

PREFACE

The whole world is covered with nations of which we know only the names, yet we dabble in judging. ... Let us suppose a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot ... traveling in order to inform ... by observing and describing ... Turkey ... the interior of Africa ... China, Tartary ... Mexico, Peru, Chile, and finally the Caribbean. ... Let us suppose these new Hercules ... then wrote at leisure the natural, moral, and political history of what they would have seen; we ourselves would see a new world ... and we would thus learn to know our own. (Rousseau, in Lévi-Strauss 1976: 34)

In an essay about the origins of anthropology, Claude Lévi-Strauss credited Rousseau with a delineation of the discipline. The idea behind Rousseau's anthropology was to send 'new Hercules' out and about, "traveling ... to inform" compatriots about different people in the world, the better "to know our own." This book is Rousseauian in spirit. It is a real trip, a journey to other peoples and places to know the United States and its global entanglements. A word on how this peregrination came about is in order.

I received a draft deferment to attend an Ivy League university in the 1960s and so avoided the Vietnam War. In 1968, as a privileged graduate student, I went instead to live among the Barma in Chad—then as isolated a place as existed on the globe—to conduct research into descent groups. There I went from person to person, asking, "So, what about clans?" They didn't know. Chad, it turned out, was in the midst of civil war. One evening in 1969 in a tiny village, two months into fieldwork, Musa woke me with the words "*Malatol debgé kidé*," which translated as "The masters of killing have come" or maybe as "The masters of killing are coming—soon!" We waited for them under the old *bili* tree where the road into the village stopped and under which the chief held court—a motley crew of six, all over sixty except for the guy swollen from elephantiasis. We were armed with a shotgun (no shells), an ancient sword (pretty short), and a fishing lance (jagged).

They did not come that night, but they kept coming elsewhere. At a roadblock a few years later, a soldier maneuvered the barrel of his auto-

matic weapon to push up my companion's sunglasses, the better to see his face—and the better to kill him (if necessary). After some very fast talk, the gun was removed and the glasses slid back into place. During one period in N'Djamena, Chad's capital, if you woke up in the morning and saw birds in the tree, you knew there had been fighting near the Presidential Palace the previous night. At the time a friend recounted how an old man near the palace had raised his arm above his shoulder, brandishing a knife, and been machine-gunned by soldiers who then approached the body and threw hand grenades at it. "They blew him into mini-pieces," he said, and kept repeating, "mini-morcaux, mini-morcaux. *Why?*" This led me to understand that unilineal descent groups—then the regnant anthropological conceptual boytoys—were not of pressing significance to Chadians, whereas understanding why portions of their agnates kept flying off in blasted, bloody chunks was.

This realization was followed by another. Maybe Chad was not so isolated. Americans and Europeans were involved in the violence. After all, in that first village an old American World War II fighter plane, piloted by a Frenchman, would fly out of the eastern dawn, bank sharply over the village at strafing level—the pilot's silver glasses glinting in the sun—and head northward. Once, on the way to a funeral, I drove through a line of French legionnaires retreating from the area where the funeral was to be held. In 1970 at a parade in N'Djamena's Independence Square, celebrants of the tenth anniversary of Chad's independence watched a tank roll by. Actually, it was Chad's only tank, the Gaurang. Standing in the Gaurang's main turret, facing and saluting the reviewing stand, was a Chadian soldier; at another opening up front, a European officer stared straight ahead, saluting no one. Fast-forward ten years: on one battlefield in the 1980s there were reports of a "Bob," said to be a CIA officer. Fast-forward another quarter of a century: there was *still* warfare. As we traveled to the small city of Abeché near the Sudanese border, high, high above a French Jaguar jet left a contrail pointing east, toward the hostilities.

Such memories are disquieting—Bob and Europeans haunting imagination's shadows. But as readers will learn, Bob and the Europeans doing their thing in Chad was not a singularity. Rather, they were, and are, a global imperial phenomenon characterizing our times. I had gone to Chad to study Chadians' worlds, and in so doing had learned "our own" world was part of theirs. Bob and his compatriots—"masters of killing" who "have come" or "are coming—soon!"—were out there. Among other matters, this text provides theory and evidence to argue that since the end of World War II, a New American Empire has emerged in our world to choreograph Bob and his allies' operations in other worlds across the globe.