



Satire in post-independence African plays: A study of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *Prison Graduates* (2015)



Research article



This article is published in Nairobi, Kenya by Royallite Global in the:

Research Journal in Advanced Humanities, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2021

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Article Information

Submitted: 4th December 2020

Accepted: 29th March 2021

Published: 10th April 2021

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was reported by the authors

Funding: None



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ISSN: 2708-5945 (Print)

ISSN: 2708-5953 (Online)



To read the paper online, please scan this QR code

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Abstract

Post-independence African plays have been characterized by the disillusionment of playwrights with African reality. Corruption, which is chiefly political, and of other forms, and other pertinent neo-colonial issues have been religiously dealt with by these writers in their creative works. Through the tents of postcolonial theory, this article attempts to analyze Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *Prison Graduates* as a satire. A normative research method, which is based entirely on the impressionistic observations of the investigator was used in the data collection. Practically, satire has rightly become a preferred form of writing for various writers to express their disillusionment. In his text, Mawugbe uses satire to create a real African world which looks beyond foreign aids in order to claim African dignity and identity.

Keywords: African play, African identity, humour, Mawugbe, realism, satire



How to Cite:

Essuman, J., Ben-Daniels, F., & Ohene-Adu, K. B. . (2021). Satire in post-independence African plays: A study of Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *Prison Graduates* (2015). *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 2(1). Retrieved from <https://royalliteglobal.com/advanced-humanities/article/view/500>



Public Interest Statement

At the crossroads between tradition and modernity, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe was a multitalented pioneer of Ghanaian theatre. Born on 21st April 1954 in Kumasi, Ghana, he was the prolific author of over twenty plays, hundreds of articles (published under the female pseudonym 'Araba Season' in *The Mirror*), and the novel *My Father's Song*. His play, *The Prison Graduates*, won the BBC World Service/British Council International Radio Playwriting Competition 2009 in the English as a 2nd Language category. (Africa Book Collective, accessed 10/04/2021)

Introduction

Drama as an art is a powerful force towards revealing and examining societal or individual follies and ills. Satirical drama therefore becomes the type of drama that is used in performing such acts. This article, however, aims at presenting analytically the use of satire as a literary technique in Efo Kodjo Mawugbe's *Prison Graduates*. It critically looks at the writer's style and approach in using this form in his work of art and juxtaposes the witty use of satire in it.

African Literature during the pre-independence era focused on struggle for freedom from the colonizers. Writers during this era were very much busy in trying to shape a cultural nationalistic fiction as a way asserting African or indigenous identity. Such literatures were written when the Africa was hopeful that after independence, it will not remain as it is and that it will prosper. Such works thus "tended to be dominated by a forward-looking optimism" (Pandurang, 2010). Such hopeful perception, however, birthed despair shortly after Africa had gotten independence. The swift change of governance did not culminate into bringing about the desired change that the African continent had longed for. The very people who were the hope of the continent disappointed Africa. They became power-drunk thus instead of caring for the people who trusted them, they ended up repeating what the colonial masters did. Corruption and other political failures left the people only disappointed. Experiencing these, writers like Ayi Kwei Armah, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and many others had to take a second look at their duties as writers. They swiftly shifted towards the mode of writing where they could show their disgust and disappointment. Since satire has proven to be the only way to cause reformation, these writers resorted to the use of satire because they found it as the best mode and more practical and useful. This style of writing assisted them to clearly demonstrate their pledge to and involvement with the painful problems of their people.

Literature review: textual analysis

The play, *Prison Graduates* is a political satire set in Ghana and talks about serious issues on a light note. It highlights situations in Ghana and Africa as a whole. We are presented with four prisoners, Chaka, Gomido, Abutu and BasaBasa, who are fortunate to have been granted amnesty. As free men, they begin to think about how they can make use of the freedom granted them. Thus, each

gives readers his personal account on how such freedom given would be utilized. As these men reveal to the audience their varying aspirations in life outside the prison walls, the audience is overwhelmed by the in-depth focus of these ex-convicts. Their hopes in life reveals to their audience the political and the socio-economic situations in Africa and Ghana in particular. At the end, with the exception of Abutu who dreams of making a living out of coffin making, three of these ex-convicts become doubtful of their survival outside prison, hence their return.

Mawugbe's first satirical punch is aimed at Christians in the African setting. Mawugbe shows his displeasure towards the attitude of some Christians in the African society. This is clearly shown at the very beginning of the play where a Lone Voice presents to the audience what he calls a remixed-like version of Psalm 23. A critical observation of the Psalms being recited reveals the horrible nature of the prison yard. The very happenings of the prison yard has been exposed to readers. The Lone Voice says: "He maketh us to lie down on cold dungeon floors . . . He locketh us behind the steel bars and says He restoreth our self-esteem . . ." (p.2). Readers are made to wonder who the Personal Pronoun "He" in the song represents. The very fact that the pronoun begins with an initial capital shows that its referent is God. Can one therefore conclude by saying that the Voice was making mockery of the deity of God? However, the successive lines: "Yea though we live through this valley of our prison sentences, we'll fear no prison officer, for thou art with us. Thy rod and thy staff . . ." (p.2) which have more voices joining in creates another form of confusion. Within this statement, the audience realizes that the voices make reference to the very meaning of the biblical allusion. "Thy" as used in the statement refers to God as stated in the Bible. The question therefore remains, who is the 'He' used in the song representing and consequently being mocked?

It is not surprising to discover later that Gomido tells the Chaplain that: "And may the same Lord delete your name from the register of His good shepherds" (p.6) after the Chaplain has asked for mercy from the Lord to be shown on him despite his impudent nature. One can therefore glean from this that the personal pronoun 'He' used in the song, does not necessarily refer to God but rather His representative on earth in the person of the Chaplain of the prisons. This is aptly confirmed by the Chaplain after he has been blamed by Abutu for being responsible for their emaciated selves. He retorts: "Mine was to feed you spiritually which I believe I did to the best of my ability" (p.5). This is very unfortunate on the part a Chaplain. He is not much concerned about the life of the prisoners and as he says, his task is to take care of the prisoners, spiritually. Whatever befalls the prisoner in the prison walls is not the concern of the Chaplain. This aptly confirms the use of the personal pronoun 'He' in the song. The Chaplain becomes the referent hence, making them 'to lie down on cold dungeon floors' and locking them 'behind the steel bars'. Mawugbe, thus, through the use of biblical allusion, achieves satirizing religion—religious hypocrisy—as in the words of Gomido: "Osofo, this is my assport, stamp the multiple entry visa in there. You hypocrite, You Serpent!" (p.5) The satirization of religion is not a new concept. For instance,

Moliere's *Tartuffe*, first performed in 1664, is a typical example of a religious satire. The play depicts the self-centred nature of religious leaders and the gullibility of religious faithfuls. Also, Wole Soyinka's play, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, also satirizes religion by throwing light on the self-centred and manipulative nature of religious leaders. The recurring subject matter of religious hypocrisy by satirists is a clear evidence of the level of importance of the subject matter to these playwrights. This is obviously due to the fact that religious mishaps continue to occur consistently.

It is for this reason that Mawugbe spends the first part of the First Leg of his play, satirizing religion and religious leaders. As such, it is vividly exhibited in the interaction between the prisoners, in particular Gomido, and Chaplain that the type of satire employed by the writer is Juvenalian. Gomido does not take lightly the Chaplain's attitude, hence, his reactions. He demonstrates a kind of moral indignation and scorn towards the Chaplain. Words such as 'double-tongued charlatan', 'hypocrite', 'Serpent' (p.5) and 'wolf' (p.6) are among the harsh words that Gomido uses in describing the Chaplain. The harshness of these words makes Chaka who is seen as the leader of the group react: "Those are very strong words to use against a Man of God" (p.5). It is obvious that Gomido is not happy and enthused about the character of the Chaplain. He further shows his hostility by removing his trousers and bending down to directly show his buttocks to the face of the Chaplain. Chaka who feels very uncomfortable about the attitude of Gomido shouts: "Number 96, Stop it" (p.5). This is a clear indication that the playwright through Gomido demonstrates his displeasure towards the hypocrisy that exists in the religious milieu of Africa and Ghana in particular.

Additionally, Mawugbe metaphorically presents the happenings of the colonial times. The happenings in the early part of Leg 1 is a parody of what happened to Africans during the colonial times. In Ghana specifically, the present castles in Cape Coast, Elmina and Accra are historical evidence of the capture of men, women and children bound for the West to work as slaves. The ships that brought in the slave merchants also brought in missionaries who came to supposedly deliver the natives from their 'savage cultural practises' and were also in favour of enslaving people of a different race and religion. Battle and Sawula (2013) state: "European Christians initially saw non-Christians as "natural slaves." With New World expansion, however, Europeans came to primarily associate Africans with the institution of slavery. To explain this racial shift from a Judeo-Christian worldview, sixteenth and seventeenth century theologians merged Aristotle's theory of "natural slaves" with the biblical [Curse of Ham](#)." This was clear evidence that as far as the European missionaries were concerned, the Christian concept of love and equality did not apply to Africans. As such, men and women were enslaved by Europeans while their missionaries looked on. Strong men were captured as slaves and put into dungeons of European castles without having committed any crime against their captors. Perhaps, it is for this reason that the opening of the play does not tell us the wrongs of these prisoners. This has been testified by many African writers in their works of art. For instance, in Kofi Anyidoho's "Go Tell Jesus", he uses rhetorical questions

to show his disapproval of the behaviours of the white missionaries. In his poem he asks: "Ask Him if He said/Men are all equal or/Men are un-equal?/Who did he say God is?/A bearded old boogy/sitting far up in the skies/watching and not caring?" The persona wonders why God is not intervening in the affairs of the suffering masses after the missionaries had taken over the land, thus putting forward these questions. It is of no doubt then that the Chaplain would only be concerned about the spiritual welfare of the prisoners at the expense of other concerns of the prisoners.

Another aspect of religion which has been ridiculed is the exploitative nature of religious leaders. Gomido shares his interest in being a pastor. He clearly states that "I want to fight Satan from the pulpit." (p.19) Gomido's interest in establishing a church is born out of the fact that he would want to capitalize on the gullibility of some Christian folks. To be able to exploit his members, he begins to manipulate them psychologically. After assuming the role of a charismatic preacher, he says: "The good book teaches us to lay up our treasures where?" the very fact that his focus is directly on 'treasures' indicates his intentions. He continues to emphasize his desire to exploit his congregants by saying: "Yes, But you can only get there through your Bishop. Your Bishop, is God's own chosen gatekeeper to the divine treasure throne of Heaven. So, channel all your treasures here on earth through, who?" His motive is now clear to readers. He uses the word 'only' which means there is no other alternative to get to the treasures of Heaven. He extends his psychological manipulation by laying emphasis on the fact that he is 'God's own chosen gatekeeper'. This indicates that there is no other person apart from him to help his congregants to store up their treasures in Heaven. This is the kind of exploitation that exists in the religious environment. Wole Soyinka typifies this in his play *The Trials of Brother Jero* where Brother Jero the main character who is a Man of God exploits his congregants. He classifies them as 'customers' and shows how he manages to keep them in his net:

Jero: I am glad I got here before any customers – I mean worshippers – well, customers if you like. I always get that feeling every morning that I am a shop-keeper waiting for customers. The regular ones come at definite times. Strange, dissatisfied people. I know they are dissatisfied because I keep them dissatisfied. Once they are full, they won't come again. (p. 20)

This statement confirms the exploitative nature of some pastors in the African society. For a pastor to call his members, 'customers', clearly indicates that he is a business man with a commodity to sell for money. In this case, the commodity is the manipulation of the Christian word of God to serve his whims and caprices. This is why Jero mentions that he always feels like a 'shop-keeper' every morning. It is no wonder that Jero keeps on exploiting his congregants. The very fact that Brother Jero is the reason for the dissatisfaction of the members tells readers that his intentions

are just to exploit and manipulate the congregants. Likewise, Gomido who says he is 'the chosen gatekeeper' also confirms that exploitative nature of religious leaders. And this is successfully ridiculed by the playwright through the use of humour.

Notwithstanding the above, religious leaders' comical affection for grandiloquent names and titles have been ridiculed. Man's love for titles and hollow honorifics have blinded him to the extent that the very nature of the God he professes to serve has eluded him. When Gomido is introduced to the congregants, the audience is bombarded with a long list of titles: "De Honourable...Most Holy...Very Reverend...Bishop...Pastor...Evangelist...Prophet...Doctor... Gomey!" (p.21) These and many more are the titles and names that religious leaders clad themselves with. How honourable is someone who has an ulterior motive to exploit members of his church? He calls himself 'Most Holy' yet he is the very person who teaches his congregants how to lie in order to attend church. He tells the congregants that: "If your work is going to bother you, just report sick at the hospital. Ask the Doctor to give you five days sick-off. After the fifth day you go back for a review and request for additional five days or ask for a ten-day casual leave from your employers. Amen!" (p.22) The so-called 'Most Holy' skilfully teaches his congregants how to lie to their employers in order to attend a "ten-day power-packed Holy Spirit-filled Crusade" from "8:30am to 6:00pm" knowing very well that the time for the crusade is the same time for his members to work and contribute their quota to the development of the economy. He exhibits his unpatriotic nature by asking members to forget about going to work but rather attend the crusade. This is however ironic, hence the playwright ridiculing such behaviours and absurd keenness for grandiloquent titles.

As already established, this play is a political satire and Mawugbe through the use of irony ridicules the follies of political leaders in the African continent. After freedom is granted to these four ex-convicts, Chaka, the self-imposed leader of the group, asks Abutu how he feels about the freedom granted them. Abutu responds: "to tell the truth, I feel like a nation having just attained independence after centuries of colonial rule" (p.13). Abutu through the use of simile, compares himself to an independent nation. Their imprisonment is rightly compared to colonial rule. The excitement that comes with freedom from colonial oppression and rule is shown by Abutu. Likewise, BasaBasa comments: "Na true. So make we change una names. . ." (p.13) Gomido is not left out on this. He says: ". . . We need new names and a new freedom song. A national anthem" (p.13). During the colonial times, names of persons and countries were changed due to the fact that the colonial masters found many of the local names difficult to pronounce. For instance, Ghana was called the Gold Coast by the European masters. Till date, there are still streets, towns and suburbs in Ghana named after colonial masters or European cities. For instance, the coastal town, Ogua, still retains its colonial name, Cape Coast. Mawugbe depicts this in his play through the use of numbers as names for the prisoners instead of their original names. To confirm the need for change in names and flag, Abutu comments:

Abutu: We need to be original.
We need something of our own.
To reflect our new status...
Our sovereignty...
We need to create for ourselves a new identity...
A new personality
A new flag... (p,13)

As a matter of fact, the redefinition of the African identity became the focus of many African countries after gaining independence. Having suffered identity crisis under colonial rule, there was massive agitation for redefinition of the African identity after becoming independent. For instance, after independence, Ghana changed its name from the Gold Coast to Ghana. This is exactly what Mawugbe's ex-convicts agree to do. Abutu demonstrates in his statement that there is the need to "create for ourselves a new identity" (p.13) which will help "to reflect our new status..." (p.13) But the very question that one may ask is, has this been achieved or the identity only lies in our names and flag? It is very disheartening to see that the very focus of the freedom granted has been misplaced. Africans have still not been able to "create for ourselves a new identity", "to reflect our new status..." as independent states and people.

For instance, in Ama Ata Aidoo's short story, "For Whom Things Did Not Change", her character, Kobina, expresses his disappointment as to why Africans are incapable of our own production: " 'I'm mad but I think I'm sane enough not to drink pressed, homogenised, dehydrated, re-crystallised, thawed, diluted and heaven-knows-what-else- orange juice, imported from countries where oranges do not grow...' " (p.17). Africans after independence were poised to make great changes in their countries but this is the exact opposite of what pertains in Africa presently. As such, Mawugbe succeeds in using irony to ridicule the very nature of our leaders who after independence still rely on their colonial masters.

Probably, Africans were not prepared enough for this freedom given them. This, Abutu confirms: "Can you imagine you are in this prison...For so many years...Then, one day, out of the blue, you have all the freedom in the world hurled at you...in fact, thrown at you." (p.10) Abutu's statement calls for much attention. The expression 'out of the blue' gives credence to the fact that the freedom attained was completely unexpected. To make matters worse, he says that the freedom is 'thrown' at them. The use of this diction indicates that there was no form of preparedness or agreement between the colonizer and the colonized as Chaka likens it to a basketball. This lack of preparedness is perchance what has accounted for the failed leadership and economy in most African countries hence, the very disillusionment of independence.

Again, as a political satire, the cunning nature of politicians has been satirized. Gomido shares his interest in politics which incites laughter out of his friends. He believes that the only way he could 'fight for human rights' is to 'stand for elections' and 'go to parliament'. However, Basabasa's statement shows that African politicians only promise the citizens what never becomes a reality. The welfare of the citizens is not of much concern to African politicians. This is captured in the statement of Basa as "hungry people". The people of the land are hungry because their leaders do not have their problems at heart. Poverty has engulfed the African continent and leaders are not in an inch concerned about the plight of the citizenry. Such cunning nature of politicians have been captured in Gomido's response to Basa's question on his package for the many suffering housewives in the countryside: "For us, the term Housewife shall not be part of the political lexicon. DOMESTIC ENGINEERS shall be the replacement. That, I think, is much more dignifying, even if only semantically." (p.45) Basa's question is very clear but Gomido cunningly avoids giving a response. Instead of stating what his party intends doing to help housewives suffering in the rural areas, he just changes the name from housewife to 'domestic engineers'. This is absolutely what the citizens are not expecting from their leaders—change of names. Their welfare should be paramount but the leaders have relegated the welfare of the citizens to the background hence, the poor nature.

In addition, the playwright is able to ridicule politicians through the use of incongruities. The inconsistencies that exist in their responses and policies clearly shows their motive of becoming politicians. Gomido's response to what policies would be put in place to check wife molesters in the society, gives credence to the incongruous policies that our politicians put in place. He says: "...We shall introduce a new concept of women empowerment that shall require all women to be trained in martial arts and equipped with boxing gloves to be worn over their minds for mental defense" (p.46) From this statement, it is evident that there is no proper policy to check domestic violence. One is made to think from the beginning of the response that, his party is going to do something positive to benefit women. However, he proposes a futuristic chaos. Women will be trained in martial arts and will be given boxing gloves. One wonders how this would help mitigate the problem of domestic violence. To worsen the case, he adds that such empowerment shall only be 'worn over their minds for mental defense.' Does fighting back solve the problem of domestic violence? Obviously, not only do politicians lack better policies for the betterment of the citizenry but also they heighten the predicaments of the populace.

Moreover, bribery and corruption among African leaders which has bedevilled African nations has been duly addressed. Corruption has remained a very huge challenge for the world. African countries have battled with this canker for so long but there has not been any proper antidote to nib it in the bud. It is not surprising then to see many African writers expressing their disgust towards corruption in their works. Mawugbe also joins the wagon to fight against corruption which has plagued our society. To address this, he uses his character, Gomido to reveal

to his audience the level of corruption that exists in the civil service. A mention is made of the Internal Revenue service:

That is where you make all the big bucks. A guy is supposed to pay tax of twenty thousand cedis. You arrive at a gentleman's agreement with him. He pays only twenty cedis, you enter extra zeros as if he has paid in full and he gives you a gift of ten thousand cedis. (p. 54)

From this statement, it is unambiguous to state that this is the exact attitude of some civil servants in the society which the playwright seeks to ridicule. It does not only bother on the Revenue collector but also the tax payer. A patriotic citizen will not condone and connive with government officials to 'steal' money from the state. This kind of thieving which Chaka defends with his statement: "everybody in the civil service does it" (p.54) is most unfortunate. It is very shameful to know that the very people who are to protect the coffers of the State and ensure the right appropriation of State funds end up enriching themselves with these monies. Gomido emphasizes: "that is the lubricant that keeps the engine of the African civil service running...carrying only the rich and leaving the poor behind on the tracks." (p.54) The metaphor used in the statement shows that without bribery, the civil service sector does not function appropriately. Their service—engine—stops functioning if one decides not to give out money—lubricant. The ultimate hazard that this creates is the enrichment of the leaders and the impoverishment of the citizenry.

Another disheartening issue that Mawugbe seeks to address is the citizens' zeal to travel to foreign countries specifically Europe to seek for greener pastures. Abutu makes readers aware that he will not "be staying in this bishop-corrupted, cocaine-juiced and God forsaken country Southside of the vast Sahara for one more day..." (p.25) It is clear that the condition of the land forces him to look for greener pastures outside his motherland. It is surprising to know that some of the reasons that these embassies give to applicants to turn down their applications are very dehumanizing. The reason for refusing Abutu visa is very appalling. The female consular officer tells him that: "Well, I am sorry, by the look in your eyes and the shape of your nose, I feel convinced you are not the type who'll return to this country if you ever stepped in Europe." (p.33) This and others are some of the reasons that people are given for refusing them visas.

However, the disheartening aspect of this situation which Mawugbe seeks to draw the audience's attention to is the amount of money that people who call themselves 'poor' pay into European accounts. It is reported that on the average, we enrich the economies of these European countries with a whopping amount of "9.9billion cedis" a month and "188.8billion cedis" (p.35) a year. How on earth can such an amount of money end up in the accounts of European countries, impoverishing us the more and enriching their economies? Abutu refers to this as "pure diplomatic

extortion" (p.35) and sarcastically summarizes it by saying: "that is the unsolicited contribution by our poor folks from this God forsaken side of the Atlantic Ocean, to the economy of former colonial masters." (p. 36).

In fact, this unfortunate desire among Africans to migrate to the West continues as a result of what Mawugbe's characters have described so far—self-centred politicians, corrupt public systems that demand bribery in order to function, amongst other myriads of problems. And since the problems never seem to end, Mawugbe's characters continue their dramatization of these shifting situations—they turn their satirical lenses on Africa's health system. The characters quickly move to the enactment of a hospital scene where Basa is told to pay fifty dollars (\$50). Basa becomes amazed because he is aware that in Ghana, the local currency is not dollars. He questions Nurse I: "...You be Nurse or you be foreign exchange bureau operator?" (p. 68) This is a clear indication that Basa is shocked about the fact that they are being charged dollars. In addition to this, the hospital worsens the situation of the citizenry as they run under the system of 'cash and carry'. This means that without making initial payment, one cannot receive medical care from "... A Government Teaching Hospital and not a street side Market." (p.68) This makes one wonder if Government hospitals are built for only the rich because the poor in the likes of Basa and Gomido will never receive medical care without making deposits. To complicate issues, readers are told that the fifty dollars that Basa paid was just "... for the doctor guessing which lab tests you probably needed to undergo." (p.71) This system of money changing hands even before the least consultation with a health worker can occur is what leads to the death of Gomido.

In addition to the criticism of the provision of health service is the inadequacy that exists in the health sector. The facilities that exist in the hospital leave very little to be desired. Orderly, the nurse's assistant, makes it clear to Basa that there are not enough beds in the hospital and that they need to 'improvise' by pulling two benches together to form a bed. Orderly humorously states: "one is a bench, but two equals a hospital bed" (p. 73). This is very disturbing, a sick person sleeping on benches and in Basa's confused state, he questions Orderly: "You wan put de live person for de top of hard wooden bench, as if say ibi cow meat una dey put for butcher table! Abi?" (p.73) The comparison that Basa makes in his statement clearly shows the uncomfortable nature of the bench put together for a sick person. He makes it so clear in his statement that; this condition is not good for humans. But to add insult to injury, Orderly says that "That is what we call P.I.S. Presidential Initiated Suite. Look, you should be grateful to God that your brother has a double bench. I wish you could take a trip to the maternity Block to see things for yourself." (p. 73) For Orderly to tell Basa that whatever they do for the sick as improvisation is 'Presidential Initiated Suite', reveals that the political leaders including the President are very much aware of the conditions that the health sector is battling with. Indeed, the situation at the maternity ward is very appalling. It is difficult to come to terms with the fact that, "over there both mothers and their newly born babies lie comfortably sleeping on the bare cold terrazzo floor. Six newly-born

fine babies sharing one cot." (p. 74) How comfortable is the state of mothers and babies? This shows the sarcastic tone of the statement and as a matter of fact, criticizing the health sector. And Orderly tells Basa that: "... they are very grateful for the generosity of the charitable medical system we operate." (p. 74) Indeed, this act of service is charitable and generous! This is to say that African leaders, in particular politicians, are not so much concerned about the plight of the poor and the conditions of the Government hospitals hence, the playwright's criticism.

Ultimately, it is heart-breaking to note that the freedom given to these prisoners comes to not. They decide to return to the prison because for them, life outside the prison is difficult. The ex-convicts recount their experiences:

Abutu: Let us simply get out of here.

Gomido: Out of here to where?

Abutu: To somewhere...anywhere...Just somewhere we can get some shelter and...

Basa: And Food!...Food! Some of we de hungry. (p.80)

The conversation above shows clearly the condition of the ex-convicts outside the prison. Having been granted freedom, they believed that life will go on as expected—easy for them—but this is not what embraces them after their release. They come face to face with the stark reality of their unpreparedness for their freedom, their greed as public servants, their self-centred nature as politicians, their exploitative and manipulative nature as religious and family heads, among other vices and as such, become disillusioned. The statement by Abutu: "let us simply get out of here," (p.80) is a symbolic statement. This statement comes after the characters have exhausted their discussions of the myriads of problems plaguing post-colonial Africa. This statement carries the weight of the need of Africa's youth to get out of the suffocating systems of Africa—"let us simply get out of here." (p.80) This statement is the most common statement among the masses. It is the statement that springboards Africa's youth towards migration.

Africa's youth need to migrate in order to 'eat.' The repetition of the word 'Food!' by Basa shows how that has been their need. Food is used to represent the economic needs of Africa. The emphasis is heightened by the use of the exclamation sign. These ex-convicts were as a matter of fact, disillusioned, the excitement with which they embraced the freedom given was short lived and this has been the life of most Africans after independence. The very benefits of the independence gained were not enjoyed by the less privileged in the African societies. The African bourgeois who took over from the Colonial masters did exactly what they fought against and corruption ruled their minds. This consequently leads to the suffering of the many less privileged in the likes of these ex-convicts.

Furthermore, the playwright employs the use of allusion to heighten the criticism. As the ex-convicts continue to contemplate on their return to the prison, Basa says: "...We dey go for the

PALACE jus over dere. Oya, Forward NEVER, Backward EVER! Make we go now.” (p.83) It is historically known in Ghana that the first President, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, in his famous independence speech declared: “Forward Ever, Backwards Never”. This was to say that the country after independence will not look back but rather forge ahead to achieve the greatest ambitions that she has conceived. However, the irony of the statement is that Ghana has not moved forward as much as Nkrumah had anticipated she would when he made that statement. And because there has not been much moving forward for Ghana since independence, her citizens keep going back to their former colonial masters just as the audience witness the ex-convicts do. The ex-convicts refer to prison as PALACE—Palace Reserved for Important Sons of the Nation. The acronym is sarcastic. Prison cannot be a palace for ex-convicts. It remains a symbol of oppression and a return to prison means a return to oppression. However, for the prisoners, going back to the PALACE is the only way they can get themselves the best of life: “...We can be sure of getting some warm second-hand clothes in there.” (p.81) Not only were they going to have clothes but also: “become assets of the State and receive free medical attention.” (p.82) Humorously, these ex-convicts who return to the prison refer to themselves: ‘Prodigal Royals’ and in a whisper, Basa tells the Voice that: “...we be HIPEC, Hungrily Indebted Poor Ex-cons...” (p.85). Obviously, the lives of these ex-convicts clearly show this description.

In fact, the very state of most African states after independence has been summarized by Basa’s statement. This is a clear case of Ghana’s state in the early 2000s. Ghana, during the time of President Agyekum Kuffour, became HIPC—Highly Indebted Poor Country. A country that had much ambitions of being an industrial hub of the Sub-Saharan Africa, now turns back to International Agencies and Donors for monetary support and assistance. These Agencies and donors in turn give us their own regulations and subtly control our political systems and the entire economy because we “forfeited that right by applying for readmission into the palace.” (p.87) This is evident in the play. As such, after the initial interaction with the chaplain which occurs within the prison walls, the rest of the plot unfolds behind the prison walls. In fact, the ex-convicts never really leave. Mawugbe retains the backdrop of the prison walls all through the play as an uncomfortable reminder of the looming presence of Africa’s colonial masters. And this represents the ultimate definition of neo-colonialism.

Conclusion

Efo Kodjo Mawugbe in his play, *Prison Graduates*, seeks to refashion his society, specifically Ghana and Africa as a whole. This he achieves by employing satire as his literary style. The drama has predominantly made use of Horatian type of satire. With this type, the playwright engages his readers to view the negative sides of his society through the use of irony, sarcasm, incongruity and humor. As a political satire, the foibles of politicians or African political leaders have been brought to the fore. Not only does the text satirizes the political milieu but also religion and the

health systems of Africa and Ghana in particular. However, a satire is aimed at bringing about change. The playwright therefore positions Abutu rightly to cause the change that he (playwright) desires. Abutu becomes the hope of change for the post-independence African nations. Abutu resolves not to follow his friends back to prison but rather make meaning of the freedom granted him. He clearly states without equivocation that his "mind is made up. I am determined to stay out of your so-called PALACE by every means possible." (p.83) Abutu's resolve absolves him from all entanglements of neo-colonialism. The very bondage Africans find themselves in in this era of neo-colonialism basically borders on psychological enslavement. Upon the return of the three ex-convicts, they are told that they "are all suffering from an acute form of Acquired Prison Traumatic Syndrome" (p.86). So, for Abutu to say that he has made up his mind not to be part of the return, shows that in order to liberate ourselves from this enslavement—Acquired Prison Traumatic Syndrome, we need toughness of mind. Consequently, by presenting the reality of the Ghanaian and African society, the playwright successfully creates a real African world which should look beyond foreign aids in order to claim our African dignity and identity.

Funding: This research received neither internal nor external funding.

Conflict of Interest: There was no conflict of interest declared by the authors.

Authorship and Level of Contribution: The authors equally took part in the research, writing and revision of the paper for consideration for publishing.

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