

## 'In the Shadow of a Saint' by Ken Wiwa

A Book Review by Beatrice M. Spadacini

My father. Where does he end and where do I begin? The first line of Ken Wiwa's memoir, "In the Shadow of a Saint" sets the tone for the entire book. The strength of this powerful narrative is that it unfolds on many different levels and that it blends the personal with the political.

It is the story of a father and a first born son, of a play writer and a journalist, of a political activist who ends up in jail and a son who is given the privilege to study abroad, of a traditional African husband and a young man who marries outside his own race.

The author is the son of Nigerian activist Ken Saro Wiwa, who was brutally killed, along with eight other member of the Ogoni tribe, in late 1995 by General Sani Abacha, former dictator and strongman of the most populous country in Africa.

In tracing his father's life and commitment to the Ogoni struggle for social justice, Ken Wiwa is also attempting to define himself as the first born son who is given the responsibility of carrying on his father's legacy.

Throughout the memoir, the reader is taken through the inner struggle of a son who is sent to study in the UK, and later finds himself not only alienated from his native Nigeria but also from his father's own struggle for justice.

Ken Wiwa's personal journey is terribly human as he openly shares his own contradictory feelings towards his father. His sentiments range from admiration to resentment for being born the son of a political activist and for never having had a 'normal childhood'.

In an attempt to better understand his own predicament, in the last few chapters of the book, the author shares his feelings and thoughts with other sons and daughters of political leaders who died in the struggle for justice. Among these are Zinzi Mandela, Nkosinathi Biko and Aung Sang Suu Kyi.

The memoir is young Wiwa's tribute to his father and a coming to terms with the responsibility of carrying on the struggle for social justice for the Ogoni people of Nigeria.