

**SCRIPTING LEADERSHIP CRISIS AND SOCIAL REDEMPTION IN  
BARTH AKPAH'S *LAND OF TALES***

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
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**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by **Michelle Inibokun ORHEWERE (Miss)** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**Date**

**DEDICATION**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to critically examine the themes of leadership crisis and social redemption in Barth Akpah's poetic narratives in *Land of Tales*. Specifically, this study aims to analyse the portrayal of leadership crisis, explore the vision of social redemption and understand the poet's messages.

#### 1.2 Scope of study

The scope is limited to Akpah's *Land of Tales* and concentrate on the themes of leadership crisis and social redemption as depicted in his poems. The study will explore the relevance and implication of Akpah's work in the Nigerian context. Although Akpah has published another collection: *How Does the Rain Sound?*, this essay will concentrate on the former because of its depiction of leadership crisis and the possibility of redemption.

#### 1.3 Methodology

This essay employs qualitative research strictly relying on textual analysis to read the poems. Also, close reading of the different poems is conducted with the view to isolating and classifying poems which treat similar themes and ideas. Relevant secondary materials are sourced from journals, books and online to improve the work.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

New Historicism is adopted to read the poetry of Barth Akpah. New Historicism became popular in the 1980s as a critical approach that emphasized the relationship between literature and history. According Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt “New Historicism functions as an active participant in literary texts, shaping and being shaped by historical forces”,(8) unlike Historicism that view historical context as mere background to literary texts.

Greenblatt is reputed to be the leading scholar of New Historicism. The theory arose partly as a reaction against the a historical tendencies of New Criticism and structuralism, which treated literary texts as autonomous authentic objects divorced from their historical contexts. According Peter Barry, New Historicism” responded to the limitations of older forms of historical criticism that viewed history as a stable, objective backdrop against which literature could be understood”(18). Thus, New Historicism employs history as a leitmotif.

New Historicism rejects the traditional hierarchy that places history as primary and literature as secondary. In the opinion of Louis Adrian Montrose, New Historicism argues that “literary and non-literary texts are equally embedded in the discursive practices of their time” (21). Historical documents, legal records, medical treatises, and literary works all participate in constructing the cultural reality of a particular historical moment.

Borrowing from anthropologist Clifford Geertz New Historicist employs “thick description” to “analyse the dense practices” (15): This approach involves detailed examination of seemingly minor historical incidents or cultural artifacts to reveal broader patterns of power, belief, and social organization.

Influenced by poststructuralist theory, New Historicism recognizes that historical “facts” are always mediated through textual representations. Hayden White explains that “Historical documents are not transparent windows into the past but constructed narratives that require careful interpretation” (427). This perspective challenges traditional notions of historical objectivity and emphasizes the role of discourse in shaping historical understanding.

Michel Foucault’s work on discourse, power, and knowledge proved foundational to New Historicist theory. His analysis of how institutions create and maintain power relationships through discursive practices provided New Historicists with tools for understanding how literary texts participate in broader cultural formations (Foucault, *Archaeology*(22).

While not explicitly Marxist, New Historicism drew on Marxist insights about the relationships between cultural production and material conditions. The work of Raymond Williams, particularly his concepts of “cultural materialism” and “structures of feeling,”(128) provided important theoretical resources for understanding how literature participates in ideological processes.

New Historicism represents a significant shift in literary criticism, moving away from formalist approaches toward a more contextual and culturally engaged methodology. While the movement faces ongoing challenges and criticisms, its core insights about the mutual constitution of literature and history continue to influence contemporary scholarship (John Brannigan,6). The approach's emphasis on cultural specificity, power provides valuable tools for understanding how literary works participate in the complex cultural conversations of their historical movements.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Barth Akpah's poetry has attracted few scholarly attention. In a foreword to the collection, *Land of Tales*, Obododimma Oha explores the various ideas contained in the poems. According to him, "Tales remind us about the structures of life, for they begin somewhere, have twists and turns inside, and end somewhere. We are mindful of roles we play in these twists and turns of collective tales. That is why poets like Barth Akpah should not stifle their voices" (10)

Looking at the title of Akpah's collection, the word, "tales" occupies a significant position. The poems construct vivid stories about contemporary Nigeria Hence, the land refers to Nigeria. The tales being scripted are those which represent the pain and predicament of the people who seek freedom from their oppressive and corrupt leaders.

Stephen Kekeghe explores themes of dreams and despairs of nationhood in Akpah's poems. In his words, Kekeghe remarks that: "The poems, given their philosophical depths, in content and form, transcend landscapes and cultures, yielding meanings to people of different tongues and visions." (37) Kekeghe's reading of Akpah's poetry reveals his own sense of artistic vision and intellectualism, for it's a deep thinker to recognize one. Surely, Akah's poems offer breath of freshness to Nigerian literary expression. His poems are rich in ideological persuasions, penetrating depth of reasoning and subtly sarcastic. The meanings of his poems are often discernible at the deep structure level. To understand his poetic thought often requires rigorous reading to unearth the deep seated meanings.

Remi Raji explains in the blurb of the collection that:

Barth Akpah announces his arrival through years of immersion and emergence from the circling pond of poetry; here is a new voice, passionate emissary of the fluent word, fixed upon the anthems of his land's narrative of malaise, of hypocrisy and strife, (blurb).

Raji has described Akpah as a poet who has been prepared through his exposure to previous generations of poets and being trained has now emerged a new voice telling the tales of the land: from the negative to the positive aspects of our national life. As other scholars before him, Raji does not explore Akpah's

commitment to leadership crisis neither does he recommend redemptive strategies to free the land from misleaders who are bent on ruining the land.

Also, Hyginus Ekwuazi explains that the collection:

*Land of Tales* is a maiden work, and it is spectacular what Barth Akpah has done: how he had woven ideas, images and feelings together, how he has made these ideas, images and feelings to meet, collide and scatter in all directions in the reader's mind.(Blurb).

Ekwuazi is spot on when he describes *Land of Tales* as a spectacular collection of poems because, according to him, Akpah weaves ideas, images and feelings together to express deep concerns about the nation. It is impossible therefore to read the poem without being impacted or even grasped the messages being artfully represented in the poems. Thus, Akpah's poems affect the mind, the soul and the spirit – in fact, the totality of one's being.

In his second collection, several scholars share their views on Akpah's poetry and they have been reviewed to expound the poetic depth of his messages.

Ayo Kehinde wrote the foreword to Akpah's collection entitled, *How Does the Rain Sound?* and in it, he remarks that: "Anybody who wants to appreciate the literary direction in Nigerian Poetry, in terms of its techniques, Styles and thematic preoccupations, Must read Bark Akpah's poems." (9).

The uniqueness of Akpah's poetry is the maturity with which he handles the themes. What begins as an experimentation with form and content has developed over time and has become manifest in the new collection. Therefore, Akpah appears to be signaling a new poetic agenda and direction for the poetry-loving audience to savor. Having read Kehinde's assessment of the poems, it is needful to add that Akpah will become a household name if he sustains his poetic offerings.

Also, Akin Tella explores Akpah's concern with private memories and public conscience in the new collection and explains thus: "Beyond the breadth and depth of the motifs, this collection of poetry deploys many tropes. The metaphors cut across many domains and fit well in the contexts of use." (94)

Apart from Akpah's strict awareness of the socio-political aberration in Nigeria, his literary awareness of styles and tropes are second to none and those are employed to reveal the themes, carry the reader along and orchestrate social redemption. Tella may not have dwelled directly on the leadership crisis issue and this obvious omission has necessitated this research.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

Barth Akpah in the poem collection, *Land of Tales* critiques leadership crisis in Nigeria, characterized by political indifference, power abuse, and social injustice, scripting a vision of social redemption that advocates re-orientation of the masses

through education and social movement as well as mass mobilization anchored on pluralistic vision and indoctrination.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LEADERSHIP CRISIS

The leadership crisis in Nigeria has been a recurring theme in literary works, with poets like Barth Akpah using their craft to critique the failures of leadership and its impact on society. Akpah's poetic narratives offer a scathing critique of the leadership crisis, exposing the rot of political indifference, power abuse, and social injustice that has plagued the nation. This chapter will examine the theme of leadership crisis in Akpah's work.

#### 2.1 Political Indifference

One glaring aspect of leadership crisis in the poetry of Akpah is political indifference, especially of the Nigerian ruling elites to the suffering of the people. One such poem is entitled, "Weep not..." Adopting a consolatory tone, the speaker lambasts the leadership for being unresponsive to the people's ordeal:

Weep not, my son  
 For the scepter is aloof to your cries  
 Blind to your tears  
 Dumb to your lamentations  
 Dead to your dream...(Akpah,54)

The literary quality of metonymy employed to convey the sense of leadership is impressive. The word, "Scepter" represents leadership, power and authority. Here it is invested with human quality, that of, indifference as it stays "aloof" to the

people's "cries". This presupposes that those in power are distant and unresponsive to the people's pleas. Suddenly, the scepter has become a person imbued with human perceptive vision, "eyes". But to the speaker's irritation, they (the leaders) are blind, which implies that the leaders are oblivious to the suffering and pain of the people. In the last line of the first stanza, we get to hear that they are dead to the people's dreams. This suggests that the leaders are not only unresponsive but also actively opposed to the people's aspirations.

The imagery emphasizes the vast disconnect between those in power and the people they are supposed to serve. The leaders' indifference to the people's suffering demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding. The poem suggests that the leaders are not addressing the needs and concerns of the people, leading to a sense of hopelessness. Through this poem, Akpah critiques the Nigerian political elite's indifference to the suffering of the people, highlighting the leadership crisis that arises from this disconnect. The poem is a powerful commentary on the need for leaders who are responsive, empathetic, and committed to serving the people.

The stanza that follows further emphasizes the theme of indifference and neglect by those in power:

Weep not, my son

For the scepter sees no life in your breath

Silent to the tailspin of your dreams

Calm to the hunger gnawing your belly

Be numbed to the bleak sunray. (54)

Still upholding the scepter image as a symbol of leadership, the speaker posits that the leaders do not view the people as human beings but as insignificant or unimportant. The leader's silence implies that they are unresponsive to the people's aspirations and hopes. Their sense of calm, rather than prompt response to the people's hunger highlights the leader's indifference to the people's basic needs and suffering. This is further conveyed through their be numbness at "the bleak sunray". This image suggests a sense of numbness and unresponsiveness to the harsh realities faced by the people.

The poem vividly portrays the suffering of the people, emphasizing the physical suffering. The image of "hunger gnawing your belly", symbolizes the physical toll of poverty and neglect. It also amplifies emotional suffering. The phrase "tailspin of your dreams" suggests a sense of despair and hopelessness. The poem paints a bleak picture of a leadership that is disconnected from the people, indifferent to their suffering, and unresponsive to their needs. The imagery and language used emphasize the depth of the crisis and the urgent need for change.

The final stanza reinforces the theme of indifference and neglect, with the scepter symbolizing power:

Weep, not my son

For the sceptre is deaf to raging agitations  
 Deaf to the dissonant throbbing of our hearts  
 Still to your future's pains  
 Lame to your pain's songs. (54)

The poem's artistic success is its use of metaphorical language. The expression "raging agitations" refers to the people's concerns and frustrations to which the leaders have refused to listen. They are impervious to legitimate yearnings of the people or their plight. Thus the image of deafness which has been repeated in the same stanza emphasizes the leaders' indifference to the physical and emotional needs of those being led. It implicates the leaders as being unfairly oppressive. Even worse is the leaders' unconcerned attitude about the long term consequences of their action on the people's lives. The poem concludes by underscoring the depth of the leadership crisis, emphasizing the need for change and accountability.

## **2.2 Abuse of Power**

Another aspect of leadership crisis in the poem of Akpah is abuse of power. The poem "Parliamentarians" is a scathing critique of the Nigerian political elite.

We are the law Brea(m)kern  
 In hallowed chambers  
 We set the rules  
 And cage the rules. (Akpah, 59)

The use of “brae(m)kerns” is a clever play on words, suggesting that those who are supposed to uphold the law are actually breaking it. The phrase “hallowed chambers” is ironic, implying that the supposed sanctity of the legislative body is tainted by corruption. The tone of the poem is one of outrage and disillusionment. The voice is critical and satirical, using irony and wordplay to convey the message. The title “ Parrymentarians” is a clever parody of the word “ Parliamentarians” implying that those in power are more interested in parrying or deflecting criticism rather than serving the people. The title reinforces the theme of corruption and hypocrisy in the poem, suggesting that those in power are more concerned with maintaining their own interests than with serving the public good. The title is an effective satirical device, using humor and irony to critique the political system and those who operate within it. Akpah in another poem, *The land of Locusts*

Dissonance built a ménage  
and planted spikelet in our homes.

The land is heavy with termites  
And seeing mass of hawks festering  
On the land’s soul. (Akpah, 31)

The theme of power abuse is indeed palpable in the stanza above. The imagery and language used suggest that those in power are exploiting and manipulating the

system for their own gain, leading to widespread suffering and disillusionment. The “termites” and “hawks” imagery suggests a system eaten away by corruption and exploitation. The “dissonance” and “obloquy” imply a deliberate attempt to distort and manipulate truth, further entrenching power abuse. The overall tone and language convey a sense of destruction and chaos, implying that power abuse is having a devastating impact on the society.

A country is born  
At the death of honor  
Now hatred reigns, and the obloquy that  
Swims...

The line “A country is born/ at the death of honor” suggests that the society has lost its moral compass and is now driven by base and ignoble motivations. The tone of the poem is one of outrage and despair, with a sense of urgency and concern. The voice is critical and reflective, using powerful imagery and symbolism to convey the message. The poem is a powerful and thought-provoking critique of a society in crisis. It suggests that the society is being ravaged by forces of destruction and decay, and that the values and institutions that once held it together are being eroded.

The poem suggests that in a country born at the “death of honor”, power abuse is likely to thrive, perpetuating a culture of corruption, manipulation and oppression. The poem implies that power dynamics in such a country are

characterized by exploitation. Those in power exploit their positions for personal gain, perpetuating corruption and abuse. Power is used to manipulate and control others, often through coercion, deception, or force. The prevalence of hatred and obloquy suggests a society where certain groups or individuals are marginalized, oppressed, or persecuted. The poem paints a bleak picture of a country where power abuse is endemic, and the consequences are far-reaching and devastating. The stanza above is a paradox which highlights the stark contrast between the ideals of a nation's birth and the harsh reality of its existence. The country's birth at the "death of honor" sets the tone for "hatred" and "obloquy" thrive. The paradox underscores the theme of inverted values. The country's foundation is built on the demise of honor, implying a lack of integrity and moral principles. The prevalence of hatred suggests a society marked by conflict, division and animosity. The image of obloquy (Shameful or contemptuous language) "swimming" implies a pervasive and entrenched culture of disrespect and vitriol. The paradox serves as a powerful commentary on the state of a nation. Highlighting the consequences of a leadership crisis and the erosion of values.

### **2.3 Social Injustice**

Besides the political indifference and abuse of power, Akpah also dwells on social injustice as factors contributing to leadership crisis in the poems. In the poem "Unwanted songs", the poet draws attention to the theme of social injustice. It begins thus:

I do not want to sing dirges  
 For the virtues of the land-the fumigations  
 Of hard work and its bounties at harvests  
 To many wishes  
 Of scent effort crowned in abundance  
 I do not want... ( Akpah, 56)

The speaker's reluctance to sing dirges for the virtues of the land suggests a society where values are inverted, and hard work is not rewarded. The "fumigations of hard work" is a powerful metaphor that suggests destruction or elimination of hard work. It implies the idea that the system or society is designed to stifle or destroy the value of hard work. The metaphor conveys a sense of disillusionment and frustration, implying that hard work is not yielding the expected results. By using this metaphor, the poet effectively conveys the sense of social injustice and partiality, emphasizing the disconnect between effort and reward.

I do not want to mourn the rogues  
 Stalking into huts at nightfall  
 My tears bewailing the loss  
 Of treasures bequeathed on us,  
 Tossed and traded by palace dim wits  
 Whose words and crowns

Drive fears and snivels into our eyes

I do not want... (56)

The poem is a scathing critique of corrupt leadership and the exploitation of power. It highlights the speaker's mourning of national treasures, which are being mismanaged or exploited by those in power. The image of rogues stalking into huts at nightfall suggests stealthy and predatory behaviour, implying that those in power are preying on the vulnerable. The treasures likely refer to the nation's resources or wealth, which are being mismanaged or exploited. The phrase, "palace dimwits" is a strong condemnation of the leaders, implying that they are incompetent and irresponsible. The poem is a powerful commentary on the consequences of corrupt leadership and the need for accountability and good governance. The phrase further implies a gross abuse of power, perpetuating social injustice. The poem suggests that those in power are not held accountable for their actions, allowing social injustice to persist. By highlighting these themes, the poem sheds light on the social injustices perpetuated by those in power.

The poem ends thus:

I do not want to say blame kismet

For the fate befallen us,

The poverty ravaging us,

In the midst of opulence. ( Akpah, 57)

The poem juxtaposes poverty and opulence, highlighting the vast disparities in wealth and living conditions. The speaker rejects the idea of blaming kismet, instead emphasizing human responsibility for the fate of the people. The poem implies that those in power have a responsibility to address poverty and inequality. The phrase “in the midst of opulence” suggests that poverty is not just a natural occurrence, but rather a symptom of a broader systemic failure.

Akpah’s portrayal of leadership crisis serves as a powerful indictment of failure of leadership in Nigeria. Through his poetic, Akpah exposes the deep-seated problems of political indifference, power abuse, and social injustice that have undermined the nation’s progress. By analyzing the forms, causes, and consequences of leadership crisis in Akpah’s work, this chapter has highlighted the poet’s nuanced understanding of the complexities of leadership and its impact on society.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RE-ORIENTATION OF THE MASSES

In the face of leadership crisis and social decay, reorientation emerges as a crucial strategy for social redemption in Barth Akpah's poetry. Through his poetic lines, Akpah advocates for a reorientation of social values and activation of memory as essential components of social redemption. This chapter will explore the concept of reorientation in Akpah's poetry, analyzing how it serves as a strategy of social redemption and transformation.

#### 3.1 Education

Akpah reorients the masses through education. In the poem, "Your cast", the poet conducts political education encouraging the masses to choose wisely before casting their votes:

Before you cast  
Sieve their past and sign their days.  
Play the old lyrics  
Of classical roulades  
And cross their thoughts  
In present, past and past per principles  
In chapters of time (Akpah, 58)

This poem presents a compelling framework for understanding how education can serve as a tool for mass re-orientation, particularly in contexts where people must

make critical decisions-likely political choices, given the final reference to “the booth of destinies”. This phrase presupposes that the people’s destinies depend on the choice being made at the ballot. The repeated refrain “Before you cast” establishes education as a prerequisite to action suggesting that informed decision-making requires systematic preparation. The poet advocates for a multi-layered educational approach that examines both historical context and present realities.

The sieve symbolizes the critical filtering of political histories-separating truth from propaganda in candidate records and party legacies. The poem advocates for rigorous historical vetting before electoral decision. The expression: “play the old lyrics/of classical roulades” represents the recycled political promises and familiar rhetorical flourishes that politicians deploy cyclically. “Classical roulades” – ornate musical embellishments symbolize the decorative but ultimate empty nature of much political discourse voters must learn to recognize when politicians are merely performing old scripts. Also, the poet calls on the masses to “cross their thoughts/In present, past and past per principles”. This demands temporal analysis: examining how politicians’ current positions align with their historical actions and stated principles across different periods. This prevents voters from being swayed by recent conversations or convenient position changes.

Before you cast;

cross their deeds  
 of sudden mansions  
 and their honey pots.  
 Seek their motions  
 And unravel their mysteries. 58

The above stanza shifts focus to materials conditions and class consciousness. The poet educates the masses further reorienting them to “cross their deeds” by asking them to question how the political leaders acquire their “sudden mansions” This phrase symbolizes unexplained wealth accumulations by politicians a critical issues in contexts where public office becomes a path to personal enrichment. The expression “honey pots” represents the patronage systems and corrupt practices that politicians use to build support networks. Effective political educations must help voter identify and reject candidates whose wealth suggests corruption.

The poet also asks the masses to “seek their motions\and unravel their mysteries” as a way of understanding the leaders. This is a call to trace political and financial connections, understand funding sources, and expose hidden agendas. This reflects the need for what contemporary discourse calls “follow the money” analysis in electoral choices.

Before you cast  
 Follow not their tawdry marbles  
 On caressing lips

And clappers of  
 Piercing rhetories on missions  
 Of burning chase. (58)

The poet warns the masses against being misled by “Tawdy marbles”, a metaphor for cheap, attractive but worthless political promises superficially appealing but lacking substance. The “caressing lips” symbolize the reductive delivery of these empty promises. Thus this warns against being swayed by charismatic presentation over substantive content. The word, clappers,” refers to the parts of bells that create sound. This symbolizes inflammatory political rhetoric designed to create noise rather than illuminate truth. Also, the phrase, burning chase represents the politics of division and conflict that politicians use to distract from their failure or inadequacies.

Before you cast  
 Flee from vampires thirst  
 Return their smiles and dimples gaze  
 With suspense and missions  
 And cast them out  
 In the booth of destines.(58)

The “vampires” symbolizes parasitic politicians who drain public resources and exploit citizens’ vulnerabilities. Their “thirst” represents insatiable appetite for power and wealth at public expenses. This metaphor particularly resonates in

contexts where politics becomes extractive rather than representative. The poet calls on the masses to be vigilant and focused on substantive policy goals rather than personality. “Return their smiles and dimples gaze/with suspense and missions” This advocates for maintaining healthy skepticism toward politicians charm offensives. “smiles and dimple gaze” represent the superficial appeal politicians deploy to win trust, while “suspense missions” suggest voters should remain vigilant and focused on substantive policy goals rather than personality. The final imperative: “cast them out\ In the booth of destines” transform the voting, booth into a space of collective purification not just selecting leaders but actually rejecting those who fail the educational test outlined in the previous stanzas.

Ultimately, the poem presents political education not as neutral information transfer but as active preparation for democratic combat-equipping citizens with the analytical tools needed to identify and reject political predators while selecting leaders genuinely committed to collective welfare. The poem suggests that re-orientation cannot occur through simple information transfer but requires developing analytical capabilities that allow people to navigate complex social and political landscapes independently. This aligns with transformative educative philosophies that see education not merely as knowledge transmission but as consciousness-raising that enables people to understand and potentially reshape their social conditions

### 3.2 Social Movement

The poet also suggests engaging in social movement as a way of re-orienting the masses to actualizing social redemption. This idea resonates in the poem, "The mongers." The poem is written in two stanzas. The opening stanza urges the masses thus:

Remembers...  
 The limbs  
 On errands  
 The blood  
 That whetted the land  
 The lives  
 That groaned beyond  
 The souls  
 That went to the never land.(55)

This poem functions as a powerful manifesto for social movement mobilization employing memory as the foundational catalyst for collective action. The structure and symbolism work together to transform individuals suffering into collective consciousness and ultimately revolutionary momentum. The repeated imperative "Remember..." operates both liturgical invocation and revolutionary summons. This is not passive nostalgia but active memory work-the deliberate cultivation of historical formation. The ellipsis after each "Remember" creates

dramatic pause, forcing contemplation and internalization of what follows. The limbs symbolizes the body parts of activists, the dangerous work of resistance: "The limbs\were grand gestures but everyday acts of defiance-distributing, leaflets, organizing meetings, crossing police lines. This democratizes heroism, showing that social movements are built through countless small acts of courage rather than singular dramatic moments.

The expression, "The blood/that whetted the land, "Blood as symbol transcends individual death to represent collective sacrifice that nourishes future struggle. The word, "whetted" which means sharpened, transforms blood from mere loss into active preparation-the land itself becomes sharpened, ready for harvest or battle. This suggests that martyrdom does not end but intensifies it, creating more fertile ground for movement growth. The groaning evokes both physical and spiritual transcendence,. "Beyond" suggests these lives continue to speak and influence from death, becoming ancestral voices that guide contemporary struggle. In social movement terms, this represents how past sacrifices becomes moral authority for present action. "Never land," as used in the poem, functions as deliberate ambiguity-simultaneously suggesting death (never returning to land of living) and eternal presence (never leaving the land of struggle). This transforms death from ending into permanent revolutionary presence, making fallen comrades ongoing participants in social movement.

In the second stanza, Akpah further presents the masses to engage in social movements;

Remember...

The hunger

That torments our bellies

The thirst

That exsiccates our tongues

The darkness

That chases our light.(Akpah,55)

This moves from historical martyrdom to immediate material condition. Hunger is not individual misfortune but collective oppression-the masses are systematically starved while oppressors feast. The visceral "torments our bellies" makes abstract economics exploitation physically unbearable, creating bodily demand for revolutionary action, Thirst operates on multiple revolutionary levels: material deprivation (we lack basic necessities),political silencing (our voices are dried up),and spiritual yearning (we thirst for justice)."Exsiccates"(completely dries)suggest systematic dehydration-the oppressive system is literally sucking the life from the masses. This darkness actively "chases" light, representing systematic suppression of truth, hope and revolutionary consciousness. The image suggests that oppression is not passive but aggressive-it hunts down and destroys enlightenment. Revolutionary action becomes necessary to restore light to the

The bullets  
That chase our breaths  
The quakes  
That bury our bones  
And many lying in the rubble  
Remember...(Akpah55)

Bullets represent state violence, while “chase or breaths” shows how oppression makes survival itself an act of resistance. The masses live under constant threat of death, their very breathing an act of defiance against systems that want them dead. This create permanent revolutionary condition-mere existence becomes rebellion. The word “quakes” symbolizes both natural disasters and social upheavals that destroys communities. The system creates conditions where ”our bones” are literally buried-generations of people destroyed by oppressive structures. This accumulated destruction demands revolutionary response. The “rubble” represents the human wreckage of systematic oppression-communities destroyed, lives shattered, dreams crushed. Also, the phrase “many lying” suggests both death and abandonment. The masses see themselves in this rubble, recognizing that revolutionary action is necessary for survival.

This poem employs several symbols which serve as revolutionary weapons. Firstly, the bloody human body is constructed and expressed as a battle ground. Everybody parts (limbs, blood, bellies, tongues, breaths, bones) becomes

a site of struggle. The poem shows how oppression attacks the physical body while revolutionary memory uses that same body as weapon for resistance.

Secondly, there is collective embodiment of the struggle. The shift from “the”(historical)to “our”(contemporary) transforms individual readers into collective revolutionary subject. Personal suffering becomes class consciousness, individual grievance becomes mass revolt. Thirdly, there is liturgical mobilization. The repeated “remember ...”creates ritual structure that can be chanted at demonstrations, recited at meetings, or performed as revolutionary ceremony. The poem becomes tool for mass mobilization.

The poem’s ultimate message is that remembering demands revolting. The accumulated weight of historical martyrdom and protect suffering creates moral obligation that can only be fulfilled through mass uprising. To remember without acting becomes betrayal of both the revolutionary dead and the currently oppressed.

Akpah’s concept of re-orientation offers a powerful strategy for social redemption, one that emphasizes the importance of education and social movement as means of achieving social redemption and promoting positive change. Through his poems, Akpah highlights the importance of challenging oppressive systems and structures, and advocating for the rights and dignity of marginalized communities. By exploring the theme of resistance, this chapter has demonstrated the significance of Akpah’s poetry as a call to action, inspiring

readers to engage in the struggle for social justice and human rights. Ultimately, Akpah's poetry offers a message of hope and resilience, reminding us that even in the face of adversity, resistance can be a powerful catalyst for change.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **MASS MOBILISATION**

In the complex landscape of contemporary social transformation, mass mobilization emerges as both a critical necessity and a profound challenge. The question of how societies move from recognition of problems to collective action for solutions requires careful examination of the mechanisms that can successfully engage diverse populations in sustained efforts toward social redemption. This chapter explores how two seemingly contrasting yet potentially complementary approaches to mass mobilization: the pluralistic vision that embraces diversity and contradiction as sources of strength, and strategic indoctrination that channels individual commitment toward collective transformation.

The urgency of this exploration becomes apparent when we consider that social redemption—the restoration of communities to health, justice, and prosperity—cannot be achieved through isolated individual efforts or top-down governmental interventions alone. It requires the active participation of masses who must be convinced not only that change is possible but that their personal investment in transformation will yield meaningful returns for themselves and their communities. This mobilization faces particular challenges in pluralistic societies where ethnic, religious, cultural, and ideological differences often fragment potential unity, creating the need for sophisticated strategies that can harness diversity rather than be paralyzed by it.

Through detailed analysis of literary works that model these approaches, this chapter examined how pluralistic views can transform apparent contradictions into creative tensions that energize social change, while exploring how constructive indoctrination can cultivate the mindsets and behaviors necessary for sustained collective action. Rather than viewing these approaches as mutually exclusive, we investigate their potential synthesis in creating mass movements capable of achieving genuine social redemption in complex, diverse societies.

#### **4.1 Pluralistic Vision**

Akpah articulates a pluralistic vision as a pathway for social mass mobilization through which social redemption can be achieved. In the poem "Niger area..." this idea is explored. This poem represents a profound meditation on Nigeria's complex socio-political landscape, using the recurring refrain "I have a country" to acknowledge and embrace the nation's inherent contradictions. The structure itself embodies a pluralistic vision by refusing to present a monolithic narrative of either despair or hope.

I have a country

Where hatred and love thrive.

I have a country

Where unity and disunity melt.

I have a country

Where peace and violence melt. (Akpah 77)

The poem's power lies in its deliberate juxtaposition of opposing forces that coexist within the national space. Each stanza pairs contradictory elements—"hatred and love", "unity and disunity", "peace and violence"—suggesting that true national identity emerges not from the dominance of one force over another, but from their dynamic interaction. This reflects a mature pluralistic understanding that societies contain multitudes and contradictions.

The verbs chosen are particularly significant. "thrive", "mold", and "melt" suggest active engagement rather than mere coexistence. These terms imply that opposing forces do not simply occupy the same space but interact creatively, potentially generating new possibilities. This linguistic choice models how pluralistic societies can transform difference into generative tension rather than destructive conflict.

The wedding metaphor in the poem is especially powerful, positioning the three major ethnic groups—Ohaneze (Igbo), Afenifere (Yoruba), and Arewa (Northern/Hausa-Fulani)—as witnesses to a marriage ceremony:

I have a country  
 Where death and life walked  
 down the aisles with  
 Ohaneze, Afenifere and Arewa counties  
 Chorus for better for worse  
 And let no one put asunder. (77)

The traditional vows "for better for worse" and "let no one put asunder" suggest a commitment to unity that transcends temporary difficulties. This reimagines ethnic diversity not as a source of division but as stakeholders in a shared covenant.

Rather than denying Nigeria's problems or pretending they do not exist, the poem creates space for honest recognition. This acknowledgment is the first step toward redemption—you cannot heal what you refuse to see. The pluralistic vision here involves accepting the full spectrum of national experience. Also, the poem does not suggest that hatred, violence, or disunity should be eliminated entirely, but rather that they should be held in creative tension with their opposites. This reflects a sophisticated understanding that social redemption does not come from achieving perfect harmony, but from managing contradictions constructively.

The poem mobilizes the masses not through exclusion of uncomfortable truths, but through inclusion of the full range of national experience. This approach can foster social redemption by offering hope through realism. Rather than offering false optimism, the poem suggests that redemption comes through engaging with reality as it is, not as we wish it were.

The pluralistic vision here ultimately serves social redemption by proposing that Nigeria's diversity is not an obstacle to overcome but a resource to be channeled.

The poem suggests that mass mobilization happens when citizens can see themselves and their experiences reflected in a natural narrative that excludes no one and includes everyone's truth. This inclusive approach to national identity offers a foundation for the kind of mass mobilization that could lead to genuine social transformation, because it begins with the recognition that every citizen has legitimate standing to contribute to the country's redemption.

#### **4.2 Indoctrination**

Akpah also suggests indoctrination of the masses as a way of urging mass mobilization for social redemption. This is the cornerstone of the poem "Today for Tomorrow". This poem functions as a powerful manifesto for mass mobilization through what could be termed "Productive Indoctrination"—a systematic reshaping of mindsets from passive acceptance to active engagement in personal and collective transformation.

I will till the land and make my ridges

I will water the verdure

Today for Tomorrow. (Akpah 76)

The opening stanza's agricultural imagery, "till the land," "makes my ridges," "water the verdure," offers a powerful work at both literal and metaphorical foundation for social transformation. This indoctrination strategy connects abstract concepts of social redemption to concrete, familiar activities that ordinary people can understand and emulate.

I will hasten my steps  
 Unto the doorsteps of sages  
 Topping their ups and downs  
 Growing my trees and not tears  
 In the light of relevance  
 Today, for tomorrow! (76)

The second stanza's focus on seeking wisdom from "sages" and "topping their ups and downs" refers to intellectual indoctrination. The poem advocates for active learning rather than passive consumption of knowledge. The phrase "growing my trees and not tears" creates a binary choice between productive action and unproductive lamentation. This poem mobilizes masses by democratizing wisdom—suggesting that anyone can access sage knowledge if they "hasten" their steps. The indoctrination here works by making intellectual growth seem both urgent and attainable, while simultaneously rejecting victimhood mentality as incompatible with social redemption.

I will sing the song of time  
 Make hay with the sun  
 And scat from pangs of privation  
 Housed in procrastination  
 The lazy man's comfort  
 Not for me, the fainthearted

Today, for tomorrow. (Akpah 76)

The stanza above directly confronts economic passivity through aggressive rejection of procrastinating. Terms like "pangs of privation", "lazy man's comfort", and "fainthearted" create negative associations with inaction, while "make hay with the sun" promotes opportunistic productivity. The indoctrination strategy here employs shame and pride as motivating forces. By labelling procrastination as "comfort for the lazy," the poem stigmatizes inaction while valuing industriousness. This creates social pressure for conformity to productive behavior, a classic technique in mass mobilization campaigns. The constant emphasis on "today for tomorrow" indoctrinates readers into future-oriented thinking, countering the present-focused mindset that often perpetuates poverty and social stagnation.

I will weave my basket now  
 And carry my future arias  
 Into the marketplace of hopes  
 And unbar the nudity  
 Of soothing grace

Today for tomorrow. (Akpah 76)

The final stanza's imagery of "weaving baskets" and "carrying future arias/into the marketplace of hopes" combines practical skills with artistic expression. This represents indoctrination into a holistic vision of human development that

includes spiritual and creative dimensions alongside material productivity. The phrase "unbar the nudity of soothing grace" suggests that social redemption requires removing barriers to divine or natural blessing. This spiritual dimension in the indoctrination strategy appeals to religious sensibilities while maintaining secular applicability.

The poem's indoctrination approach to mass mobilization is sophisticated because it avoids external coercion, instead fostering internal motivation for behaviors that serve both individual advancement and collective social redemption. By making productive learning, and spiritual growth seem personally beneficial rather than imposed, the poem creates sustainable motivation for the kind of mass behavioral change that could transform society.

The analysis of pluralistic views and indoctrination as strategies for mass mobilization reveals that social redemption in diverse societies requires more nuanced approaches than traditional either-or frameworks typically provide. The problems examined demonstrate that effective mass mobilization can simultaneously embrace complexity and promote focused action, suggesting that the apparent tension between pluralistic acceptance and directed commitment may be more apparent than real.

The pluralistic approach offers the crucial foundation of inclusivity that prevents mass movements from becoming instruments of exclusion or oppression by acknowledging contradicting and celebrating diversity. This approach creates

space for all members of society to see themselves as stakeholders in transformation rather than targets of change. However, without the focused energy that purposeful indoctrination can provide, pluralistic movements risk dissipating into ineffective tolerance that celebrates difference without channeling it toward concrete improvements.

Conversely, indoctrination approaches offer the focused commitment and shared vision necessary for sustained collective action.

The systematic cultivation of productive mindsets, future-orientation, and personal responsibility can transform individual consciousness in ways that aggregate into significant social change. Yet, without an inclusive framework that pluralistic views provide, indoctrination risks becoming coercive, exclusionary, and manipulative, ultimately undermining the very social redemption it seeks to achieve.

The synthesis suggested by this essay points toward a model of mass mobilization that combines the inclusive breadth of pluralistic views with the focused depth of emancipative indoctrination. This synthesis requires sophisticated leadership capable of maintaining creative tension between acceptance and direction, between embracing what is and working toward what could be. The future of social redemption may well depend on our ability to mobilize masses through approaches that are simultaneously inclusive and

directive, accepting and transformative, honoring both the complexity of human society and the simplicity of human hope for better lives.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The examination of Bath Akpah's poetic oeuvre reveals a wider deeply engaged with the fundamental tensions that define contemporary African leadership and society. Through his careful scripting of leadership crisis and social redemption, Akpah emerges not merely as a chronicler of dysfunctions but as a visionary architect of possibility. His poetry functions as both mirror and lamp reflecting the stark realities of failed governance while illuminating pathways toward collective renewal.

Throughout this essay, we have observed how Akpah's treatment of leadership crisis operates on multiple registers. His poetic voice captures the immediate devastation wrought by corrupt and incompetent leadership while simultaneously excavating the deeper historical and cultural roots of these failures. The poet's genius lies in his refusal to present crisis as an endpoint. Instead, his work reveals crisis as a necessary prelude to transformation, a clearing of ground that makes genuine renewal possible.

The concept of social redemption in Akpah's poetry proves equally complex and nuanced. Rather than offering simplistic solutions or utopian visions, the poet grounds his redemptive imagination in the lived experience of ordinary people. His characters—farmers, students, market women, unemployed youth—become agents of change not through grand gestures but through small acts of

resistance, solidarity, and moral courage. This democratic nature of redemption represents one of Akpah's most significant contributions to contemporary African literature.

Akpah's stylistic choices serve his thematic concerns with remarkable precision. His deployment of indigenous metaphors alongside contemporary political vocabulary creates a linguistic hybrid that mirrors the cultural complexity of modern African experience. The poet's code-switching between English and local languages reflects not confusion but a strategic multilingualism that expands the expressive possibilities of his medium.

The rhythmic structures of his verse often echo traditional art forms while addressing thoroughly modern predicaments. This formal innovation allows Akpah to speak simultaneously to multiple audiences, urban intellectuals and rural communities, local readers and global observers. His poetry thus becomes a bridge between worlds, facilitating dialogue across the divides that leadership crisis has often widened.

One of the most striking aspects of Akpah's work is his ethical approach to representing suffering and struggle. While unflinching in his depiction of social problems, he consistently avoids the twin pitfalls of voyeurism and despair. His characters retain their dignity even in degradation, which reflects the poet's deeper commitment to literature as a tool of empowerment rather than mere documentation.

The redemptive vision that emerges from Akpah's poetry is neither naive nor abstract. It is grounded in specific cultural practices, particular landscapes, and concrete human relationships. His imagination of renewal draws heavily on indigenous wisdom traditions while remaining open to external influences that might contribute to positive change. This balanced approach offers a model for postcolonial literature that neither romanticizes the past nor uncritically embraces Western modernity.

The themes explored in Akpah's poetry resonate far beyond their immediate African context. In an era of global leadership crisis, his work offers insights relevant to readers worldwide. His demonstration that poetry can address political realities without sacrificing aesthetic sophistication provides encouragement to writers everywhere who seek to make their art socially relevant. The poet's integration of traditional wisdom with contemporary analysis suggests productive directions for future scholarship. His work invites comparative studies with other poets who have similarly engaged with questions of leadership and social transformation. Additionally, his innovative use of multilingual techniques offers rich material for investigating into the evolving nature of postcolonial literary expression.

Barth Akpah's poetry ultimately argues for the possibility of renewal in the face of seemingly intractable problems. His scripting of leadership crisis serves not to paralyze but to mobilize, not to despair but to inspire action. The social

redemption he envisions emerges not from the intervention of messianic leaders but from the collective awakening of ordinary citizens to their own power and responsibility.

In this vision lies perhaps the most radical aspect of Akpah's work. By locating the potential for transformation within communities rather than political leadership, he offers a fundamentally different approach to social change. His poetry suggests that redemption begins not with the replacement of bad leaders with good ones, but with the cultivation of new forms of consciousness that make exploitation and manipulation impossible.

The enduring value of Akpah's poetry lies in its insistence that neither leadership crisis nor social redemption represents a final state. Both are ongoing processes, continuously shaped by the choices and actions of individuals and communities. In this understanding his work offers not just analysis but invitation—a call to readers to participate in the ongoing work of social transformation that his verse both documents and inspires.

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