



**KENULE BEESON SARO-WIWA**  
1941 -1995

***Chapter 5:***  
***Introduction to***  
**GENOCIDE IN NIGERIA:**  
**THE OGO NI TRAGEDY**

(Port Harcourt: Saros, 1992; 103 pp.)

Ken Saro Wiwa

Writing this book has been one of the most painful experiences of my life. Ordinarily, writing a book is torture, a chore. But when, on every page, following upon every word, every letter, a tragedy leaps up before the eyes of a writer, he or she cannot derive that pleasure, that fulfillment in which the creative process often terminates.

What has probably worsened the matter is that I have lived through most of the period covered by this sordid story. I knew, as a child, that period from 1947 when the Ogoni saw, for a few brief years, the possibility of extricating themselves from the cruel fate which seems to have been ordained for them. I watched as they went into decline. I was privileged to play a role in the civil war

which decimated them further and to assist in their rehabilitation at the end of that war.

Since then I have watched helplessly as they have been gradually ground to dust by the combined effort of the multinational oil company, Shell Petroleum Development Company, the murderous ethnic majority in Nigeria and the country's military dictatorships. Not the pleas, not the writing over the years have convinced the Nigerian elite that something special ought to be done to relieve the distress of the Ogoni.

I have known and argued earnestly since I was a lad of seventeen that the only way the Ogoni can survive is for them to exercise their political and economic rights. But because the Nigerian elite appear, on this particular matter, to have hearts of stone and the brains of millipedes; because Shell is a multinational company with the ability to crush whomever it wishes; because the petroleum resources of the Ogoni serve everyone's greed, all the doors seemed closed.

Three recent events have encouraged me to now place the issue before the world: the end of the cold War, the increasing attention being paid to the global environment, and the insistence of the European Community that minority rights be respected, albeit in the successor states to the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia. What remains to be seen is whether Europe and America will apply in Nigeria the same standards which they have applied in Eastern Europe.

For what has happened and is happening to the Ogoni is strictly not the fault of the Nigerian elite and Shell Company alone; the international community has played a very significant role in it. If the Americans did not purchase Nigerian oil, the Nigerian nation would not be, nor would the oppressive ethnic majority in the country have the wherewithal to pursue its genocidal intentions. Indeed, there is a sense in which the "Nigerian" oil which

the Americans, Europeans and Japanese buy is stolen property: it has been seized from its owners by force of arms and has not been paid for. Therefore, these buyers are receiving stolen property. Also, it is Western investment and technology which keep the Nigerian oil industry and therefore the Nigerian nation alive, oil being 94 percent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product.

Also, European and American shareholders in multi-national oil companies and manufacturers of oil mining equipment have benefited from the purloining of Ogoni resources, the devastation of the Ogoni environment and the genocide of the Ogoni people. Thus, shareholders in the multi-national oil companies -- both Shell and Chevron -- which prospect for oil in Ogoni [lands], the American, Japanese and European governments, and the multinational oil companies have a moral if not legal responsibility for ending the genocide of the Ogoni people and the complete devastation of their environment, if, indeed, that is still possible.

The requirement is enormous and urgent. The Ogoni people themselves including their children are determined to save whatever is left of their rich heritage. The international community can support this determination by championing the drive of the Ogoni for autonomy within Nigeria. The restoration of their rights, political, economic and environmental does not, cannot, hurt anyone. It will only place the responsibility for ending this dreadful situation where it should lie: on the Ogoni people themselves. The area being rich in resources and the people resourceful, the Ogoni will be able to sort out their problem in time.

Secondly, the international community must prevail on Shell and Chevron which prospect for oil in Ogoni, and the Nigerian Government which abets them, to stop flaring gas in the area immediately.

Thirdly, the international community can help by sending experts -- medical, environmental and agricultural -- to assist the Ogoni people restore a semblance of normality to Ogoni territory.

In the early years of this century, a French writer, Andre Gide, toured the Congo and observed the gross abuse of human rights being perpetrated in that country by King Leopold II of Belgium and his agents. He wrote about it and Europeans were sufficiently shocked to end the abuses.

I write now in the hope that the international community will, in similar fashion, do something to mitigate the Ogoni tragedy. It is bad enough that it is happening a few years into [before?] the twenty-first century. It will be a disgrace to humanity should it persist one day longer.

I expect the ethnic majority of Nigeria to turn the heat of their well-known vindictiveness on me for writing this book. I defy them to do so.

Some may wonder at my use of the word "genocide" to describe what has happened to the Ogoni people. The United Nations defines genocide as "the commission of acts with intent to destroy a national, ethnic, racial or religious group." If anyone, after reading this book, has any further doubt of, or has a better description for, the crime against the Ogoni people, I will be happy to know it.

I wish to thank Barika Idamkue and Dr. Sonpie Kpone-Tonwe for kindly reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions for improving the work; and my assistant, Hyacinth Wayi, for speedy word-processing.

All errors in the book are mine and I accept full responsibility for them.

Ken Saro-Wiwa, Port Harcourt, 1992

## **Words from the final statement of Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa**

*In representing the Ogoni peoples of Nigeria in a struggle against devastation of their lands by multinational oil corporations, Ken Saro-Wiwa spoke for the impoverished many, against the empowered few. For his efforts, Saro-Wiwa was arrested in May, 1994 in Nigeria, on what many believe to have been spurious charges. On November 10, 1995, a Nigerian military-appointed tribunal executed nine Ogoni leaders. Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa was among them. His final statement, the closing paragraphs of which are reprinted here, was never heard by the tribunal.*

(Editor's note: The text of this excerpt comes to us with certain logical inconsistencies in paragraph 3, perhaps the result of the trying circumstances under which it was written or transcribed. I have inserted, in brackets [ ], three short suggested amending phrases which allow the paragraph to express what I was believe Ken Saro-Wiwa's original intent.)

Closing paragraphs from final statement from Nigeria:

My lord,

We all stand before history. I am a man of peace, of ideas. Appalled by the denigrating poverty of my people who live on a richly endowed land, distressed by their political marginalization and economic strangulation, angered by the devastation of their land, their ultimate heritage, anxious to preserve their right to life and to a decent living, and determined to usher to this country as a whole a fair and just democratic system which protects everyone and every ethnic group and gives us all a valid claim to human civilization, I have devoted my intellectual and material resources, my very

life, to a cause in which I have total belief and from which I cannot be blackmailed or intimidated. I have no doubt at all about the ultimate success of my cause, no matter the trials and tribulations which I and those who believe with me may encounter on our journey. Neither imprisonment nor death can stop our ultimate victory.

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, judges, 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.

We all stand on trial, my lord, for by our actions we have denigrated our Country and jeopardized the future of our children. As we subscribe to the sub-normal and accept double standards, as we lie and cheat openly, as we protect injustice and oppression, we empty our classrooms,

denigrate our hospitals, fill our stomachs with hunger and elect to make ourselves the slaves of those who [do not] ascribe to higher standards, [do not] pursue the truth, and [do not] honour justice, freedom, and hard work. I predict that the scene here will be played and replayed by generations yet unborn. Some have already cast themselves in the role of villains, some are tragic victims, some still have a chance to redeem themselves. The choice is for each individual.

I predict that the denouement of the riddle of the Niger delta will soon come. The agenda is being set at this trial. Whether the peaceful ways I have favoured will prevail depends on what the oppressor decides, what signals it sends out to the waiting public. In my innocence of the false charges I face Here, in my utter conviction, I call upon the

Ogoni people, the peoples of the Niger delta, and the oppressed ethnic minorities of Nigeria to stand up now and fight fearlessly and peacefully for their rights. History is on their side. God is on their side. For the Holy Quran says in Sura 42, verse 41: “All those that fight when oppressed incur no guilt, but Allah shall punish the oppressor.” Come the day.

Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa

(Saro-Wiwa’s full statement, of which the above is an excerpt, can be read at <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/KSWstmt.html>)

