I am indebted to the many South Sudanese who shared with me very personal and difficult stories. I hope I did them justice. My South Sudanese friends encouraged me throughout. They shall remain nameless for their safety. I owe another debt to my international friends who supported my work in multiple ways, from South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia to the U.S., Switzerland, the Netherlands, and France. Most of them shall also remain nameless for their safety.

I wish to thank Roger Haydon, my editor, for supporting this project, trusting me, and offering sharp, invaluable feedback from the start. I also am very grateful to the anonymous reviewers and to William Reno and Geoffrey Robinson, who commented on a first draft during a book conference organized and funded by Indiana University in 2017. At Indiana University, a team of wonderfully engaging colleagues and friends supported this project: Purnima Bose, Gardner Bovingdon, Emma Gilligan, Michelle Moyd, John Hanson, Mike McGinnis, Jessica O’Reilly, David Bosco, Padraic Kenney, Jessica Steinberg, Amali Ibrahim, Keera Allendorf, Mark Roseman, and Barbara Breitung. Jordan Blekking patiently worked with me to create maps. I also benefited from Indiana University’s funding for field work in 2017, through an Emerging Areas of Research grant directed by P.I. Elizabeth Dunn, and through a Research Travel Grant from the College of Arts and Humanities Institute.

Outside Bloomington, I am indebted to Gérard Prunier, whose intellectual mentoring helped me to develop as an independent scholar. At UC Berkeley, where I was a Fulbright fellow, Martha Saavedra, Leo Arriola, John and Peggy Cummins, and Robert Price also provided invaluable support. Nic Cheeseman and Pierre Englebert played a key role in introducing me to new scholarship. Douglas H. Johnson, Cherry Leonardi, Maria Eriksson Baaz, Henri Médard, and Marc Lavergne offered critical feedback I used throughout this book.

From Shanghai to Princeton, Nicola Di Cosmo offered me his advice, mentoring, and friendship. I am grateful to Jeffrey Lehman and NYU Shanghai for funding my fieldwork in 2014. I thank Zachariah Mampilly, Catharine MacKinnon, and Thomas Kühne for their comments on earlier drafts, and Scott Straus for his suggestions on the final manuscript. Gratitude also goes to Dirk Moses for introducing me to a new field of social inquiry, and to Christopher Cramer and Maayan Armelin for discussions on ethnic supremacy, command, and control.
Brian Da Silva, Kate Almquist, Payton Knopf, Alex De Waal, Lotje De Vries, and Rens Twijnstra also helped me throughout the years in multiple ways. I found comfort and useful feedback in the network formed with Kerry Crawford, Nicole Gerring, and Chloe Lewis on sexual violence in armed conflict. Sareta Ashraph also answered my questions on international criminal law.

This book would not have been possible without the support of my longtime friends. I am beholden to Jennifer and the Brownings for making me an honorary member of their family, to V. for the safe havens, kindness, stimulation, and entertainment across the world, to S. for always helping me out. Bloomington friends made life better while writing: Susan and Catherine Seizer, Taha Hameduddin, Seema Golestaneh, Margaret Graves, Tracy Templeton, and Amanda Vredenburgh. I found a second family in the Adolphe-Estrades of Paris, and I thank Akil, Angeline, the B. Team, Noémie, Anne-Claire and Angelica for their kindness and humor. Finally, I credit my parents for bearing with me through the hardships. Dr. Marie Jaspard, the team from the Croix Rousse hospital, Marcy l’Etoile, and Dr Kristin Sheikh also kept me alive and sane to write this book.

I dedicate this book to my father, to the victims of these wars, to my South Sudanese friends and their children, and to Adam.