be read as a candid admission that mercenaries had been employed. If so, it was not the first time the British sent in soldiers to assist their Nigerian operations, as we shall see.

The note ended: 'One of the positive elements resulting from this incident is that there are moves to draw up a code of conduct for Nigerian oil industry workers. It will include disciplinary measures to deal with the occupations of rigs. Transocean floated the idea with the American Embassy, who have agreed to become involved in the talks with the Nigerian Ministry of Labour. We propose supporting this initiative.' Once again America and Britain were meddling in the affairs of the Nigerian oil industry.

The Eighth Anniversary, 2003–4: An Integral Part of the Conflict

By 2003 another lethal ingredient was being added to the tinderbox of the Delta. 'Oil bunkering' involved groups (normally armed) in siphoning off oil from the myriad of pipes, then selling this crude on the black market. Some 10 per cent of Nigeria's oil production was now thought to be going into illegal

bunkering, in an extremely lucrative trade controlled by local politicians who hired armed militias to look after their interests. 'Bunkering is not a business for poor people,' argues Patrick Naagbanton, an Ogoni and Director of the Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human Rights and Development. 'It is rich people that are involved.'⁹³

Naagbanton's concerns have been backed up by a report from the UK Department for International Development into the bunkering which concluded that the illegal trade 'would not be possible without the complicity of some senior government personnel for whom this is evidently profitable'. The report noted that, in part because of the bunkering, Warri was now a major focal port for arms imports into the country.⁹⁴

Warring factions fighting for control of the bunkering trade had now become a major problem in the Delta that was sending worrying signals around the world. Rampant government corruption and fighting between ethnic groups engaged in lethal arguments over the control of money and resources once again ignited the Delta in bloody conflict. In April 2003, Human Rights Watch wrote to Shell and other oil companies expressing their 'concern regarding recent violent clashes in Nigeria's Niger Delta'. They called on the Nigerian government and the oil companies to take immediate measures to prevent further violence.⁹⁵ However, over the next couple of months hundreds were killed, hundreds of homes destroyed and thousands displaced as rival factions fought around the oil town of Warri. At the height of the violence, 40 per cent of Nigeria's oil production was closed down.⁹⁶

If the closure of many of its wells was giving Shell the jitters, it was also having to deal with another equally explosive issue. In response to the violence and 'increased risk of resource extrac-

tion', Shell had 'initiated the development of a Peace and Security Strategy, an integrated and comprehensive approach to establishing security through peace rather than through purely fiscal means'.

In December 2003 a key part of this strategy – a report by the consultants WAC, hired by Shell – was leaked. Rather than indicating how the company could be a solution to the problem of the Niger Delta, WAC identified Shell as part of the problem. The report concluded that the way Shell operated 'creates, feeds into, or exacerbates conflict' and that 'after over 50 years in Nigeria' Shell had become 'an integral part of the Niger Delta conflict system'.⁹⁷

Its conclusions were alarming: first, that the company's 'social license to operate is fast eroding'; secondly, that 'If current conflict trends continue uninterrupted, it would be surprising if SCIN [Shell Companies in Nigeria] is able to continue on-shore resource extraction in the Niger Delta beyond 2008, whilst complying with Shell Business Principles'.⁹⁸

Here were Shell's own consultants saying that a business-as-usual scenario was no longer possible for Shell. If things did not rapidly change, the company might have to give up its on-shore oil production – the majority of its oil and gas reserves being on-shore. The report sent shock waves to London, The Hague and Washington, at about the same time that the reserves crisis was hitting Shell (see Chapter 5). It also sent shockwaves to the City brokers, who worried that the 10 per cent of Shell's oil originating in Nigeria could be under threat. Shell disputed that it would have to leave onshore oil extraction in Nigeria.

Whilst Shell's consultants were saying that the company was on the verge of failing to comply with its business principles, the company's website was declaring: 'In general, we would with-

draw from Nigeria (and indeed any country) when we found that we could not operate there in a manner which was consistent with our business principles.’⁹⁹

The Ninth Anniversary, 2004–5: Niger People’s Volunteer Force

By 2004 oil bunkering was escalating out of control. The WAC report had concluded that between 275,000 and 685,000 barrels of oil were being stolen on average every day, generating a staggering \$1.5 to \$4 billion a year for those involved. Shell has tried to play down these figures, saying 40,000 to 100,000 barrels per day are more likely.¹⁰⁰

The bunkering and the violence were alarming the Americans as well as the British. Two weeks before the ninth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa’s death, a delegation of American businessmen, the ‘Business Executives for National Security’, had drinks with the US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell.

Trip notes from the delegation show just how important the region had by now become to the US (see Chapter 7): ‘The Gulf of Guinea already provides 10% of US oil needs, a number that could easily increase to 25% by 2015.’ The Ambassador told the delegation that although the Delta was strategically important, there was only one problem – ‘It’s wild there.’¹⁰¹

The delegation also noted ominously that ‘As this region finally begins to leverage its natural resources, it will undoubtedly attract increasingly negative influences and attention, making the need to focus on security issues of growing importance.’ For the US, security of oil supply means militarization.

The ‘security issue’ was reinforced when a conflict erupted between two rival groups for control of the lucrative bunkering

trade. When Alhaji Dokubo Asari, the Ijaw leader of one of the groups, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, threatened to launch an all-out war in the Delta, it sent shock waves through the oil industry. The name of Asari's force was symbolic – it had been inspired by the Ijaw revolutionary Isaac Boro, who had been the first Delta leader to attack the oil companies. Asari was threatening to launch 'Operation Locust Feast', to reclaim the oil that he said was rightly that of the Ijaws. The announcement helped send the international price of oil through the \$50 a barrel mark for the first time.

A peace deal, reportedly brokered by the Americans, was hastily arranged by President Obasanjo, calling for the 'disbandment of all militias and militant groups'. Although over a thousand weapons were collected, the Delta remains awash with arms and is still ready to ignite at any moment.¹⁰² many observers believe that the flashpoint will be the federal and state elections in 2007. The process starts with primaries in early 2006 and the risk of armed confrontation seems inevitable.

Towards The Tenth Anniversary, 2005

In March 2005 six people were feared dead after an anti-Shell demonstration in the Ahoada area of Rivers State descended into inter-community violence. One of the communities told the Nigerian press that they 'wanted to engage Shell and the government in discussion as to how certain issues concerning environmental devastation, the loss of their means of livelihood, could be solved.'¹⁰³

On 1 April 2005 Ken Saro-Wiwa's father, Pa Wiwa, finally passed away, aged 101. A long-term colleague of Oronto Douglas, activist Ike Okonta, recalls meeting Pa Wiwa before he died.

‘He told me of the morning, now so long ago, when Ken came to him and sought his permission to lead the Ogoni to freedom from the tyranny of Shell and the Nigerian state. “It was a difficult decision for me to make,” Pa Wiwa told me. “I asked my son, who will bury me after they have killed you? I asked him this question three times. But he was still determined to do something to save our people. In the end, I gave him my blessing.”’¹⁰⁴

Owens Wiwa travelled back to Nigeria to bury his father. An estimated 200,000 to 250,000 took part in the celebration of Pa Wiwa’s life. The ten years since his brother’s death have not eased Owens’s anger or pain. He still blames Shell for Saro-Wiwa’s death. ‘Ken told me in 1993 that Shell would like to see him dead, and not only dead but disgraced. That Shell would like to have him in for murder. He told me that in 1993. I thought it was a joke.’

He believes that Brian Anderson, the Chairman of Shell Nigeria, who met secretly with Owens before his brother’s death, ‘had the power to stop that trial, but he refused when he didn’t get what he wanted from me’. Anderson had wanted Owens to call the international protests off. ‘Shell made it possible for the government’ to kill Ken, he said.¹⁰⁵

The increase in violence in the Niger Delta is directly attributable to what people saw as the injustice of Ken’s murder, argues Owens. He says that when people saw what had happened to Saro-Wiwa’s peaceful struggle, they took up arms. ‘Unfortunately we now have this combination of violence, greed, in terms of illegal oil bunkering taking over from the empowering, non-violent struggle for the environment and for resource control.’

He adds that ‘The oil companies do not really appear to have

learnt any lessons. Their response has been, in my view, “get more oil as fast as possible”.’ But in Ogoni, he adds, ‘there is strength among the women and men to prevent the return of Shell. There is a restoration of dignity.’¹⁰⁶ A dignity the Ogoni had been denied by years of colonial, military and oil company rule.

Saro-Wiwa’s son, Ken Wiwa also blames the oil company for his father’s death. ‘Shell could have stopped it at any time they wanted to,’ he says. ‘They have that kind of power in Nigeria. Shell basically encouraged state violence against the Ogoni people, and eventually against my father. OK, they didn’t tie the noose around my father’s neck, but without Shell’s intervention and encouraging of the military government it would never have happened.’

Wiwa continues: ‘As far as I am concerned they encouraged the military Internal Security Task Force that violated the human rights of the people. All that was done to enable oil production to resume. Whether they like it or not, they are involved in the murder of my father, they are a co-conspirator in the murder of my father. All the blood on Abacha’s hands is also on Shell’s logo.’¹⁰⁷

Remembering Saro-Wiwa – Andy Rowell

I remember the day Ken died. I was one of the ‘international community’ that had been helping the Ogoni with their plight. I had first met Saro-Wiwa over three years before, when I was writing a report for Greenpeace on the social and environmental impacts of the seven largest oil companies.

Saro-Wiwa was drumming up support for the Ogoni, a people no one had ever heard of from a far-away Delta that Ken would bring a little closer on every visit. This awoke the consciousness of many environmental NGOs in London and Washington, for whom Africa was off the radar. But more importantly, it dismayed Shell officials in London, who thought that a little local difficulty in Nigeria would never reach the international stage.

They underestimated Saro-Wiwa and his unnerving commitment to gaining justice for his people. But he could not do it alone. He needed to bring the fight back to London, The Hague and Washington – Shell’s power centres, where it would have to sit up and listen. ‘It’s just going to get worse, unless the international community intervenes,’ he told me. On his visits we would talk, share information, and sometimes go for a drink.

During the research for this book, I found a long-forgotten interview that I never used. I switch the tape on. It is December 1992, just weeks before the Ogoni Day March of 1993. I listen to the voice of a younger me. I listen to the voice of a dead man. It

is strange to hear Ken's gravelly voice again, but it is strong and alive. He laughs a lot. We talk about the Niger Delta and Shell.

'You have two problems, the human rights problem and the environmental problem. You cannot talk about the environment without human rights,' he says. Shell must bear 'responsibility' for the pipelines, the gas flaring, and environmental devastation. He talks about Nigeria's 'bandit government' that 'subordinates all other tiers of government to its own wishes. Those that are running the government are just anxious to transfer the money from the Delta to the North of the country. They are happy collaborators with Shell. So the people at the local level are suffering both at the hands of Shell but also the ethnic majority who run the country.'

We talk about Shell's response so far. 'Shell employees have also told me that they are stepping up their community development efforts. But so long as Shell is doing this over and above the heads of the local people it has no meaning whatsoever. They come around with their concrete classroom blocks, but what is that? It is a joke.' Ken offers a long, room-filling laugh. I remember his laughter being infectious. 'They can only do that to people who do not know how much money they are taking away.'

We talk about what will happen. 'The awareness about the environment now is very high. When I did a tour of Ogoni recently for two weeks, many people said they were willing to die. They were ready to march. We have planned that on the fourth of January there will be a massive demonstration by all Ogoni people, men, women and children. The march is against the devastation of the environment. It is against the non-payment of royalties. It is anti-Shell. It is anti-Federal Govern-

ment, because as far as we are concerned the two are in league to destroy the Ogoni people.’

We then move on to the authorities’ response to Ken. ‘There is a lot of concern now in the local areas because they think I am at risk.’

‘Have you had any threats?’ I ask.

‘No, they are not going to send warning letters,’ Ken laughs. ‘They couldn’t really arrest me now, but they could organize an accidental death or something of that sort. But I am not too worried about it.’

I was worried about it, even if Ken wasn’t. Between his visits, I had wondered how anyone could take on the might of a corrupt military regime and the might of the oil industry and win. Each time we met, I wondered if it would be the last. But Ken was never frightened. Or if he was, he did not show it. In many ways he knew what his destiny was, as if the dice had already been rolled.

On 10 November 1995 I remember sitting at my desk, still holding on to a shred of hope that he would be pardoned – that he and the others would be set free, because the international pressure would finally buckle the military’s resolve. I don’t think he probably thought they would kill him. How wrong he was. How wrong we were.

I remember the phone ringing continually, puncturing the quiet of my office. Would it be good news or bad? First we got unconfirmed reports that Saro-Wiwa and the others were dead. Then it was confirmed: Ken had been hung, along with the other eight.

It is said that those who were old enough knew where they were when Armstrong landed on the moon, when Kennedy was shot, when Lennon was murdered, and we all remember where

we were on September 11th 2001. I and others will never forget 10 November 1995, and the dreadful feeling that the international community had let Ken down. I still believe that we failed him in his darkest hour.

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Chapter 2: The Colonial Company

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