

# DEMOCRATIZING NIGERIAN POLITY THROUGH POPPER'S CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY

By

IFECHUKWU J. NDIANEFOO, Ph.D, SENIOR LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA, NIGERIA.

## Abstract

The political history of Nigeria can be characterized as the history of the country's tortuous attempts at democratic governance since her independence in 1960. It is against this backdrop that the country has often been described as a fledgling democracy. To graduate from a fledgling democracy to a stable democracy, Nigeria needs to democratize all her institutional processes and practices. Popper's critical philosophy is recommended as a recipe to Nigeria's floundering attempts at democracy because it presents the most powerful theoretical justification of the case for freedom and democracy ever made. The upshot of Popper's critical philosophy is that all knowledge is tentative and should be held undogmatically, giving room for improvement. This is evidently the intellectual counterpart of what is, in the practical sphere, the outlook of liberalism or democracy in the pristine, strict sense of the term. It is hoped that the lofty and liberal values espoused by Popper's critical philosophy should be imbibed by Nigerian policy makers and executors in particular and Nigerian citizenry in general.

**KEYWORDS: NIGERIA, DEMOCRACY, PHILOSOPHY, POLITY, CRITICISM.**

## 1. Introduction

### (i) Democracy

Social concepts such as "democracy" are characteristically fluid. Thus, there is constant need to preface any discourse involving these concepts by a definition keyed in a chosen context. The concept "democracy" has become notorious for such fluidity not in the least because of its acquired charm. Writers and speakers alike employ it as if it were a magical theory and practice that could fit into any context. The feuding ideologues of capitalism and socialism describe their governments as democratic –thus giving rise to the terms, 'bourgeois democracy' and 'socialist democracy', ascribed respectively to them. And in Africa, there are emergent rebels who are insistent on what they call 'African democracy' moored, according to them, upon traditional consensual decision-making process. To these rebels, 'African democracy' is 'consensus democracy' and therefore logically and materially different from the so-called 'bourgeois democracy' and 'socialist democracy' which the rebels pejoratively term 'majoritarian democracies'.

The concept of 'democracy' which prima facie seemed simple has, against the foregoing analysis, become a controversial question. This is why in this discourse recourse will be had to the puritanical use and sense of the concept as the Athenians originated it in 450 B.C. In this original Athenian sense, 'democracy' literally means *demos* (people) and *kratos* (government or power). Pericles, the great Athenian statesman, defined democracy in its original sense thus:

*'Our constitution is named a democracy because it is in the hands not of the few but of the many. But our laws secure equal justice for all in their private disputes and our public opinion welcomes and honours talent in every branch of achievement...on grounds of excellence alone...our citizens attend both to public and private duties and do not allow absorption in their various affairs to interfere with their knowledge of the city's....We decide or debate, carefully and in person all matters of policy, holding...that acts are foredoomed to failure when undertaken undiscussed'.(quoted in Macridis 1982,16)*

The following points crystallize from the above enunciation of democracy by Pericles, viz:

- a. Government by the people with the full and direct participation of the people.
- b. Equality before the law.
- c. Pluralism –that is, respect for all talents, pursuits and viewpoints.

d. Respect for a separate and private (as opposed to public) domain for fulfillment and expression of an individual's personality.

These principles have for over two millennia remained the defining characteristics of democracy despite whatever cultural or ideological tinge that may be imposed on it by the various adaptations described above. Hence, whether one is talking about western or bourgeois democracy, social democracy, or African consensus democracy, these four canons of democracy remain the universal index of democracy. The various adaptations rise or fall in their claim to democracy according to the degree they exemplify these canons of democracy.

## **(ii) Karl Popper's Critical Philosophy**

The main contention of Popper's critical philosophy (otherwise technically known as falsificationism) is that the only practicable way of expanding human knowledge is by an unending feedback process of criticism. For Karl Popper who is widely regarded as England's greatest philosopher of science after Bertrand Russell (Gardiner 2001,13), criticism is not limited to verbal critical arguments but includes observations and experiments because according to him, observations and experiments play the same role as verbal critical arguments; that is to say, they may be used to test theories, challenge theories, even refute theories, but are only ever relevant in so far as they constitute potential criticism of theories.

Popper did not claim he invented the philosophy of criticism as a royal route to growth of knowledge. Instead, in his characteristic intellectual honesty, he rightly attributed it to the pre-Socratics who he said inaugurated the tradition of critical discussion as a consciously used way of expanding knowledge (Magee2003, 229).

The connection between Popper's critical philosophy (which is the theoretical matrix of this paper) and democracy is patently seamless. Popper's critical philosophy contains the most powerful theoretical justification of the case for freedom and democracy ever made. The upshot of Popper's critical philosophy or falsificationism is that all knowledge is tentative and should be held undogmatically, giving room for improvement. This is evidently the intellectual counterpart of what is, in the practical sphere, the outlook of liberalism or democracy in the pristine, strict sense of the term.

In this discourse, the reader is invited to appreciate the application of Popper's philosophy of science, otherwise, called Popper's critical philosophy, in the social and political worlds, particularly as a theoretical guide to fostering democratic attitudes and practices in Nigerian polity. The cardinal thesis of this paper is that Popper's critical philosophy is an engine of liberal and democratic principles and attitudes and should be imbibed by Nigerian policy makers and executors in particular, and Nigerian citizenry, in general.

## **2. The Nigerian State and Society in Democratic Transition**

The modern state paradigm in Africa is imperiled so much that there are whispers in Western capitals and among disillusioned Africans whether surrender of these fragile sovereignties to their former imperial powers would not be a viable option. The Nigerian state today is severely challenged not only by the Boko Haram's terrorism but also by ethnic chauvinism and hatred, bigotry, illiteracy and endemic corruption which had once plunged the country into hellish strife and civil war. These challenges are so serious that there are fears whether the American prediction of the unraveling of the Nigerian state in 2015 will turn out true. The shambolic socio-political condition in Nigeria and some other sub-Saharan African countries is brought about mainly by dictatorship which, by its nature, engenders corruption. This parlous state of affairs is more regrettable against the backdrop that at the independence of Nigeria from Britain in 1960 there was a great hope that self rule would heal the wounds of colonialism and turn the country into a homeland of the black race. This was not to be as the crass ineptitude and corruption of the new indigenous political elite pushed the country to the precipice and also evoked mass disenchantment and revulsion. The result was a violent coup d'état on January 15, 1966 which was the first ever military intervention in the politics and governance of Nigeria. The following excerpt of the Speech of the military revolutionaries is a vivid reflection of the social rot the first indigenous government brought about:

*'Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten per cent; those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPS at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before the international circles; those that have corrupted our society and put*

*the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds...'*  
(Quoted in Madunagu 2001, 32)

It is a tragic irony that successive military regimes from 1966 to 1999, punctuated by brief civilian regimes, failed in their ostensible mission to stabilize the Nigerian state and upgrade the society. The long period of military rule continued a hideous assault on the Nigerian psyche from where British colonialism left off. At the time the most notorious of the military despots, General Abacha, died in bizarre circumstances after his eight years reign of terror and barbarism, the Nigerian state and society were at the lowest ebb in all the known indices of modern civilization. Crass corruption and impunity had become the order of the day. And what is worse, the Nigerian military as an institution became as parlous as the society it came to mend. Indeed the handover of power to elected civilian government in 1999 was a dual anodyne: the military was happily released from their self-inflicted burden of ineptitude and corruption while the society was released from military dictatorship. The myth of military interventionism exploded as the myth of the civilizing mission of colonialism before it.

Civil rule resumed in 1999 and periodic elections have been had in 2003, 2007 and 2011, but these periodic elections merely signify democracy, they were not definitive democratic elections because they were neither free nor fair. Respect for human rights, political participation, free and fair elections, transparency and accountability remain daunting tasks for democracy in Nigeria. This condition prevailed and still prevails because of two reasons. In the first place, the military, having been infiltrated and influenced by the bankrupt national political elites shortly after the coup d'état, was not corrective and redemptive. Instead, it raised the co-efficient of National decay as witnessed in the notorious regimes of Generals Babangida and Abacha. In the second place, the long years of military rule has exacted a mortal wound on the national psyche. The national psyche is brutalized, militarized and vulgarized and, in consequence, has precipitated a culture of impunity in public affairs.

This impunity in public affairs is symbolized by electoral fraud which has become a feature of elections in Nigeria, a condition under which former President Obasanjo declared the 2007 election "as do or die election" and the ruling party's secretary, Vincent Ogbulafor, declared that the party will rule Nigeria for 60 years. This appalling condition persists even as the country prepares for 2015 general election, what with the innovation in electoral violence and intimidation by Senator Omisore, a governorship candidate in the August 9, 2014 gubernatorial election in Osun state when he campaigned guarded by hooded gun-trotting security men (The Nation on Sunday, July 6, 2014, 4). Although the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) chairman condemned it (The Nation on Sunday, August 24, 2014, 15) and assured that never again shall the 'unknown security official' be a feature of the nation's electioneering process, the Ekiti state governor-elect, Mr. Ayo Fayose, used violence on 22 and 25 September 2014 to abort a court sitting to hear a case against his eligibility to stand in the election. The government agency entrusted with the supervision of the Judiciary, the National Judicial Council, reacted to the attack on a sitting court regretting it has become a common feature in the country's body politic in the following word

*'Council in very strong terms condemned the attacks on the judiciary and judicial officers in general across the country and in particular, the one carried out in high court complex, Ado-Ekiti on 22<sup>nd</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2014.*

*Council requested the inspector-General of police to take over and investigate the alleged attacks on Hon. Justices John Adeyeye and Isaac Ogunyemi, some members of staff of the court and vandalizing of property of the high court of justice, Ado-Ekiti and bring the culprits to justice' (The Nation on Sunday, October 5, 2014, 67)*

This impunity explains why the world ethical watchdog, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index showed Nigeria has not made any appreciable progress in her much-touted anti-corruption campaign with her 139<sup>th</sup> position out of 176 countries in 2012 from her 30<sup>th</sup> position out of 180 countries in 2009 while the Mo Ibrahim Foundation rated the country as 14<sup>th</sup> out of the considered 16 countries in West Africa on human rights, political participation, transparency and accountability (The Nation on Sunday, October 21, 2012, 15). Perhaps what qualifies as a stronger testament to the degree of impunity and corruption in public affairs in Nigeria comes from World Bank's former technocrat, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iwealla. She said in an article in a British newsmagazine that she would be quite satisfied if by the end of her current term as the country's finance minister and the co-

coordinating minister of the economy she would be able to reduce the scale of corruption and mismanagement in the country by 4% (The Economist, March 2012)

All these aberrations show the country is neither a democratic state nor a good soil for democratic incubation, even though it is under a civilian government. At best, it is only transiting to democracy and this requires weaning the average Nigerian off the undemocratic habits acquired in the long years of brutalization, militarization and vulgarization of the national psyche and culture under military rule. What is required at this juncture of the country's historic evolution is attitudinal change and value re-orientation especially on the part of the political elites who should be salt and conscience of the body politic. This is where Popper's critical philosophy comes to the bargain as an intellectual instrument for democratization and it will be against the grain of the country's political elite whose predatory politics a popular columnist, Tatalo Alamu, once lamented in the following words:

“Is there an elite conspiracy against democratic rule in this country? The attitude of many members of the ruling class does not reflect the mental conditioning of those committed to the general principles of democracy either as a short term prospect or as a long term project. Yet without such mental conditioning, we can never build durable institutions, and without such durable institutions we can never sustain democracy. It is an appalling prospect for nation and society. The international community must be watching Nigeria with a degree of sympathy-fatigue. The cost of maintaining a deficient democracy is becoming truly prohibitive in terms of human toll and economic wastage” (The Nation on Sunday, December 23, 2012, 3)

The fundamental thesis of this essay is that Nigeria's predatory political elites should imbibe the general principles of democracy intellectually enunciated and justified by Popper's critical philosophy and impart the principles, as leaders, to the body politic. This objective is predicated on Professor Ake's thesis that political conditions are the greatest impediment to development in Africa (Claude Ake 1996, 7, 9). The extant political conditions which manipulate and employ the state as an instrument of predation by elite minority should be superseded and replaced by the political conditions of true democracy which history has shown to be the only path to sustainable development. The intellectual attitudes necessary for incubation of such political conditions of true democracy is what Popper's critical philosophy has spelled out.

### **3. Popper's Critical Philosophy as an Intellectual Anatomy and Justification of Democracy**

The main contention of Popper's critical philosophy (otherwise technically called 'falsificationism') is that the only practicable way of expanding human knowledge is by an unending feedback process of criticism. For Popper, a leading philosopher of science, criticism is not limited to verbal critical arguments but includes observations and experiments because, according to him, observations and experiments play the same role as verbal arguments: they may be used to test theories, challenge theories, even refute theories, but are ever relevant in so far as they constitute potential criticism of theories.

Popper did not claim he invented the philosophy of criticism as a royal route to growth of knowledge. Instead, in his characteristic intellectual honesty, he rightly attributed it to the pre-Socratics whom he said inaugurated the tradition of critical discussion as a consciously used way of expanding human knowledge (Magee2003, 229). Popper gave an intriguing account of the process of knowledge acquisition and transmission in ancient time before the pre-Socratics. According to him, all societies regarded knowledge as something to be handed down inviolate and uncontaminated from each generation to the next and, under such context, dissent was normally punishable by death. The upshot of this, Popper continued, was that a society's core body of knowledge and doctrine tended to remain almost static, especially if inscribed in writings that were regarded as holy. Popper maintained that it was against this historical background that the pre-Socratic philosophers of ancient Greece introduced something wholly new and revolutionary: they institutionalized criticism. From Thales onwards, each of the pre-Socratics encouraged his pupils to discuss, debate, *criticize* and to produce a better argument or theory if they could.

The renown which Popper achieved in the history of scientific method is due to his uncanny skill in enunciating this pre-Socratics' critical tradition as the mainstay of scientific method and his powerful advocacy and popularization of this method of investigation and discovery in his over ten enviable books.

The connection between Popper's critical philosophy (which is the theoretical framework of this discourse) and democracy is patently seamless. Popper's critical philosophy contains the most powerful theoretical justification of the case for freedom and democracy ever made. The upshot of Popper's critical philosophy or falsificationism is that all knowledge is tentative and should be held undogmatically, giving room for improvement. This is evidently the intellectual counterpart of what is, in the social sphere, described as liberalism in the pristine, strict sense of the term. Popper spent his long life espousing this critical method of inquiry and the implied freedom as Helmut Kohl, the former German Chancellor, poignantly stated it:

*'The age of totalitarian ideologies in Europe is drawing to a close. The belief in the historic mission of one race or class has proved to be the most devastating fallacy of this century: millions of innocent people fell victim to its sway. Karl Popper ceaselessly fought this fallacy. He is among the most significant champions of the open society.... The triumph of freedom and democracy in Europe demonstrates that Popper was right. His message for the future is that we must remain alert; critical rationality is the precondition for the coexistence of people and nations in dignity and peace' (Popper 1992, 5)*

#### **4. Critical Method as an Element of Scientific Rationality**

Popper's passion for the critical traditional which was to exercise a decisive influence on his writings had its origin in what seemed to him a Damascus Road experience which he had at a lecture given by the leading scientist, Albert Einstein, in Vienna in 1919 on the New Physics. That experience marked an intellectual turning point in his great career.

Einstein's eclipse predictions as a test of his new theory of gravitation with implicit new cosmology were successfully tested by two British expeditions. Einstein's new discoveries explained all of Newton's and even went beyond Newton's. Popper pointed out that what impressed him most was Einstein's declaration that he would regard his general theory of relativity as untenable if it failed critical tests. Einstein had declared: 'if the red shift of spectral lines due to gravitational potential should not exist, then the general theory of relativity will be untenable' (Truesdell 1967, 35)

Popper saw in this declaration of Einstein a critical attitude (as he also saw in the pre-Socratics) totally different from the dogmatic attitude of Marx, Freud and Adler. He came to realize that Marx's theory of history, Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychology failed to make precisely formulated predictions that could be subjected to direct (or indirect) empirical test. In the words of Popper,

*'Here was an attitude utterly different from the dogmatic attitude of Marx, Freud, Adler and even more so that of their followers. Einstein was looking for critical experiments whose agreement with his predictions would by no means establish his theory; while a disagreement, as he was the first to stress, would show his theory to be untenable. This, I felt, was the true scientific attitude. It was utterly different from the dogmatic attitude which constantly claimed to find "verifications" for its favorite theories' (Popper 1992, 38)*

Consequently, Popper took the critical method as an element of scientific rationality and from this he developed a theory of scientific rationality marked, according to him, by objectivity and testability (criticism) of scientific theories which yield, he held, a logic of discovery and advancement of knowledge generally. Within the context of Popperian scholarship, the critical method is the *organon* of science, the purveyor, and sustainer of scientific rationality. This intellectual account of the logic and method of science is masterfully argued in his Opus Magnum, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934.

The upshot of Popper's logic of discovery and advancement of knowledge which is the hallmark of his critical philosophy is that knowledge is of its nature, provisional and permanently so and grows by constant criticism and revision. This explains his rejection of verification principle and advocacy of fallibilism (Popper 1992, 36). Popper states this logic of discovery and advancement of knowledge in the following words:

*'Knowledge can grow, and science can progress -just because we can learn from our mistakes. The way in which knowledge progresses, and especially our scientific knowledge, is by unjustified (and unjustifiable) anticipations, by guesses, by tentative solutions to our problems, by conjectures. These conjectures are controlled by criticism, which is by attempted refutations, which include several critical tests; but they can never be positively justified: they can neither be established as certainly true nor even as "probability" (in the sense of probability calculus)'(1963,vii).*

Popper has reduced the logic of scientific discovery enunciated in the above quote to his now famous and venerable schema:  $P_1 \rightarrow TT \rightarrow EE \rightarrow P_2$ , in which  $P_1$  is the initial problem, TT is the tentative theory or trial solution, EE is the process of error elimination applied to the tentative theory or trial solution, and  $P_2$  is the resulting situation, with new problems. It is essentially a feedback process. It is not cyclic, for  $P_2$  is always different from  $P_1$ : even complete failure to solve a problem teaches us something new about where its difficulties lie, and therefore alters the problem situation; nor is it dialectical (in any Hegelian or Marxist sense) since it regards contradiction (as distinct from criticism) as something that cannot be accommodated on any level, and still less welcomed (Popper 1972, 121).

## **5. Fostering Democratic Attitudes and Practices in Nigerian Polity through Popper's Critical Philosophy**

Democratic attitudes and practices come hard in the Third World especially in a country like Nigeria with a history of long military dictatorship. Democracy is not just a matter of holding elections for elections themselves could be manipulated and corrupt as it is the case in Nigeria. This is why the Nigerian polity needs to be weaned from the ill effects of her experience of long military dictatorship. Popper's critical philosophy provides a ready instrument for such weaning.

Popper was able to employ his method of critical rationality (developed in his philosophy of science) as a battering ram against illiberality in the social world because of the seamless continuity he forged between the critical method in science and critical method in the social world. Bertrand Russell, Popper's fellow citizen and fellow philosopher, accounts for Popper's apt methodological transition from the physical realm (science) to the social realm (democracy) in the following words "science is empirical, tentative and undogmatic. The scientific outlook, accordingly, is the intellectual counterpart of what is, in the social sphere, the outlook of liberalism". (Russell 1950, 26).

Popper's critical method, critical rationality or scientific rationality (as the terms are used interchangeably) is characterized in physical investigation by critical test or experiment, but in social research it translates to a methodology for management of change. In a nutshell, this latter concept means that social solutions to social problems otherwise known as policies should be subjected to criticism, weighing them against alternative possible solutions via-a-vis their expected practical effects (Magee 1995, 262). The more effective the criticism, the greater will the saving in time, economic resources and human happiness. So, a debate of this kind is not an abstract, airy-fairy matter, but a hard-headedly, practical one. And the proposals whose effective criticism is more desirable, because most fruitful, are those of government, because these are the ones that are put into practice on largest scale, and with the most powerful, and with the greatest effect on people's lives. Full and free critical public discussion of proposed government policies is therefore essential if avoidable large-scale error is indeed to be avoided. Without such discussion, there will inevitably be more and more costly, public policy disasters. Such full and free public discussion of government policies is only possible in a democracy. This is why Popper sees democracy or liberalism as a necessary evil (Popper 1963, 350).

Although "democracy is not a revelation", that is, its expression and concrete form vary from society to society, as Salim Salim (1990,29) has rightly argued, Nigerian democracy, and democracy anywhere, must adapt itself to the now trite universal principles of democracy deducible from Pericles' enunciation of democracy above and which have been further elaborated by David Beetham and Kevin Boyle, to wit: "free and fair elections, open

and accountable government , civil and political liberties, and the existence of a vibrant civil society which facilitates the emergence , sustenance and consolidation of democracy”(1995,28).

The need for democratization through systematic inculcation of democratic attitudes and practices both at the institutional and individual levels is exigent and compelling in an ethnically and culturally plural society like Nigeria. Social peace and social harmony are attained in such a society by free debate and amicable resolutions of issues of the day than by authoritarian muzzling of dissent. Furthermore, available historical evidence invariably shows that rapid economic development is, with very few exceptions, higher in societies that are democratic than in authoritarian and totalitarian societies. Hence, the common refrain that democracy and development are complementary.

These points make it urgent that the extant, though fledgling, democracy in Nigeria should be stabilized and institutionalized in the very fabric of national policy. This calls for nothing short of a democratization policy and, to achieve this, Popper’s critical philosophy will provide an indispensable theoretical framework. Popper’s critical philosophy, as its foregoing analysis has shown, advocates critical culture and in that light regards every stage of affairs not as an end of the road, but a notch in the continuum of permanent revision and permanent progress. In this regard, the government would do well to make the cultivation of critical culture a deliberate governmental policy which should be assimilated into the country’s national culture and made to permeate her national life through formal and informal institutions. Unfortunately, there is doubt that such democratization policy will be implemented given what a popular columnist, Tatalo Alamu, has described as “elite delinquency and conspiracy against democracy in Nigeria”, but enlightened self interest dictates it as the elites have no rarefied upper atmosphere in the Nigerian space in which to live apart in the event of a national social convulsion and implosion which may be triggered by the conflicting cultural pluralities of the Nigerian federation if they are not tamed by democratic attitudes and practices. In the country’s present socio-economic and political circumstances what is needed is openness and transparency which is most guaranteed under democracy. So, a true democratization of the Nigerian polity is a desideratum as opposed to the present charade which the government shamelessly calls democracy.

For the critical culture which Popper advocated as the mainstay of democracy to percolate and drive the Nigerian polity, the government has to prosecute it by both formal and informal institutions. The extant formal institutions like the Judiciary, Media, Mass Literacy Program, National Orientation Agency and the Consumer Protection Council need to be overhauled and reinvigorated to perform their respective constitutional functions. The judiciary is universally held to be the last hope of the common man or as a Nigerian judge admirably put it ‘it stands between people and the government’. Although the debates still rage in jurisprudential circles whether the judiciary should be conservative or activist in orientation, it must be noted that justice which the courts are set up to give to all manner of men without fear or favor is itself a liberal concept much intertwined with principles of democracy. Hence the judiciary is essentially a liberal institution and to that extent should uphold critical culture which is an important feature of liberalism. Against this backdrop, the Nigerian judiciary should be a catalyst in the democratization project and indeed need to be so mobilized except that it has not been spared by the corruption bug which afflicts other social institutions in Nigeria.

The media is another social institution that must be mobilized to play its role as the watchdog of the realm. Indeed, under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 as Amended, the media is presumed to be a watchdog of the realm as it is assigned a constitutional duty to ‘uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people’ (Section 22). The media can only discharge this constitutional function in the Popperian spirit of critiquing government policies, hosting debates on matters of public interest and publishing viewpoints which may disagree with, and even oppose, those of the government. The Nigerian media has a reputation of being independent and critical particularly during the military regimes despite its ownership structure. The strong and viable section of the Nigerian media since independence has been under the ownership of either entrepreneurs who amassed wealth by political patronage or politicians who amassed wealth while in government. The strong and viable and, therefore, the dominant section of the Nigerian media is a product of an evil concert between capitalism and the state. Such concert ruptured at a point during military rule when the proprietors of media felt that the military had over-stayed in power and shut them out for too long. This explains the significant role the media played in the liquidation of military rule in Nigeria. But in the current civilian governance the evil alliance between capitalism and state has been revived because the media proprietors are part of the elite minority either as business men enjoying some political patronage or as politicians wielding or jostling for state power. Under these circumstances, the critical function of the media is obviously compromised. The direct consequence is that despite the enactment and coming into force of the Freedom of Information Law, the critical edge of the media is blunted. Its criticism of the policies and acts of government and public affairs is largely elite intra-class criticism

driven by elite contest for state power. It is not a criticism directed to holding the government accountable to the people.

To restore the Nigerian press to its truly critical role in the democratization of Nigerian polity, the ownership structure must be changed. A liberation media contemplated by section 22 of the Nigerian Constitution and envisaged by Popper's critical philosophy must have its life strings in the hands of some guild or apolitical entrepreneurs who did not make wealth by government contracts or some other dubious association with government. It is under such ownership structure that the Nigerian media can play the role of conscience of the society by being a medium for free critical discussion and debate of public policies and other governmental questions -thus making the Nigerian polity a liberal polity or "open society" advocated by Popper's critical philosophy.

The realization of the aspiration of making Nigeria a liberal polity or 'open society' postulated by Popper's critical philosophy demands nothing less than a modest literacy rate among the citizenry. This is so because an independent and critical medias which can maintain a feedback mechanism of democratization and social improvement by criticism in the Nigerian polity as envisaged by Popper's critical philosophy will be impotent without significant improvement in the literacy rate and reading culture in the country.

Literacy rate in Nigeria is still low particularly in the North. A survey by the British Council in 2012 showed that 80 per cent of women between 20 and 29 in eight states of the North were unable to read and write, the corresponding figure for the South was 54 per cent. The British Council's Gender Equality Study further indicated that 94 per cent of women in Jigawa State and 42 per cent of the men in the state were illiterates. The document also brought up the shameful fact that two-thirds of girls between 15 and 19 years in the North are unable to read an English sentence, while, in the South, the figure is 10 per cent (The Nation on Sunday, April 21, 2013, 15). Consequently, given the poor literacy level in the region, Nigeria has been unable to advance towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals on education, especially for the female folk.

This makes it imperative for the government to embark on a well-articulated and vigorous mass literacy program different from the current charade under which corrupt government officials and contractors feed fat on the funds made available by UNESCO, European Union and other international organizations for implementation of Universal Basic Education program. It is against this backdrop that the collaboration (<http://www.anyiam-osigwe.org>) between Anyiam Osigwe Foundation and Nigeria Philosophical Association on the campaign for the introduction of Ethics, Logic, Critical and Creative Thinking (ELCC) into the Nigerian primary and secondary school curriculums is a welcome development. That the campaign is being done in Nigeria, a Third World country known for its minimal critical culture, lying thousands of kilometers away from Popper's country and after twenty years of his death is both a validation of Popper's critical philosophy and a posthumous honour to his genius.

Efficient democracy requires mass participation of educated and critical electorate. The low literacy level in the country frustrates the attainment of this basic requirement. This accounts for the obvious impotence of the country's National Orientation Agency in performing its statutory function of mass enlightenment or citizenship education. The government is not bothered by this because, as with many other government programs, it did not really intend to go beyond mere gesture. The ruling class knows that it cannot continue its pillage of the public treasury with the emergence of educated and critical electorate. Like the European colonialists before it, the Nigerian ruling class, now the internal colonialists, has no illusion about educated and critical Nigerian population. The Nigerian ruling class, therefore, strategically pursues only a semblance or gesture of human capital development.

The ruling class is satisfied with the country's low literacy level, dying reading culture among the educated minority and the attendant fatuity and herd mentality of the mass of the population. The latter constitute the crowd at political campaign rallies who are easily manipulated to continue to vote for inept and corrupt politicians. Such people happily receive money hand outs and food items at political campaign rallies. Such predominantly illiterate and uninformed electorate who cannot critically discuss or debate public issues of the day and demand explanations and accountability from the government constitute stumbling blocks to democracy in Nigeria.

There is a peculiar interaction between the gullibility and docility of the Nigerian electorate and greed of the ruling elite. The gullibility and docility of the electorate humor and, therefore, spur the greed of the ruling elite. The average Nigerian voter romanticizes and praises the Nigerian politician for the latter's wealth and wishes to be like the latter. And who will blame the average Nigerian for itching to join a booming industry which politics in the Third World has been made to be. Nigerian parliamentarians have achieved a queer reputation of being the highest paid parliamentarians in the world. It is indisputable that Nigerian democracy, amongst other factors discussed in the

foregoing, is endangered by “money politics” as a national newspaper recently described the situation in its editorial entitled “Our Money Politics”. The editorial described the situation thus:

*“Nigeria is quickly drifting to plutocracy. High costs squeeze poor people out of elections. After investing in elections, winners make recouping their investments priority while in office. It creates fertile platform for corruption. Anxiety to secure victory also promotes malpractices, especially violence” (The Vanguard, October 21, 2014, 18)*

All this simply point to the fact that Nigerian democracy is not driven by Popper’s thesis of growth by rational criticism of ideas. It has been made clear in the foregoing why the political elite has not made, and will not make, the cultivation of critical culture a governmental policy to foster genuine democracy in Nigeria. The situation is made more parlous by government’s systematic muzzling of civil society groups which have taken up the challenge posed by government’s inaction. These civil society groups which contributed immensely towards the liquidation of military rule in Nigeria know that civil rule is not a synonym of democracy, it can become a dictatorship.

Hence the civil society groups have maintained a commendable vigilance on the fledgling democracy in Nigeria and have acquitted themselves well as a critical segment of Nigerian society. In commendable Popperian spirit they critique government policies, mould and aggregate opinions on public affairs through public enlightenment campaigns, rallies, symposia and protests. Three occasions stand out as mile stones in the civil society’s critical interrogation of Nigerian democracy. The first occasion was the groups’ organized and disciplined criticism of the constitutional stalemate precipitated by late president Yar’ardua’s medical leave without transferring power to his vice president, Dr. Jonathan in 2010, which prodded the Nigerian parliament to invoke the doctrine of necessity by virtue of which it passed a resolution making vice president Jonathan the acting president. The second occasion was the January 2012 petroleum price hike mass protest organized by the civil society groups which held the country’s major cities standstill for over a week and compelled the government to review the price hike down to ₦97 per liter. The current protest sustained by Save Our Girls Movement has galvanized the government into making concerted efforts to engage their abductors, Boko Haram, both militarily and diplomatically.

The lessons of the protests and criticisms by the civil society groups are unmistakable. Debate and criticism of public policies are not treason but elixir of democracy and this is a point which Popper’s critical philosophy has made most brilliantly and powerfully.

## **6. Conclusion**

Governments at different levels of the federation and the Nigerian people yearn for socio- economic and political development of the country. But historical evidence invariably shows that rapid socio-economic development is, with very few exceptions, higher in stable democracies than in authoritarian and totalitarian societies. Hence, the common refrain that democracy and development are complementary.

For Nigerians to realize their desire for development, the extant democratic process should not only be sustained but indeed should be deepened. The route to this destination is pointed out by Popper’s permanent critical vigilance as has been elucidated in this discourse. Nigeria can only walk this route by heeding Popper’s call to scientific rationality, to critical objectivity and freedom. Even our own brother African, Professor Kwesi Wiredu, enjoins us that the philosophy of development we need in Africa must be critical and reconstructive. It should be one which is capable of inculcating in large percentage of the African population such habits of mind as exactness and rigor in thinking, the pursuit of systematic coherence and the experimental approach (quoted in Oladipo1996, 17)

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