

Globalization: The Purgatory of Delusions

Tribute and Overview of Frederic F. Clairmont's book by Bernard Mbeki

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Theme: [Global Economy](#), [History](#), [Poverty](#)
& [Social Inequality](#)

The power of the two major contributions published in this book highlights Frederic Clairmont's unrelenting analysis of the driving forces of imperialism, which has now entered the most critical stages of its decay since World War 2. They must be read as independent entities but their richness can only be fully grasped within the context of the totality of his work as teacher and writer.

I shall not be concerned therefore in my commentary merely with summarizing the major themes of these two contributions but will reveal the continuity and constant revolutionizing of Dr Clairmont's thought over several decades. The notion of bourgeois objectivity is as alien to his being as it is for me. The foundations of his critique of economic liberalism were enshrined in his classic work on *The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism* that shredded conventional bourgeois economics.

You will remember also his investigations into the nature of corporate capital first revealed in his magisterial work on *The Marketing and Distribution of Bananas*, which was his first major work, universally acclaimed, written in the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (Unctad). (That was before that institution was castrated by the triumphalist forces of neoliberalism and its imperial agents working within the secretariat and outside at the end of the 1970s.)

What is the nature of corporate power, of which the transnational corporation is the highest expression, and its relationship to imperialism? Here one was able to see the role of the United Fruit Company, for example, in its many dimensions, which revolutionized thinking on global marketing. But such research and the policy conclusions emanating therefrom were inimical to corporate capital and the dominant UN Permanent Missions. They grasped immediately the potentially revolutionary significance of this research and the directions of its author. It is well to review briefly what the author was saying because such thinking was nothing short of revolutionary.

His central thesis that imploded conventional commodity analysis revealed its fetishism. It was true that the "banana republics" – the very designation smacks of imperial racism – were exporters of the commodity bananas, but that statement of geographical location did not reveal the breadth of the corporate gulag's power embodied in only three transnational corporations, of which the United Fruit Company was the largest and most notorious. The nature of power is masked behind formal commodity export/import data.

Indeed, three mega transnational conglomerates, with the United Fruit Company (now known as Chiquita) leading the pack, dominate the output, pricing, marketing and worldwide distribution of bananas from the plantation to the supermarket. And they have done so for decades. They achieved their primacy by working hand in hand with the large latifundistas

(landowners) and the military. Hence mechanisms of effective transnational power are totally dissimulated in official trade flows measured by imports/exports. The banana tripartite gulag, as Dr Clairmont branded them, ensured that the “banana republics” remained banana republics, with all the racist and exploitative connotations associated with that designation, as well as totally subordinate to the geo-strategic exigencies of US imperialism.

I have stressed this seminal study because it gave us an insight into the workings of global accumulation and disaccumulation. It was a study in political economy for it revealed the morphology of classes, of oppressors and oppressed. The banana republics, then as now, had no say in the flows of investment and the directions of profits and dividends. The peoples of those blighted republics did not know that members of the US Congress were massive shareholders of United Fruit.

It is obvious that bourgeois textbook economics deliberately mystifies the class nature of power. But the masters of corporate capital have no need for such casuistry when it comes to elucidating the mechanics of real power and its manipulation. The repressive implications are obvious, best perceived in a glib understatement by a former United Fruit President in 1968, 14 years after the mass butchery and eradication of the democratically elected Guatemalan government of Jacobo Arbenz, whose land reforms had been seen as inimical to United Fruit’s interests: “There remains the question of the political impact of a large corporation in a country such as Honduras. It would be foolish to pretend that the United Fruit Company is without political influence in Honduras.”

One of the celebratory pieties of Big Capital has always been the insistence on the market’s role as the dynamic activator, catalyst and signalman of capitalist decision-making, or corporate governance, to use their deferential platitude. But what the trite mutterings of neoclassical dogma continue to ignore is that markets and market relations are not, and indeed can never be, neutral between buyers and sellers, borrowers and lenders, consumers and producers, landlords and peasants, workers and capitalists. This is so because markets and market configurations are structures of class power.

What runs through Dr Clairmont’s works and teaching is his line of argument – buttressed by prodigious historical research – that markets are power complexes dominated by an ever-smaller but ever-more powerful group of concentrated finance capital. Thus they are massive configurations of sectoral muscle operating through a web of intricately corrupt modes of shareholding and interlocking directorates. This has become a staggeringly pervasive trait of a totalitarian monster whose striving for fatter and fatter market shares to boost profits and thereby enhance the concentration of capital becomes the alpha and omega of the system.

What the two essays in this book reveal is the extent of the stricken state of the empire and its jackals, as seen in their perpetual economic convulsions and military debacles. What the world has long known is that the crimes of empire are perpetrated in the highsounding rhetoric of freedom and human rights. But these shabby rationalizations are being destroyed before our very eyes. As a great teacher, Dr Clairmont has the capacity to bring before our lives the nature of change, and nowhere is this done with greater force than in the quotations of Al Capone which he cites here. Dr Clairmont has no time for fatuous theoretical discussions on globalization.

In one quotation from an executive of a leading petroleum company in Venezuela in the

1950s we grasp the nettle of the meaning of freedom as seen through the eyes of a spokesman of Standard Oil, then one of the Seven Sisters oil cartel. The freedom that he refers to occurred during one of the most bloodthirsty dictatorships in Venezuelan history, that of Marcos Perez Jimenez. It would be difficult to find a more lucid encapsulation of globalized imperialism than that: "Here in Venezuela, you have the right to do what you like with your capital. This right is dearer to me than all the political rights in the world."² The advent of Hugo Chavez and the Bolivarian revolution in Venezuela wrote the epitaph of that "freedom". It was a policy generalization applicable not only to Venezuela but to the world.

Capitalism and its parasitical political elites, as we perceive in these essays, have lost their resilience. Its irrevocably corrupt ruling classes have proved unable to confront the disintegration of their system. Dr Clairmont has devoted a considerable amount of his time to a study of the eurozone. In the first place it never had any claims to democracy. The economic integration that its architects peddled as the great dream of human salvation and European brotherhood is now in a shambles. The French and Greek elections in May 2012 were harbingers of the cataclysm in the making.

What we see in Spain is a grim laboratory of its failures and its chambers of horrors. At the start of May 2012, Spain's jobless rate exceeded one in four, or 25% (that does not include the underemployed). According to the National Statistical Institute in Madrid, this totals over 5.7 million. In comparison, at the height of the Great Depression in the United States in November 1931, the jobless rate was 23%. Spain, like other members of the neo-colonized 17- member eurozone, has no control over its monetary affairs; it is unable to manipulate its lending and borrowing rates. Monetary sovereignty is a vital component of national sovereignty. ² Quoted in Time, 21 September 1952.

Given prevailing conditions and the victory of Francois Hollande in the French presidential elections as well as the political turbulence in Greece, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands, it is questionable whether the euro single currency will survive and, if so, in what form. Hollande's reformist idea of rewriting the Fiscal Pact (blueprinted to save and not bury the eurozone) runs up against the implacable opposition of German Big Capital. But that is only one of its contradictions. More important is that it does not even address the contradictions that are at the heart of the foundations of Maastricht with its one-size-fits-all approach, the dictatorship of Brussels and German economic hegemony. The current battles being waged against the Maastricht power complex must therefore be seen as part of a process of decolonization of the group of 17. But the current war against the dictates of Maastricht goes beyond the affirmation of monetary sovereignty. It is an integral part of a liberation war against the unhindered advance of globalized capitalism and neoliberalism.

The elimination of monetary sovereignty and the centralized dictatorship of capital in Brussels, which masquerades under the innocuous title of "the economic integration of Europe", march hand in hand with the jackboot of austerity. Its now familiar policy prescriptions entail the smashing of the institutions of organized labour, cutting pensions to the bone, raising taxes, slashing wages and social expenditures such as health and education, and the dismantling of the public sector and its transfer to transnational corporations. The architects of Maastricht, however, are now jumping from one desperate expedient to another. Bailout follows bailout and the latest, announced in December 2011 with much fanfare, was the European Central Bank (ECB)'s Longer-term Refinancing Operation (LTRO), proclaimed to be the magic wand that would inject an unlimited supply of cheap three-year loans into the eurozone's undercapitalized banks.

What we see is that the balance sheet of the ECB is now bloated to 3 trillion euros, or one-third of the eurozone's GDP. This was proclaimed the grande finale that would stave off financial, economic and ultimately political collapse. But these Himalayan capital injections have not done the trick nor can they be expected to. They are designed to capitalize the banks and are not jobcreating investments. Tinkering with the mechanisms that went into the fabrication of this politico-financial contraption bypasses the central fact that we are dealing with the afflictions of global capitalism – tsunamic levels of debt, deflation, overproduction and economic stagnation, with all its depressionary implications. In its annihilation of consumption (which is around 65-70% of GDP) it has aggravated the economic convulsions and misery of millions and, in so doing, slashed purchasing power. The claim that the peripheral countries of the eurozone will be able to export their way out of the crisis is therefore one of the greatest of political swindles. Under these conditions there can be no such thing as a return to normality.

The LTRO is not a palliative. With the collapse of the Spanish and Greek economies, foreign bondholders are bolting for the exit and selling their holdings at discount prices. The upshot of the economic implosion – and not only in Spain – is that borrowing costs are soaring. And with this comes a further explosive surge in unsustainable debt.

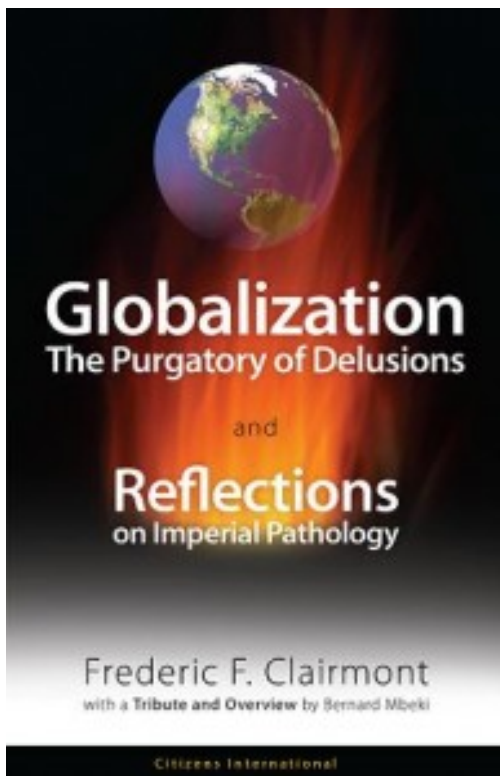
The desperation of Spain's predicament is portrayed in the whining of its foreign minister, who compared the European Union to the doomed liner Titanic, claiming that "all the passengers would be saved only if all worked together to find a solution." And who are the "all" that are expected to work together? The analogy is sentimental slush destined to delude. The very word "solidarity" is alien to the operation of the colonized eurozone. The earlier successive bailouts to the sub-zero-growth peripheral countries were aimed at boosting their grossly undercapitalized banks to prevent them from defaulting. German exposure in the peripheral countries now runs to hundreds of billions of euros. Defaults will send Merkel's Germany into a tailspin.

This is debt that will never be repaid. The Titanic's fate was irreversible because it hit an iceberg. The Spanish minister ought not to forget that the class composition of the passengers of the Titanic revealed the nature of the capitalist society that produced it. The bulk of those that got into the lifeboats were members of the upper class; nine-tenths of those proletarian passengers who were in storage class perished. The minister's appeals for total solidarity ignore the reality on which the eurozone was built, namely competition between its members, and the total absence of democratic participation.

With no sarcasm intended, a Spanish labour statistician lamented in a mood of total despair that he saw nothing to stop the jobless rate spiralling to 30%. Youth unemployment (15-28 years) already outstrips 51%. By the same logic of the overall jobless rate, what will stop the youth jobless rate climbing to 60%? This is total disaster that flings the door wide open to mass revolt. And those that are paying the price for this, need we add, belong to the working class who have nothing to sell but their labour power which the capitalists no longer need. How long will human flesh withstand such agony? Compounding Spain's debacle is that Standard & Poor's, the credit rating agency, has now downgraded its rating, thereby rocketing its borrowing costs and exacerbating its already bloated debt.

Who has been the prime beneficiary of the eurozone? The answer is the German powerhouse which engulfs one-third of the eurozone's GDP. Its current account surplus is positive and 18% larger than the rest of the eurozone (minus the Netherlands and Finland) which is negative; its yield (interest rate) is merely one-seventh that of the bankrupt

peripheral countries, hence its competitiveness and ability to borrow cheap further enhances its hegemony. Meanwhile the entire eurozone has sunk to sub-zero growth rates, with Greece leading the pack at -7.5%. It is argued by the masters of the Bundesbank, Germany's central bank, that austerity is the only path to adjustment which will lead sooner or later (how soon we are not told) to boom time. Where have we heard that claptrap before? Austerity which engenders the mass liquidation of purchasing power generates deflation. The peoples of the Third World felt its destructive power when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank imposed their programmes of "structural adjustment" in developing countries, and it's superfluous for me to review the horrors of that adjustment.



I am not concerned in this Tribute with speculating on the implications of default and the breakdown of the euro. The political convulsions that were triggered in May will speed up this process. Both Dr Clairmont and myself agree that the probability that it will take place in 2012 is likely. Default on such a colossal scale, when it occurs, will wipe out hundreds of billions of euros to cataclysmic effect on world financial markets. There are certain analysts like Joseph Stiglitz who argue that budgetary cutbacks and the devastation wrought by structural adjustment will drive Europe to suicide. Nation states, however, do not commit suicide, individuals do. What this does throw into relief is the suicide in Athens in April of a Greek pharmacist. Dr Clairmont has always hammered home to his readers the poignant truth that "a drop of water gives us a clue into the chemical composition of the sea." This is the narrative of retired pharmacist (77) Dimitris Christoulas, who shot himself in Syntagma Square opposite the Greek Parliament. This is the place where tens of thousands of protesters gathered, invariably being tear-gassed and savagely beaten by the police and armed militia, the appalling spectacle of repression seen by millions of tele-viewers worldwide. The place where Christoulas shot himself is now permanently wreathed in flowers. For most resisters it is hallowed ground where tens of thousands of protesters gather to denounce Maastricht as another species of occupation. For many of the protesters his death was an assassination. The suffering imposed on his people had become

unbearable: hospitals that could no longer afford to purchase medicines or pay their medical personnel; malnutrition, mendicancy and poverty on a scale that Greece had never known; the shutdown of factories and schools; and the breadlines that got longer by the day.

Christoulas' suicide note was crafted with great beauty and simplicity: "The sufferings of my people are unbearable to me. This is the vilest of occupations and we must resist it. It runs counter to every vital interest of our nation. It is destroying us with a butcher's knife. I can no longer continue to live on my pension which is reduced to a pittance. I cannot continue to supplement my daily subsistence from garbage cans, which increasingly is the fate of many of my countrymen. We must resist this foreign evil that sucks our blood."

Christoulas' death was a stark reminder for all of us that a bleeding, impoverished Greece would never be able to export or grow out of its foreign-imposed, austerity-drenched debt trap. The torments and ultimate sacrifice of this brave man exemplify the repugnant truth of the proverbial drop of water that is neoliberalism which is part of the larger sea of economic depression.

In any discussion of the global capitalist depression US imperialism occupies a central role. In the perpetuation of its crimes, however, it had its criminal accomplices. The British empire, for example, wouldn't have been able to sustain its centuries-long occupation of India without the intermediation of the Indian princes, known as Princely India, its Gurkha mercenaries and powerful Indian colonial expeditionary forces. Likewise, such scum as Vaclav Havel and Christopher Hitchens illustrate the deployment of individuals in the service of the present imperial order.

The strivings of the militaro-corporate gulag to annihilate any individual, social or national obstacles that run counter to the preservation and extension of its empire are writ large in the history of the United States since 1945. People everywhere have seen the US bleeding of the world – the blood of coloured colonial and semi-colonial peoples – that imperial conquest has brought in its wake. The bleeding has not stopped, as seen in the cold-blooded murder in Kabul recently of 16 innocent men, women and children who were gunned down. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria and others have cut short the lives of more than 2 million. Their nations' productive and infrastructural assets have been wiped out. NATO was an accomplice to this crime of colonial pillage and destruction. It required the full force of NATO to crush a small nation like Libya. Its defeat, which led to the assassination of its leader and the colonial occupation that followed, was inconceivable without the big knife of American imperialism. This was the gang leader abetted by his vassals. Such is the confidential evaluation of a NATO report published in the New York Times: "Even Europe's most sophisticated militaries lacked the specialized aircraft and trained personnel needed to intercept Libyan government communications and verify potential targets, and they quickly ran short of precision guided munitions."

This is the quintessence of imperialist internationalism. Progressive internationalists, in contrast, will take heart from the fact that successive US imperial expeditionary legions have never won any of its colonial interventions starting with China in 1945. In November 1949, Chairman Mao proclaimed in an imperishable eight-word sentence the yearning for freedom that reverberated throughout the colonial slave empires: "We the people of China have stood up." To the charge that US imperialism had 'lost' China, Secretary of State Dean Acheson, like a beaten dog with its tail between its legs, whimpered: "Nothing that this country did nor could have done ... could have changed the result; nothing that was left undone by the United States has contributed to it. We did everything that could be done to

halt the march of revolutionary events in China, but it was of no avail.” And with the realization culled from tens of billions of dollars spent on sustaining its Asian gulag, the Kuomintang, the Acheson report concluded truthfully: “It was the product of internal Chinese forces, forces which this country tried to influence but could not.” The Kuomintang was its criminal accomplice in that war that led to the occupation of Taiwan.

The only ‘victory’ the US achieved in almost seven decades of colonial pillage was the military conquest of the small island of Grenada, the ousting of a legally elected government and a member of the United Nations and, true to form, the murder, by one of its domestic killers, of the prime minister. What historians can never forget is that the combined forces of NATO, comically garbed in the mantle of “the coalition of the willing”, were defeated in Afghanistan and Iraq. Here was a combined colonial expeditionary force whose GDP was infinitely larger than that of Afghanistan, and yet the forces of empire ground to a halt in a country that ranked among the poorest of the poor.

This is called asymmetric warfare. This is a war that fills the writings and the teachings of Dr Clairmont. It is a war that imperialism started but cannot end. We are seeing the unfolding of the same grim narrative in Syria but this time they are using their vassals headquartered in London, Istanbul, Doha, Riyadh and Paris. In this they are backed by their media spokesmen in the BBC, CNN and Fox News, to name but three major outlets that have long been ventriloquist dummies of imperialism. The entire corporate dominated lie machine, including the Financial Times, Le Monde, Le Figaro, the Wall Street Journal and of course the New York Times, has joined the bandwagon in backing the wholesale destruction of human life with its endless streams of misinformation and scurrilous mendacity. The scenario is simple: the destruction of the regime of Bashar al- Assad is intended as a sequel to Libya. Its degutting, as the Israeli military high command has noted ad nauseam, will (in their view) end the “existential” threat (their familiar mantra) to Israel’s occupation of the Golan Heights, contribute to the weakening and ultimate liquidation of Hizbollah and Hamas, and set the stage for the erosion of the Iranian government leading to its internal dissolution, the elimination of Russian influence in the eastern Mediterranean, and the imperial takeover of the country’s huge petroleum and agricultural resources.

Dr Clairmont has elaborated the geo-political and strategic designs of this expansionist imperial blueprint in his major lectures and writings. Needless to say, the best of the most homicidal of plans often go awry. And Syria does not promise to be an exception because the imperial plans are rooted in fantasies and take no account of the determination of the Syrian people and their heroic armed forces to defend their freedom and national sovereignty. In the meantime, however, the foreign-bankrolled terrorist machine armed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Arab League, with their safe havens entrenched in Turkey, are targeting innocent men, women and children for indiscriminate destruction. What reveals the scope of this tragedy is that such carnage is openly abetted by the sanctions of the European Union. What this indicates is the extent of the imbrications of foreign accomplices acting in unison with the US state terrorist complex.

But that is not the sum total of the imperial cabal. To this must be added certain individuals within the United Nations secretariat whose office directly or indirectly serves the interests of imperialism. Here the active role of the UN’s Secretary-General becomes conspicuous because Ban Ki-moon, drawing on his authority and his pre-eminent status as Secretary-General, has launched incessant verbal onslaughts on the Syrian government. In certain ways his utterances have parallels to one of his predecessors, that vicious racist Dag Hammarskjöld who, acting jointly with the special services of the Belgian colonial

administration and the CIA, toppled the Congolese government of Patrice Lumumba, who was replaced by their stooge Tshombe and later Mobutu. This is the classic interventionist format.

I should add that Dr Clairmont was fully acquainted with these events in the Congo because he taught at the Ecole Nationale de Droit et d'Administration and Lovanium University in Leopoldville, and interviewed many of the Belgian and UN actors that were involved in these changes. It was his first contact with the operations of the United Nations, many of whose leading cadres had become part of the imperial neo-colonial network. In his subsequent relocation to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in Addis Ababa he was able to deepen his knowledge of these processes, scrutinizing from within the organization the techniques deployed by these sinister destructive forces of imperialism operating inside the world body. Subsequently, he saw the intricacies of these imperialist infiltrations in his later assignment to the Unctad secretariat.

He was to author a profound investigative analysis entitled *Iraq: The Torments of Empire* (also published by Citizens International). One of the leading dramatis personae was the UN's chief envoy in Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello. He was a scion of a wealthy Brazilian family whose ancestors brought in slaves to work in their sugar plantations in the 19th century. As Dr Clairmont emphasized, it was misleading to believe that Vieira de Mello was 'recruited' by the CIA. That would be a mechanistic interpretation of history. Rather, here was a senior UN civil servant whose class interests meshed with theirs. He was a visceral anti-communist and he made no bones about this. Before we proceed, it is well to remind a younger generation of the horrors perpetrated by the megaterrorist state to which operatives like Vieira de Mello rendered their ignoble services.

This is how José Luis Zapatero, Spain's former prime minister, described the nature of the crime: "The colonial invasion of Iraq and the ugliest of lies of the lie machine that propagated and justified these barbarous acts will forever remain among the greatest and unpardonable crimes against humanity."

The pivotal role of Sergio Vieira de Mello in these "unpardonable" crimes exhibits the extended network of quislings operating openly within the United Nations. It is well, as Dr Clairmont noted, that the world understands the facts that led to the execution of Vieira de Mello and his collaborators at Canal House (the UN's Baghdad headquarters) by the Iraqi resistance. The resistance had earlier been aware of his daily collaborationist links with Paul Bremer, the chief of US operations in Iraq. The attack against Canal House was not an aberration, and it should be emphasized that Vieira de Mello never sought to conceal his ideological propensities. In this respect, he was above board, and well could Bremer contend: "He was one of the most loyal [sic] collaborators we ever had and I shall go as far as to say that his services were indispensable." That is the supreme accolade that the imperial master could confer on one of its acolytes. Vieira de Mello, we ought not forget, had also been deeply involved with US policies that dismembered Yugoslavia.

On the plus side of his balance sheet, Vieira de Mello did not deny this but rather bellowed it loud and clear. In one of his infamous utterances he quipped: "My goal is to wipe out all vestiges of communism in Iraq and ensure that henceforth it will always be a part of the free world." And that from a senior UN civil servant. Vieira de Mello never shunned the limelight. As a master of self-promotion he grabbed publicity on every occasion. He had the gall to utter this morsel of blasphemy not in his name but in that of the United Nations. And there were none in the upper reaches of the UN secretariat who reprimanded him for these

mouthings. That was the kind of lingo that the Pentagon and the CIA fulsomely embraced. In his vulgarity, the arrogant Vieira de Mello had become a poster boy of the empire. Well could Bremer note: he had the makings of a great UN Secretary-General.

This was the same creature that robustly applauded NATO's bombing of Kosovo and Belgrade. The same team of anti-communist crusaders that he had corralled in Yugoslavia were shifted to Iraq. Their goals were the same: to effectuate the dismemberment of Iraq and ensure its permanent colonial occupation and the shift in ownership of its resources to the big oil majors. His advocacy and measures to implement the privatization of Iraq's vast petroleum resources and to wipe out all vestiges of the public sector were the last straw. It was tantamount to signing his death warrant. It is for this reason that I consider Dr Clairmont's opus *Iraq: The Torments of Empire* a classic that deserves to be read (it has been translated into Arabic and widely distributed) and studied.

This investigative report that unmasked the workings of a Vieira de Mello, which indubitably represent one of the crudest forms of servitude to the empire, should be obligatory reading. Also, I am not alone in my conviction that it should be read in conjunction with, and indeed is inseparable from, Dr Clairmont's classic that received worldwide acclaim and has also been translated into several languages: *The Rise and Fall of Economic Liberalism: The Making of the Economic Gulag*. The battles for self-determination, decolonization and sovereignty are inseparable from our unrelenting war against neoliberalism and its agents within the UN secretariat, the World Bank, the IMF, the World Trade Organization and a multitude of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The attempt to obliterate the liberation forces of Ho Chi Minh from 1946 until the ignominious debacle of the American expeditionary force several decades later resulted in the massacre of 3 million Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians. Joined in this act of colonial genocide were the armies of South Vietnam, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Taiwan and others. The French colonial reconquest of Indochina, kicked off in 1946, would not have been possible, given the dilapidated state of the French economy that had been bled white by the Nazi occupation, without massive US financial and military support. And here I draw the readers' attention to Dr Clairmont's gripping *Dien Bien Phu: A Personal Memoir*. The reader will note that he served as a civilian officer in the peace commission which supervised the Geneva Agreements that followed the crushing of French colonialism in the battle of Dien Bien Phu in April 1954. It was in Laos that he made the lasting friendship of Prince Souphanouvong, leader of the Pathet Lao, and several leaders of the Vietminh including Ho Chi Minh who received him personally. These were the crucial historical forces that shaped him as a militant, a teacher and a writer. I can do no better than to quote this revealing passage from the memoir: "It was in Indochina ... that I came face to face with a multiplicity of Oradours³ that had been created by the [French Expeditionary Corps] in its punitive strikes and its yearning to reconquer." It was in Vietnam that Dr Clairmont saw at first hand how France, as the power incarnate of mass colonial genocide, had recruited and bestowed its citizenship to thousands of French Foreign Legion Nazi SS and Ukrainian fascists to pursue its imperial butcheries.

This was the seminal occurrence that shaped Dr Clairmont's implacable anti-imperialist perspective, incubated his unbending hatred against injustice and impressed upon his young spirit the historical necessity of armed struggle. Georges Bidault, former Nazi collaborator, had abetted the management of the Indochina genocide. He obsequiously spelt out the imperatives of the pursuit of mass genocide to his patron and benefactor John Foster Dulles, with his chilling demand that "all Vietnamese communists and their hangers-on must

be eliminated ... In Indochina, we are fighting for the preservation of the free world and democracy.” Dulles and his successor fully rose to the occasion. In a few years the US conquest of Vietnam would commence.

The Nazi exterminators had posted on the iron gates of the extermination camp in Auschwitz their credo: “Arbeit macht Frei” (labour makes you free). Dr Clairmont had visited Auschwitz and I well recall him telling his audience that this was Nazi hypocrisy for nothing in their credo smacked of freedom. Nazism, as he always stressed, was capitalism writ large. It was the alpha and omega of the capitalist counter-revolution. The Nazi order was designed to save capitalism from social revolution. It was capitalism once again that harnessed slave labour to serve the interests of the capitalists such as Alfred Krupp and his fellow industrialists. Capitalist wage labour had become transmogrified into unpaid slave labour and when these slaves were unable to work and make profits for their Nazi slave masters, they were shovelled into the gas ovens. The bourgeois architects of the American constitution extolled their nostrum of what they baptized as “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. We were not told whose lives, liberty for what and happiness for whom.

History has not forgotten that George Washington and Thomas Jefferson (the first and third presidents of the United States), touted by the misinformed as the greatest of “freedom fighters”, were slave owners. Nor has history forgotten that the American constitution – which proclaims the primacy of private property and private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, with private profit and competition as its centrepiece – was hatched to maintain existing class structures with its pathological excrescences. It is in this respect that Dr Clairmont has always argued that the designation of Harold Laski’s work *The American Democracy* (whose critical content he valued) was grotesquely misleading. To drive home the point, we should do well to remember that American capitalism was founded on the unpaid labour of millions of Blacks that prevailed for centuries (slavery was abolished only in 1865, followed by a system of peonage subsistence wages) and the savage expropriation of the lands of Native Americans, which was orchestrated with their physical extermination. When writing these lines my attention was drawn to the explicit comment of the police commissioner of Philadelphia at a meeting on gun violence: “Our streets are bleeding and they are bleeding profusely.”⁴ While it is a masterpiece of concision, it lays no claim to novelty, for the fact has long been recognized by the Black American freedom fighter Rap Brown: “Violence is as American as apple pie.” He knew for he was to pay the ultimate price of freedom with his skin for challenging the oppression of the system. The profuse bleeding that the commissioner refers to is seen not only at home but also abroad, inasmuch as foreign policy is an extension of domestic policy. Some would appropriately call this “profuse bleeding” the workings of state terrorism. Nowhere is this more clearly articulated than by one of Reagan’s handlers, as quoted by Dr Clairmont in one of his essays published here. In a discussion on Cuba during a meeting of the National Security Council, General Alexander Haig turned to Reagan and expostulated: “You just give me the word and I’ll turn that fucking little island into a parking lot.” There are depths beyond depths and heights beyond heights. This is true of the spiralling spectacle of depravity that was the display of murdered resistance fighters in Afghanistan whose dismembered bodies, amid the boisterous laughter of their killers, were exhibited to be photographed. Is this a manifestation of the rule of law and due process? Is this a manifestation of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? The rape, ravages and rapacity to which colonial peoples have been subjected are part of the march of perpetual terror unleashed by colonial expeditionary forces since 1945. I have never ceased to be captivated by the searing beauty of Dr Clairmont’s prose and his seething ire when he describes these

crimes and their perpetrators. Personally, I have used his references in my lectures time and again. They are permanent mementoes of crimes against humanity that ought never to be forgotten or forgiven. Here was the case of US staff sergeant James Massey, before the Canadian Refugee Status Commission, describing how he and his fellow Marines shot and murdered more than 30 unarmed men, women and children in Iraq, including a boy who got out of his car with his hands up: "We fired at a cyclic rate of 500 bullets per vehicle." The repetitive tide of these killer-confessions has been reduced almost to the level of banality. Another killer from the 82nd Airborne Division also confessed to the Canadian Commission:

"We were told to consider all Arabs as potential terrorists ... but were stimulated to encourage an attitude of hatred that gets your blood boiling" (*italics mine*).⁶

Dr Clairmont's life, teaching and militancy that continues its unstoppable tempo have been dedicated to unmasking the crimes of these "blood-boiling" techniques that are the warp and woof of imperial exterminism. My Lai in Vietnam in 1968 was one of the dozens of such unpardonable crimes. Writing to his senator, a conscience-stricken Marine described the pleasures that the members of his platoon derived from the spectacle of butchery inflicted with a 50-calibre machine gun on a young woman.⁷ He detailed how they ecstatically stamped their feet on the ground and roared in laughter when the woman was knocked 30 feet by the impact. In sum, the 347 victims of My Lai, overwhelmingly women and children, were not people. In the idiom of their killers' soul-brothers in the SS ranks, they were Untermenschen, or sub-human species. These are words that not merely express the most excruciating of human agony but also, as Dr Clairmont never ceases to remind us, exemplify the nature of the bloodlust of an enemy that must be fought. It reveals the depth and dimensions of his humanism. David Ben Gurion himself, an impenitent Zionist, raised the crucial question regarding the dispossessed Palestinians: "We have come and have stolen their country. Why should they accept it?" The short answer is that no oppressed people have ever accepted the bestiality of colonial rule and the indignities that are one of its central components. And that is because colonialism is incompatible with human dignity. Through their heroic resistance, the Palestinian

people in the occupied lands, including the biggest open-air gulag in history that is Gaza, have given their unequivocal answer. Nor should we forget that Ben Gurion, an active collaborator in the Anglo-American toppling of Dr Mohammad Mossadeq's government in Iran, was an active co-conspirator in the setting up of one of the most brutal terrorist forces of all times, the Shah's Savak secret police. As the researches of Dr Clairmont showed, Savak, as conceived and executed by Ben Gurion and the CIA, was practically a carbon copy of the Nazi Gestapo secret police and the SS military fighting units. Tens of thousands of workers, peasants, students, intellectuals and militants were rounded up, murdered, disappeared or sent to concentration camps in the Shah's Iran.

The subsequent killing fields bore similarities to that of Pinochet in Chile, save that the butchery was on a far vaster scale. In his words, Ben Gurion's Savak, as it was contemptuously labelled in Iran, became the training ground, in the years following the Shah's return, for mass repression and torture. Training camps were swiftly set up within Iran and in Israel whose instructors and torture techniques were transferred to the School of the Americas in Panama. Ben Gurion's Savak was now globalized in the service of imperialism. In conclusion, I might add that Dr Clairmont's research work, both within and outside the United Nations, embraces a broad spectrum of the criminal compacts of imperialism. What I have done is to illustrate the interlinkages of imperialism and its dependence on foreign mercenaries and institutions such as NATO and the European Union

as analyzed in his works. Without such jackals, US imperialism could never have achieved its goals.

But even with their aid, its role as the master of imperial ceremonies is swiftly drawing to an end. American capitalism, with its endemic debts and deficits straddling decades, would never have been able to pursue its wars of colonial pillage without foreign money. China's purchases of US assets and Treasury bonds already outstrip \$1.3 trillion. In short, the militaro-corporate gulag is, as Dr Clairmont writes, living off borrowed time and borrowed money. It is borrowed money that it will never be able to reimburse. It is this factor – apart from the onrushing economic crisis of which the collapse of the eurozone is but one example – joined to the resistance of those that it has failed to colonize, which will contribute to its collapse. That remains one of the pivotal teachings of this inspired writer and greatest of teachers. A reading and understanding of his two major essays in this book will take us a long way in grasping the lineaments and direction of imperialism. But it will also give us hope that where there is oppression there will also be resistance.

B e r n a r d Mbeki

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Frederic F. Clairmont, 2012

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