

# The Land of Empires



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*A sharp, satirical examination of Asaba's social economy, where spectacle, survival, and scarcity intertwine. Through vivid cultural observation, the piece explores how informal pathways — beauty, relationships, performance, and shadow markets — evolve as adaptive mechanisms of mobility within constrained systems. Beneath the humor lies a layered reflection on dignity, aspiration, and the structural paradox of squalor and squander.*

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In Asaba, everyone has an empire.

*Michael Manuel's Boutique Empire.*

*Hairess.* ( An uppity hair salon next to the near defunct Okpanam police station).

*CNO Beauty Empire.* Now, this beauty salon was squat next to the popular Midwifery Market, squeezed in between a very un-empiric building materials shop and stationary bookshop.

*Harmony's Empire.* (This boutique in particular was unisex. How unique for Harmony).

You get the picture?

In Asaba, the girls are white skinned and purchased skincare like the *Oshaprapa 7-days whitening soap* from *Penny's Glow Organic glow skincare*. And if you weren't, you best have an enormous behind to help your prospects.

What?

Would you rather get a BBL? Is this Lagos?

In Asaba, sixteen year boys had "*clients*" and could lodge their fourteen year old bud breasted girlfriends in 4-star hotels. They usually did this with their seven figure sports cars and were sure to smear a handful of freshly minted naira notes in the hands of uniformed patrol officers. Afterall, "*Na my guy na!*"

In Asaba, the most you could aim for was a politician, his son, brother, uncle, father or nephew.

He would pick you to be his wife amongst his harem of four or five ladies if you met his "standards" Then you got to brag to your girlfriends about this trip or that trip or that super double drawn human hair wig and gold necklace he got you after you caught him with side chick number what now?

"*At least,*" your best friend would say, "*he respects you enough to cheat outside and not bring it inside the house.*"

Asaba has two daughters: Squalor and Squander.

I met Squander before Squalor ever said hello.

Squander was in the midst of the nineteen year old yellow pawpaw who could pass for a model and his *Sodom* of a barber shop.

One day, Squalor had me in there. I had gone to charge my phone, my workstation—my life.

But with a full battery came overflowing ears. It was rot at first glance. And neglect at the double take.

In Asaba, the sisters Squalor and Squander are two sides of a coin and which side you flip decides which face you see.