

Many of us grew up playing educational board games like scrabble and monopoly. The first is supposed to improve spelling and vocabulary, the second to teach the basics of real estate and financial wheeling and dealing. In addition, monopoly teaches players the geography of the City of London. So popular has "monopoly" been that it has established a virtual monopoly in the board games business all over the world.

Now that monopoly may be challenged, in Nigeria at least, by a Nigerian version of the game, set in Lagos and titled, "The Lagos Hustler". The instruction leaflet introduces the game. The Lagos Hustler has especially been designed for the enjoyment of anyone living in our great city of Lagos whatever be his state or country of origin. Lagos is a melting pot of Lagosian from all over Nigeria, Africa and the world."

However, the Yoruba culture and ethos of Lagos is maintained in the game: on the board, some squares read "Adaba" and "Akoba". The player then chooses an Adaba or Akoba card from a pile on the center of the board. The leaflet explains that Adaba means "self-inflicted misfortune or fortune brought on directly by one's actions---such as 'Chieftaincy title as the Onigbadun of Lagos. Pay N1,500,000'." and "Your son is about to marry a beautiful Igbo girl. Pay a dowry of N2 million."

Akoba means "fortune or misfortune brought about by the action of other people" such as: "Your container has been seized. Settle N200,000 or go to jail (Kirikiri)" or "Alaye boys are in your way .. settle them N200,000 to pass." Another is "Fuel scarcity. Collect N100,000 from each petrol station you own." (There are petrol and NITEL and NEPA stations on the board).

There are title deeds for properties valued according to the real estate ratings of the eighteen suburbs, ranging from two million naira for the mortuary value of a house in Ikoyi, one and half million for Ikeja, a million for Satellite, half a million for Mushin to three hundred thousand for Ajegunle. The currency notes are in denominations of ten, five and one million, and five, two and one hundred thousand, the lowest-- ten thousand naira. They may seem very large, compared to amounts of money pilaged by the Abachas, Babangidas etc. They have conditioned us already to view the naira as fool's gold, monopoly type money. The decimal point can be very slippery.

The object of the game is to acquire and develop property either houses or hotels, subject to certain rules. Then, a player who lands on your property must pay rent to you. On the other hand, if you sell a house or hotel to the bank, you will be paid half of the purchase price. A player may only collect a loan from the bank at the mortgage value of a property. When a property is on the mortgage, the player cannot collect rent on that property. The game ends either when all players withdraw due to bankruptcy or when all players agree to end it. Then the assets of each player are calculated and the person with the highest value wins.

"Players are advised to enjoy themselves; everything is allowed: being a multi-millionaire, buy, sell, cheat, do 419, play politics ... even be a banker. It's just a game." Such instructions may not be found in a monopoly, but after all, fraud, fast dealing, tax evasion, gazumping etc. are found in the property business everywhere.

Unfortunately, in Lagos (and in all parts of Nigeria) hustling is not limited to real estate but intrudes into the real life of all Lagosians from wherever

## Nina' Mba's Insider / Outsider's Account



# Lagos Hustlers

er they originate. May I share with you a few vignettes of life in Lagos as experienced recently by visiting foreigners, Nigerians from outside Lagos and resident expatriates.

A young man on his first trip outside of his own country (in Asia) was picked up by the driver of his host. En route to Victoria Island, the car was held up by armed robbers. The driver was able to escape. One of the robbers took the wheel, three others joined the terrified young man and they drove off to the site of their next operations. They parked the car under a bridge and led their unwilling company into a strategic position to observe the passing traffic. The robbers chatted with their 'guest' and explained to him which kinds of cars-and passengers - they were after. In one fell

floor. In the morning, Kemi took him to a business center where they telephoned his distraught hosts who immediately set off in two vehicles with an extra driver, guards and plenty of cash. The grateful hosts offered Kemi and her sister a generous amount of money to thank them, which Kemi and sister adamantly refused to accept, insisting that they only did what any decent Nigerian would do for a visitor.

So, misfortune is countered by good fortune in the game of life.

The second vignette concerns a female expatriate's experience not with hustlers as such, but with a typical Lagos hustling lady, with siren blasting pilot vehicles of two convoys, on either side of a dual carriageway. Caught in the middle of one convoy, in a typical Lagos *go slow*, she was bombarded by the sirens to her left and her right. The noise so deafened and bamboozled her that she could not drive, so she just stopped and covered her ears. This action blocked the convoy behind her. An irate whip-yielding policeman ran up to her, ordering her to move. However, when he saw her, he realized what had happened and asked: "Is the siren disturbing you?" "Yes," she shrieked. Lo and behold, the policeman turned off his siren and ran to the pilot vehicle on the other side of the carriageway who turned his siren off. Sudden deafening silence. The lady could think again, she waved her thanks and drove off. Again, misfortune is balanced by a good deed.

The third incident concerns a Nigerian doctor who met two foreign colleagues and his family at the international airport. No problems with immigration or customs so they made it to the car park. As they reached the doctor's car, they were surrounded by six men, four in some kind of uniform. They identified themselves as Nigerian Airport Authority security service, then demanded the passports of the white foreigners and the identification of the doctor. The doctor replied that they had no right to demand the passports, showed them his identity card and said he invited his colleagues and was taking them to his home. The guards demanded to see his letter of invitation to the foreigners. The doctor explained that the letter had been sent to the Nigerian Embassy, which issued the visas, etc. The guards then shouted that he was trying to kidnap the white men and must follow them to their commandant. The doctor told his colleagues and family to get into his vehicle, lock it and hold the keys while he argued and argued with the guards.

The doctor offered N5,000.00 he had on him--they laughed. Hours passed, night fell, the doctor's fury turned into fear for the safety of his family and friends. Then he remembered that his wife had a mobile phone and on the pretext of seeing how his children were, whispered to his wife to ring his brother. Six hours later, a top police officer contacted by the doctor's brother appeared and arrested the guards for extortion and harassment.

The doctor was deeply distressed and ashamed that his visitors should have to undergo such an ordeal on their arrival in Lagos. Such is life in the city on the lagoon, which is not its real name anyway but was used by the Portuguese. Nothing is what it seems in Lagos/EKO. The Gambian poet, Lenrie Peters, has a stanza in an untitled poem which is appropriate in this column on games and hustling:

*"The seats of government levelled at the dice, they get the most who tell the biggest lies. "*

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swoop, they hijacked three cars, ejected the drivers and passengers and, one robber to each car, zoomed away but not before telling the

stupefied boy that since he had been well behaved, they would let him go and then the keys of his host's car was given to him

It was pitch dark, the young man had no idea of his bearings and was utterly helpless. The usual Lagos crowd gathered and sympathized, but the victim was now deeply suspicious of everyone. He spied a young woman of his age group standing to the side and instinctively felt he could trust her. So, he approached her and explained his predicament. Kami suggested that she could arrange for someone to drive him to Victoria Island, but the young foreigner was too afraid to be driven by anyone. So Kemi took pity on him and offered to take him to her home and pass the night, then in the morning, contact his hosts. Kemi and her sister lived in one room nearby. They shared their frugal meal with him and insisted that he slept on the