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Ndjio, B.

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African Studies Centre  
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Basile Ndjio

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African Studies Centre  
P.O. Box 9555  
2300 RB Leiden  
The Netherlands

Telephone +31-71-5273372  
Fax +31-71-5273344  
E-mail [asc@ascleiden.nl](mailto:asc@ascleiden.nl)  
Website <http://www.ascleiden.nl>

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# Cameroonian *feymen* and Nigerian '419' scammers: two examples of Africa's 'reinvention' of the global capitalism

Basile Ndjio<sup>1</sup>

One can disagree with the authors of *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Bayart et al. 1999), who by locating the growth of criminal enterprises at the very heart of the African postcolonial states, or by making a connection between fraudulent economic practices and tenure of public office, and between criminal entrepreneurs and holders of political power in Africa, tend to overlook the fact that much of African criminal activities and unlawful businesses are now carried out outside the Black continent. In addition, African criminal networks are slowly re-orientating themselves towards western countries —and to a lesser extent the Persian Gulf— which have become over time the major centres and main bases for their unlawful operations. This is the case with many Europe-based west African criminal operators who now oversee the growing underground or shadow economy in the south of Amsterdam and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, North West of London, and in many *banlieues* (suburbs) or neighbourhoods of Paris (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; Ndjio 2006).

Yet, it will be a bad faith not to acknowledge the fact that Bayart and his collaborators are right in their observation that the social capital of African economies is increasingly taking the form of a widespread use of deception and 'dirty tricks' (1999: 70), and that in many African countries, crime, corruption, confidence trick, business frauds and financial deceptions now influence business activities, as well as they dominate the mode of conducting economic transactions. They are also right when they point out the fact that many African social actors have managed to re-appropriate to their own advantage the economic reforms imposed upon them by western institutions (i.e. World Bank and IMF), as much as they have succeeded in

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Basile Ndjio is a Lecturer at the University of Douala (Cameroon), and was a visiting fellow at the African Studies Centre, Leiden in April-June 2008. He received his doctorate in social science (Anthropology) at the University of Amsterdam in 2006.

capturing the contradictory insertion of their countries into the market economy and global capitalism. They **did it** not only by developing new modes of acquisition of wealth which no longer follow conventional economic strategies and norms, but also by inventing their own economic practices which can be morally and judicially classified as criminal or illicit. Symptomatic of this African inventive spirit is the emergence since the late 1980s and early 1990s in most African countries of new modes of accumulation of wealth which, according to some analysts dramatize the criminalization of the state (Bayart et al. 1999) and the informalization of African economies (MacGaffey 1998: 37-50; Roitman 2005; Spring and McDade 1994). The particularity of this new African economic entrepreneurship is that it dissolves the difference between criminal behaviour and legitimate profit-seeking, between normal economic activities and vulgar criminal practices. This is particularly the case with the new generation of African businessmen and entrepreneurs who are for the most part notorious for their passion for shady business, dirty tricks, fraud and smuggling, and especially their inclination for taking an unfair advantage of their business partners' trust (Bayart 1994; Hibou 1999: 70-113; MacGaffey 1987, 1994: 189-204; Ndjio 2002a and b; Warnier 1993). For example, in an interesting article about what he called '*La "bigarrure" des patrons Camerounais*' (variegation of Cameroonian patrons), the French anthropologist Jean-Pierre Warnier (1994: 175-201) showed that the actions of many of them were informed by unethical principles and immoral values such as deception, unscrupulousness, double-dealing and duplicity. In many respects, the behaviour of these Cameroonian entrepreneurs, who excelled in the art of juggling with laws, evading tax, doctoring their accounts or faking official documents in order to mislead tax inspectors or customs officers, contrasted with the business ethics and moral principles preached for example by Benjamin Franklin and other Puritanist ideologues of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

More interesting is the fact that these new economic practices, which straddle the licit and the illicit, the 'visible' and 'invisible' economy (Ndjio 2006), embody the ambition or bid of many African businessmen and entrepreneurs to 'reinvent' the global capitalism—a term borrowed from Bayart (1994). By 'reinvention of global capitalism', I mean here not only the remodelling of its rationality and logics, but also the questioning of the ethical codes, principles and laws that govern economic activities and commercial transactions at both local and international levels. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, advanced-fee fraud and confidence trick commonly characterized in Nigeria as '419' scam—in reference to a section of the Nigerian criminal code that deals with business malpractices at large and a specific fraud—and in

Cameroon as *feymanian*<sup>2</sup>, have become one of the most noticeable manifestations of this Africans' endeavour to *reinvent* the global capitalism. Likewise, Nigerian '419' scammers and Cameroonian *feymen* (as international swindlers and confidence tricksters are generally called in Cameroon), who through confidence trick and sophisticated business frauds manage to accumulate considerable fortunes in a span of little time, have become the embodiment of new forms of capitalism— call it adventure or criminal capitalism— which essentially live on fraudulent practices.

This paper which is essentially based on ethnographic research conducted between 2000 and 2005 in Cameroon, and in some European countries (France, Great Britain, Germany and The Netherlands) is the continuation of my previous research on the moral economy of trickery and deceit that yields 'unconventional' and 'unethical' modes of wealth production in contemporary Cameroon (Ndjio 2001, 2006). The main objective of this paper is to show through the example of Nigerian advance-fee scammers and Cameroonian international swindlers how since the mid 1990s, young marginalized African youths have been endeavouring, not only to make the most of accumulative opportunities provided by the present global capitalism, but also to reframe this dominant mode of capitalization of riches; that is, to corrupt its conventional norms and systems of values. This study will show that one of the main schemes developed by these young African 'criminal' entrepreneurs and adventure businessmen consists in converting the global capitalism into a global economy of swindle and fraud.

This paper is divided into three parts: the first section makes a comparative analysis between the art of *feymanian* and advance-fee fraud of which young Bamileke from the Western region of Cameroon (see Malaquais 2001:101-18; Ndjio 2001) and Igbo in the South-East of Nigeria (Smith et al. 1999, Smith 2007) are key actors. The second part of the research discusses the internationalisation, of both advance-fee fraud and *feymanian*-related practices, which seems to go along with the criminalisation of the West by some West African transnational confidence tricksters and fraudsters who have found greener pastures in many western countries. The third section explores this African reinvention of global capitalism.

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<sup>2</sup>Historically, the term *feymanian* was popularized in the early 1990s as a result of the emergence of a group of wealthy young comen and tricky businessmen who came to be known by the public as *feymen*. The concept 'feymanian' derives from the local urban vernacular expression '*fe*' which, according to many informants, is the distortion of the English word 'fool.' Malaquais (2001:101-18) rather derives the expression *feymanian* from the French word *faire*, which also means: 'deceiving someone'. As she explains, the art of *feymanian* is the art of '*faire*' or '*feyre*:' the skill of cheating someone.'

## **The art of *feymania* and '419' scam**

Giving a clear-cut and unequivocal definition of the concepts of '*feymania*' and 'advance-fee fraud' is not an easy task, especially because one is dealing with such elusive and fuzzy expressions, which allow for various and, sometimes, contradictory interpretations that often confuse the analyst. This exercise is all the more difficult since in both Cameroonian and Nigerian popular discourses, the terms '*feymania*' and '419' scam have become an all-purpose concept for explaining illicit forms of wealth accumulation, unlawful economic activities, riches acquired by occult means, ill-gotten fortunes, and above all fantastic forms of wealth creation, which are officially unsanctioned because they derive from business activities or economic practices which contravene conventional norms and moral values, and especially circumvent official economic regulatory channels. In the local popular understanding, the terms also account for 'any behaviour that relies on dissimulation, illusion, or some other manipulation of the truth in order to facilitate gain or advantage' as Smith (2007:20) has explained about Nigerian advance-fee fraud. Moreover, *feymania* and '419' scam are more and more associated with all sorts of immoral demeanours such as deceit, duplicity, confidence trick, embezzlement, corruption, treachery and dishonesty. For example, it is common to read in a local press in both countries that the government and its opposition are practicing *feymania* or '419' politics, because of the former's skill at misleading international organizations and manipulating its political opponents (by means of bribe), and the latter's propensity to lust after ministerial posts or to connive with the incumbent regime. People also use the same words to point out deceitful and dishonest behaviours of their fellow countrymen. For example, the folks will say about a cunning and unscrupulous merchant who deceives his/her customers by selling them fake products, an unfaithful husband who keeps several mistresses out of his wife's knowledge, or a dishonest woman who extorts money from her naïve lovers by fooling them into believing that they have fathered her unborn child, that they have played their victims a *feymania* or '419', or will brand them '419' or *fey (wo) men*. So is the corrupt bureaucrat who uses his/her administrative position to siphon the state funds or a dishonest student who cheats during class exams (Ndjio 2006; Smith 2007: 53-87).

This inflation of meaning sometimes overshadows the fact that in the mid 1980s in Nigeria and early 1990s in Cameroon, when people spoke of '419' and *feymania*, they generally referred to the 'ability to attain wealth through witchcraft, trickery and devilish intelligence (and not through violence)' (Hibou 2004: 7). Indeed, these expressions initially made reference to a specific practice of fraud which involved money-doubling, wheeling-dealing, sophisticated bank

frauds and financial deceptions. As Béatrice Hibou (1999:105) explains about the practice of feymania:

In general *feymen* organize confidence tricks, frauds and financial deceptions. Their hallmark is to eschew the use of violence, and to achieve their ends by pure deception. *Feymen* persuade their victims that they are being offered fabulous bargains. They are adept at selling goods which do not in fact exist, and at proposing non-existing projects to development and aid agencies so as to defraud foreign embassies. There are cases of some who claim to be the King of Cameroon. Others claim to be able to multiply banknotes.

Yet, the critical question many readers might ask is: How do these young con(wo)men manage to extort huge amounts of money from their victims who are often experienced financiers, entrepreneurs or businessmen? What devilish tricks do they resort to take the dupes in? My own experience with a group of young *feymen* from Paris could help shed light not only on the tricksters' spectacular coups, but also their stunning intelligence and cynicism. Indeed, during the summer of 2002 (June-August), I spent more than two months among a ring gang of young Cameroonian swindlers whose ethnic and linguistic homogeneity made them impermeable to outsiders. These young transnational confidence tricksters were specialized in money-doubling, and in what my informants generally referred to as *wash-wash*, *eksi* or *kaolo*. All these pidgin terms account for the 'black money scam'. How does the feymen's trick work?

In general, a suitcase or trunk allegedly full of genuine money (generally \$ 100 bills) is shown to the *mougou* (dupe or gullible person), as ordinary Nigerians and Cameroonians call it. However, the notes are all black and the prospective victim is told that they have been ostensibly coated with a special substance in order to transport them safely. The blackening of the notes is usually caused by a Vaseline and iodine solution. The con artist will make use of his 'devilish intelligence' to use Hibou's words (2004: 7), to persuade the *mougou* to purchase a special cleaning solution at a cost between \$ 100,000 and \$ 500,000. The so-called expensive chemical which is allegedly necessary to remove the black substance used to disguise the notes as cash from the authorities, is in fact a mixture of washing up liquid and any other solution with an unusual odour and colour which the victim will not be able to detect easily. To win over the dupe who is generally a wealthy Arab or Asian businessman, or a white-collar Westerner, the confidence trickster will select randomly between two and four notes from the case. In front of the *mougou*, the hustler will wash them in a tiny portion of the solution, which he has brought with him, returning them to their original form as real bank notes. They are given to the mark who is asked to spend them or get them checked at the bank or any financial institution to confirm their authenticity. In reality of course, the con artist knows perfectly well which notes he



is selecting and takes the only ones that are there, the remainder being cut-to-size paper. A really dexterous trickster will even invite the gullible to choose notes to clean and use a well-practiced sleight of hand to trick the fool into selecting the genuine ones. As the case(s) will contain various amounts ranging from \$ 5 million to \$ 20 million, this seems like a ‘magical deal,’ which leads the dupe nicely into magical tricks. Unfortunately, it is only later that the mougou discovers that he/she has been conned. Garas, a ‘retired’ feyman who claims to be one of the initiators of *feymanian*–related activities in Cameroon, has revealed how cunning Cameroonian confidence tricksters manage to get money from some naïve and avaricious businessmen or politicians by trapping them into signing over major assets, or by making them believe that the feyman with whom they are dealing has a magical power to increase their capital. As he has explained in one Cameroonian newspaper<sup>3</sup>:

In 1991, I met a Greek businessman in Istanbul and told him that I could make him become very rich, if he agreed to go into business with me. I explained to him that I could fabricate several \$ million notes. To prove him that I could make it, I produced some copies of \$ 100 notes. He took them and went to many banks to check. A few hours later, he came back and told me that all the notes were genuine. The man was now convinced of my technique. He agreed to be my business partner. I ended up getting \$ 500,000 from the mougou and disappeared (translation is mine, BN)

Some readers will certainly dismiss this account as entirely imaginary or unreal for it seems almost impossible to delude people with such simple a scheme. But what the sceptics are likely to forget is that feymen, like other tricksters, are above all smooth talkers and professional crooks who know not only how to awaken the passion of greed that lies dormant in every man, but also to win over their victims with enticing proposals and convincing arguments. For example, one member of the gang of feymen mentioned earlier, once confided in me that he and his acolytes easily deceived their victims because they were either *broutoukou* (naïve or gullible) or had *de longs yeux* (to be greedy). According to the young trickster, as long as there are people who still believe in godsend or want to make a fast buck, feymanian-related activities will keep thriving. My informant himself was amazed how simple it was to convince people to hand over their property and huge sums of cash to an unknown person. But, despite the generalization of such swindling operations in many Western countries, and the growing number of victims of financial deceptions<sup>2</sup>, very few cases of confidence tricks are disclosed or reported to the law

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Le Messenger*, 10 May 2001: 8.

<sup>2</sup> For example, according to the online newspaper, *ThisisNewNottingham*, (22 May, 2004) which quotes the Chief Constable of the Nottingham Police, several hundred of individuals and businesses within the county are targeted over a year by *feymen* and other West African criminal networks that operate in the United Kingdom. We learn from the same

enforcement agencies. The sentiment of guilt and shame that most of the victims of feymen's art of deception generally feel, added to the fear of being blamed for their greedy spirit, or charged with criminal conspiracy drives many to keep silent about their distress. As the case of a British family from Nottingham, who lost more than £100,000 in an elaborate scam set up by one trickster shows, victims of feymen's confidence tricks are usually too embarrassed to report their loss to the police<sup>3</sup>.

As regards the notorious Nigerian '419' which has now gained a worldwide reputation, both the popular and academic literature about this scam seems to suggest that Nigerian fraudsters are rather specialized in advance-fee schemes and bank frauds. The former are generally perpetrated by underdogs or young amateur criminals who are also attracted by the prospect of fast wealth that '419' activities yield, and sometimes by ordinary Nigerians who make use of one of the various ruses of '419' in order to achieve their own economic aspirations, or to get round the conditions of liability that impinge on their lives. The scam consists in ensnaring a dupe into advancing fees and providing information about his/her bank account, against the promise of a much larger return. Concretely, the confidence tricksters start by sending to their prospective victims faxes or email messages that generally rely on the symbols of Nigeria's petroleum industry or state apparatuses. In these letters, the fraudsters who generally impersonate government officials, top-ranking military officers, bank managers, oil industry executives, high-profile politicians, or even relatives of a deceased African head of State, claim to be in possession of millions of dollar obtained by fraudulent means, and frozen in an African bank account or a safety deposit location. The recipients of the letters are asked for assistance in transferring the funds out of the continent, and are promised to receive in turn a percentage (between 30 to 50%) of the hidden funds. The positive reply to the scammers' messages is an indication that the recipients are willing mougous. Several mail exchanges or phone conversations will help the fraudsters win the dupes' trust, who will not hesitate to send them details of their bank account. Such information are useful not only because they enable the fraudsters to withdraw money from their victims' bank account, but also because they can help them to apply for credit cards, ask for loans to the victims' banks, or forge cheques useful for illegal bank transactions.

Perpetrators of sophisticated financial scams and bank frauds which require exceptional technical know-how, coordination of large number of people, and infiltration of the banking

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source that in the UK, the average victim is conned out of more than £50,000.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *This is New Nottingham* online, 22 May 2004; especially the article: 'Operation zero will net victim just like that.'

system are rather Nigerian kingpins of '419' fraud, who generally operate within loosely organized criminal groups supposedly connected by ethnic bounds. This is the case with the notorious Nigerian transnational crime syndicate that is reportedly controlled by what some observers now refer to as Igbo Mafia who allegedly makes use of the social capital of ethnicity, kinship lineage and place of origin to prosper in criminal activities (Bayart et al. 1999: 40). According to Smith (2007: 38), Nigerian criminal networks that reportedly control multimillion of dollars derived from their fraudulent business schemes, also rely on clientelist relationships that permeate both the government and the private sector, and on the ties that Nigerians at home generally maintain with their fellow compatriots living abroad. These international networks of crime, which often work together with the Colombian, Russian, Chinese and Italian crime syndicates, are increasingly involved in drug smuggling, money laundering, bank fraud, 419 scams, counterfeiting of foreign currencies and credit cards, etc. Top figures of Nigerian crime syndicates often recruit individuals to infiltrate bank workers or bribe employees who can provide them with critical information about customers' bank accounts and addresses. Glickman (2005: 471) has revealed that '419' scammers also take advantage of internet insecurity to prey on banks and individuals. Not surprising that many western banks have been victims of some cunning Nigerian scammers who set up fake websites resembling their legitimate sites. Unsuspecting customers logging in these bogus websites are far from imagining that they are revealing of their own volition their personal information to smart smooth criminals who will use them to drain their accounts or to perpetrate bank frauds. Symptomatic of this bank fraud is the Citybank of London which has become one of the main targets of some West African fraudsters who regularly impersonate the bank's website to swindle its clients (Catan and Peel 2003). A German industrialist reportedly lost £1 million in such a sophisticated scam crafted by these cunning African hustlers (Glickman, *ibid*: 471-72).

Students of West African criminal networks will find a correspondence between the practice of feymania and the criminal business deal commonly glossed as '419' of which young Nigerian nationals are key actors. Indeed, Cameroonian feymen bear a close resemblance to Nigerian advance-fee scammers, since both have made dirty tricks a primary means of accumulating wealth, and are engaged in what can be termed a moral economy of swindle, hoodwinking, double-dealing and fraud, which has taken a dramatic turn in Cameroon and Nigeria. In addition, both are involved in what Apter (2005: 13) would call 'the economy of images and appearances' that produces value from floating signifiers. However, these similarities should not make us lose sight of the significant differences that exist between Cameroonian

feymen and Nigerian 419 scammers in terms of itineraries of accumulation, social strategies or relationships with the postcolonial state. For example, like their politico-bureaucratic elites with whom they maintain clientelist relationships, many Nigerian kingpins of organised crime generally achieve their fraudulent activities in the nexus of the Nigerian postcolonial state and within the pervasive networks of patronage and reciprocity, that according to Smith (2007:13), constitute a significant proportion of the everyday political economy in Nigeria. They do it, not only by securing political support from some local big men and influential government or state officials, but also by making use of both government facilities and symbols of the Nigerian state. The centrality of the Nigerian state in the 419 scam is epitomized by the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporate (NNPC). For example, a significant number of Nigerian scammers who send email-scams to their prospective marks generally impersonate the insignia of this famous and respectable state-owned company, which embodies the Nigerian-driven oil economy. It is this proximity with different structures of the postcolonial state that has led some analysts to interpret the practice of '419' as one of new forms of corruption and criminalization of the Nigerian state that emerged in the late 1980s under the former regime of General Babangida also nicknamed 'Maradona' (after the famous Argentine football player), for his ability to play a confidence trick on both his political opponents and the international community (Apter 1999: 267-307, 2005; Smith 2007).

While, what is distinctive about feymen is the fact that, contrary to the older generation of Cameroonian businessmen and financial elites whose business interests were (and are still) closely connected with those of the politico-bureaucratic bourgeoisie (Bayart 1993: 95), a great number of prominent *feymen* who mostly come from underprivileged social backgrounds initially distanced themselves from the state officials and politicians with whom they shared no social backgrounds, much less cultural affiliations<sup>4</sup>. In addition, since the emergence of feymanian-related practices in the early 1990s, most of successful confidence tricksters have tended to downplay the importance of the corrupt and clientelist state in access to financial and material resources, and thus freeing themselves from the state's paternalism and the whims of the local big men. In addition, in their accumulative project, many prominent tricky businessmen are inclined to give priority to 'alternative modes of accumulation' (Geschiere and Konings, 1993) which challenge the officially sanctioned modes of creation and distribution of riches in postcolonial Cameroon. That is why *feymanian*-related practices first appeared as a 'popular mode

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<sup>4</sup>This conflicting relationship with the ruling CPDM regime was dramatized by the fact that most young people turned feymen were urban marginalized Bamileke youths who originated from a region generally considered hostile to President Biya in power since 1982.

of political action' (Bayart et al. 1992) or a 'hidden transcript of resistance' (Scott 1990) that was essentially directed against the dominant groups, since most of the victims of *feymen*'s confidence tricks were either the politico-bureaucratic elites or wealthy businessmen connected to the ruling CPDM regime<sup>5</sup>.

### **Criminalize and swindle the West**

The globalization, or at least the internationalisation of both the feymanian-related practices and the '419' scam is one of the most notable changes that occurred these recent years in these two types of fraudulent business deals. Symptomatic of this globalisation of west African organized crime is the propensity of many West African criminal entrepreneurs to expand their swindling operations on a worldwide scale, thus making use of both 'resources of extraversion' (Bayart 1993) and accumulative opportunities provided by the present global capitalism that often permits to secure instant wealth and without great effort. Indeed, like many other West African criminal operators such as the Congolese traffickers, Liberian fraudsters and Ivorian email hustlers, the new generations of Nigerian 419 scammers and Cameroonian feymen have since the early 1990s for the former, and the mid 1990s for the latter, embarked on a global process of crime and fraud, suggesting that it is not only the Black continent and its political elites who indulge in criminal and fraudulent practices on the large scale, as some analysts have upheld about Africa (Bayart et al. 1999:20). According to Andrew Apter (2005: 228), the globalisation of the '419' scam in the early 1990s was prompted by the decision of Babangida regime (1985-1993) to deregulate the banking system and foreign-exchange market, and especially by the drop in the world price of the oil which plunged the Naira (Nigerian currency) into a dramatic spiral of devaluation. The steady loss of value of their national currency against international currencies such as the US or Canadian Dollar, the British Pound caused many Nigerian con artists to search for foreign dupes, most notably Western marks, from whom they could extort hard currencies in order to compensate a Naria turned a 'monkey money' or worthless paper. By

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<sup>5</sup> However it is important to relativize or nuance this subversive character of feymanian-related practices, because, as we have demonstrated elsewhere (Ndjio 2006), these activities have also become an integral part of the ruling CPDM regime's policy of plundering or 'eating' the state. This is because, in its attempt to curb the growing influence of independent Bamileke feymen who have always tended to bypass its importance, the Cameroon government has encouraged the emergence of compliant and manipulable feymen from the President's own ethnic group (the Beti from the forest region of Cameroon), who rather owe their economic success to their ability to take advantage of the patrimonial and corrupt character of the Biya regime. Moreover, unlike most Bamileke feymen, the wealth and social promotion of members of what Cameroonians disparagingly call 'feymen du Renouveau' (the Renouveau or New Deal in English, is the official designation of the Biya regime) stem from their connections with holders of political power.

deciding to internationalize their fraudulent business activities, these Nigerian fraudsters were only inserting themselves into the globalized market and finance capitalism which, as Comaroff and Comaroff (2001) have convincingly shown, open up the potential for venture enterprises and criminal practices.

As far as feymanism is concerned, its internationalisation was rather the result of the effort of the Cameroonian government to 'enslave' successful feymen into both the localizing framework of ethno-politics and the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart 1993). In my previous research (Ndjio 2001, 2006) on Cameroonian confidence tricksters, I demonstrated that this attempt by the ruling CPDM regime to domesticate the newly emerging class of wealthy hustlers led many prominent feymen who had little connections with official lucrative networks of patronage to search for accumulative opportunities outside their home country. Moreover, the state's hegemonic ambition on this independent class of nouveaux riches propelled the emergence of what I referred to as 'globalizing feymen' who tended to carry out their swindle operations on a worldwide scale. But, unlike the older generations of feymen who always came back home with their 'spoils,' these new generations of professional swindlers were rather inclined to establish themselves abroad because they were sceptical about the future of their home country.

There are also a number of factors that can explain why the newly emerging group of young Nigerian and Cameroonian 'criminal' entrepreneurs decided by mid 1990s to search for new pastures outside their continent. The first one was the saturation of the African *front* (a place where a swindling operation is carried out) which was no longer attractive, as some transnational confidence tricksters from Paris and London once confided in me during an interview conducted in November 2004. This saturation was itself prompted by the rush of many young Nigerians and Cameroonians for '419' and feymanism-related activities, which offered socially and economically marginalized youths of both countries a perspective of gaining access to wealth from which they were excluded by their corrupt and patrimonial governments. The second factor was the growing setbacks of feymen and 419 scammers in many sub-Saharan countries where they could no longer get up to their old tricks because most of their potential mougous were now aware of them, thanks to their government's warning, but also because some of them had already been taken in by Cameroonian and Nigerian con artists. Finally, following the spectacular coups achieved by some notorious feymen and 419 scammers in a number of African countries, local authorities had decided to wage a bitter war on these 'unscrupulous foreigners' who 'not only were harming the economy of their country, but also were teaching the local population how to become dishonest and immoral,' to quote Theodor Obiang Nguema, the Equatorial Guinean

President<sup>6</sup>. As a result of these tough measures against West African criminals, throughout Africa, feymen and 419 scammers were hunted down, arrested, harshly beaten up, jailed, and sometimes shot dead or burnt alive, either by the local police or population, as it happened in South Africa and Botswana in mid-1990s<sup>7</sup>.

More important is the fact that this globalisation of West African organized crime seems to take the form of a special kind of ‘westernization,’ since most of these ring gangs are now based in Western countries where they pursue their economic delinquencies. Given that a great number of young African immigrants who reside in Western countries now live on the informal or criminal economy, one cannot help asking if the West is not mimicking sub-Saharan Africa in a steady move towards the informalization and criminalization of its economy. One might be tempted to answer in the affirmative, if one acknowledges the fact that many of these western countries have become hubs for West African organized crime, and that in many districts or neighbourhoods of the major European or North American cities, African criminal networks manage to launder the proceeds of their criminal activities in formal enterprises, and more importantly, oversee the growing shadow economy that is being developed in the very heart of the late modern capitalism. This is the case with the 17<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement, and most notably Château d’Eau and Château Rouge, La Gare du Nord neighbourhoods in Paris, the Quartier Matongue in Brussels, the Bijlmer neighbourhood in the suburb of Amsterdam, and the Northwest region of London. As I observed during my fieldwork in those popular areas, some big bosses of west African crime syndicates ran through their relatives or front men many African nightclubs, clandestine bars, cafés, hostels, restaurants, beauty saloons, and haberdasheries (see also MacGaffey and Bazenguissa 2000). They also controlled the burgeoning illegal activities which irrigated the local economy. This is confirmed by a special report that *France 2*, a French government-run TV, broadcast on the 13 October 2005 about what the reporter called ‘underground economy’ that, according to him, was widespread in most *banlieues* (disenfranchised neighbourhoods mostly populated by African and Arab immigrants) of Paris. During this programme, one of the police officers whose special unit was involved in the fight against organized crime in these disenfranchised suburbs lamented about the fact that most criminal networks which were involved in theft of luxury cars, drug trafficking, confidence trick, counterfeiting of bank notes and credit cards were controlled by young African criminal

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<sup>6</sup>The man himself was said to be one of the victims of some feymen who reportedly swindled several million CFA out of him (see *Mutations*, 15 May 1999; Malaquais, 2001: 101-18)

<sup>7</sup>Cf. *La Nouvelle Expression*, 05 July 1996; *La Colombe*, 12 May 2000; *Le Messenger*, 9 February 2000. See also Glickman (2005:460-89)

operators originating from West and Central Africa. According to this police officer, his unit was created in reaction to the criminalization of the main suburbs of Paris by African organized crime syndicates. He and his team were particularly concerned about the actions of Ivorian and Congolese fraudsters, and Cameroonian confidence tricksters and professional swindlers who regularly extorted money from some naïve and avaricious local merchants and businessmen who were hungry enough for a quick buck.

As the above example shows, the *relocalisation* of feymen's and 419 scammers' criminal activities in Western countries has gone along with the 'whitization' of their victims; that is, turning many White people into what is known in the *feymen* milieu as *gros pigeons* (big suckers or dupes). Indeed, unlike their predecessors who essentially preyed on African politicians and businessmen (Malaquais 2001:101-18; Ndjio 2006) — as alluded to earlier—, the younger generations of Cameroonian swindlers and Nigerian 419 scammers rather tend to bamboozle White middle-classes who have become the main victims of their dirty tricks and 'art of composition', as Cameroonian feymen often say. There are many examples of western politicians, professionals, businessmen or entrepreneurs who have fallen prey to some young African hustlers and confidence tricksters who lured them into providing advance fees against the promise of larger payoffs. For example in 2001, the Canadian newspaper *Canada Newswire* reported story about a fraud ring of Toronto-based Nigerian hustlers who managed to defraud three hundred Canadian citizens in a large sophisticated scam. Individual losses rolled from \$ 52 000 to over \$5 million<sup>8</sup>. This large swindling operation was reminiscent of the scam perpetrated a few years earlier by some cunning Nigerian hustlers against a former American congressman and a Texas oil executive from whom they swindled several \$ million<sup>9</sup> Like the avaricious Texan entrepreneur and politician, many greedy and gullible Americans have lost millions of dollar in sophisticated business frauds and scams pulled off by some kingpins of West African organised crime<sup>10</sup>. In a previous work on feymen, I related a story about a young Cameroonian lady who helped in 2000 a ring of five France-based Cameroonian confidence tricksters to defraud FF 20 million (more than \$4 million) from a wealthy banker from Luxembourg, who was then her partner. To win over her naïve companion, the cunning woman invested her personal savings and jewellery in the swindling operation, knowing that she would get them back when she and her associates met somewhere in the town to share their haul (Ndjio 2006, especially chap IV). More

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Glickman (2005: 479)

<sup>9</sup>See Brady (2003); Glickman(2005: 460-89)

<sup>10</sup>Cf. *ABC news* on 5 September 2000.



dramatic was the fact that the mark did not only lose all his fortune in this money doubling scam crafted by these young Cameroonian con artists. He also found himself deeply indebted to his bank. The question one can ask here is: what enable Cameroonian and Nigerian confidence tricksters to bait their white victims (who are often experienced professionals or well-advised politicians) into investing their money into their shady businesses?

The comments made by a young Bamileke feyman from Paris— quoted earlier—, who believed that feyman-related activities thrived in western countries only because there existed some naive and greedy White fellows who wanted to make windfall profits, seemed to suggest that young West African smooth criminals exploited to their own advantage both the naivety and avarice of some Westerners to con them. However, some analysts have pertinently noted that Cameroonian and Nigerian confidence tricksters generally play on the West's racist and ethnocentric stereotypes about Africans and their continent to achieve their business frauds and scams (Apter 2005, Glickman 2005: 460-89). Some of these received ideas often take for granted that Africans are inexperienced and naive in business, and incapable of understanding the subtlety and complexity of the global capitalism. Other clichés that are still unfortunately still prevalent in much of the western mainstream literature on Africa, hold it for true that Africans don't know the value of money because they build wealth in people and knowledge, and not in ruthless acquisition of money and material resources (Guyer 1993, 1995). In the West is also widely believed that Africa is a place where it is easy for western foreigners to make fantastic profits in a spam of little time or to strike good deals because of the widespread practice of corruption, and especially the criminal behaviour of many African political elites. For example, Apter (2005: 233) has mentioned a case of 419 scam involving a Canadian real estate broker who, despite losing \$ 60 000, was so taken in by his Nigerian associates that he still believed that they were sincere in their efforts to keep \$ 32 million out of the hands of corrupt and kleptomaniac Nigerian officials. Like many Nigerian-crafted scams, this swindling operation was premised on Nigeria's worldwide reputation for corruption and criminalisation of the state by venal politicians and bureaucrats who have made their country be perceived by the western watchdog Transparency International as one of the most corrupt and criminal countries in the world. It often happens that in their bid to pull off their scams, some young African hustlers, most notably Ivorian fraudsters who have joined Nigerian 419 scammers in the performance of the art of con games, rather exploit both the Westerners' paternalistic and pitiful attitude the towards Africans, and the clichés of horror and tragedy that pervade most western media when it comes to depicting the Black continent. Little wonder that in many 419 scam letters that they

send to their White marks, West African con(wo) men generally attempt to lure the unsuspecting recipients into a false belief that they are dealing with naive and unfortunate Africans who desperately need some help. For example in early 2004, one colleague from the University of Amsterdam received an email scam from a young Ivorian woman (even if he suspected that the sender was a Nigerian national) who passed herself off as the daughter's of the late General Robert Gueye, the former Ivorian military ruler who was killed together with his wife and aides in a failed coup attempt perpetrated in September 2002 by a group of assailants coming from the Northern region of the country. The recipient was asked for assistance in transferring \$20 million that were secretly hidden somewhere in a neighbouring country into a bank account in Europe in exchange for a substantial percentage (40%) with discretion. More interesting in this email was the fact that it dramatized to excess the political turmoil in Ivory Coast, and especially the persecutions that close relatives of the former head of state were enduring under the regime of President Laurent Gbagbo. I came across this mail because my then colleague, who had little knowledge of the sagacity spirit of some Africans, was so touched by the pathetic story concocted by the young African lady that he wanted to share his compassion and sympathy with an African colleague, who might have experienced a similar hardship in 'the heart of darkness' continent.

My investigation among young Cameroonian feymen from Paris and London revealed that some cunning African international swindlers also took advantage of the ignorance of many Westerners of African society and culture. For example, the young Cameroonian lady mentioned earlier fooled her naive White lover into believing that her implication in the deal would secure his fortune, and especially would prevent the tricksters who were her village fellows to con him because in the Bamileke custom, cheating one's kith and kin brings ill luck and misfortune. Obviously, the cunning lady was playing on the general cliché that both traditional and modern African societies at large are essentially guided by the system of kinship, and the principle of communal socialities and mutual obligation that ensure individuals 'protective solidarities', but hinder their individualisation; that is, their emergence as 'autonomous actors' (Marie 1997). If the 'good man' of Luxembourg had read Alain Marie's *L'Afrique des Individus* (1997), he would have been aware of the fact that, in their expression of 'individualisation' and their practice of sagacity, some Africans have no qualms about flouting the traditional system of kinship, or challenging the tyrannical power of community and ethnicity. Were he familiar with the popular literature in Cameroon, he would have known that in this country, as in many African countries, both the 'invention du quotidien' and the 'art de faire'(de Certeau 1980) also coincide with what

Dominique Malaquais (2001: 101-18) aptly calls the 'art de feyre'. That is, the art of defrauding or taking an unfair advantage of a fellow who is fool enough to trust you.

### **Reinventing the global capitalism**

One of the unexpected turns of the peripheral insertion of the Black continent into the world economy, and the economic crisis many African countries have been experiencing since the late 1980s, is indisputably the recent emergence in this continent of new modes of capitalization of wealth that today encourage new economic conducts and new ethos of accumulation that end up rendering obsolete the old system of business transactions and economic entrepreneurship. More important is the fact that this new art of making money heralds a shift in common understandings of the nature of capitalism and business activities, as well as it is preparing the ground for what Janet MacGaffey (1994: 189-204) aptly calls 'African capitalism' which has not yet been sufficiently theorized. What particularly marks out this African capitalism is less the fact that it essentially lives on fraud, prevarication and other fraudulent practices, than the fact that it clutters itself very little with ethical values and moral principles which, according to Max Weber ([1920]1958), guided the behaviour of Protestant capitalists of eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In many respects, Nigerian advance-fee fraud and Cameroonian feymanian are the embodiment of these unconventional business ventures and unorthodox economic practices that undermine the established logic of international financial transactions, as well as they encourage a steady loss of ethics and moral principles in business and economic activities (Brittan and Hamlin 1995; Reidenbach and Robin 1989; Sen 1985, 1995: 23-34). More importantly, both feymanian and '419' scam herald a Second Coming of capitalism, not in its millennial, neo-liberal and global manifestations, as forecast by Comaroff and Comaroff (2001), but rather in its criminal, felonious and venal expressions. By this, we mean that we are dealing with a kind of unlawful business deals and non-standard ways of bargaining and trading exchanges that prefigure a new form of entrepreneurship in which business people are turned into immoral economic agents whose actions are essentially driven by 'ruthless acquisition, bound to no ethical norms whatever,' as Max Weber ([1920]1958: 71) would say. Little wonder that since the mid 1990s, many self-appointed western criminal 'experts' have been producing both 'grand narratives', and sometimes a phantasmagorical literature about the expansion of the so-called 'global transnational criminality' in general, and 'west African organized crime' in particular, which allegedly threatens the very foundation of both the market economy and the liberal

democracy (Favarel-Garrigues et al. 2002; Handelman 1995; Maillard 2001; Naylor 2002; Strange 1998; Varese 2001). In so doing, they join their governments in both their lamentations and panic about the progressive transformation of the global capitalism into a global economy of crime and venality, in which business ventures are assimilated to criminal enterprises. Western academics, politicians and policy makers particularly worry about the propagation of what John Flemming, the former chief economist for the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, has referred to as 'Mafia capitalism' (Flemming 1995: 45-56) which, according to him, is based on the effort to create riches by appeal to techniques that contravene both national and international laws and conventions governing economic activities. These recent years, this general concern has led in most western countries to real political, administrative and juridical offensives against the *méchante* African criminals who have become the nightmare for many western governments and financial institutions trapped into the nets of west African economy of fraud and hoodwinking. Apter (2005: 228) reveals for example that financial scams and business frauds perpetrated in many parts of the world by members of West African organized crime have now 'engaged the energies of Scotland Yard, the FBI, Interpol, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and a variety of private and subsidiary agencies, such as Better Business Bureau and the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network in the US'. The criminal activities of some young African international swindlers in Western countries also give a headache to the British MPFA (Metropolitan Police Fraud Alert) and WAOCS (West African Organized Crime Section), the American NCIS (National Criminal Intelligence Service), and the Dutch *Dienst Nationale Recherche Informatie Landelijk Bureau Fraude* (Dutch National Bureau of the Financial Crime Unit) of the Dutch National Bureau of Investigation, which have been conducting an investigation into worldwide fraud practices of '419 fraud' and confidence trick.

The fact that young African criminal entrepreneurs such the notorious Nigerian '419' scammers and Cameroonian feymen who are increasingly active in Western Europe and North America, have compelled many western governments to set up anti-fraud units to combat what many criminal experts now label 'west African organized crime' can be cynically interpreted as a revenge of African *sans culottes* against the global economic system that only marginalizes or *peripherizes* African in the world economy. The fact that young Ivorian fraudsters and Congolese *mikilistes* have forced many French and Belgian banks to invest millions of dollar in tightening their banking security against the theft of identity is also a strong reminder that Africans refuse to play a passive role in the global market, or to occupy the position of underdogs in the world economic game.

Whether one limits the behaviour of these young African con artists to criminal practices (Hibou 1999: 70-113; Malaquais 2001), whether one interprets their economic delinquency either as an avatar of the neo-liberal capitalism which has always put up with business frauds (Bayart 2004), the truth is that young West African transnational swindlers and professional tricksters have nowadays engaged in a process of redefinition of the cannons and rules of the global economic games, which have so far been set by the West. They are especially involved in a symbolic destabilisation of the hegemonic order that western developed countries have always maintained in their commercial and economic transactions with African countries. And one of the often-neglected dimensions of the practices of feymania and '419' scam is that since the mid 1990s, both have been embodying what can be provisionally called African modes of capitalism or Africa's work *on* capitalism. These African practices of capitalism embody the conscious or unconscious effort of African confidence tricksters and professional fraudsters to africanize what is still perceived by many as an *alienating* economic system, and especially to reinvent the global capitalism, as alluded to earlier in the introduction of this paper. Though Bayart (1994), following the French historian Fernand Braudel (1985), was one of the first analysts to advance the hypothesis of 'reinvention of capitalism' as a result of its global expansion, our use of this concept is different from his. In general, by reinvention of (global) capitalism, he means 'the emergence of differentiation in the logics of capitalism, the change in the way of accumulation and consumption, and the method and spirit of industrial management' (ibid, 15). Bayart especially discusses this *reinvention* with respect to the emergence or exacerbation of culturalist particularisms in business economic activities, the use of identity strategies in the individual or collective attempt to gain access to wealth and material resources. In addition, he understands this expression as 'a way of making the erosion of the homogenizing aspects of the global capitalism' (p.250). In short for him, the reinvention of capitalism goes along with the 'reinvention of difference' —a concept borrowed from James Clifford (1988).

In this contribution, we rather understand the concept 'reinvention of capitalism' as an African project of reshaping or re-forming both the classical art of enterprising and trading, and the global dominant economic order that has until now profited Western developed countries. This programme entails not only the re-appropriation of the rationality and logics that inform the present global economy, but also the questioning of the established norms, ethical codes and laws that regulate the economic activities at both local and international levels. By 'reinvention of global capitalism', we particularly make reference to an unprecedented insidious undermining work that some young cunning African transnational swindlers and professional tricksters have

been exerting on the world economy, and which is exacerbating the corruption of its conventional norms and systems of values.

One of the most expressive forms of this denaturalisation of the neo-capitalist system is its slow conversion by Cameroonian feymen and Nigerian 419 scammers into a transnational economy of swindle and fraud in which deception is no longer a substitute or an 'alternative mode of accumulation' (Geschiere and Konings 1993), but is rather the driving force of economic entrepreneurship and business ventures, and especially the main methods of making money. Indeed, with the practices of feymanism and 419 scam, we are no longer dealing with more classical forms of illegal activities, which sometimes straddle the licit and the illicit, or combine both the legal and illegal enterprises, as the work of Janet MacGaffey (1992: 514-24; 1998: 37-50; see also MacGaffey and Bazenguissa 2000) has convincingly demonstrated. Instead, we bear witness of the emergence of unprecedented forms of criminal business practices which, not only make the violation of business rules and economic conventions a norm, but also promote the normalisation of the economy of deception and trickery, the aestheticisation of criminality and venality, the routinization of business frauds, the moralisation and ethicisation of dishonesty and double-dealing, and the immoralisation of honesty and rectitude, insofar as in both feymanism and 419 scam, righteousness and virtue are viewed as a vice or a luxury that the hustlers cannot afford. This implies that those who are involved in this economy of false (*faux*) and forgery that goes along with unethical values and deceptive ethics, reject what McCloskey (2006) calls 'bourgeois virtues', which generally associate economic success with moral codes or behavioural ethics (Beauchamp and Bowie 1992; de George 1982; Reidenbach and Robin 1989; Sen 1987, 1995: 23-34; Weber [1920]1958). For example, members of a ring gang of feymen we followed in Paris between June and September 2002 had for maxim what can be summarized as: 'In business, it is dishonest to be honest because everybody is dishonest' (Ndjio 2006). Even among these 'thieves' who generally paid lip service to moral principles and ethic values, there were no honour, since they tended to play a confidence trick even on their own cronies or partners with whom they conspired to swindle some unscrupulous Westerner dupes.

Another critical aspect of this reinvention of global capitalism is its transmutation into a vast economy of illusion and simulacrum in which success in business ventures mainly depends on the 'performance of the art of con games' which involves stagecraft, impersonation, and those 'collusive fabrications' as Apter (2005: 228) would put it. In this moral economy of masquerade, delusion and semblance, the achievement of dirty tricks and economic malpractice also rests on one's ability to cover one's real project and activities, conceal one's real motives and intention, or flout one's true identity; in short to 'wear the mask of appearance', as Suzanne Brenner (1998)

would say. For example, to win over his/her victim, the swindler-entrepreneur must pretend to be not what he/she is really, but someone else; that is, a honest businessperson or a money-doubling' expert who knows how to produce bank notes, and even a good person (benefactor) who just wants to help his/her fellow to accrue his/her capital, and not a vulgar crook or a smooth criminal (malefactor) who only lusts after his/her victim's money. However, the trickster's simulacrum or *dédoublement* (split personality) is only intended to deceive the mark. For, as Apter (ibid, 234) remind us, in the world of '419' scam and confidence trick, the 'truth-value of the appearances' is never shared by both parties, because what is true for the dupe is not for the confidence trickster; what the mougou takes for real and is ready to invest all his/her fortune, is only mise-en-scène, appearance and fabrication whose fictitious character will be only revealed when the con game or fool bargain is over. That is, when the hustler has absconded with the mark's money, leaving his/her victim only with bogus documents and fake addresses. Such 'unequal terms of social interaction' that create 'unequal terms of financial exchange' (Apter, ibid: 234) are always profitable to the same person: the trickster.

We are conscious of the fact that some analysts would argue against our hypothesis about the African reinvention of global capitalism that fraud, deception, and trickery have always been common practices in capitalist system (Warnier 1994: 185), and have played a critical role in capital formation in western economies (Harvey 1989). Others would probably point out that the activities or practices we are describing are only one of the most radical expressions of the dynamism of global capitalism so well captured by Braudel (1985)<sup>11</sup>. But when these critiques have been conceded, what remains undeniable and irrefutable is the observation that both feymanian and '419' scam confront us with new forms of entrepreneurship in which the classical principles: 'Honesty is the best Policy' — so dear to puritan capitalists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries — has been replaced by 'Dishonesty is the best policy'. In addition, with these business malpractices, we are witnessing the emergence of a specific economy of duplicity and treachery in which a business partner is seen above all as a dupe to swindle or a *gros pigeon* to fleece. However, what is most sticking in both feymanian and advance-fee fraud is less the fact that 'money changes hands in one direction only, despite the expectations of a return', as (Apter 2005: 234) has observed about Nigerian 419 scam, than the fact that the betrayal of one's partner's trust is common practice. What we are making reference to is a kind of immoral business deals, in which dirty tricks are no longer marginal or trivial practices developed on the margins of normal economic activities, but are rather integral aspects of business transactions

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<sup>11</sup> For Braudel (1985:78), the main characteristic of capitalism is its 'flexibility', 'adaptability' and 'eclecticism'.

and exchanges. Elsewhere (Ndjio 2002b), we referred to these business malpractices as both the 'economy of distrust' (*sans confiance*) and 'breach of trust' (*abus de confiance*). For if the art of feymanian and '419' scam is the art of con game which entails above all engaging the mark into 'magical deals' which generally lead him/her nicely into magical tricks, it also implies trapping the dupe in a fool's bargain in which he/she gives everything, but receives nothing in turn. Moreover, in this kind of tricky game, one party strongly believes that to win or achieve his/her objectives (accruing his/her capital), he/she must put all his/her confidence in the other contractor who has all the reasons to be smart, or to take unfair advantage of his/her partner's trust. That is why the art of confidence trick is generally associated with both the regime of disloyalty and dishonesty (Ndjio 2002b).

## Conclusion

In many respects, both Nigerian advance fee-fraud and Cameroonian feymanian are one of the new types of business malpractices, and economy of illusion and magic trick that came forth by the late 1980s and early 1990s in a context of disappointed expectations, broken contracts, and unfulfilled national development plans (Apter 2005: 226). More importantly, both are of the most radical expressions of what we referred elsewhere (Ndjio, forthcoming) as 'African sagacity spirit', which enable both the elites and the commoners not only to adapt to modern changes, but also to invent new opportunities for enrichment in an atmosphere marked by economic decline, austerity and drastic structural adjustment measures imposed by international financial institutions, and above all, by the dwindling of state resources (de Boeck 1998; 777-809; Hibou 2004; Jua 2003: 13-36; Konings 2006; Trefon 2004). Unfortunately, both western government criminal investigations and the mainstream academic literature on the topic have so far limited the understanding of these business malpractices and economic malfeasances either to the growing process of criminalization of the state in Africa (Bayart 1999: 114-16, 2004; Hibou 1999: 70-113, 2004; Malaquais 2001: 101-18) or to the rampant political culture of fraud, corruption and deception in postcolonial Africa (Apter 2005; Glickman 2005:460-89; Smith 2007). In other words, ordinary Nigerians and Cameroonians who try their hands at advance-fee fraud and feymanian are only mimicking the criminal and venal attitude of their state-based elites who have notorious for siphoning the state resources into private pockets.

Though we sympathize with both the theories of the criminalization and corruption, we think that they have failed not only to chart the shift recorded this last decade in the so-called west African transnational crime, but also to grasp the relation between the growth in the



economy of swindle and confidence trick, and the emergence of immoral business practices and felonious capitalism that aggravate the erosion of ethics and morality in international business and economic activities, the dramatization of alternative modes of accumulation that sometimes downplay the importance of the African postcolonial state as the major centre of production and redistribution of wealth, the effort of some cunning young African business adventurers to transform the mode of doing business at both national and international levels, and the constitution of new class of nouveaux riches that sometimes assert their independence towards the political and bureaucratic elites, as is the case with many prominent feymen. It is a pity that both academics and experts have given insufficient attention to the strategies of malfeasance of young Cameroonian feymen and Nigerian advance fee fraudsters, their subversive play of the logics of neo-liberal capitalism, and their audacious challenge of the ethical and judicial codes and that inform the global economic activities. We have shown in this paper that one of the remarkable forms of African work on the global capitalism, was its mischievous transformation by young African business adventurers and transnational confidence tricksters into a global economy of magic trick and dissimulation. In this moral economy of dishonesty in which ethics no longer makes sense, business transactions are turned into a fool bargain: one business partner acting as the *truant* (trickster) and another playing the naive role of the *bon* (dupe or mark) who invests everything for receiving nothing. This third world mimic of global economy, as Homi Bhabha (1994) would put it, embodies not only African *bricolages* (patched-up jobs) of capitalism, but also the effort of some Africans to 'reinvent' the global capitalist system. Though some critics might disagree with our interpretation of feymanism and '419' scam, we believe that a radical form taken by this economy of swindle and deception suggests that a new form of entrepreneurship may be emerging not only in Africa, but across the world, if acknowledges the fact young Cameroonian and Nigerian international swindlers and confidence tricksters are now exporting their expertise and craft in places as remote as the Caribbean, Philippines, Russia, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore (Roberts 2002; Perry 2003).

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