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KENYA'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS:  
ETHNIC POLITICS IN TWO RURAL  
CONSTITUENCIES IN NYANZA

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ABSTRACT

This analysis traces the historical origins of Luo ethnic factor and discusses the role it has played in modern electoral politics in two rural constituencies in Nyanza: Bondo and Gem. The ethnic factor is seen to emerge from social transformation starting from the pre-colonial period and this took significantly different patterns in each of the two constituencies.

The crux of the argument is that following the introduction of elections there has been a process of selective modernisation whereby both 'modern' and 'traditional' values have combined. The institution of elections is not therefore operating purely under the influence of values elections are associated with in western democracies especially the determining role of parties in electoral politics.

The thrust of the analysis is therefore on the existence of social forces which have determined the somewhat surprising election results in the two constituencies. Furthermore, proper understanding of these social forces can help in the prediction, of outcomes of elections in these areas.

## Introduction

The term modernization has greatly influenced attempts to understand socio-economic and political change in Third World countries.<sup>1</sup> In regard specifically to political change, a common view of "modern politics" which has been the subject of major debate is that it is characterized by the organization of political institutions such as parties, public bureaucracy, parliament, elections, etc., as these have been known to operate in Western democracies.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of elections, these should be freely contested by candidates, put up by rival parties which present voters with different platforms. Through secret ballot, one candidate gets elected and becomes the representative in parliament for a fixed term. It is appropriate to concede that major developments, such as the emergence of one-party states, have resulted in changes of certain assumptions about elections, especially in African countries. All the same elections have been essentially viewed in the context of modern democratic politics.<sup>3</sup>

The broad objective of this analysis is therefore to examine the extent to which, after nearly a quarter century, the organization and practices in post-independence elections in Kenya, particularly the 1979 and 1983 General Elections in the case of Bondo and Gem constituencies in Siaya District, conform to the more widely accepted views of modern politics. And in view of our concerns, the role that the indigenous institutions and values play in the political process will be of special interest. Thus, the specific question being addressed is the extent to which ethnicity is a crucial determinant of behaviour and conflict in a conspicuous aspect of the

1. Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies: A critical Perspective," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 15,2 (1973): 199-226.
2. William Tordoff, Government and Politics in Africa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), pp.16-20; James S. Coleman and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr., eds., Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).
3. William Tordoff, Government and Politics in Africa, pp.18-19. Goran Hyden and Colin Leys, "Elections and Politics in Single-Party Systems: The Case of Kenya," British Journal of Political Science, 12,1(1972): 22; Larry Diamond, "Class, Ethnicity and the Democratic State: Nigeria 1950-1966," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 25,3(1983): 457-489.

political process namely, the electoral process. It is useful to add, regarding the choice of elections for this study, that in Kenya elections are also the key institution for a proper understanding of modern politics because of its relative persistence as compared to other political institutions notably political parties.

#### Ethnic Approach to Political Analysis

The overall perspective emanates from the basic premise, and hence the approach of this analysis, that it is by incorporating both "modern" and indigenous or so called "traditional" values into one's analysis, that political change and its various components in the election process, for example, can be more accurately understood.<sup>4</sup> The point is not that there has been no concern about traditional values in analyzing political change in Africa. Rather, it has often been the case that in looking at the interaction process between traditional and modern values the latter has been given undue weight, resulting in assigning traditional values a residual, and even negative role, but more importantly a transient role.

The "national integration" school of analysis recognized what was labelled tribal loyalties which later became known as ethnicity<sup>5</sup> But it was seen mainly as a disintegrative influence in the newly independent African states. The expectation was that these divisive tendencies would disappear through a political modernization process resulting in the emergence of unified nation-states. The conclusion after observing the trend in these countries for only a few years was, however, that there was, instead, political decay. This was in reference to the dismal performance of the modern political parties and the public bureaucracy which clouded the future of modern elements in these political institutions.<sup>6</sup>

4. Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies", p. 213.
5. Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), p.15; Nelson Kasfir, The Shrinking Political Arena: Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976); Brian M. du Toit, ed., Ethnicity in Modern Africa (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), pp.5-11.
6. Samuel P. Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Joseph La Palombara, Bureaucracy and Political Development, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

Analyses using class approach have in the same vein argued that ethnicity is an indication of false consciousness. It is considered disruptive and slows down the process of class formation and the crystallization of classes.<sup>7</sup>

The actual point of similarity with the national integration approach is that ethnicity, subsumed under what have been generally termed precapitalist relations, and more recently captured by the coinage "economy of affection,"<sup>8</sup> is envisaged to give way to some other entirely new form of relations. In other words, both approaches visualize some kind of an assimilation process in which ethnicity vanishes.

In direct contrast to the foregoing approaches, in this particular analysis there is a direct focus on ethnicity, not as a passing, but an enduring factor in the political process. Furthermore, it is maintained that in certain situations it plays an integrative role which needs to be emphasized also, as opposed to focusing mainly on disintegrative aspects as has been the case generally. Ethnicity, in other words, is not necessarily disruptive.

In brief, the distinctive aspect of this analysis is that it is asserting the continued existence of cultural pluralism in African states.<sup>9</sup> And it is instructive to point out in this regard, that cultural pluralism has now gained public recognition in western capitalist states as well. So, experience has already shown that even in these industrialized states the assimilationist thesis is not being borne out by the facts after all.<sup>10</sup>

7. Archie Mafeje, "The Ideology of 'Tribalism,'" Journal of Modern African Studies, 9,2 (1971): 253-261; Larry Diamond, "Class, Ethnicity and the Democratic State: Nigeria 1950-1966," Comparative Studies in Society and History, 25, 3(1983): 457-489.
8. Goran Hyden, No Shortcut to Progress: African Development Management in Perspective (Nairobi; Heinemann, 1983), pp.8-22.
9. Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism; pp.3-22, Robert H. Bates, "Moderization, Ethnic Competition, and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa?" in D. Rothchild and V. Olorunsola, eds., State Versus Ethnic Claims: African Policy Dilemmas (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983), pp.152-171.
10. Milton J. Esman, ed., Ethnic Conflict in the Western World, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), p.371.

There is another important aspect of this analysis regarding the level of analysis. There is a shift here from interethnic to intra-ethnic level of analysis which is rare particularly for political analysis in the African context.<sup>11</sup> The rationale for moving further down the micro level, to below the ethnic group level, is to be able to identify forces operating at the subethnic group level. These are the actual determinants of social action, by the ethnic group in some situations, and by only certain sections of it in others. The argument is that it is thus possible to avoid seeing an ethnic group as always being in solidarity and in struggles with other ethnic groups, as often appears to be the case when analysis is confined to the overall ethnic group level.

Lastly, our analysis of the political process at the /intra ethnic level should shed some light on grassroots participation in development, especially the question of the role of traditional leadership. The point is that, if the traditional leaders are in fact part and parcel of the rural populace, they cannot be simply ignored in any people-centered rural development effort.<sup>12</sup>

#### Ethnicity in a Modernizing Political Context

There have been, as pointed out at the outset, various analyses of tradition and modernity, their dynamics and interrelationships, in the change process of the so-called African traditional societies. These analyses, in cases where there is appreciation of African traditional values, have been instructive in understanding ethnicity as a key factor explaining modern politics in the African context particularly in the post-independence period.<sup>13</sup> It has been revealed first, that the view of these

11 See Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism; Rene Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa: Competing Solidarities in Nation-Building," in Steffen W. Schmidt, et al, eds., Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp.100-123.

12. David C. Korten and Rudi Klauss, eds., People-Centred Development (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1984), Chapter 18; Coralie Bryant and Louise G. White, Managing Development in the Third World (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982), Chapter 10.

13. Nelson Kasfir, The Shrinking Political Arena; Rene Lemarchand, "Political Clientelism and Ethnicity in Tropical Africa."

traditional societies as static is untenable. There was change and adaptation in these societies even prior to contact with European societies. Furthermore, this pre-contact experience was not completely erased by European contact.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, these analyses have shown that the presumed similarity of traditional societies is false. These societies have had multiplicity of tradition and have never been homogeneous in both a spatial and temporal sense. There were indeed differences between these societies to begin with which is what basically contributes to the specific character of each one of them in their development. Even following the colonial experience it is the persistence of a host of traditional forms in the post-colonial period that has proved a major stumbling-block for the emergence of single national societies.

Thirdly, the conclusion has been reached that modernity and tradition are not mutually exclusive and that each does not constitute a closed, functionally interdependent system of attributes. In other words, the attributes of modernity and likewise of tradition, do not necessarily appear as a "package." Rather, the attributes may be "unbundled" and absorbed selectively as evidenced in the actual dynamics of modernization in which mutual interpenetration and transformation has been the trend as opposed to the substitution of one set of attributes for another, i.e., of modernity for tradition.

It is therefore more fitting, in analyzing the introduction of modern values, as in our case of elections, to talk of selective modernization, which may actually strengthen traditional institutions and values and uphold rapid social change in certain spheres, but not in others.<sup>15</sup> Thus, we can ascertain the emergent patterns of behaviour and the attendant values, that may have evolved following the introduction of elections into an African traditional setting, and be able to identify the relevance of ethnicity.

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<sup>14</sup> Dean C. Tipps, "Modernization Theory and the Comparative Study of Societies," p.212-213.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



Ethnicity, for the purposes of our analysis, can be simply viewed as the social solidarity resulting from an ideology of unity based on actual or fictitious cultural, geographical or political characteristics. In an important sense, ethnicity is therefore a subjective phenomenon such that defining attributes of ethnic commonality such as language, territory, political unit, cultural values or symbols, etc., may have only a limited application in terms of ethnic group mobilization, in most modern political situations. An ethnic group, for instance, may not have a standardized language and all the members may not reside in one geographical location.<sup>16</sup>

But as a conceptual tool, ethnicity is, however, quite useful. It is, for instance, not burdened by the assumption of monolithic social groups necessarily beholden to atavistic customs such as tribe or tribalism. As a matter of fact, it happens that there are often conflicts within what are popularly regarded as tribes and that some, or all the groups, engaged in these struggles may also unite on the basis of ethnic criteria.<sup>17</sup>

Ethnicity, as a variable affecting political behaviour, can therefore be characterized as fluid, intermittent and experiential. In ethnically-based political action, individuals and groups may act on the basis of individual preference at one point in time, at another they make choices based on clan-based considerations; or might even decide to act in a given manner based upon their perception of class interests at stake. Ethnicity does not, therefore, inevitably lead to politicized "groups" like the American interest groups, pictured as coherent units, constantly involved in politics in order to protect and promote the interests of their members. As to the scope and intensity of political competition

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16. Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism, pp.48-49.

17. William R. Ochieng, "Tribalism and National Unity: The Kenya Case," in Albert Ojuka and W. R. Ochieng, eds., Politics and Leadership in Africa, (Nairobi: E. A. Literature Bureau, 1975), pp. 256-258.

18. Gabriel A. Almond, "A Comparative Study of Interest Groups and the Political Process," in Louis J. Cantori, ed., Comparative Political Systems (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1974), p.267.

centering around ethnicity, this is most often determined by how ethnic elites define political situations.<sup>19</sup>

At the level of the individual, for purposes of determining the scope of the individual's ethnic reference group in a political situation two important indicators would seem to be (i) the nature of stakes involved and (ii) the nature of the existing political climate. Ethnic allegiance and groupings are therefore dynamic in nature, making ethnic political mobilization responsive to certain kinds of situations and not to others, as underlined already in comparison to American interest groups. It would seem, therefore, that in African political situations, which for the most part are characterized by fluidity due to changing political climate that constantly alters stakes, ethnicity is a salient explanatory variable.

However, to discover whether ethnic forces are operative in a particular African political situation is an empirical question. In this analysis of the organization and nature of elections as an institution, an attempt will therefore be made to identify those social forces that have been at play, whether organized around ethnic or other interests, with a view to specifying the role of ethnicity in a modernizing political context.

#### Social Transformation in Gem and Bondo

##### 1. Pre-Colonial Period.

In terms of ethnic context, Bondo and Gem constituencies are in Luoland. They are located in Siaya district which together with Kisumu and South Nyanza districts are the three "Luo" districts. Siaya was designated a district only in 1968, but it was part and actually formed the central core of the old Central Nyanza district that has always been at the forefront of Luo politics.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Edmond J. Keller, "Revolution, Class and the National Question: The Case of Ethiopia," Paper prepared for National Conference of Black Political Scientists, 1980 Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, March 6, 1980, p.4; Milton J. Esman, ed., Ethnic Conflict in the Western World, p.374.

20. Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1967), pp.25-29.

Economic history of the Luo reveals that as they were forced to adopt a sedentary way of life, there was a greater reliance upon fishing and agriculture for subsistence.<sup>21</sup> This meant for Bondo people, engaging in fishing and livestock keeping, gaining relative importance over other agricultural enterprises. Gem people on their part took the lead in the establishment of sedentary cultivation, with greater dependence upon crops than cattle. In other words, Gem took to a sedentary way of life with a clear emphasis on crop farming, which resulted in land becoming increasingly crucial but scarce in their economy. In Bondo, in contrast, crop farming lagged behind fishing and livestock keeping, and land remained in relative abundance.

In regard to socio-political organization, the people of Gem (Jo-Gem), generally trace their lineage to a common ancestor Gem, believed to be their founder-father. But, there are amongst Gem people, two major lineage groupings known as Kojudhi and Kwenda comprised of different clans. Also, in terms of settlement, Kojudhi group of clans have generally settled in the north and the Kwenda clans to the south of Gem territory. In addition there are many ("jodak") settlers in the midst of Gem people but mostly found in the northern part of Gem territory. Among the settlers, people of Bantu origin comprised of a number of clans constitute a significant grouping, but there are also other "jodak" of Nilotic origin.<sup>22</sup>

It is believed that within Gem in cases of political groupings the Kwenda clans generally form an alliance and so do Kojudhi clans, vis a vis one another, and are usually joined by the "jodak" living in their respective territories. However, a continual leadership struggle in Kwenda over the years kept clans to the south divided and facilitated their domination and rule to the great advantage of the northern clans. Kojudhi, more as a result, historically dominated politics and leadership in Gem.<sup>23</sup>

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21. M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, (Nairobi: Christian Council of Kenya, 1964), p.43.

22. Samuel G. Ayany, Kar Chakruok Mar Luo, (Kisumu: Nyanza Printing Works Limited, 1951), p.31; Shadrack Malo, Dhudi Moko Mag Luo, (Kisumu: Olucch Publishing House, 1950), pp.114-115.

23. Shadrack Malo, Dhudi Moko Mag Luo, p.116.

However, in fighting external forces in the precolonial period, Gem people buried their internal differences. And their wars, especially against their Bantu neighbors, worked towards greater Gem solidarity. This solidarity was promoted by a well established rulership (Chieftaincy) which produced strong rulers that in turn led Gem people in these wars.

The situation in Bondo, in contrast, was one of greater heterogeneity, internal strife and lack of solidarity. The first point to note is that Bondo is comprised of Sakwa, Asembo, Uyoma and Yimbo which are in effect separate entities to the same level as the whole of Gem. Secondly, there has not been an overriding unity principle between these entities apart from intermarriage. In the case of Asembo and Uyoma, their intermarriage developed into a geneological affinity which may tend to be exclusive in relation to the rest of Bondo.<sup>24</sup> Thirdly, Bondo peoples engaged in fierce internecine wars amongst themselves in which Sakwa seems to have been the main aggressor against Asembo, Uyoma and Yimbo, and in which there seemed to be a somewhat consistent alliance between Asembo and Uyoma.<sup>25</sup>

Thus in Gem, in contrast to Bondo, socio-political organization revolved around one common ancestor, but there were strong well established alliances along clan lines into which "jodak," mainly of Baruu origin, were also incorporated. It was the institution of chieftaincy which was largely instrumental in the persistence of tradition in the form of clanism. At the same time, the chieftaincy contributed towards maintaining Gem solidarity, especially in the face of a relatively high level of culture mix and change witnessed by Gem. In comparison to Bondo, the culture mix in Gem is also a pointer to the fact that, Gem seemed relatively well prepared for the oncoming external change during the colonial period, while Bondo in general terms exhibited persistence of tradition.

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24. M. Whisson, Change and Challenge, p. 25-26.

25. Ibid.

2. Social Transformation Under Colonialism

It needs to be reiterated that it is a key contention of this analysis that there was change taking place, albeit differently, in African societies before the imposition of colonial rule. Also that the outcome of this change had an effect on, and made contributions to subsequent stages of development thereby helping determine the nature of societies that evolved. However, it must be admitted that, historically, it is colonialism, with its mission of drawing the African population out of subsistence into capitalist economy, that has had the greatest impact on social transformation in African areas such as Bongo and Gem.

There were focal points of action by colonizers, elements of which set a new, faster pace for change, and at the same time constituted a force which thereafter engineered that change. These included first, setting up communications that went hand-in-hand with instituting colonial administration, which was euphemistically referred to as establishment of law and order. In reality, it was the imposition of a colonial state and laying the foundations for trade and exchange between African and capitalistic societies.

Secondly, there was expropriation of land and/or imposition of limits on land use and settlement, coupled with measures designed to ensure African labour supply. These meant that directly Africans were deprived the use, for their own benefit, of the two major factors of production they possessed, i.e., land and labour. Even if not so deprived, indirectly, it meant that they would now be more easily exploited by their colonizers.

Thirdly, certain services such as education, religion, health and the introduction of cash and food crops, which were considered crucial to the functioning of the colonial economy, were provided, albeit sparingly. These were actually the main vehicles for inculcating capitalistic norms.

In the case of Bondo and Gem, the beginning of colonial rule can be dated as coinciding with the arrival of European personnel in the region, in particular C. S. Hobley (Bwana Obilo) in 1896. An important distinction, however, is that the contact with Europeans and administrative operations started first in Gem and later reached Bondo.<sup>26</sup> It is also significant that Gem chiefs actually facilitated the process of imposition of colonial rule, especially the subjugation of parts of Bondo, notably Uyoma, where there was open resistance.<sup>27</sup> Thus in Gem, the encounter points to a mutual interaction, and hence faster formalization of colonial administration, than in the case of Bondo.

The mark of British colonial administration being imposed on Luoland, and beginning to affect the daily lives of the local people, was when the boundaries which had been fluctuating between subtribes, e.g. Gem, Sakwa, Uyoma, etc., from month to month were frozen. A new name "location" was given to the territorial units inhabited by the subtribes which were known to them as "pinje" and of which there were 12 in Central Nyanza, viz Gem, Sakwa, Asembo, Uyoma, Yimbo, Alego, Ugenya, Seme, Kisumu, Kajulu, Kano, and Nyakach. It should, however, be emphasized that the boundaries of each subtribe had all along been clearly defined, despite continuous sporadic fighting because of earlier hostilities over a fairly wide stretch of land left for hunting which also acted as a buffer zone between one subtribe and another.<sup>28</sup>

In each location the colonial administrators sought to find chiefs who in their view commanded the respect of the people. The chiefs in turn, with the approval of the administration, appointed a member of the dominant clan in sub areas of the location as Headman for his "Gweng mar Dhoot," ie., / <sup>his land.</sup> At a lower level within clan areas sub-Headmen were appointed also, following lineage principle. Granted there were cases of irregularities, e.g.,

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26. Patrick O. Alila, "Kenya General Elections in Bondo and Gem: The Origins of Luo Ethnic Factor in Modern Politics," Working Paper No.403, (Nairobi: IDS, University of Nairobi, June 1984): 16-17.

27. Samuel G. Ayany, Kar Chakruok Mar Luo, p.26; Shadrack Malo, Dhudi: Moko Mag Luo, p.16.

28. Bethwell A. Ogot, A History of the Southern Luo, (Nairobi: E.A. Literature Bureau, 1967), p.185.

nepotism, but generally there was representation in local leadership which approximated the indigenous system to a large extent. This proved instrumental in maintaining in political activities, the importance of the preexisting lineage structure guided by the hereditary principle.<sup>29</sup>

At any rate, in performing their duties the chiefs and their assistants were the agents of the colonizers. Through them, various measures were introduced that resulted in a system essentially of tribute paid to Europeans in exchange for security in their positions and military support in time of crisis. The most celebrated of those measures were taxation and labour conscription. The judiciary function was also an important part of the work of chiefs and their "Jodong Gweng" (Elders). Those chiefs who cooperated with the new power were used against those who did not. This had direct implications for the entrenchment of colonial administration in that it varied from area to area depending mainly on the extent of mutual cooperation with the local indigenous leadership and the latter's own local ambitions.

The cordial relationship Gem had during the initial contact with the Europeans thus thrived and resulted in a strong bond with the colonial administration. The point is that, as it greatly facilitated their work, the colonizers strengthened and maximized the linkages with Gem and similar areas where their basic requirements were being met and their ideas received with enthusiasm. Railway and road communication networks that gave rise to major trading centers were located in Gem leaving Bondo in the "rain shadow." This move had far reaching implications due to the fact that the introduction of additional socio-economic change occurred along communication routes for ease of administration. The new cash crops such as maize, cotton, etc., were introduced following this pattern to facilitate supervision and eventual transportation for marketing. Likewise, the setting up of schools, and to a lesser extent, churches, was influenced by the communication network. It is therefore significant that a branch railway line was constructed passing through Gem and a major road to Kenya-Uganda border also built. To this development is closely linked the popularization of the growing of maize in Gem; a process which was no doubt aided by the

29. G. M. Wilson, Luo Customary Law and Marriage Law Customs, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1968), p.1.

fact that Gem people had already started putting emphasis on crop cultivation in their agricultural activities. The building of schools was also undertaken to the advantage of Gem. This is especially true with regard to two high schools, St. Mary's Yala and Maseno, which were for long the only high schools in the whole of Luoland.<sup>30</sup>

It was because of the strategy of colonial administration of maximizing results of initially established linkages like Gem that colonialism had greater impact there than in Bondo. It is, however, important to note that even within Gem itself, it was the northern portion, which was laid bare for colonial maneuvers due to ease of access, that had a relatively greater impact than the southern portion. Thus, change in outlook and material well being brought about by education, labour migration, crops grown, health services, etc., have accentuated precolonial differences in social transformation between areas in significant ways that have a bearing on modern politics.

A cursory look at the current socio-economic situation in Gem as compared to Bondo is actually quite revealing. The level of agricultural practices in Gem, including cash cropping, keeping improved livestock, cooperative organization, marketing channels, etc., points to greater commercial orientation in contrast to subsistence orientation predominant in Bondo. As regards transportation and communication, Gem can boast of two major tarmac roads, supplemented by a number of feeder roads linking up virtually all corners of Gem and, of course, the historic railway line. Bondo has only one major tarmac road and most parts are still remote and inaccessible in relative terms. Gem is better served by postal services and newspapers are locally available to a greater extent than in Bondo. Similarly, Gem is better served in terms of welfare services including water supply, education and health services. Lastly, the level of rural industrialization is higher in Gem than Bondo as evidenced by the presence of a white sugar factory, supplemented by three jaggery factories and widespread informal sector activities, e.g., flour mills, tailoring, tinsmith, bicycle repair, shoe repair, carpentry, making charcoal burners, etc.

30. Patrick O. Alila, "Kenya General Elections in Bondo and Gem," pp.19-21.



### Emergence of Luo Ethnic Factor in Modern Politics

It seems appropriate that a discussion of modern politics focusing on elections should, in the Kenyan context, start from mid-1955 when the emergency ban on all African political organizations following the Mau-Mau revolt was relaxed.<sup>31</sup> It was then that the colonial government realized the futility of continued European political domination and set forth a framework for African political development. But, significantly, confined the formation of political associations to a district basis.<sup>32</sup>

In essence this was the same strategy employed in setting up colonial administration whereby district boundaries were drawn to coincide with tribal land limits. At a lower level, as evidenced in Luoland particularly, sub-district units boundaries also coincided with subtribes. The intended effect of colonial intervention in this way even in this new phase of political evolution, was to play up local-level district or tribal loyalties. There was therefore the danger at the very onset of uneven pace of political development between districts, locations, etc., which would subsequently be the source of parochialism rooted in tribal loyalties at the expense of African national Unity. As a matter of fact, the colonial government refused registration of Kenya African National Congress proposed by Argwings-Kodhek, an African Luo lawyer from Gem because the association aimed at becoming colony wide.<sup>33</sup> And although the associations permitted by the colonial administration were a landmark in political development, they had the consequence of encouraging parochialism.

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31. Cherry Gertzel, The Politics of Independent Kenya 1963-8, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), pp.15-18.
  32. Cherry Gertzel, et al., Government and Politics in Kenya, (Nairobi: E.A. Publishing House, 1969), p.106.
  33. Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru, p.147; Also David Goldsworthy, Tom Mboya: The Man Kenya Wanted to Forget, (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1982), p.77.

At the same time, new leadership opportunities opened up prospects for alliances as it turned out to be the case for Bondo and Gem leadership despite their differences especially during colonization. Angwings-Kodhek's Congress was based in Nairobi while the rural district association in Central Nyanza was controlled by Oginga Odinga coming from Bondo. This resulted in the two prominent Luo leaders from Central Nyanza having different areas of operation, thereby limiting conflict. For Odinga who had gained ascendancy in Luo politics within Luo Union (EA) culminating in his election to the Legislative Council in 1957, assuming the leadership of the new form of political organization in Luoland gave him a dominant position in Luo leadership, while enhancing the position of Bondo in Luo politics, as compared to Gem.<sup>34</sup> But it was only on the surface that political parties as elements of modernity seemed to be triumphant over ethnicity, but even then only temporarily. This happened because it was a time when ethnic considerations became secondary to matters of national unity and independence.<sup>35</sup> Once independence was attained ethnicity emerged as a major factor in modern politics.

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34. Oginga Odinga, Not Yet Uhuru, p.28.

35. Cherry Gertzel, The Politics of Independent Kenya, p.11; Crawford Young, The Politics of Cultural Pluralism, p.133.

Manifestations of Luo Ethnic Factor in Parliamentary  
Elections: Bondo and Gem By-elections.

The evidence of Luo ethnic factor playing a role in modern politics started surfacing in the initial by-elections in Bondo and Gem following independence. Although the Bondo by-election was in 1966 and the Gem by-election in 1969, they both had a lot in common showing that they were part of a wider social transformation process, which helps explain the nature and outcome of these and later elections. The different timing of the by-elections in Bondo and Gem can be attributed to the contrast peculiar to the two constituencies. Apart from differences in social transformation, leadership visions of Odinga and Argwings-Kodhek, who became members of Parliament (MPs), representing Bondo and Gem respectively following the 1963 General Elections, added to the contrasts of the two constituencies.

The Bondo by-election was held as part of Kenya's Little General Election in 1966 because of Odinga quitting the government and KANU and forming an opposition party, the Kenya Peoples Union (KPU)<sup>36</sup>. The Gem by-election was held as a result of untimely tragic death of Argwing-Kodhek, on the road at night, within Nairobi, in January 1969. However, in view of the fact that they were both prominent, nationally renowned Luo leaders; in both by-elections the question of overall Luo leadership was of primary concern within the community. There was a growing feeling that there were forces at work to deprive the Luo of nationalist leaders who had brought them to the center of power with the attainment of independence. This therefore marks the beginning of perceptions of external threats.

Furthermore, Odinga and Argwings-Kodhek had made sacrifices and compromises which resulted in Kikuyu leadership gaining control of the new African government. To get rid of them was therefore viewed as a sign of ingratitude to them and the community as well. In other words, the Luo community felt they were being denied a "fair" share of the fruits of independence brought about by their participation in the winning coalition with the Kikuyu. There was, at the same time, a feeling of resentment about the fact that national leaders

<sup>36</sup>Cherry Gertzel, The Politics of Independent Kenya, pp. 73-78.

who had held opposing views about the timing of independence and the release of Jomo Kenyatta, for instance, and their communities, were gaining ascendancy in the national power structure at the expense of the Luo. The resultant common feeling of being outcasts only served to strengthen the bonds of Luo unity.

The popular feeling and ethnic solidarity within the Luo community is reflected in the over-whelming support given to KPU candidates in the two by-elections. They registered landslide victories over KANU candidates despite government backing for the latter and restrictions on the KPU candidates.<sup>37</sup> As a matter of fact, KANU had problems finding candidates and the final selection was done on the basis of local internal constituency politics. In Bondo, the KANU candidate had had longstanding and somewhat personal differences with Odinga which is what really prompted him to run against Odinga. It is interesting to note that the KANU candidate viewed his location of origin, Uyoma, as his ethnic reference group. In Gem, clan politics, especially in North Gem, was crucial in determining who was to be the KANU candidate to run against the KPU candidate. A well known Odinga supporter and a straightforward choice of his party, the KPU candidate rose above the traditional clan politics within Gem in being designated a party candidate. These are useful pointers to the fact that scope and intensity of political/<sup>competition</sup> centering around ethnicity is determined by how ethnic elites define political situations KANU in particular was caught up in intra ethnic competition while KPU rose above it in both constituencies. This is mainly because KANU leadership in view of difficulties of maintaining support in Luoland was mobilising support at the sub-ethnic level while the KPU, due to its grassroots popularity in Luoland, pitched its campaigns at the level of overall Luo ethnic solidarity.

The organization structure for both by-elections was virtually the same in terms of heavy reliance on Luo clan relations in Bondo and Gem. This was augmented by the use of Luo idiom and

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<sup>37</sup> John Okumu, "The By-election in Gem: An Assessment," East Africa Journal 6, 6, June 1969; Cherry Gertzel, The Politics of Independent p. 80

symbolism, which was much more intense in the Gem campaign. In part, this is due to the fact that it is in Gem where there was a real contest as compared to Bondo where the outcome of the election was a forgone conclusion. Also the circumstances of Argwings-Kodhek's death were such that foul play was suspected.

The issues were also practically the same. The emphasis was on government rural development effort which the KPU argued showed neglect in matters such as education, health services, and agricultural credit. The stand of KANU candidates was that all the same the government was powerful and would bring about progress. This was, however, difficult to demonstrate in an impoverished rural constituency. But the hot issue remained the resulting effects of Kikuyu domination of the civil service and trade, and specifically Odinga's position.<sup>38</sup>

The campaign strategy Odinga employed in view of government restrictions on him regarding public meetings, was informal conversational style meetings. As it turned out, the restrictions made him even more popular. It is worth mentioning specifically his regular appearances at funerals which for the Luos are traditionally sacred and emotionally charged and therefore resulted in his endearment to the community. It was actually said of Odinga that he "had become a major social force in Luoland such that without major social and economic changes in Luo society it will be extremely difficult to dislodge him"<sup>39</sup> But, instead of social and economic changes the ensuing trend of events only served to mobilize the Luo behind Odinga.

A historic, and the most important event was the assassination of Tom Mboya, a Luo nationalist of the same stature as Odinga, and Argwings-Kodhek. This took place hardly six months after the death of Argwings-Kodhek which was therefore still fresh in peoples' minds.<sup>40</sup> As these two were the prominent Luo ministers who remained behind, after Odinga and his KPU colleagues such as Oneko quit the government the assassination added a new dimension. The prevailing view was

<sup>38</sup>Cherry Gertzel, The Politics of Independent Kenya, p. 118

<sup>39</sup>John Okumu, "The By-Election in Gem," p. 17.

<sup>40</sup>Africa Contemporary Record, 1969-70, pp. B 122-26.

now that there was a calculated move to completely exclude Luos from the government and it brought Luo solidarity to the highest peak ever in the post independence period.

It was in an attempt to break up Luo solidarity and stave off an onslaught on the Kikuyu hold on power that Kenyatta went to Luoland as a demonstration of strength and show of being in control. The inevitable outcome was a bloody confrontation with Odinga and his supporters. But for Kenyatta, this served as a good excuse for Odinga and other KPU leaders and MPs to be arrested and thrown into detention. To crown it all KPU was banned and Kenya once again became a de facto one-party state.<sup>41</sup>

The Aftermath of KPU Era: Luo Political Leadership and Participation Crisis

In the Luo political context the period following the banning of the KPU up to the 1979 General Elections can be characterized as one of crisis of participation and leadership. The KPU having become the popular party in Luoland was the vehicle for participation in modern politics. Therefore, banning KPU automatically resulted in a crisis of participation. The leadership crisis was brought about by the detention of Odinga and other KPU leaders, and subsequently by banning Odinga from contesting parliamentary elections following his release from detention.

The crux of the problem was that all along, popular political party leadership in Luoland, and hence leadership in national politics, had remained essentially identical with Luo community leadership. Therefore, by merely ostracizing these leaders it could not be expected that their following and organization machinery would easily come under the control of a new leadership, especially the rival minority

<sup>41</sup>Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, Personal Rule in Black Africa, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp. 103-105; C. Young The Politics of Cultural Pluralism, pp. 133-134.

leadership in Luoland that had remained in KANU. The latter had proved unpopular with the people as clearly demonstrated by the crushing defeat of KANU in the by-elections. In addition there was a strong belief in Luoland that the rival group was responsible for the political banishment of the KPU and its leadership due to the formers ambition to capture Luo leadership.

At the grassroots level, since the KPU machinery was based on Luo community organization, an important consequence of the crisis for political organization was the rejuvenation of Luo traditional political organization. This meant that, in effect, small interest groups mostly at the clan level reemerged as the crucial political grouping guiding political action.<sup>42</sup> This situation, it should be noted, is basically similar to the state of political organization prior to the formation of KANU and KPU when there were no popularly accepted unifying links above the clan level. But such links had become essential in a modern political context. It is in this sense that one can understand the fact that, from 1969 up to the present, Luo community leadership has been a central question in parliamentary elections because of the dual role of parliamentary representatives which includes community leadership as well.

In response to the Luo ethnic demands for unity and progress an attempt was therefore made by the newly elected MPs in 1969 to forge one common leadership. At this stage no attempt was made to exclude Oding and his detained colleagues. But soon after the release of Odinga from detention, and especially as 1974 elections approached, a division emerged and widened thereafter such that by the time of the 1979 elections one could definitely talk of two opposing camps in Luo leadership. On the one hand those for, and, on the other hand, those against, Luo leadership headed by Odinga.

The widening of the rift in Luo leadership can be mainly attributed to actions by the Executive, especially after 1974 elections. These actions, it was obvious, blatantly favoured individuals well

<sup>42</sup>Goran Hyden and C. Leys, "Elections and Politics in Single-Party Systems," p. 22

known to be in the anti-Odinga camp. At the same time they were apparently meant to spite those considered by the establishment to be in the Odinga camp.

In Bondo, Omamo, after winning that parliamentary seat in the 1969 election in the absence of Odinga, was appointed a cabinet minister in an apparent move to replace Odinga in Bondo and subsequently Luo politics. This became obvious when Odinga was barred from contesting the 1974 election and he counteracted the move by supporting the candidacy of Ougo Ochieng' against Omamo. Although Ougo won the election, apart from not being appointed a minister, he had to sit in parliament with Omamo who was appointed a nominated MP after losing. It thus seemed that it was Omamo, who lost, who was rewarded.

The Executive was also instrumental in maneuvers by opponents of Odinga to banish him from the party both locally and at the national level. It is in this context that the accession of Omolo Okero from Gem to the position of KANU national chairman can be understood. He was a cabinet minister and had been in that position and in national politics only since 1969 after the banning of KPU. But he was viewed as heading the anti-Odinga camp. He, for instance, led the group in what was termed the fight against the challenge posed by Odinga through the Luo Union "to end the Odinga myth once and for all".<sup>43</sup> The leadership of the Union was soon after actually replaced by the anti-Odinga group which installed a caretaker committee headed by Omamo. To say the least the trend of events relating to the Luo Union came as a shock to the Luo community earning the anti-Odinga group image of dissidents who had actually lost grassroots popularity and whom an increasing majority wanted to see removed from Luo parliamentary leadership.

The problem of leadership in Luoland subsequently became quite critical until the end of the Kenyatta era. The beginning of the new Moi era was therefore seen by the Luo community as a chance to install a popular leadership and come back to the political

<sup>43</sup>The Weekly Review, 26 May 1978



mainstream. There was, in fact, great hope initially. But, this gave way immediately to grave doubts when the KPU issue which had become a stigma for the Luo community was revived to ban Odinga from contesting party and parliamentary elections. It can therefore be said that the 1979 elections through which the new regime was seeking its own mandate to rule the country had around it an air of misgivings in Luoland regarding the future of the Luo ethnic group.

#### Luo Ethnic Factor in 1979 and 1983 Elections

##### 1. 1979 General Elections in Bondo and Gem

In Bondo and Gem, as for the rest of Kenya, the 1979 General Elections were particularly significant because of ushering in a new political regime. A major consideration was, therefore, in view of the prevailing intra-ethnic leadership rivalry, to elect a leadership that would work towards Luo unity and serve other political aspirations of the Luo community. Specifically, to bring to an end the isolation of Luos in Kenya politics. The fact that these needs fell in the realm of modern politics, it is interesting to point out, did not mean that they were found incompatible with Luo ethnic political organization. The indication from looking at the candidates, campaign organization and issues is in fact that Luo ethnic norms were dominant especially since the only political party, KANU, lacked local level grassroots organization in Luoland. This, however, also implies certain differences between Bondo and Gem elections because of local level heterogeneity in Luoland discussed earlier.

Regarding candidates, Gem had many more candidates, than ever before in the history of the constituency, contesting this particular election. There were twice the number of candidates in Bondo which had only three candidates. The explanation of several candidates contesting the election in Gem seems to be leadership ambitions based on clan and even subclan rivalry, especially since only two candidates were well known politically even within Gem. The candidates fall into two distinct groups. First, those coming from the north, where there is intense rivalry, and therefore the

area that produced most of the candidates. Secondly, those coming from the south, where there are only two major rival clans which produced one candidate each.<sup>44</sup>

In Bondo there were strictly speaking two main contenders, the same as in the 1974 election. This is mainly a consequence of the dominant position of Odinga in politics, not only in Bondo, but the whole of Luoland, which neutralized the leadership ambitions of nearly all potential contenders. Odinga also made an astute political move by supporting a candidate who comes from a different location, Asembo, in view of the fact that, Omamo, the formidable opponent, comes from Odinga's own location, Sakwa. All the same, one could still see the aggressiveness of Sakwa within Bondo dating back to the pre-colonial days. The point is that in the final analysis the confrontation was really between Odinga and Omamo, both coming from Sakwa.

The organization of election campaigns by the various candidates was similar in certain respects in both Bondo and Gem. The size and strength, however, differed from candidate to candidate principally on the basis of the scope of kinship ties, and effectiveness within kin groups of a candidate's key supporters. In most cases these were local elders and/or notables. The range of kinship ties included paternal kin, maternal kin, in-laws, etc., who could be scattered all over the constituency depending on the size of one's clan plus marriage and settlement pattern. The kinship network situation in Gem, because of clear-cut paternal kinship ties in the south as opposed to the north, is fairly straightforward. Conversely, in Bondo absence of large paternal kinship ties coupled with scattered maternal kin and in-laws make the kinship network relatively complex. In any case, in both Bondo and Gem the strength of a candidate depended on kinship ties.

There was also a difference between candidates in both Bondo and Gem depending on their financial resources. The finances were used mainly to furnish supporters with gifts in kind or cash, either

<sup>44</sup>Patrick O. Alila, "Luo Ethnic Factor in the 1979 and 1983 Elections Bondo and Gem," Working Paper No. 408, (Nairobi: IDS, University of Nairobi, June 1984); 5-18.

for their own use or to distribute to the electorate. Also, the finances were used to hire transportation to ferry youthful supporters to the campaign rallies in various parts of the constituency and it was obvious certain candidates had a lot more funds. All the same, the organization of active supporters to utilize the funds to effectively reach the electorate depended very much on the particular candidate's kinship network of support. The active supporters would be mostly close kin and they would have to work through trusted kin group or village representatives to have an impact.

It should be noted regarding public rallies, that it can happen that because a candidate has much money he can afford to transport his active supporters, composed mostly of his close kin, to different rallies. This will give the superficial impression of widespread popular support which, if not supplemented with support from other kin groups cannot win an election. What it normally does is, that it raises the expectation of gifts on the part of the electorate.

A notable difference between Bondo and Gem was that in Bondo all the candidates held joint rallies while in Gem, five candidates (5-group) held joint rallies and the remaining two candidates, Okero and Otieno Ambala, each held his own separate rallies. The 5-group rallies in Gem were similar to Bondo rallies in that they were chaired by an official from the provincial administration and only the candidates spoke for a specified number of minutes like in a debate situation. A significant difference in the Gem 5-group rallies, however, is that the candidates were relatively political unknowns even within Gem. Also the group referred to themselves as "Jo-Gem Asili" meaning the true sons of Gem. This was particularly in reference to Ambala whom they described as coming from Alego ("Ja-Alego") by descent and therefore authentically not from Gem.

Apart from Ambala and Okero campaign rallies being held separately, these rallies had certain distinctive features. They, to begin with, were not chaired by officials of the provincial

administration. Ambala invited those addressing his meetings to speak while Okero designated a well known university professor of history, Prof. B.A. Ogot, to be the chairman of his meetings. Secondly, the fact that not just the candidates were addressing these latter rallies was an important feature. These other speakers included retired civil servants, especially chiefs, local elders, local politicians, local women and church leaders, etc., all of whom were influential personalities in the whole of Gem or even just the southern or northern parts of the constituency. They could, all the same publicly, bring their influence to bear on the campaign. It is important to mention specifically among the personalities in Ambala's rallies, Wasonga Sijeyo, who was the former KPU member of parliament, who won the 1969 Gem by-election and had remained in detention until Moi came to power and released political detainees a few months before the 1979 elections.

The issues in this campaign can be broadly categorized as leadership and personality traits on the one hand, and on the other hand, development matters. Leadership and personality were mainly of concern in relation to Luo ethnic leadership and national political status. However, there was also local level competition for leadership which was much more intense in Gem than in Bondo. It was also in Gem where the issue of development was a matter of intense debate. This was as a result of the feeling within Gem that the area was lagging behind in development, especially, after the death of Argwings-Kodhek, which was in contrast to the historically leading position of Gem in Luoland.

In Gem it was the leadership capability of Okero which was greatly in question resulting in a rallying call for his replacement as Gem MP. He had served for two terms, having gone to parliament in 1969 following the ban of KPU and detention of its leaders. A lot had been expected of Okero's leadership in Gem and Luoland generally, because of accession to the highest level of national political leadership as senior cabinet minister and the national KANU chairman, not to forget that he had been chosen a leader of Luo MPs during that period. In Gem specifically he was in addition seen, because of similar

traits such as being a lawyer and coming from Kojuodhi, as the person who would fit into the shoes of Argwings-Kodhek in leading Gem in modern politics.

The key argument in the opposition to Okero's leadership was that he was not development conscious which summarized the feeling of the expectations not being fulfilled especially in Gem. It was lamented that Gem was no longer in a leading position particularly in self-help "harambee" development to build schools, hospitals, roads, etc., despite having a senior cabinet minister as the area MP for ten years. It is significant to point out also that, while there were complaints about the inadequate passive role of Okero in development even in the northern part of Gem where he comes from, in the south there was a feeling of complete neglect.

However, the source of outrage against Okero was the style and quality of his leadership. There were widespread complaints over his failure to project the historical image of Gem and charges of inaccessibility. In addition there were accusations of dividing not only Gem people but also the Luo community. The people of South Gem strongly felt that Okero looked down upon them while he was also playing a leading role in the public campaign against Odinga's leadership in Luoland. Thus, his approach to leadership pointed towards division not unity, in Gem or Luoland. This was the origin of a convergence of negative opinion of Okero among his opponents within Gem and elsewhere in Luoland.

But the signs of imminent replacement of Okero then gave rise to traditional interclan rivalries within Gem that during the campaign showed there would be a division of the votes. This could even work to his advantage. The main rivalry was of course between Kojuodhi and Kwenda. Kojuodhi produced more candidates as already mentioned. But, apart from Okero, none of them was really politically known such that despite the danger of Kojuodhi votes being split he remained the most formidable Kojuodhi candidate. It is in the case of Kwenda where there were two strong candidates, within Kwenda at

least, that there seemed to be a balanced competition. The significant qualities of the two Kwenda candidates were that Otieno Ambala, on the one hand, was politically well known in Gem but had the problem of being considered Ja-Alego. Ongili Owiti on the other hand, while relatively much less known politically in Gem, was regarded as being Ja-Gem Asili - a true son of Gem. In brief, clanism became an issue more than ever before in election politics in Gem.

In Bondo, in comparison, there was no complex link between leadership, clanism and development issues. There was mention of development matters such as domestic water, health facilities, roads, etc., but these were only secondary considerations. The overriding issue remained the position of Odinga in Bondo politics and his political leadership role in Luoland. In the background there was also a concern over his position nationally in view of the change in political regime in the country. And the issue as in previous elections, was again posed in terms of Bondo people making a choice between Odinga and Omamo. It was therefore preference for Odinga or Omamo which was critical and determined crystallization of clans in Bondo into two major groupings. The crux of the matter was the political rehabilitation of Odinga who had played a positive role in leadership in Luoland as opposed to Omamo who was viewed, like Okero, as engaging in divisive anti-Odinga politics in collaboration with forces from outside the Luo community.

The outcome of the 1979 General Elections reveals that differences in social transformation in Bondo and Gem notwithstanding Luo ethnic factor was apparently the crucial element, underlining the versatility of ethnicity in modern politics. Omamo and Okero both suffered crushing defeat in Bondo and Gem respectively and yet they were extremely different as election candidates in two major ways. In contrast to Okero who was regarded as not being development conscious and considered inaccessible because of his leadership style, Omamo was generally viewed in Bondo as having played an active role in development and was not being accused of inaccessibility. The common problem in their candidacies which resulted in their defeat is, therefore, the organization of an anti Odinga leadership in collaboration

with external forces, contrary to Luo ethnic political stand and aspirations. In the circumstances not even their national political status as former cabinet ministers could help them in an election, leave alone their strong persuasive individual personalities evident in the public rallies.

There were, however, other significant contributing factors at the constituency level leading to these results. In Gem, with pervasive clan politics, it was crucial that the strong candidacy of Ambala attracted support from both Kojudhi and Kwenda clans and a winning coalition emerged despite arguments about his descent from Alego. In this connection one needs to recognize the important role played by influential Gem local leaders who were able to bridge the gap between the two rival groups of clans and at the same time give credibility to Ambala's origins. These leaders argued, regarding Ambala, that Luo culture, and especially in Gem where settlers ("jodak") were numerous, allowed for integration of "jodak" and their complete assimilation over time. The point, in brief, is the acceptance of Ambala's candidacy and the emergence of an alliance of different clans in support of Ambala. This was definitely more significant than the fact that Ambala was wealthy and a son-in-law of Odinga.

In Bondo, just as in 1974, Ougo was using the political campaign network of Odinga which spread throughout Bondo. Ougo and his supporters led by Odinga therefore concentrated on a quiet village-to-village campaign. Omamo lacked such a network and this can be said to have been his major undoing. In the circumstances he concentrated on public rallies meanwhile sending his agents to dish out money to the electorate. As a matter of fact Bondo campaign rallies always had a large group of youthful Omamo supporters mostly from his Kapiyo clan. The conclusion points to the fact that in Bondo wealth and the showing in public rallies did not constitute a strong enough force to counter grassroots clan support for Odinga controlled by elders, in order to enable Omamo to win the election against Ougo.

2. 1983 General Elections in Bondo and Gem

In terms of analysis the 1983 elections in both Gem and Bondo was a continuation of the trend observed in the 1979 elections.<sup>45</sup> There were major similarities making 1983 look like a replay. For example, the strong contenders remained the same, i.e., Otieno Ambala, Omolo Okero and Ongili Owiti in Gem, and in Bondo it was Odongo Omamo and Ougo Ochieng'. The social forces remained basically the same evidenced by the persistence of rivalry between Kojuodhi and Kwenda as the key factor while in Bondo Odingaism was still the critical force. Even the issues including leadership, personality, development, etc., were essentially the same. The discussion of 1979 elections is therefore instructive in understanding 1983 elections and the arguments are basically the same, and need not be recited. However, there were certain significant happenings between the two elections worth mentioning as they uphold and strengthen our arguments. Also, they help explain certain differences particularly in the actual results of 1983 elections.

In Gem, Ambala, following his election as Gem MP, secured a belated appointment as an Assistant Minister but ran into increasing problems. There were growing complaints within the constituency that he was favouring his own small locality in his harambee contributions. The broader implication of this was that he was only concerned about the welfare of his fellow jodak. He was also increasingly viewed as self-centered, aggressive and of violent character. He was therefore alienating his supporters, especially influential Gem leaders who had tipped the scale and enabled him to oust a true son of Gem. Among the electorate the feeling of alienation was particularly strong among the Kojuodhi in the north, and among rival Kwenda subclans in the south that had supported Owiti's candidacy.

There were additional problems Ambala was experiencing which went beyond the confines of his Gem constituency. For instance,

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 47-52.



In brief, the indications from the network of support, which was essentially for Odinga, and the vigorous campaign, was that Ougo was going to win the election with a big majority if he could not register a landslide victory. To the contrary, the election results announced by the returning officer was that Omamo was the winner. This failure of Ougo to win in 1983 cannot therefore be explained in terms of the social forces in Bondo and the realities of Bondo politics. The truth, following our analysis, seems to be in Odinga's conclusion put figuratively, that Omamo went to parliament "through the window."

#### 1979 and 1983 Electorate Survey Findings

In trying to enhance our understanding of the extent to which ethnicity remains a dominant factor in the electoral process primary data was collected during 1979 and 1983 General Elections. Interviews were conducted with the electorate in Gem and Bondo constituencies. The idea was to try and establish a participation and leadership choice pattern by way of comparison of the two areas during the two elections. The key findings are in relation to institutions in the electoral process and leadership choice factors.

##### A. Institutions

The institutions operating in the electoral process are a significant consideration because they influence participation in elections. The findings on KANU, the political party which is the main modern electoral institution, were that it only became of significance to the electorate at the time of clearance of candidates for the elections. There was evidence that more than 75 percent of respondents in Bondo and Gem are members of KANU. But only about 20 percent had attended any party meeting specifically, during 1983, the year of an election. Also, the data collected clearly showed that the party has virtually no role at all to play in the electoral process by way of creating awareness and mass mobilization. For instance, the respondents when asked about the sources of information on election, ranked KANU leaders and meetings as the least important. This is, in a descending order, after the mass media, friends and relatives,

.market places, barazas, funeral gatherings, church groups and school teachers.

The significance of KANU in the clearance of election candidates can, in addition, be said to be in a negative sense because it was essentially manifested as an expression of fear that a popular candidate would be barred from running for election. The findings from Bondo in this regard are instructive. When asked to state the main problem with selection of candidates in their constituency, about 60 percent of the Bondo respondents said in 1983 that it is the barring of candidates or more bluntly that it was linked to the clearance of Odinga. Furthermore, views were expressed in Bondo on this matter and other important party issues indicating concern that they are decided in Nairobi by KANU headquarters. Also that the decision on this and other matters could be manipulated by influentials to serve their interests. In other words, grassroots membership is virtually cut off from the party decision process.

The party also has no role in the election process at the grassroots level once the decision on election candidates has been made. From the day of nomination until polling day, election matters become the responsibility of the Provincial Administration. Thus, the administration which belongs to the executive arm of government is the modern institution that plays a dominant role in the electoral process and not the party. Even election rallies assume the nature of meetings of the administration locally known as barazas in which the party has no role.

The consequence of a dearth of modern political institutions is that the electorate can only participate in the electoral process as individuals or grouped, not on party, but some other principle.<sup>47</sup> The common forms of grouping found in Gem and Bondo included village, clan, location, church, and self-help groups which were practically all based on kinship principle. Gem provides the most clear evidence

<sup>47</sup> Milton J. Esman, ed. Ethnic Conflict in the Western World, p. 375

of this pattern. In 1983, over 90 percent of those interviewed in Gem felt that elections in their constituency are influenced by clanism/locationism and more so by clanism. In other words, there is a prevalence of groups organized around traditional norms such as location, clan or other kinship ties.

The findings on opinion makers and effective campaigners also shows that traditional institutions play a dominant role in the electoral process as compared to modern political institutions. In response to a question to rank leading opinion makers in their constituency, those interviewed in both Gem and Bondo ranked Elders ("Jodong Gweng") highest. Likewise, when asked who are the most effective campaigners, they again ranked the Elders highest. Educated Elite and Youth Wingers are ranked below Elders as opinion makers and effective campaigners, indicating a combination of both traditional and modern elements. But the dominant position of traditional elements is not in dispute.

It is important to bear in mind that we are talking about aninformed electorate and should not be misled by the above findings on opinion makers and campaigners into thinking the electorate is still caught up in traditionalism. This is evidenced by the fact that the majority of those interviewed were registered voters and had participated in previous elections through voting. They all knew who their MP was and most were able to identify his stronghold of support and to recall issues in previous elections. In addition, they actively participated in harambee development through their contributions and knew which of their leaders played a leading role in development, even if they felt he should not become an MP and therefore denied him their vote.

#### B. Factors in Leadership Choice

The post mortem findings on the factors which contributed to the victory of the MP who won in 1979 confirmed the existence of the social forces we argued are in operation in Gem and Bondo electoral politics especially clanism and Odingaism. What is even more interesting is that an understanding of these forces already identified, and how

they operate, it is evident, can help in the prediction of elections in these two constituencies. An indication of this is the pattern revealed by the results obtained in trying to determine the winners of the 1983 election before polling day.

The specific questions asked were first, whether the respondent voted for the winner in the 1979 election. Secondly, if the respondent would, in the 1983 election, vote for the same person who had won the previous 1979 election. The third question was then direct, asking the respondent to name the possible winner and the runner-up.

In Gem when asked to name the possible winner and the runner-up the responses of those interviewed were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gem Candidates Winning Score

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>	<u>Score*</u>
Ongili Owiti	22	52	96
Otieno Ambala	39	13	91
Omolo Okero	22	19	63

\*The score is arrived at by weighting, giving a score of 2 if a candidate is mentioned as a possible winner and a score of 1 if mentioned as a possible runner-up.

It was indeed a close race between Owiti and Ambala as the actual outcome revealed even after the recount during the petition filed by Ambala. At any rate, a useful pointer to the subsequent by-election Owiti won with a landslide is that over 60 percent thought by 1983 that Owiti would be the runner-up. This shows how much stronger than in 1979 his candidacy was regarded following his quiet campaign, having the right clan connections, etc. In contrast, Ambala's popularity was on the wane by 1983. While 50 percent of the Gem respondents agreed they had voted for the winner in 1979 (Ambala), only some 40 percent agreed they would vote for the same person in 1983.

In Bondo when asked to name the possible winner and runner-up the responses of those interviewed were as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Bondo Candidates Winning Score

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Runner-up</u>	<u>Score</u> *
Ougo Ochieng'	59	20	138
Odongo Omamo	15	44	<b>74</b>

\* Score arrived as in Table 1

These findings conform to our analysis and the clear winning position of Ougo can be linked directly to Odinga's influence. The historic move he made of standing down for Odinga to try and recapture Bondo's seat demonstrated that he was not an opportunist or a self-seeking leader and contrasted him sharply with Omamo. As a matter of fact, Ougo had gained more popularity than in 1979 according to our findings. When asked if they had voted for the winner in 1979 (Ougo), 66 percent of the respondents agreed. And then to the question if they would vote for that same person in 1983, 80 percent of the respondents agreed they would.

Conclusion

The key inference is that there is an interplay of modern and traditional values and that both influence electoral politics. In Luoland, however, the evidence points to Luo ethnic factor based primarily on traditional norms, playing an increasingly critical role in parliamentary elections. Furthermore, the indications are that ethnicity in Luoland has become an enduring factor in the political process. This is mainly because of the hold that elements of tradition have established over institutions for popular political participation at the grassroots level.

The nature of participation is however determined by the stakes involved and how these are manipulated by the local influential leaders. It is in this context that one can understand the outcome

of elections in places like Bondo and Gem for instance. In Bondo, Ougo, enjoying Odinga's support, was able to win despite Omamo's relatively impressive record in development effort. Ambala was also able to win in Gem despite the dominant factor of clanism/locationism, but had to give way to Owiti, a true son of Gem, in the next election.

The working of the social forces is also such that just being wealthy and dishing out money, especially to youth wingers, cannot enable one to win an election in places like Bondo and Gem. The voters openly resent the suggestion that they can be bought, while youth are not the leading opinion makers and some may not even be registered voters. In Bondo, Omamo's conspicuous wealth and support from youth could not convert Ougo supporters who in reality were Odinga supporters. Likewise, in Gem, there was widespread talk regarding Ambala's wealth during the 1984 by-election but Owiti, all the same, registered a landslide victory.

The source of increasing strength of these social forces can be said to be political isolation of the Luo community and relative economic deprivation of Luo areas. These have been translated into an external threat especially by the local political leaders. And it is such an external threat that usually leads to an increasingly strong feeling of ethnic solidarity in culturally different situations even in western democracies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Milton J. Esman, ed., Ethnic Conflict in the Western World, p. 371; C. Gregory Knight and James L. Newman, eds., Contemporary Africa: Geography and Change, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976), pp. 27-29.