

## ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER: TREASURE-HUNTING BEYOND FAMILIAR SHORES

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Africa is a continent characterized by mobility as a normal condition of being human. While the tendency of states everywhere is to police and manage mobility so as to maximize the economic and political interests of those they consider citizens, those with capitalist ambitions of dominance do not expect Africans to be mobile, especially beyond their continent, even as mobility is celebrated in principle and practice for others ([Collier 2013: 11-26](#)). When not savaged by envenomed, razor-sharp territoriality, mobile Africans are often perceived by the nationals and citizens of the host countries at whose borders they clamor for inclusion as an invasive and predatory inconvenience ([Nyamnjoh 2013a](#)). This was especially the case after the high-income societies of the West witnessed the largest increase in migration from poor countries from 1990-2000, an increase which coincided with deceleration in the growth of their high-income economies, thereby forcing them to respond by “retightening their immigration controls”, even if what followed as migration policies were “based on neither an understanding of the process of migration and its effects nor a thought-through ethical position” ([Collier 2013: 51-52](#)). Since then, those who countenance African mobility do so *selectively*, like French President Nicolas Sarkozy in his provocative speech in Dakar on July 26, 2007, where he expressed the idea of “*immigration choisie*” (“chosen and not endured immigration”) – see the reactions it elicited from African and Africanist intellectuals, [the first of which by Achille Mbembe](#) ([Bergson and Ngnemzué 2008](#); [Foé 2008](#); [Nyamnjoh 2013a](#); [Collier 2013: 57-142](#)). African musicians in France – some of whom, like Papa Wemba, have been [accused of using their position as musicians](#) to smuggle hundreds of people from Africa who disappear upon arrival – have often composed songs to decry the arrest and deportation of fellow Africans. Petit Pays of Cameroon is said to have named his band *Petit Pays et Les Sans Visa* because he was [once deported from France](#) for not having a visa. African immigrants in France,

and Africans seeking to emigrate to France, would argue that it was not without their exploitation and dispossession under French colonialism and neo-colonialism that “between 1945 and 1975 French per capita income tripled”, resulting in what the French nostalgically refer to as “The Golden Thirty Years” ([Collier 2013: 28](#)). This tendency to see the nimble-footedness of being African ([Nyamnjoh 2013b](#)) purely in narrow economic terms is highly problematic, as it tends to suggest that mobility should be the exclusive attribute only of those who are economically viable.

If there is any lesson mobile Africans could learn from their European and Western counterparts, it is how to comb the world with imperial ambitions of dominance, hunting with relentless greed for riches and resources in distant lands, and using coercive violence to dispossess and indebt without being indebted. It is thanks precisely to this logic and approach that “Third World debtor nations are almost exclusively countries that have at one time been attacked and conquered by European countries – often, the very countries to whom they now owe money” ([Graeber 2011: 5](#)). For those Africans who have borrowed a leaf from Europe, uncontested success comes from hunting for opportunities in distant unfamiliar lands, among distant unfamiliar others, who should not be close enough to appeal to one’s scruples and conscience. Ideally, the lands should be distant enough to constitute hunting grounds and the people unfamiliar enough to be considered prey, and be preyed upon. Ruthlessness and detachment are the name of the game, as it permits one to freeze the humanity of those one seeks to take advantage of. This is a sentiment superbly captured by the Nigerian actor and musician, Nkem Owoh, in his song “I Go Chop Your Dollar”, in which he argues, *inter alia*, that the infamous scamming Nigeria is renowned for is just a game, and that no one should seek to moralize unduly about it (see his film, *The Master*). He warns “Oyibo” [whites]: “[I go chop your dollar, I go take your money disappear. 419 is just a game. You are the loser, I am the winner.](#)” In Cameroon the phenomenon of *bushfalling* documents how Europe, North America, and other fruitful zones of accumulation have served as hunting grounds for mobile young Cameroonians seeking to free themselves from the frustrations, pressures, and stress of undera-

chievement and the paucity of prospects and opportunities in the homeland ([Nyamnjoh 2011](#); [Alpes 2011](#); [Tazanu 2012](#); [Nfon 2013](#); [Pelican 2013](#); [Nyamnjoh 2014](#); [Alhaji 2015](#)).

The excessive investment in governing and policing mobility by states – rich states in particular – is what brings about the apparent unequal and differentiated patterns of migration by which the West, despite its histories of migra-

tion with reckless abandon, seems to be surprisingly alarmed today.

*Francis Nyamnjoh is currently finishing a book titled: [“C'est l'homme qui fait l'homme”: Cul-de-Sac Ubuntu-ism in Côte d'Ivoire](#)”, from which he has extracted his contribution. For further details visit [www.africanbookscollective.com](http://www.africanbookscollective.com)*