

AN ASSESSMENT OF KARL POPPER'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE LIGHT OF ECONOMIC REFORMS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relevance of Karl Popper's political philosophy, specifically critical rationalism and piecemeal social engineering, within Nigeria's socio-economic reform landscape. The problem centers on the persistent failure and public hardship induced by sweeping national economic policies, highlighted by top-down, non-consultative implementations like the 2023 naira redesign and fuel subsidy removal. The primary objective is to critically apply Popper's liberal sociopolitical principles to re-engineer the design of macroeconomic reforms in Nigeria, ensuring state actions prioritize the mitigation of human suffering. Through the critical analysis method of philosophical inquiry, the study deconstructs core Popperian tenets alongside contemporary social justice frameworks and traditional African communal values. The study reveals that Nigeria's reform apparatus is structurally flawed by an irrational adherence to holistic, large-scale engineering paradigms that operate in secrecy, reject public dissent, and lack mechanisms for self-criticism. The study concludes that Popper's philosophy uniquely accommodates communal welfare goals because its focus on minimizing concrete social ills offers an accessible, low-risk blueprint for democratic social reconstruction. Consequently, the core recommendation is that Nigerian policymakers must institutionalize a critical culture of "piecemeal social engineering" by establishing transparent legal frameworks for public debate, ensuring state neutrality, and adopting gradual, phased policy implementations that permit iterative, trial-and-error adjustments based on citizens feedback.

KEYWORDS: Social Engineering, Policy Makers, Institutionalized, Deconstruct, Critical, Rationalism.

INTRODUCTION

In the annals of intellectual history, the pursuit of rationality and progress has often been ignited by the transformative power of critical thinking. At the forefront of this movement is Karl Popper, whose philosophy has left an indelible mark on our understanding of scientific inquiry and societal reform. Popper's notion that knowledge progresses through the method of

conjectures and refutations (*Conjectures and Refutations* 55) has not only influenced the scientific community but has also provided a robust framework for critical examination in various domains, including socio-political contexts. His philosophy emphasizes the importance of falsifiability as a criterion for scientific theories, advocating that for a theory to be considered scientific, it must be capable of being proven false (*Conjectures and Refutations* 40). This perspective challenges the status quo and encourages a culture of rigorous questioning and open debate, which are essential for any society striving toward rationality and progress. His ideas become particularly poignant when applied to the socio-political landscape of Nigeria, a nation characterized by a complex interplay of traditional values and modern aspirations (Odeh 78).

There is a systematic connection in Popper's liberal ideas about how the piecemeal social engineering approach works in relation to the idea of negative utilitarianism, individual freedom, and also to the idea of limited state interventionism. For Popper, democratic social reconstruction must be piecemeal in order to preserve individual freedom and to ameliorate human suffering. One can ameliorate a perceived problem in order to ensure that they reduce suffering piecemeal. Consequently, the government can only intervene in issues in society when there are recognized social-ills. This intervention can happen when, for instance, there is a need for control, for punishment, and for ways by which suffering can be reduced on as many people as possible. An intervention of a social welfare system that ensures that people who cannot afford necessary basic needs such as food and accommodation, particularly when they do not earn enough to cover these basic necessities for survival can receive some assistance from the government. These are some of the basic features of Popper's liberal ideas and they are in consonance with the idea of the common good.

One can then see that there is a social element to Popper's liberal ideas despite the sacrosanct nature of the concept of freedom in his political philosophy. Social in the sense that it considers, for instance, how to ensure that people do not suffer. How to ensure that government policies tackle social reform in the way that it is piecemeal, and avoid holistic approaches with tendencies of having ever-lasting damaging effects. These attributes are social, and it is the reason that the research believes that rather than just adopting liberalism on the whole, we can find ways to synthesize Popper's liberal ideas with the positive elements in the communalistic background that societies in Africa are supposedly built. In other words, because there is inherent implicit social element to Popper's idea, in spite of its explicit individualism, it makes it easier, different from all other liberal ideas, to be able to apply it to the basic constituents of communalism.

There is no gain re-emphasizing that much of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is in a precarious state with numerous developmental challenges such as; wide spread corruption, glaring looting of the national treasury, mass poverty, decayed infrastructures, alarming unemployment, wanton insecurity of lives and properties, moribund manufacturing sector, poor state of education and health system, pervasive inequality, food insecurity, compromised judiciary, rampant inflation, confused ideology, crisis of leadership, failed followership, electoral fraud and absolute disregard for due process and the rule of law among others.

Nigeria, as one of the most populous countries in Africa, faces unique challenges that complicate its economic landscape. The nation's post-colonial history is marked by corruption, military rule, and ethnic divisions, hindering effective policy implementation and economic growth (Olusanya 32). Since the return to democratic governance in the late 1990s, Nigeria has attempted various economic reforms aimed at stabilizing its economy and attracting foreign

investment. However, the effectiveness of these reforms has been inconsistent, often hampered by inadequate governance structures, persistent corruption, and social unrest (Aigbokhan 44).

This study will explore the intersections of Popper's political philosophy with Nigeria's economic policy landscape, investigating the challenges and prospects and how his political theory can illuminate pathways for fostering positive reforms in order to ensure better and people-oriented governance in Nigeria which coheres with Popper's notion that, "all things living are in a search of a better world" (*In Search of a Better World*. vii)

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Reforms: Reform is simply understood here as a change for better. It is an improvement or amendment of what is wrong. It can also be understood as the strategic plan of action to generate a sustained economic growth and longtime development (Mabera and Hassan 96).

Economic Reforms: Economic reforms refer to deliberate changes implemented by governments to improve their economic systems, aiming to enhance efficiency, growth, and stability (Fiveable 1). These reforms can take various forms, such as trade liberalization, deregulation, and fiscal adjustments, often seeking to address imbalances or inefficiencies within the economy (Fiveable 1).

Utilitarianism: At its core, utilitarianism emphasizes the idea that the right action is the one that produces the most overall good. It is based on the idea that an action should be judged according to its consequences, and that the greatest good for the greatest number of people should be the ultimate goal (Rueter 1). This ethical theory has been used to evaluate a variety of different social and political issues, from economic policy to criminal justice.

Negative Utilitarianism: This is a version of utilitarianism propounded by Karl Popper. It is the view that the state or an agent should only focus on actions that are capable of reducing the unhappiness and the suffering in the society.

POPPER'S METHOD: CRITICAL RATIONALISM

Karl Popper coined the term critical rationalism to describe his philosophy. The term simply refers to Popper's rejection of empiricism and the inductive account of science. Being critical of empiricism, Popper opted for a rationalism. Popper argues that scientific theories are abstract in nature and can be tested only directly by reference to their implications. For him, theories and human knowledge generally are conjectures or hypotheses, and is generated by the creative imagination in order to solve problems that have arisen in specific historico-cultural settings (Essien 58). In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Popper noted that every genuine test of a theory is an attempt to falsify or refute it. In falsification, scientific theories must be tested in order to bring out anomalies, and theories are found to contain anomalies should be rejected. According to him, theories that contain anomalies have been falsified whereas theories without anomalies are corroborated (*The Logic...* 86). In fact, Knowledge for Karl Popper, grows through constant criticism (critical test) and revision and it accounts for his core faith in fallibilism (Popper: *Unended Quest...*55). Popper, therefore believes that human knowledge is fallible, and theories are useful as to the extent that they solve problems. Hence, he uses this same conviction to develop a political theory that echoes the human infallibility, while attempting to point out how ideas are important in organizing a civil state.

Popper admitted that Marx, Socrates, Kant and Hegel were all rationalists. But he noted that there were limitations in their rationality, which made them fall short as the basis of unity of mankind. The rationalism of Marx and Hegel were hampered by their insistence that our ideas

and opinions are determined by our class interest and national interests respectively. In defining rationalism, Popper notes that;

Rationalism is an attitude of readiness to listen to critical arguments and to learn from experience. It is fundamentally an attitude of admitting that I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort we will get nearer to the truth. It is an attitude which does not lightly give up hope that by such as argument and careful observation, people may reach some kind of agreement on many problems of importance; and that, even where their demands and their interests clash, it is often possible to argue about the various proposals, and to reach perhaps by arbitration-a compromise which because of its equity, is acceptable to most, if not to all (Popper: *The Poverty of Historicism...* 225).

Popper traced the genesis of critical rationalism to the philosophy of Socrates. The Socratic method of midwifery of knowledge is critical in nature. Through the dialectic method of questioning, one is able to discover more truth. Popper writing about the value of the Socratic Method observes that, those eager to learn are helped to free themselves from their prejudice; thus they may learn self-criticism, and that truth is not easily attained. But they may also learn to make up their minds, and to rely critically on their decisions, and on their insight (Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies* 129).

According to Hans Albert, critical rationalism, includes three main assertions on which all those philosophers who ascribe to this particular philosophical school of thought agree (212). These are, first, consistent fallibilism, the assumption that all humans are fallible, not only in their cognitive practice but also in all their attempts at problem solution; second, critical realism, the assumption that we are able, in principle, to recognize real connections that are independent from us, that is, to arrive at true statements about these; and third, methodological revisionism, the assumption that all of our assertions may require revision following critical examination. Furthermore, Albert maintains that there is also the correspondence theory of truth, the assumption that classical logic applies, which facilitates deductive reasoning, the rejection of induction and the rejection of the dogmatization of problem solutions. Accordingly, he observes that critical rationalism emphasizes the significance of tradition, both in the context of gaining scientific insights and for culture, as well as the relevance of institutions for knowledge and society (Albert 210).

Oyekunle Ayegboyega and Precious Obioha locate the theoretical background of critical rationalism in Popper's principle of falsificationism, which is a justification for human freedom against dogmatism. Accordingly they pointed out that falsificationism, which can be cleaned as the pivotal instrument of Popper's thought, seeks to establish a system of knowledge acquisition that is either wholly or partly free from dogmatism and in turn paves the way for improved knowledge acquisition. This is what Adegboyega and Obioha consider as the "intellectual counterpart of what is, the pragmatic sphere, in the strict sense of the term, the outlook of liberalism or democracy" (3). Hence, Popper's concern was how to espouse a method of free inquiry that promotes the freedom of knowledge.

The Open and Closed Societies

The concept 'Open Society' was not first used by Popper. It was used by Bergeson. But the meaning Popper attached to it was different. Bergeson regards the closed society as a society

based on closed morality and a closed soul while open society is characterized by open morality and an open soul. He used the term in reference to religious openness. He noted that this openness is accessible only to the saints of Christianity. In fact, he called it a mystic society (Steinvorth, 240).

Popper on the other hand used the concept in a different sense. Accordingly, he gives a meaningful insight into his usage of the terms by asserting “my terms indicate a rationalist distinction; the closed society is characterized by the belief in magical taboos, while the open society is one in which men have learned to some extent to be critical of taboos and to base decisions on the authority of their own intelligence” (cited in Steinvorth 242). Hans Albert observes that:

The open society as has been characterized by Popper is a society whose members have the possibility to decide freely about how to lead their lives and to participate in the decisions about their common affairs. By the institutionalization of competition and criticism in all social realms, such societies are in a condition to find new solutions for problems of all kinds, to analyse and to discuss these solutions, and to come to reforms (7).

From the above, we can infer that an open society is founded on the principle of rationality and critical principles. It is a society where men’s lives are not ruled by taboos and instincts but by reason. It is therefore a society that offers a wide range of opportunity to the rational and critical input of its citizens without limitations. In such society, citizens have unfettered opportunity to critically express their convictions on virtually every issue. Just as science makes progress through the overthrow or modification of theories through refutation, society makes progress as well through the same principle. The more tolerant a society is to opposing views, the more open such a society is.

According to Popper’s classification of closed societies, the situation of tribal societies and the situation where people are closely knit together by blood ties and customs became a manifest example. The societal norm, customs and taboos are the major moderating factor in determining human conduct and life patterns. What basically makes this type of society closed is the fact that the lives of men are controlled by either a force or authority outside him. Decisions and attitudes are not products of personal convictions. It can be the authority of the gods or the collective morality of the community. A closed society Popper contends, resembles a herd in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kingship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress (Popper: *The Open Society*...2). This type of society appears to provide mutual harmony and brotherhood which is actually absent in modern societies. But it fails to provide the needed intellectual freedom needed for men to exercise their mental and philosophical abilities. This is because the society reasons for everyone through established customs, norms and values.

Popper observes that the breakdown of the tribal society is an advance towards the open society. He notes that tribal exclusiveness and self-sufficiency could only be superseded by some form of imperialism (Popper: *The Open Society*...173). He therefore contends that Athenian imperialism was an advance towards the open society. This is because by opening up to other nations, the bonds of tribal exclusiveness were destroyed. Popper had to draw the distinction between closed and open society from the policy of Sparta and Athens. The Spartan policy according to Popper, were based on the following; (a) Shut out all foreign influences which might endanger tribal taboos (b) shut out all equalitarian, democratic and individualistic ideologies (c) be independent of trade (d) uphold the differentiation between your tribe and

others and do not mix with inferiors (f) dominate and enslave your neighbours (g) the city should not become too large (Popper 184). It is in this respect that Popper appraises the Athenian imperialism as being liberal.

The Enemies of the Open Society

Popper maintains that there are three deep philosophical predispositions which underpins Plato's defense of the closed society and, indeed, subsequent defenses of the closed society during the next two-and-a-half millennia (Gorton 1). He calls these ideas the enemies of the open society. These ideas are *holism*, *essentialism* and *historicism*.

Holism may be defined as the view that adequate understanding of certain kinds of entities requires understanding them as a whole. This is often held to be true for biological and social systems, for example, an organism, an ecosystem, an economy, or a culture. A corollary that is typically held to follow from this view is that such entities have properties that cannot be reduced to the entities' constituent parts. For instance, some philosophers argue that human consciousness is an emergent phenomenon whose properties cannot be explained solely by the properties of the physical components (nerve cells, neurotransmitters, and so forth) that comprise the human brain. Similarly, those who advocate a holistic approach to social inquiry argue that social entities cannot be reduced to the properties of the individuals that comprise them. That is, they reject methodological individualism and support methodological holism, as Popper called it.

Popper argues that Plato's *holism* is reflected in his view that the city, the Greek *polis*, was prior to and, in a sense, more real than the individuals who resided in it. For Plato "(o) only a stable whole, the permanent collective, has reality, not the passing individuals" (*Open Society Vol. 1*, 80). This view in turn implied that the city has real needs that supersede those of individuals and was thus the source of Plato's ethical collectivism. According to Popper, Plato believed that a just society required individuals to sacrifice their needs to the interests of the state. "Justice for [Plato]," he wrote, "is nothing but health, unity and stability of the collective body" (*Open Society*, vol. I...106).

Popper saw this as profoundly dangerous. In fact, he said, the view that some collective social entity, be it, for example, a city, a state, society, a nation, or a race—has needs that are prior and superior to the needs of actual living persons is a central ethical tenet of all totalitarian systems, whether ancient or modern. Nazis, for instance, emphasized the needs of the Aryan race to justify their brutal policies, whereas communists in the Soviet Union spoke of class aims and interests as the motor of history to which the individual must bend. The needs of the race or class superseded the needs of individuals. In contrast, Popper held, members of an open society see the state and other social institutions as human designed, subject to rational scrutiny, and always serving the interests of individuals, and never the other way around.

Another dangerous enemy of the open society that Popper identifies is a position that he termed "methodological essentialism." For him, adherents of this view claim "that it is the task of pure knowledge or 'science' to discover and to describe the true nature of things, i.e., their hidden reality or essence" (Popper: *Open Society Vol. 1*...31). Plato's theory of the Forms exemplified this approach. According to Plato, understanding of any kind of thing, for example, a bed, a triangle, a human being, or a city, requires understanding what Plato called its Form. The Forms are timeless, unchanging and perfect exemplars of sensible things found in our world. Coming to understand a Form, Plato believed, requires rational examination of its essence. Such understanding is governed by a kind of intuition rather than empirical inquiry.

On Democracy

By democracy, Popper does not mean ‘the rule of the majority’ or ‘the rule of the people’ (Oyigo 64). He observes that “although ‘the people’ may influence the actions of their rulers by the threat of dismissal, they never rule themselves in any concrete practical sense” (cited in Oyigo 64). He also believes that the election of governments by majority of the governed leads to what he calls the paradox of democracy

For him, therefore, democracy does not consist in the rule of anyone in particular but in ‘institutional control’ of those who hold office by those who do not hold office. Accordingly, his democracy should be understood as a characteristic or form of power—institutions or institutions of management, defined in terms of the institutional control over governors, including their dismissal and replacement, which is exerted by those whom they govern. This is well captured by his contention that;

By a democracy I do not mean something as vague as ‘the rule of the people’ or the ‘rule of the majority’, but a set of institutions (among them especially general elections i.e the right of the people to dismiss their government) which permit public control of the rulers and the dismissal by the ruled, and which make it possible for the ruled to obtain reforms without using violence, even against the will of the rulers (Popper: *The Open society and its enemies* 10).

From this definition, he gives the standard by which one should judge the democratic nature of a political system as the degree of adequacy allowed for the expression of the will of the people; that is, the extent to which the people are involved in decision making processes. Indeed, unlike earlier democratic theorists like Locke, Mill etc. Who saw the problem of democracy as being the control of government by the people, Popper sees it as being how to give institutional expression to the will of the people; that is, how to make the will of the people explicit in real and concrete terms. For Popper, democracy is, by definition, which type of government by which the rulers can be dismissed by the ruled. Tyranny is the type of government in which the ruled cannot get rid of their rulers without bloodshed (Popper: *The Open Society and its enemies* 124). Popper's main political proposal is to avoid and resist tyranny. Tyranny is evil since it violates the humanitarian theory of justice. Democracy is good since it allows those affected by injustice the opportunity to remove the rulers who perpetrate it.

Popper's view of democracy is radical and uncompromising. It leaves the decision when to dismiss the rulers absolutely and categorically in the hands of the ruled. According to him, “a consistent democratic constitution should exclude only one type of change in the legal system, namely a change which would endanger its democratic character” (161). He stresses the importance of building institutions to protect against bad rulers.

Utopian Social Engineering

The utopian social engineering is a political policy advanced in the closed society as a means of attaining set goals through a well thought out blueprint (Denis and Udofia 393). Popper considers utopian social engineering as one of the enemies of the open society and a very regressive approach towards politics (Corvi 52). In other words, utopianism is the attempt at reconstructing or reforming the society as a whole (Denis and Udofia 394). This approach is, for Popper, dangerous because dictatorial and totalitarian principles are inevitable for the full

implementation of political blueprints. Wilkie (64) explains that blue print politics refers to the practice that political reforms must follow a preconceived model of society.

Piecemeal Social Engineering

Piecemeal social engineering is a theory of social governance propounded by Karl Popper as a criticism of historicism and a pathway to social and political reforms (Avery 26). It is the application of scientific thought to solving social problems just as an engineer would use technical know-how to solve problems of science or technology (Umotong 114). For Popper, therefore, piecemeal social engineering is a process of attaining social development by addressing societal issues critically in bits and stages (Denis and Udofia 394).

The word piecemeal denotes actions done or released in small proportions or quantity. It can also refer to stage by stage, bit by bit and gradually. The opposite of piecemeal is whole or holistic. It is not out of place to note here that the central pursuit of Popper's political thought is to set out the principles of piecemeal social engineering as the most realistic political alternative for mankind. Piecemeal Social Engineering can be defined as a process of social development which entails tackling societal problems critically and reflectively in small steps and stages.

The piecemeal social engineer adopts a means of searching for, and fighting against the most urgent evils, of society, rather than searching for and fighting for, it's ultimate good. (Popper, *The Open Society* 159). Popper insists that the piecemeal method is an approach which is methodologically sound. He contends that the politician who adopts this method may not have a blueprint in mind, and may not hope that mankind will one day realize an ideal state and achieve happiness (*The Open Society* 59). The piecemeal social engineer adopts or tackles issues and problems on piecemeal basis rather than an elaborate plan of projection to attain an ideal state. So rather than approach political problems by trying to eradicate all ills at once, piecemeal social engineering favours handling them in bits.

The following highlights can be made of the piecemeal social engineer. Firstly, he does not believe in redesigning the entire society as a whole. He rather approaches it through small adjustments with the aim of always improving upon them. Secondly, the piecemeal engineer is aware we learn only from our mistakes and success. He is a learner and do not possess any sense of having arrived. He understands that much of what he ought to know will unveil itself at the level of social practice. So he proceeds step by step, cross checking the progress made with the expected or desired result. Thirdly, he avoids embarking on reforms that are complex and capable of leading him into a dead end. Fourthly, he does all within his power to ensure that the reform do not create additional suffering on the masses.

MACROECONOMIC STABILIZATION IN NIGERIA

Fuel Subsidy Reform

Introduced on the current administration's Inauguration Day, this reform targeted fiscal imbalances by reducing subsidy expenditure, which made up approximately 20% of government expenditure in 2022, amounting to an average annual spend of up to NGN 3.36 trillion. The primary goal was to free up fiscal resources for infrastructure and social investment (Great for Growth 9) Additionally, the reform aimed to curtail widespread corrupt practices, such as inflated claims and payments to ghost marketers.

Foreign Exchange (FX) Market Unification

The CBN unified the official and parallel market exchange rates to eliminate the 60% differential observed in 2022. Prior to this reform, the FX market had operated a dual system, with official CBN rates coexisting alongside parallel market rates, often referred to as ‘black market’ rates. The significant disparity between these two systems often led to unequal access to FX for certain individuals and companies, creating inefficiencies, enhanced liquidity risks and implications for FDI inflows. The unification reform was implemented to address these issues by establishing a market-driven, single exchange rate system, enhancing liquidity and promoting greater stability in the Nigerian FX market (CBN 2)

Removal of Foreign Exchange (FX) Restrictions

The CBN removed FX restrictions on 43 import lines, which were initially imposed in 2015 to curb FX demand for locally producible goods and conserve foreign reserves. However, these restrictions led to increased activity in the parallel market, which resulted in a surplus demand for FX, higher parallel market rates and ultimately, price increases for essential goods. To mitigate these issues, the reform was therefore introduced to further enable the market-driven exchange rate system by enhancing price stability, improving FX liquidity and limiting distortions (CBN 24).

MPR Increases

The CBN significantly increased the MPR in response to escalating inflationary pressures. In February 2024, the inflation rate was 31.7%, continuing its upward trend. By August 2024, inflation had surged to 32.15%. In response, the CBN’s Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) adjusted the MPR, raising it from 18.5% in February to 27.25% by the end of September. This decision aimed to improve price stability and ultimately rein in inflation while addressing Nigeria’s complex economic landscape, including high public debt, exchange rate volatility and supply-side constraints (MPC 54; World Bank 220).

Electricity Tariff Review

The Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC) reviewed and increased electricity tariffs for Band A customers from NGN 66 per kWh to NGN 225 per kWh.^{12,13} This review aimed to attract investments to the power sector, which stood at USD 58.9 billion at the time, and ultimately improve the power supply. Previously, the sector saw limited development due to low investment stemming from non-cost-reflective tariffs.

Additionally, the sector had accumulated a debt of over NGN 3 trillion owed to power companies over the last decade due to the lack of cost-reflective pricing.¹⁴ The April reform introduced cost-reflective tariffs to attract investment, enhance electricity supply and reduce the financial burden on the government, specifically by lowering the subsidy by NGN 1.1 trillion for 2024 (Nairametrics 1; Budget 40).

New Tax Regime

A new tax regime was proposed to increase the tax revenue contribution to GDP, which stood at approximately 10.86% in 2023. The country currently has 60 official and 200 unofficial taxes and experiences low revenue accountability. The reform aimed to enhance revenue generation by expanding the tax base and simplifying the tax processes (Fitch Solutions 1)

FUEL SUBSIDY AND ITS REMOVAL: A POPPERIAN ASSESSMENT

Subsidies, while defined in various ways, fundamentally represent state-sponsored interventions designed to artificially lower the cost of specific commodities to provide economic relief to consumers. Beyond direct consumer support, subsidies function as fiscal mechanisms intended to promote specific economic activities or achieve strategic social objectives. As Julien observes, subsidies are structural measures that foster long-term economic stability, enabling the state to absorb shocks during recessions or unforeseen global crises(20)

The Nigerian Context

In Nigeria, the fuel subsidy regime was institutionalized via the Price Control Act of 1977 to shield citizens from the volatility of the international oil market. Without such intervention, the domestic economy remains vulnerable to global price fluctuations, which can trigger uncontrollable inflation and severe macroeconomic instability. In Nigeria, these subsidies have historically centered on Premium Motor Spirit (PMS)—the energy lifeblood for most sectors of the economy. While successive administrations acknowledged this mechanism's importance to public welfare, the status quo was abruptly dismantled by President Bola Tinubu in his inaugural address on May 29, 2023, with the declaration: "Fuel subsidy is gone!"

The Economic Aftermath

This abrupt policy shift raises a critical question: was such a sweeping mandate prudent in the absence of a compensatory framework? The aftermath was immediate and severe. Pump prices surged from approximately ₦200 to over ₦1,350 per litre. This rapid inflation, fueled by escalating logistics costs and rising energy expenses for businesses, crippled household purchasing power, eroded the middle class, and forced the closure of numerous small-scale enterprises and manufacturing plants. Because this elimination was executed without a phased transition or robust public engagement, the ripple effect across the nation has been devastating.

A Popperian Critique

When subjected to the epistemological framework of Karl Popper, the government's unilateral approach appears fundamentally irrational. Popper did not argue against the necessity of reform; rather, he advocated for "piecemeal social engineering"—the idea that policy reforms should be executed incrementally. This allows for empirical adjustments as policies are tested against the realities of the social landscape.

Popper strongly opposed utopian or "holistic" restructuring, which imposes sudden, radical shocks on society. He emphasized that human societies are subject to unpredictable variables that inevitably complicate even the most carefully constructed plans. Had the Nigerian administration adopted a gradual, step-by-step reform strategy, the systemic damage could have been significantly mitigated. As labor leader Joe Ajaero has suggested, the aggressive and hasty nature of the subsidy removal contradicts the rational procedures required for sound public policy, particularly when the resulting shock to the domestic economy is both predictable and profound.

National Security and Consciousness

National security plays a crucial role in the socio-economic reform of any country. Therefore, any reform aimed at transforming the socio-economic fortune of the state must first

and foremost put security of lives and properties as top of its agenda. But what has been the major visible reform in the Nigeria security sector?

In Nigeria, the security system suffers the menace of lack of proper agenda for reform, lack of political will and commitment to the course of collective national security devoid of bias and sentiments, lack of capacity and motivation on the actors in the theatre of war across several locations where conflicts exists, among others. Some or all of these factors congeal to mitigate against not only the security sector reform, but also on the models and strategies that have been enunciated by the government to move the nation to the next level of peace, stability and development in the 21st century and beyond (Akinwumi et al 89).

The Nigerian state requires more than what is already available for us as a nation. It is on this premise that the whole reform strategies need a new lease of life. For us to move forward as a nation there is the dire need to revisit our past, reconstruct some of the structural and institutional loopholes and then, tailor our collective resolve towards a direction that places national interest truly above parochial regarding. There is also the need to re-orient our minds either as leaders or followers. The re-orientation here is two-pronged. Leadership is critical in reforms. The followers are likely to emulate what the leaders do. What this means is that there is need for vertical and horizontal re-examination and re-orientation (Akinwumi et al 89). This is what Popper mean by critical rationalism; a deeper reasoning for growth.

CONCLUSION

One will readily agree with Popper that the greatest problem encountered in practical politics is the issue of passion beclouding reason. This makes agreements impossible as self-interest overrides national interest. In developing countries, the pursuit of personal/group interest is the basis of financial and political corruption. So, rather than governance alleviate human suffering, it creates more of it. Popper insists that through critical rationalism, the greatest challenges confronting mankind can effectively be handled. The resort to violence is only an evidence of the failure or absence of reason. In the practical sense, Popper is saying that the most urgent evil or suffering should be identified and agreed upon. This then is followed by debates on how to address it and resolve it. The debates should produce a consensus on how to resolve the problem. The resolution of the problem now proceeds through trial and error or conjectures and refutations until the problem is finally handled. What serves as conjectures and refutations is a continuous appraisal through self- criticism and public criticism. It is the critical input made into a programme or project that refines and perfects its implementation. This has a positive impact on the quality of the final product delivered.

It is worthy of note that even in our contemporary society, various degree of piecemeal approach has become a common feature. There is hardly any government policy that does not from time to time witness adjustments. The adjustments may be arising from insufficient funds, or unforeseen circumstances which were not taken into consideration at the inception of the project. So, the modern society is not a stranger to policy adjustments. However, this is not a conscious desire to follow piecemeal approach. What Popper is contending for, is a situation where the piecemeal along with its critical rational method is adopted as the standard modus of operation in a democratic open society. This will definitely require some constitutional provisions to entrench the principle. Though Popper did not mention this aspect, but a certain degree of constitutional provision needs to be put in place before it can be practically implemented.

This work makes significant contributions to knowledge, particularly in areas of contemporary political philosophy and policy science, by successfully bridging Western critical rationalism with African sociopolitical realities. First, it advances the theoretical discourse on liberalism by demonstrating that Karl Popper's political philosophy contains an inherent, implicit "social element" via negative utilitarianism, proving that his explicit individualism does not preclude structured state-led welfare interventions to alleviate suffering. Second, it pioneers a unique cross-cultural philosophical synthesis by mapping Popperian fallibilism and "piecemeal tinkering" onto the communalistic textures of African societies, specifically illustrating how regional adages (such as the Ibibio proverb "drip by drip palm wine fills the gallon") conceptually mirror piecemeal social technology.

Furthermore, the study provides a robust, non-partisan diagnostic framework for evaluating recent Nigerian macroeconomic policy anomalies, demonstrating through the "laboratory of Popper" that the aggressive, simultaneous execution of the 2023 naira redesign and immediate fuel subsidy removal constituted an irrational, holistic "policy mismatch" that caused severe, avoidable human suffering. Finally, it redefines the parameters of democratic accountability in developing post-colonial states by arguing that sustainable economic resilience cannot be achieved through top-down elite mandates, but rather requires the institutionalization of Popperian open-society values, state neutrality, and participatory parity where citizen dissent actively shapes iterative policy modifications.

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