

## Dystopian Humour and Postcolonial Anomie in Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*

**Olumide Ogunrotimi\***

### **Abstract**

This article explores the intersection of humour and postcolonial themes in Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* through the lens of postcolonial contextualisation. Osofisan, a prominent Nigerian playwright, employs satire and dark humour to depict a dystopian society grappling with the protracted ramifications of colonialism. The play is the author's satirical condemnation of Nigeria's debased value system, as he deconstructs a wasteland of underdevelopment, corruption, and amorality. The aim of the paper is to analyse how Osofisan critiques power structures, societal norms, and the failures of postcolonial governance through humour. Central to this analysis is the concept of "postcolonial anomie," referring to the moral and social disorientation experienced in societies transitioning from colonial rule to independence. Utilising a close textual analysis of the play's major elements, the research methodology involves examining how Osofisan employs humour to depict and critique the dystopian reality of postcolonial Nigeria. The findings reveal that Osofisan's portrayal of postcolonial anomie through humour adds complexity to the narrative, highlighting both the absurdity and tragedy of the characters' predicaments. Moreover, the article uncovers how Osofisan incorporates dystopian elements to underscore the consequences of unchecked power and corruption, offering a cautionary tale about the dangers of authoritarianism and neocolonialism. By blending satire with poignant social commentary, *Midnight Hotel* emerges as a powerful vehicle for critiquing contemporary issues within the postcolonial context. In conclusion, this article contributes to the understanding of Osofisan's literary legacy and the role of humour in interrogating complex sociopolitical dynamics in postcolonial societies.

**Keywords:** humour, satire, Nigerian drama, dystopian, postcolonial anomie, *Midnight Hotel*

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\* Department of English and Literary Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria;  
[olumide.ogunrotimi@eksu.edu.ng](mailto:olumide.ogunrotimi@eksu.edu.ng)

## **Introduction**

To live in a country without a sense of humour is unbearable; but it is even more unbearable to live in a country where you need a sense of humour (Brecht, quoted by Esslin, 1961:199).

Possibly because Aristotle placed tragedy higher than comedy in the genres of dramatic expression, tragedy has always been looked upon as manifesting the “imitation of an action that is serious and complete”, while comedy is belittled as it often focuses on the discomfort of characters, attempting to make the readers/audience laugh rather than engage their deep preoccupation. However, laughter is only one of the functions of comedy, apart from being “closer to the representation of everyday life than a tragedy (it also explores) common human failings rather than tragedy’s disastrous crimes” (Baldick, 2008:62). If tragedy, by its classical nature, deals with the dynamics of tragic experience by focusing more on the elites in the society, and comedy strives to explore the everyday imperfections of the rabble, satiric-comedy attempts a different proposition. Through its ridiculing of human moral lapses, derogating certain values by making them look absurd, and deriding particular subjects which may be persons or institutions, satiric-comedy introduces a “serious” aspect to comedy by taking it beyond mere joking and poking fun at social, religious, economic and political foibles. The primary focus of satiric-comedy is ridiculing with the intent to correct. In focus, it cuts across gender, class, race, or any other delimiting social or economic construct.

It is commonly accepted that comedy relieves tension, anxiety and boredom. In a society where there are social and economic comforts aplenty, the importance or necessity of humour might be disparaged. But, in a country where the cumbrous presence of poverty is ubiquitously felt, there is always a consistent need to adopt avenues for escape from tragic reality. An elastic sense of humour is one.

Different from this transient liberating feature is the humour of disenchantment, which satirises serious social vices and collective peccabilities. This, of course, bespeaks authorial vanity, since, behind the searing humour lies a “self-appointed guardian of standards” (Cuddon, 2013:632), who sees himself as free from the vices and foibles that form the foci of the artist’s satire. The satirist is above board. To the writer the comedy in the writing is less ridicule than it is scorn or pure condemnatory vilification. This is because having set the standards for social progress, the satirist is quite outraged when society departs from these norms. So, still retaining hope of correcting these failings, the satirist laces the ridicule with humour, not to soften its impact, but to give the mockery an absurd quality that invites, simultaneously, derision and ire.

Abrams (1971:23) defines comedy as

a work in which the materials are selected and managed primarily in order to interest and amuse us: the characters and their discomfitures engage our delighted

attention rather than our profound concern, we feel confident that no great disaster will occur, and usually the action turns out happily for the chief characters.

Comedy may come in the form of jokes, satires and scatology (Odebunmi and Ogunleye, 2003). While jokes involve the concealment of knowledge later revealed, the replacement of an idea/concept by another, an unanticipated, incongruous end to an otherwise logical development and slipping on a banana peel (Nilsen and Nilsen 2000 as cited by Odebunmi and Ogunleye, 2003), satire, in its basic thrust, is directed towards “diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn” (Abrams, 1971:153). Satire, which can be either mild (Horatian) or severe (Juvenal) focuses on mocking, often by exaggeration or caricature, the morals and manners of contemporary society. To this end values in politics, religion, economy, education, family relationships and indeed national values can be the focus of satire.

The subject of humour differs from culture to culture, from profession to profession, etc. However, while it is axiomatic to state that what is funny in one locale might not be in another, sometimes some jokes do cut across social boundaries, and can even be transnational, particularly when they have a general theme.

In an attempt to distinguish between comedy and satire, Abrams (2012:353) posits that while “comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself . . . satire derides; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself.” Both deploy humour as a tool, but for different end-purposes. The focus of comedy is to entertain, to amuse the reader or the audience, while satire engages humour to provoke reflections to bring about change.

However, whereas the preferred themes of comedy and satire are “pretence, affectation or boasting” (Bamidele, 2001:8), according to Ngugi (1969:57) satire takes, for its province, a whole society and for its purpose, criticism. Childs and Fowler corroborate these explanations when they succinctly aver that the satirist:

attacks some object, using as his means wit or humour that is either fantastic or absurd. Denunciation itself is not satire, nor, of course, is grotesque humour, but the genre allows for a considerable preponderance of either one or the other. What distinguishes satire from comedy is its lack of tolerance for folly or human imperfection. Its attempt to juxtapose the actual with the ideal lifts it above mere invective. (226:211)

To Osofisan plain comedy would not do, hence the kind of satiric-comedy that seeks to foreground a serious situation but in a comic manner. This is quite understandable when one perceives that “the very basis of comedy is tragedy” (Klarmann 1965:99) and “comedy is the expression of despair” (1965:104).

### **Dystopian Humour and Postcolonial Anomie in Nigerian Drama**

In the realm of literature, Nigerian drama has long been recognized for its multifaceted exploration of societal issues, cultural complexities, and historical legacies. From the works of pioneers like Wole Soyinka and Zulu Sofola, through Ola Rotimi, and J. P. Clark, to contemporary playwrights such as Lara Owoeye, Ahmed Yerima, Esiaba Irobi, and Ojo Rasaki, Nigerian dramatists have employed various literary techniques to critique, interrogate, and illuminate the human condition within the context of a rapidly changing postcolonial/postmodern society. Among the diverse thematic concerns that have emerged prominently in Nigerian drama, two elements stand out as particularly significant: dystopian humour and postcolonial anomie.

This paper aims to delve into the intersection of these themes within the framework of Nigerian drama, examining how playwrights - in this instance Femi Osofisan - utilise humour as a tool for socio-political critique while navigating the complexities of postcolonial identity and its attendant anxieties. By analysing Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel*, this paper seeks to shed light on how dystopian humour serves as both a coping mechanism and a subversive strategy for negotiating the dissonance and disillusionment engendered by the legacy of colonialism and its aftermath.

The term "dystopian humour" encapsulates a mode of literary expression characterised by its darkly comic portrayal of amoral and unscrupulous characters, dysfunctional societies, oppressive systems, and existential absurdities. Rooted in the tradition of satire, dystopian humour operates as a form of cultural disquisitions, deploying elements of irony, wit, and exaggeration to expose the contradictions and injustices inherent in the social order. In the Nigerian context, where the legacy of colonialism continues to exert a profound influence on the national psyche, dystopian humour serves as a potent vehicle for articulating the frustrations, disillusionments, and absurdities of postcolonial existence.

Concurrently, the concept of "postcolonial anomie" denotes a state of existential disorientation and moral ambiguity that arises from the rupture of traditional values and customs and the imposition of foreign norms and structures during the colonial encounter. While acknowledging that "the satirical vision is present in much of modern and contemporary theatre" (Quintero, 2007:462) because of "unprecedented cultural and historical changes: the rapid expansion in industrialisation, incomprehensible advances in science and technology, two world wars" (Ibid), in Nigeria, as in many other postcolonial societies, the transition from colonial rule to independence was marked by a profound sense of disruption and dislocation, as the newly formed nation grappled with the legacy of exploitation, cultural displacement, and institutional dysfunction bequeathed from its colonial past. This sense of anomie, compounded by the challenges of nation-building, political volatility, economic instability, ethnic tensions and general insecurity, continues to permeate Nigerian society, shaping individual and collective identities in complex and often contradictory ways.

Against this backdrop, Nigerian writers have turned to dystopian humour as a means of confronting the absurdities and contradictions of postcolonial reality. Through the subversive use of the rhetoric of laughter, they challenge prevailing narratives of progress and development, exposing the underlying inequities and injustices that persist beneath the veneer of modernity. By employing humour as a form of social critique, these writers (and novelists like Chuma Nwokolo in *Diaries of a Dead African*, 2013) disrupt conventional power dynamics, sabotaging hegemonic discourses and opening up spaces for alternative forms of perception and resistance.

One of the most iconic figures in Nigerian drama, Wole Soyinka, exemplifies this fusion of dystopian humour and postcolonial critique in some of his plays, *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1964), *A Play of Giants* (1984), *The Beautification of the Area Boy* (1995), *King Baabu* (2002) and *Alapata Apata* (2011). *The Trials of Brother Jero* is set in a dystopian Lagos plagued by corruption, religious charlatanism, and political opportunism. Soyinka's play satirises the hypocrisy and venality of postcolonial elites while exposing the gullibility and desperation of the masses. Through the figure of Brother Jero, a self-styled prophet who exploits his followers for personal gain, Soyinka lays bare the contradictions of postcolonial religiosity, revealing how faith can be manipulated and commodified in the service of power and profit.

Undoubtedly, the intersection of dystopian humour and postcolonial anomie in Nigerian drama offers a rich and complex terrain for literary exploration and social critique. Through the subversive use of laughter, Nigerian playwrights have crafted narratives that expose the contradictions, absurdities, and injustices of postcolonial reality, while also interrogating the complexities of identity, power, and resistance. By analysing how dystopian humour operates within the framework of postcolonial discourse, this paper seeks to illuminate the transformative potential of laughter as a tool for political engagement, cultural resistance, and social change in contemporary Nigeria and beyond.

Femi Osofisan is “one of the most prominent playwrights in ... (the) country” (Osakwe, 2015:11). A member of the second generation of Nigerian dramatists, his dramatic oeuvre posits him as a writer “with a radical bent” (Adeseke 39, cited in Uwadinma-Idemudia, 2018:17). His works not only challenge the prevailing hegemonic structures that continue to militate against the growth and development of the Nigerian state, they also traverse “the realm of myths, history, as well as the contemporary environment to engage in ideological stance about his society in a way that is both revolutionary and subversive.” (Uwadinma-Idemudia, 2018:72). Osofisan's works highlight the necessity for sociocultural re-envisioning of the oppressive and venal aspects of Nigeria's postcolonial degradation. His deployment of the aesthetics of revolution, history, humour, satire, and tragedy to examine Nigeria's socio-political aberrations shows his commitment as he constantly searches for the appropriate idiom to critique the country's ills.

**Dystopian Humour And Postcolonial Anomie In Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel***

Femi Osofisan's play *Midnight Hotel* stands as a remarkable exploration of dystopia and postcolonial anomie within the framework of Nigerian society. Through the lens of dark humour and societal critique, Osofisan unveils the complexities of a nation grappling with its colonial past and the aftermath of independence by highlighting "the high ... (level) of moral decadence in the (Nigerian) society" (Yirikenyi, et. al, 2019:267). The drama unfolds in a dilapidated hotel where various characters converge, each representing a facet of Nigerian society. Osofisan employs dystopian elements to portray a world plagued by political turmoil, economic disparity, and social decay. The titular hotel serves as a microcosm of the nation, reflecting the chaos and absurdity prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. Through satirical humour and exaggerated scenarios, Osofisan exposes the dysfunctionality of postcolonial governance and the disillusionment of its citizens.

In *Midnight Hotel* Femi Osofisan proposes to show aspects of Nigeria that are often less highlighted in her literature. With the multitudes of themes (corruption, poverty, nepotism, political decadence, and religious hypocrisy) tackled by Osofisan in the play, he utilises all the comic and satiric artistry he has perfected over the years to orchestrate a satiric intervention that is foregrounded in a pathetic society under the grip of religious charlatans, and especially unscrupulous politicians who are only mild replicas of the anachronistic military regimes who had ruled previously (See Soillun, 2009). Osofisan's characters in the text are irrevocably conditioned by corrupt instincts, as they are characters enslaved by social ailments that are the consequences of colonialism, neo-colonialism, militarism and pseudo-democratism.

The instant the curtain rises we are immediately confronted with the serious nitty-gritty of the play. The Songmaster's welcome song (which incidentally gives us the notion this is not an out-and-out comedy) says it all; by giving a symbolic historical précis of the country and making it the *Midnight Hotel's*:

This place was built as a house of sin  
In the year nineteen hundred and fourteen  
With just three rooms at the beginning

This, of course, is Nigeria's history. Even though no country is mentioned as the setting of the play, it is apparent that all indices point to Nigeria. The two protectorates (the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and the Northern Nigeria Protectorate) were merged in 1914, with three main tribes (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba). But if there is still any doubt as to this, the Songmaster and by extension the playwright makes it plain and direct enough;

That soon, our old Management group  
Was chased out by the new messiahs in khaki  
Commandos of vice, and oil and pepper soup  
Who kindly led us from chaos to anarchy

Nigeria gained independence in 1960, but the civilian government that took over power from the colonial administration could only rule for six years before it was overthrown by military coupists. Though the military interventionists had claimed that they had taken over the government so that they could turn the fortunes of the country around, the situation in the country had degenerated into a civil war within a year.

After the opening salvo, it is pure comedy until Awero, a member of parliament and Suuru, a Christian pastor, are introduced. As the two characters plunge into displaying acts that are characteristic of their material types in the world, it is amazing the way they naturally become well-adapted to the values of corruption and revel in immorality. Underneath the farcical humour, below the patterns of ridiculous escapades certain national truths are exhumed. Awero, who represents the political class, epitomises their attitude of nonchalance to real national issues and a serious concern for pettifogging and individual business. Her attempt to barter sex for a contract has no “national” significance to her, but she is visibly nettled by the ‘appalling’ use of language in certain places:

AWERO:

You hear that, Pastor? We’ll have to do something about it in parliament! The state of our language is simply appalling. I must move a motion about it at our next sitting.

SUURU:

What do you mean, Honourable?

AWERO:

Didn’t you hear him? ‘I’m coming, he says, when he’s going away. (Hisses)  
Terrible!

Such satiric revelation of national sin and immorality provides the reader with the opportunity to view her as typical of the loud-mouthed Nigerian politician.

Central to Osofisan’s exploration is the concept of postcolonial anomie – a state of normlessness and moral disorientation that stems from the collapse of colonial structures and the failure of post-independence leadership. In *Midnight Hotel*, this anomie manifests in the form of pervasive corruption, societal fragmentation, and the erosion of ethical values. Characters like Chief Deme and Madame Koyinsola epitomise the moral bankruptcy of the ruling elite, as they engage in nefarious schemes and exploit the downtrodden for personal gain. Their actions reflect a broader pattern of systemic corruption that permeates every level of society, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and oppression.

Despite the grim subject matter, Osofisan infuses *Midnight Hotel* with dark humour, using satire and irony to subvert expectations and provoke critical reflection. The play’s comedic elements serve as a coping mechanism for characters grappling with the absurdity of their reality, offering moments of levity amidst the bleakness of their existence. Osofisan employs

wordplay, absurd situations, and exaggerated characters to highlight the absurdity of power dynamics and the farcical nature of political rhetoric. Through humour, he exposes the hypocrisy and folly inherent in Nigeria's postcolonial predicament, inviting audiences to confront uncomfortable truths with a sense of irony and detachment.

One of the recurring motifs in *Midnight Hotel* is that of the grotesque, wherein Osofisan exaggerates physical and behavioural traits to underscore the moral degeneration of the characters and the society at large. Chief Deme's grotesque gluttony and Madame Koyinsola's ostentatious vanity serve as caricatures of greed and excess, reflecting the moral bankruptcy of the ruling class. Similarly, the portrayal of the hotel staff as hapless and ineffectual underscores the powerlessness of the common people in the face of systemic corruption and injustice. By amplifying these traits to absurd proportions, Osofisan underscores the absurdity of Nigeria's postcolonial reality, inviting audiences to confront the grotesque spectacle of their society with a mixture of amusement and revulsion.

It is not surprising that highly topical issues relating to political, religious and social responsibility should be reflected as specific events distinctive of the society. Each character in the play has a particular sphere of comic absurdity and hypocrisy, consistently backed by personal instincts which further accentuate a ludicrous two-facedness. Pastor Suuru (patience in Yoruba language) embodies the phoney piety of the religious class. He is easily reined in by several factors detrimental to his status as a pastor. While one might laugh at his feeble resistance to the seduction by Awero, who happens to be his friend's wife, the fact of his status as a "pastor" underscores his social failure as a reliable and conscientious person. This satirically illuminates the improbably immoral heights humanity can reach. Pastor Suuru's pretence is shamelessly elastic: he is only against sexual immorality, not any other sin:

AWERO:

Will you stop that! You call yourself a pastor, and you still want a contract, or don't you?

SUURU:

Well, why not? After all, all the big Alhajis are emergency contractors also. Even our bishop! Is religion against profiteering? You know very well that's not why I am afraid (20).

But Awero the Member of Parliament will have none of that. To her, sex in exchange for contract is a "regular practice in parliament" (21). "There they call it sampling of goods" (21). And, eventually, when it is almost apparent that he is going to let the cat out of the bag and reveal everything, Pastor Suuru plays a fast one on all, confirming that all along he has not been so naïve.

Amidst the hypocritical lot, Alatise and his three naïve daughters present a case of sheep socialising with wolves. Without realising it, having left the solid protectiveness of village life, Alatise has only transitioned from a problematic situation to one of even greater difficulty.



If he is overwhelmed by rural politics and life of drudgery, he is apparently unprepared for the fish-eat-fish existence of cosmopolitan life. Alalise is not completely guileless himself (he has to bribe Bicycle to let them have a room at the hotel), but, for someone who has lost all his properties to “fatal elections”, and without relations in Lagos, one wonders how he intends to survive in a metropolitan no-man’s land that postcolonial Lagos is. If Alalise harbours any hopes as to that, these are quickly dispelled as after the experience of a night in a hotel. He tells his daughters “Go and start packing your things!” (87) as the reality sets in.

However, unlike in his other dramatic works (like *Morountodun and Other Plays*, 1982; *Once Upon Four Robbers*, 1991), Osofisan’s attitude to the plight of the masses in *Midnight Hotel* is unsupportive. This is because, although the characters that stand for the masses are obvious pawns in the hands of the rich, they are no irreproachable victims as they appear to have found escape in collaborating with their leaders in perpetuating a debased value system:

BICYCLE: I swear to you, we no get room again. And, sir,  
dis na hotel, no be Africa.

ALATISE: (*Giving him money*).  
Take this.

BICYCLE: (*Taking it after some coaxing*).  
Ah you be good man, sir! But na true I talk.  
Except ...oh yes, of course! We get one room,  
One big room, if you go fit manage ... (43-44).

Bicycle collects bribe from Alalise to let him have a room; Jimoh borrows money to pay for the adverts of a chieftaincy title; on the promise of being recommended for another chieftaincy title in Kano, he agrees to be an errand boy; and Bose sees prostitution as a means out of her family’s humiliation, hunger and wretchedness. But, if they are not victims in the sense that they partake in the general corruption going on, they are victims still in another sense where they have been coerced by exigency to become “co-debasers”.

In addition to its dystopian humour, *Midnight Hotel* explores themes of identity and cultural hybridity in the postcolonial context. The play’s characters grapple with questions of identity and belonging, torn between traditional values and the pressures of modernity. Osofisan portrays Nigeria as a nation in flux, struggling to reconcile its colonial legacy with its indigenous heritage. This tension is embodied in characters like Erelu and Wale, who navigate conflicting cultural identities and societal expectations. Through their experiences, Osofisan highlights the complexity of postcolonial identity formation and the challenges of forging a cohesive national identity in a diverse and fragmented society.

Furthermore, *Midnight Hotel* serves as a critique of neocolonialism and the legacy of imperialism in Africa. Osofisan exposes the unending exploitation of Africans and their resources by foreign powers and multinational corporations, depicting Nigeria as a willing pawn in the global power game. Characters like the American businessman Mr. Duke represent the insidious

influence of external forces on Nigeria's economic and political terrain, highlighting the struggle for sovereignty and self-determination in the postcolonial era. Through his portrayal and exploration of neocolonial forces and interactions, Osofisan accentuates the continuing legacy of colonialism and the challenges of achieving true independence and real autonomy in the face of external pressures.

### **Dystopian Humour, Satire and Osofisan's Critique in *Midnight Hotel***

In contrast to other dramatic genres, characters in comedy often exhibit minimal change throughout the narrative. This lack of development is particularly evident in comedies like *Midnight Hotel*, where characters are essentially stock types. These characters are established early as cheats, hypocrites, swindlers, thieves, and other recognizable archetypes, and they maintain these roles consistently from the beginning to the end of the play. The curtain rises to reveal the characters engaging in nefarious activities and falls with them still entrenched in these same behaviours. The characters' static nature is not incidental; it is a deliberate aspect of the genre.

The reason for this static characterization in satire lies in the author's objective. Satire aims to critique by highlighting the absurdities and flaws in human nature and society, often through exaggerated and humorous portrayals. The purpose of satire is not only to effect profound changes in the characters but also to inspire the audience to reevaluate their own lives and attitudes. Indeed, satire seeks to elicit anger and disdain by presenting characters who seem to intrinsically embody specific vices and venalities. These characters are ridiculed for their shortcomings, and the audience is invited to deprecate and denounce their greed and avarice rather than empathise with their struggles or transformations. In most cases, if there are struggles or attempts at transformation, they are feeble. The characters often lack shame and contrition, and have become brazenly unscrupulous and incorrigible.

This approach differs significantly from that of pure comedy, even though the two genres often overlap in their use of humour and ridicule. While satire also employs mockery and derision, its intent is more transformative. Satire targets specific social values, behaviours, or institutions to expose their flaws and encourage change. By holding up a mirror to society's absurdities and injustices, satire seeks to provoke thought and inspire reform. It is a genre that carries an implicit hope for amelioration, implying and proposing that through awareness and critique, people can be motivated to change their attitudes and behaviours.

In *Midnight Hotel*, the satiric approach takes precedence, and the characters' lack of development underscores this. They remain steadfast in their dishonesty and hypocrisy, reflecting the play's focus on serious ridicule which is expected to sensitise the audience in an attempt to reform by sentising them. The audience is repulsed by the characters' corruption and greed, but there is no expectation that the characters will undergo significant changes. Though this static portrayal aligns more with the essence of comedy which seeks to amuse by exaggerating and mocking human flaws without necessarily offering a path to redemption or transformation,

Osofisan plans to rile up the audience into action by highlighting the depth of corruption in the country and showing the involvement of both the rich and the poor, and the powerful and the powerless.

Although *Midnight Hotel* evokes laughter, it contains a general pessimism that is satirical, in which characters' immoral instincts become the norm. Osofisan presents a dramatic scenario of a typical set of characters living what has become a dystopian existence for Nigerians. Although the playwright urges the reader to laugh (in his prefatory notes to the revised edition), any pretence at laughter is quickly dissipated when one encounters the sobering reality that the ills foregrounded in the play are symptomatic of the general anomie in the country. No amount of laughter, spectacle or theatrical distractions integrated into the fabric of the play could make one forget that the *Midnight Hotel* symbolises Nigeria. But then again it foregrounds the necessity of laughter as an avenue for escape from "tragic" reality.

The major thrust of Osofisan's satire is against the ingrained unresponsiveness to social growth and progress that characterises government and the rabble. What we are presented with is a pot-pourri, a medley of sinners interconnected by living in a cesspool of corruption, greed, social insouciance and moral transgressions. And where is this more prominent than the centre of sins – Lagos, where, as presented in the play, everybody appears to have a mischievously unscrupulous aspect, not that alone, but a supercilious sassiness that takes all outsiders to be over-credulous morons. Deployed as a metaphorised synecdochisation for the country, it is a place where "human predators" prey on unsuspecting newcomers to the glitz of metropolitan life. And, far from apotheosizing ordinary people as victims of dictatorial callousness and empathising with them that the world into which they are born is nothing but a conspiracy against their existence, Osofisan portrays ordinary people as not particularly guileless by externalising their active participation in the gradual destruction of the country's social value system. By exposing nationalised foibles and underscoring the obvious that "the beautiful ones have indeed not yet been born", Osofisan brings to the fore Nigerians' collective experience under military and pseudo-democratic mis-governance. Although the play was published in 1998, its germaneness to the topical issues of today is tragically ironic. None of the issues explored or thematized in the play has been positively resolved or ameliorated. In truth, the situation in Nigeria has worsened. While the levels of corruption in high and low places have skyrocketed, and the impact of neocolonialism does not appear to be waning, other debilitating constructs like banditry, terrorism, kidnappings, tribal chauvinism and religious bigotry have come aboard the Nigerian landscape to further compound the existence of an already traumatised people.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, Femi Osofisan's *Midnight Hotel* offers a compelling exploration of dystopian humour and postcolonial anomie in the Nigerian context. Through satire, irony, and dark humour, Osofisan unveils the dysfunctionality and moral decadence of postcolonial Nigeria,

while also interrogating questions of identity, power, and neocolonialism. By employing comedic elements (verbal incongruities, character distortions and scenic parodies) to navigate serious national themes, Osofisan invites readers/audiences to confront uncomfortable truths about Nigerian society with a mixture of amusement and critical reflection. *Midnight Hotel* stands as a testament to Osofisan's dramatic artistry and his commitment to using theatre for social critique and cultural interrogation.

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