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CRIMINOLOGY, AFRICAN FRACTALS, AND ELECTIONS

By Biko Agozino

The recent elections in Africa with a few exceptions confound political analysts and lay people alike in terms of why they are so chaotic compared to some elections in other parts of the world that appear more orderly. I believe that the explanation lies in what is known as African Fractals. Briefly, this is the finding that Africans prefer to design their social institutions and social relations in fractal patterns rather than the linear patterns which are preferred by Europeans. This fact was recorded by Ron Eglash in his book, *African Fractals: Indigenous Designs and Modern Computer Engineering*.

According to Eglash, modern computer engineering, especially given the internet that was developed with the formula of the Nigerian genius, Phillip Emeagwali, is based on fractal designs rather than linear geometry probably due to the fact that the internet is a web with interconnectivity and not a grid with straight lines. Eglash was surprised to find that African town planning, architectural designs, beliefs in the supernatural, kinship patterns, board games, textile designs, hairstyles and what have you all exhibit an abundance of fractal geometry while European designs tend to be Cartesian and Native American designs tend to be Euclidean or three-dimensional. Many Africans entertain doubts about legalistic claims to finality – a finality that is alien to the African fractal way of thinking, which favours the fractal principles of complexity, reflexivity, interconnectedness,

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replicability, scaling, infinity and far-from-equilibrium states in contrast to European preference for easy-to-control borders, boundaries and fortresses laid out in Cartesian grids of straight lines.

Eglash warned that this should not lead to the conclusion that Africans are closer to nature since nature itself is abundantly fractal while Europeans are closer to culture. Native Americans and other cultures that do not prefer the fractal patterns so common in Africa also do not share European culture. Moreover, African Americans continue to privilege fractal designs in their settlement patterns to the extent that the State of Georgia was forced to redistrict electoral boundaries to take into consideration the fact that African Americans did not settle in straight grids but in a chaotic fractal pattern and that they would be under-represented if electoral boundaries are based strictly on straight grids. Similarly, the musical genres created by people of African descent – jazz, blues, funk, rock n roll, reggae, ragga, calypso, soca, Afrobeat, highlife, gospel – all stubbornly resist the written musical score and privilege improvisation and the call and response motif common in African culture.

Eglash did not speculate on the origin of these African fractal patterns but my guess is that after Africans were hunted and captured for hundreds of years during the African holocaust, it is understandable that people of African descent deliberately evolved complicated social and physical designs to help them to elude capture by slave raiders. This explanation was indirectly anticipated by Eglash who observed that the three great pyramids in Egypt were designed in fractal patterns thousands of years ago

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but then, the Egyptian civilization was itself the prey of many marauding invaders to the extent that even the educational system in Kemet was known as The Mysteries in which students were sworn to secrecy and very little was recorded in writing despite the availability of hieroglyphics. There is a notion of African Time that is found also among the African Diaspora which assumes that events will start later than the scheduled time but this makes sense if for hundreds of years the Africans who turned up in time for meetings were the ones kidnapped and enslaved first. This is only a guess but it sounds more convincing when we remember that Europeans may prefer Cartesian designs because the grids make it easier for them to conquer and control others.

Elections are always messy as we have seen in the American presidential elections, the electoral crisis in the Ukraine, Bangladesh, India, The Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela and Russia, to mention but a few. The only difference is that Africans expect the elections to be chaotic while Europeans expect them to be orderly and straight-forward. It is hypocritical to say that in elections in Europe and north America where only about 30-40% of the electorate bother to turn out to vote are more democratic than ones in Africa where the masses turn out to vote but electoral materials are inadequate, voters registration out of date, political thugs try to intimidate them or no electoral officers show up or do not arrive in time, adhering to the fractal principle of African Time.

Let us not forget that the 2007 election was the first time that one Nigerian regime will hand over power to another regime through

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the electoral process even if both regimes belong to the same ruling party and even if the elections are not perfect as the president himself admitted. The outrage against what someone called the 'elecsham' from the high and the low in the country is obviously an indication that the people expect more from the political leaders than the achievement of Third Term for the ruling party.

A positive development is that most of the opposition politicians are calling for due process and the rule of law to be followed instead of advocating violence as a response to what they called the stolen mandate. This principle was demonstrated by Governor Peter Obi of Anambra state who patiently pursued his election tribunal case from 2003 to 2005 before he was declared winner and the incumbent had to step down for him.

This gentleman who was mocked as not being a politician by some critics because he appears to be a stickler for the rule of law, won his office through the law courts, not once, not twice but three times. The first time was when he won the 2003 election but was rigged out of the results and it took him three years to win the case at the election petition tribunal. No sooner had he assumed office than he was impeached by the legislature that was dominated by the political party in power at the federal level which also supplied the governor who had just been sent packing by the tribunal. His deputy governor, a woman, took over from him and made history as the first female governor in the country. The young man went back to court and again won on the ground that the impeachment was null and void and of no effect. As soon as he returned to office, he filed his third case with the argument that the

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constitution granted him four years in office and so the effective date should be the date he was sworn in as governor and not the date his predecessor was sworn in three years earlier after the rigging of the election. The federal government ignored his suit and organized another election in which the ruling party candidate was selected to be the new governor of the state and was sworn in while the case was before the supreme court. Seventeen days later, the supreme court ruled in favour of Mr Obi once again and sacked the ruling party governor and returned him to office to serve three more years! This was hailed across the country as a glimmer of hope for democracy in the country.

However, a prominent human rights lawyer, Gani Fawehinmi, criticized the supreme court ruling on the ground that it did not have jurisdiction over the matter but critics accused him of partiality because the governor who lost office the third time to Mr Obi was Mr Fawehinmi's client. He denied partiality and insisted that a bad precedent had been set for Supreme Court jurisdiction, insisting that the right thing, according to the constitution, was for the case to be heard by the election complaints tribunal and finally by the election appeals tribunal. The question that the respected Gani Fawehinmi did not answer was, what if the election tribunals threw out the case for any reason, does it mean that a citizen whose constitutional rights were being violated had no protection from the supreme court of the land? In the absence of such legal protection, what would be left would be popular justice in which the people have no choice but to intervene even after the supreme court decision as they did in this case by jubilating and sending e-mail and text messages of congratulations to one another across the

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country. The alternative is for the people to go on public protests that could result in bloodshed as is the case in many parts of the country. In this context, Mr Obi has given the average Nigerian reason to be proud and hopeful that justice is not asleep in the country.

Nevertheless, winning in the Supreme Court is one thing and delivering democracy dividends is another. So Governor Peter Obi should know that the jury is still out on his performance in office. It is not enough to flash his gap-toothed smile at the cameras and visit the presidents of the country triumphantly every time he wins in court. He should show that he is indeed a better governor especially because the first governor he unseated, Dr. Chris Ngige, is still being praised as the best governor that the state of Anambra ever had due to the roads that he tarred across the state and due to the simple fact that he paid salaries to workers when due. Will Mr Obi be remembered mainly by his infamous order to shoot to kill that he gave to the police and the army against the warring gangs of youth who were battling for the control of revenues from public parks with the National Union of Road Transport Workers in Onitsha, the commercial hub of the region? I hope that Mr Obi will not commit another such blunder in office but will use his tenure to reduce the violence that is killing our youth daily by giving out grants for investment to the youth as part of the annual budgets of the state. Obi was quoted recently as saying that to him "governance is not about making a noise, it is doing things that will affect the lives of the people positively and doing them effectively". That is indeed what the people expect from the governor and Kalu Okwara reports in *Daily Champion* (July 6, 2007) that Obi is making giant strides in delivering democracy

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dividends to the people of Anambra. All I am saying is that a lot has been given to him by the electorate and by the law courts and so a lot more is expected from him by the people.

Anyone who was advocating violence as a response to widespread electoral fraud should explain why the poor should sacrifice their lives for rulers who are out of touch with the masses. Whether one candidate or the other was selected by the ruling interests to run the country does not make any difference in the lives of ordinary people and so which of them is worth dieing for? African criminologists and justice scholars should take up the challenge to study this phenomenon of peace, love and justice that is abundant across the African world instead of focusing on the obsession of western criminology with the punishment of offenders. The National Labour Congress did call a two day national strike to protest the elections that even the national president that emerged admitted was not free and fair but the government tried to pre-empt the strike by declaring public holidays for the two days of the strike timed to coincide with the inauguration of the new regime. As if to punish the labour unions for this effrontery, the out-going government raised the prices of petroleum products by ten naira and this time the labour unions declared a crushing national strike, forcing the new president to intervene by ordering that the price increase be halved and making other concessions to end the strike.

The elections cost billions of naira to organize but that did not prevent the Nigerian factor from insisting on fractal outcomes. Why were the ballots printed in South Africa and not in Nigeria and have you heard of any modern democracy that would contract

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out the printing of ballot papers to another country thousands of miles away and expect delivery to arrive in time on the very day of the election? Why was an eminent natural scientist appointed to organize the elections when there were hundreds of well qualified social scientists who could have done the job better? Why was so much energy spent trying to disqualify Nigerian citizens from contesting elections in their own country? The answers lie in the fact that the Nigerian state is an underdeveloped state in which political patronage is the main source of primitive accumulation and so the battle is a do or die one in which winners take all.

To correct any imperfections in the Nigerian elections, we need to heed the call of our founding fathers and seek the unification of Africa so that no single individual or group could ever dream of dominating the polity or intimidating the electorate the way we hear from Africa. When the countries in Africa become 54 states in the People's Republic of Africa, then no ant would ever dream of swallowing the elephant. Another lesson for the rest of Africa is that we should seriously study our preference for fractal patterns of social organization instead of simply seeing such chaotic patterns as evidence of backwardness.

When the British saw that the Igbo had no kings, for example, they concluded that it was a sign of being uncivilized without realizing that the Igbo were radically more democratic in the republican sense. They made the mistake of appointing Warrant Chiefs for the indomitable Igbo and the consequence was that Igbo women declared war on colonialism. When Phillip Emeagwali announced that he could design faster internet connectivity using principles of African fractals, people laughed at him but today he is recognized

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as a father of the internet.

We should see the recent elections in Nigeria as exposing the hypocrisies of democracy for all to see. The elections remind us that even in ancient Greece where the notion of democracy was said to have originated in the city states, the vast majority of the people were not citizens. For instance, Athens had about 500,000 residents but only about 50,000 citizens because the enslaved and women as well as children were excluded from the political process.

When Americans tried to resurrect that ancient democratic ethos, they announced that 'We the People...' but they did not include Africans who were enslaved and Native Americans who were genocidized among the so-called people, nor did they include American women until the 20th century. Anyone who was expecting the Nigerian elections or elections in Africa to be straight-forward must be out of his/her mind because elections and political processes are always messy and fractal all over the world rather than Cartesian. In other words, chaos is more common in the world than order and the fact that order has to be imposed every so often is an indication that chaos is often the order of the day. We need to research African fractals more seriously.

An immediate concern should be the payment of reparations to all the families who lost loved ones during the Nigerian elections. Frequently, the focus of opposition politicians is that someone should be punished for some misconduct or dismissed for incompetence. Hardly ever do you hear people advocating the

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African principle of love and peace as better avenues to justice for our people. It is estimated that 500 people were killed during the election. I propose that each of the families be given no less than one million naira as compensation to encourage more Nigerians to stand up for their rights and discourage murderous thugs from wasting the lives of opponents since they would be putting money in the pockets of the bereaved families. Of course, punitive measures should still be taken against proven killers but that will never be enough if nothing is done for the victimized.

The articles in this issue of our journal are all very important and relevant to the need for African scholars to study the fractal patterns of our social organization more seriously. Oko Elechi *et al* dwelt on the important issue of obstacles to police effectiveness in stopping the trafficking of women and children in Nigeria. An understanding of African fractals might tell us a thing or two about why policing operates the way they describe across Africa. Ihekwoaba Onwudiwe's essay on terrorism clearly indicates that the issue is not straight-forward when you take into consideration the fact that one man's terrorist could be another man's freedom fighter. Again, a better understanding of African fractals would help us to understand why agents of social control find it difficult to impose order completely in a world that is abundantly fractal rather than lineal. Similarly, the essay by Charles Uba deals with organized crime in a way that suggests that even criminal elements attempt to impose order on a messy terrain such as the underworld but a better understanding of African fractals would explain to us why they fail woefully in that task. The two book reviews by Temitope Oriola and Ihekwoaba Onwudiwe on the book of Oko Elechi about African mediation and peaceful resolution of conflicts

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sum up the theme of this issue – the idea that Africa should not follow European traditions blindly especially in cases where African fractal traditions could be a better lesson even for Europe. Thanks for all our reviewers for the comments that enriched the articles in this issue of our journal.