Chapter 5

The Socialist-Populist Ideology I

From Patrice Lumumba to Samora Machel

The ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the national liberation movements—which is basically due to ignorance of the historical reality which these movements claim to transform—constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all . . . nobody has yet made a successful revolution without a revolutionary theory.

—Amilcar Cabral, Revolution in Guinea, 92–93

The Socialist-Populist and Populist-Socialist Ideologies

This chapter is a survey of the political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions of the socialist-populist ideology from a distinctly socialist perspective. The concept of “populist-socialism” is borrowed from Crawford Young, who states that this group “consists of states that espouse a socialist orientation but that either do not stress or expressly reject Marxism.”1 According to Young, populist socialism is a doctrine of development that characterized the “first wave” socialist regimes of the 1960s such as Algeria, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Tanzania. The author identifies five elements that define the populist-socialist perspective: (1) radical nationalism; (2) a radical mood; (3) anti-capitalism; (4) populism and an exaltation of the peasantry; and (5) adherence to a moderate form of socialism (or social democracy) and a rejection of orthodox Marxism.2

G. Martin, African Political Thought

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In fact, these rather broad and general characteristic features equally apply to the two categories introduced in this book—namely, the socialist-populist and the populist-socialist ideologies. In the first, we refer to political leaders (and regimes) strongly—but not exclusively—influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ideology. The statesmen affiliated with this ideology were either not in power at all or else ruled for only a short period of time. Furthermore, these leaders were unable or unwilling to exercise authoritarian rule, and they truly had the best interest of their people at heart. This category includes Patrice Lumumba (Congo), Ahmed Ben Bella (Algeria), Amilcar Cabral (Guinea-Bissau), Oginga Odinga (Kenya), Agostinho Neto (Angola), Samora Machel (Mozambique), and Robert Sobukwe (South Africa). This chapter shall focus exclusively on Lumumba, Ben Bella, Cabral, and Machel.

Note that in the socialist-populist ideology, the emphasis is on socialist, while in the populist-socialist ideology (which will be the subject of Chapter 7), the emphasis is on populist. Furthermore, in all these instances, the focus of our study is on the political ideas and the common themes that bind them rather than the individual leaders themselves. The chapter begins with an overview of the unfinished revolution in the Congo (1960–61) under the leadership of Patrice Emery Lumumba. It continues with an analysis of the Algerian revolution and the construction of socialism in Algeria by Ahmed Ben Bella. Next comes a study of the revolutionary theory and practice of Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau. The chapter ends with an overview of Samora Machel’s Popular-Democratic government in Mozambique. Note that (except for the Congo), all the countries studied in this chapter achieved independence as a result of a long and protracted armed struggle.

**Patrice Émery Lumumba**  
A Biographical Note

Patrice Émery Lumumba led the struggle for the independence of the Congo (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and became that country’s first prime minister. His political murder just six months after independence made him a martyr of anticolonial resistance and a symbol of the African and Pan-African struggles throughout the world. Lumumba was born in 1925 in the district of Sankuru, Central Kasai province of the then Belgian Congo. In the course of his primary and secondary education, Lumumba became familiar with the writings of Karl Marx and Jean-Paul Sartre, which shaped his political ideas. He worked eleven years for the Belgian colonial service in the Congo, primarily in the post-office. As a member of the évolutés (educated elite), Lumumba began writing and agitating for the Congolese anticolonial movement; he wrote articles for various anticolonial publications and was also active in a number of professional organizations. Lumumba’s anticolonial activities brought him to the attention of the Belgian authorities, who sent him to Belgium in 1956 on a goodwill tour. The political reforms of 1957 led to the emergence of numerous political parties in 1958,