

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“We are children of the Cold War. We came of age when it ended,” states the narrator of Binyavanga Wainaina’s memoir *One Day I Will Write about This Place*, and his pronouncement about his Kenyan childhood holds true for my intellectual trajectory as well.¹ It has been relatively recently that I came to understand how deeply marked my worldview has been by growing up under a soul-crushing communist regime in Romania and hearing the family stories of persecution, displacement, and survival. Escaping a detested dictatorship in 1989 only to be soon confronted with the depredations of capitalism around the world has been both a sobering experience and the seed for a comparatist perspective. Were these two inimical worlds all that different from each other, when taking into account the forms of cultural and economic imperialism they generated during the Cold War? How did people living at a distance from the metropolitan hubs of the superpowers experience the differences between the high-minded promises of each model and the often devastating reality on the ground? Getting to meet both people passionately committed to the values of Western liberal democracy and persons ardently believing in the virtues of socialism has made me curious about historical and geopolitical configurations that claimed to be radically different yet mirrored and reverse-mirrored each other. This is the seed of personal history from which this book has sprung.

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“On the Margins of the Black Atlantic: Angola, the Eastern Bloc and the Cold War.” *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 3 (2014): 91–109.