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**Reference #:** 8306437

**Journal Title:** New perspectives on human security /

**Volume:**  
**Issue:**  
**Month/Year:** 2010  
**Pages:** 250-259

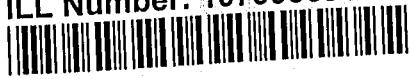
**Article Author:** Sagawa, Toru

**Article Title:** Local order and human security after the proliferation of automatic rifles in East Africa

**Imprint:** Sheffield ; Greenleaf Publishing, 2010.

**Notes:** Borrowing Notes; Thank you!

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# Local order and human security after the proliferation of automatic rifles in East Africa

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The proliferation of small arms, which has received international attention since the mid-1990s (e.g. United Nations 1997), has been a top priority for activities directed at building peace and advancing human security.<sup>1</sup> Although the role of the state in maintaining human security may conflict with its role in building peace, both efforts seem to proceed from a consensus that the state should take the initiative with respect to solving problems involving small arms and eventually hold the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence in a country. Such views rest on a deep-rooted Hobbesian assumption; that is, if violence is not controlled 'from above', people with arms will become addicted to violence, and society will descend into chaos.

Although the topic has received scant attention recently, the ways in which people in a 'stateless society' achieve 'ordered anarchy' in the absence of a formal government has traditionally constituted an area of study in the field of social

1 Chapter 8, 'Ways to advance the security of people', of *Human Security Now* (Commission on Human Security 2003), points out eight basic tasks for advancing human security. The first is '[p]rotecting people in violent conflict', and the second is '[p]rotecting people from the proliferation of arms'.

anthropology. This chapter will follow in this tradition and clarify how pastoral peoples in East Africa spontaneously maintained local order even after the inability and unwillingness of the state to protect its subjects resulted in the proliferation of automatic rifles. In addition, I will argue that state-sponsored disarmament tends to increase the public's vulnerability to natural and social changes.

## **Proliferation of automatic rifles and the disarmament policy in East Africa**

Dozens of ethnic groups in the arid and semi-arid areas of East Africa depend primarily on livestock (cattle, camel, sheep, goat and donkey) herding for their subsistence. These pastoralists are among the most marginalised peoples in East Africa and face grave threats to their human security. Approximately 100 years ago, many of these groups were conquered by the military of the (colonial) state governments, which then incorporated them into peripheral border areas. Since that time, few government development policies to improve the lives of people in these groups have been implemented. Instead, governments have established international and domestic borders surrounding the incorporated areas and have regulated movement in and out of these territories without considering issues related to the seasonal movements and social networks of the pastoralists. This policy has disturbed local livelihood strategies, which include migrating, using the abundant land for livestock, and extending trans-ethnic social networks to ensure food security.

In the context of this uncertain environment, drought, starvation and low-intensity conflicts between ethnic groups have frequently characterised the daily lives of people within these areas during the course of history. Indeed, the interaction between wants and fears has resulted in a vicious cycle in which an outbreak of conflict renders previously available resources scarcer by expanding the no-man's-land between opposing groups and disturbing the ability of aid agencies to receive and distribute emergency food provisions. This dynamic also increases the vulnerability of the entire area to natural and social changes. As a result, the danger that conflict will recur is also enhanced.

Exacerbating the effects of the state's misuse of power and the dysfunction in the security sector are the primary causes of conflicts, the struggle for natural resources such as livestock and pasture land, and the traditional culture, which values the use of violence against the enemy. Furthermore, it has been argued that the proliferation of (semi-) automatic rifles such as the AK47 and G3 has increased the seriousness of conflicts during the past 30 years. Since the end of the 1970s, when political upheavals occurred in Uganda (1979), Sudan (1983–2005), Ethiopia (1991) and Somalia (1991–), firearms supplied by developed countries have become widely available to ordinary citizens, especially pastoral peoples in border areas (Mkutu 2008: Chapter 3). It has been estimated that 5 million small arms are being circu-

lated in East Africa, many of which are illegally used by pastoralists (Simonse 2005: 244).

In response to this situation, governments, notably that of Uganda, have frequently intervened in local communities to disarm pastoralists. However, these actions have only added to the confusion because national armies have used force unfairly against target groups and areas that were unevenly chosen, in part because of the political motivations of local elites. As a result, disarmament operations have disturbed the local balance of power, deepened mistrust against the government and increased local demand for firearms (e.g. Small Arms Survey 2007; Sagawa 2010).

However, with the exception of the work of a few researchers and organisations, these failures have not yet received the appropriate critical attention until now. At present, the international community has reached a general consensus that the proliferation of firearms causes violence to flourish, indicating that the state (and 'We') should do something. Indeed, in this view, doing something is better than doing nothing. Many researchers and aid agencies have reinforced this recognition and have reported that, after the introduction of automatic rifles, pastoral societies were inundated with naked violence committed by radical youth using the new arms (e.g. Abbink 2000; Gray *et al.* 2003).

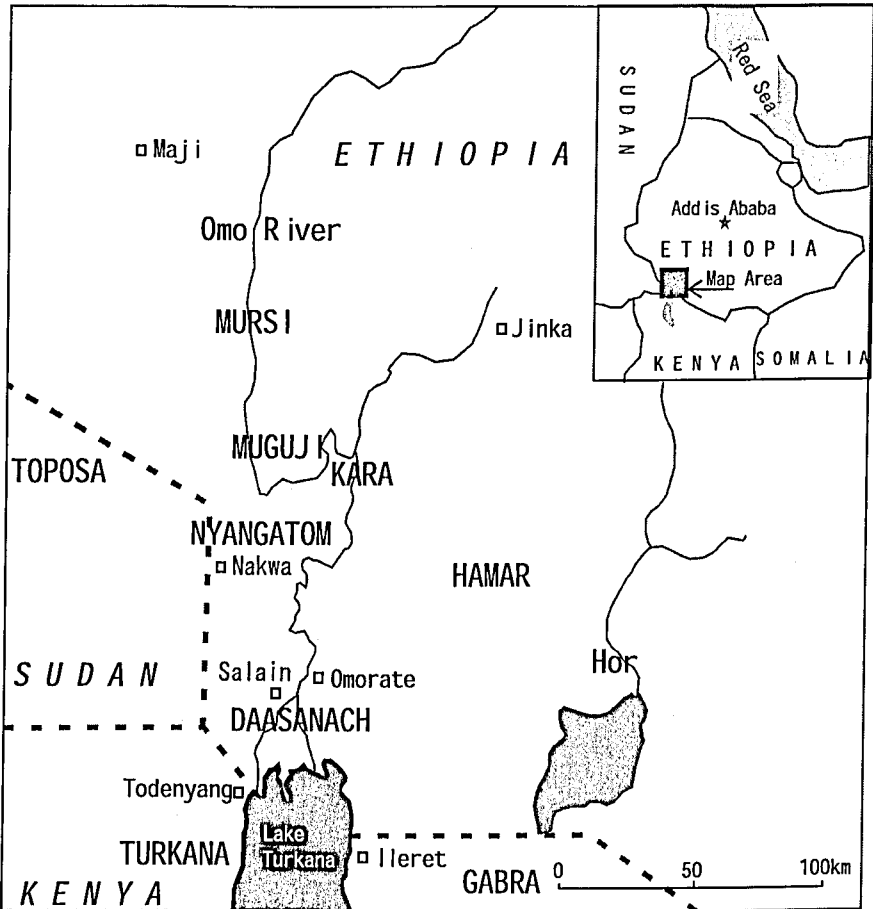
Careful reading, however, reveals that many reports do not rely solely on empirical research for their conclusions, but rest in part on a technology-deterministic way of thinking. I agree with Dave Eaton's assertion that '(t)he gun has been fetishized as a change agent without a balanced understanding having been reached as to its impact' (Eaton 2008: 105). I will use a more empirical approach to analyse how people have addressed the new situation produced by the proliferation of automatic rifles in the area.

## The case of the Daasanach

The population of the Daasanach, an agro-pastoral people living in south-western Ethiopia at the border with Kenya and the Sudan (Figure 16.1), numbers about 48,000, only about 0.06% of the total Ethiopian population in 2007. In addition, thousands of Daasanach live in north-western Kenya. They classify four neighbouring (agro-) pastoral groups (the Turkana, the Nyangatom, the Hamar and the Gabra) as *kiz* or the 'enemy' and have been engaged in intermittent conflict with them for more than half a century.

The negative impact of state power constitutes the source of these conflicts. The Daasanach were conquered by imperial Ethiopia in the late 19th century. During the first half of 20th century, the Ethiopian state advanced into the area to demonstrate its authority to British Kenya and to exploit natural resources such as ivory. Toward these ends, the Ethiopian state organised a raiding party consisting of local

Figure 16.1 The Daasanach and their neighbouring groups



Names in upper case (not oblique) are ethnic groups; place names are upper and lower case; the dotted lines are national borders.

pastoralists, which caused the escalation of hostilities between the Daasanach and neighbouring groups. After the Second World War, however, Ethiopia lost interest in this remote territory and left the area without attempting to mitigate the escalated hostility or collect the firearms. Thus, the situation in this area differs from that of Ugandan pastoral societies, in which government-sponsored disarmament projects have been enforced on many occasions.

Old-type firearms such as muskets were introduced to the area after the state's involvement, and automatic rifles have also been available since the late 1980s. In 2006, 48% of Daasanach adult males ( $N = 163$ ) had rifles, mainly automatic rifles. The Daasanach obtained rifles primarily by bartering with merchants or neigh-

bouring peoples. One automatic rifle could be traded for two adult oxen and 100 bullets could be traded for one female calf in 2006.

In the Daasanach language, *osu* means war or a collective and organised violent attack designed to kill the enemy and raid their livestock. According to interviews I conducted with 174 adult Daasanach males in 2006, adult males went to *osu* an average of 3.4 times, and 67% of adult males had raided the livestock of enemies during previous battles. Although most battles lasted one or two days, more than 100 people have died in large-scale battles. Unorganised small raiding activities (*sulla*) occur much more frequently. Although the data on this situation seems devastating, pastoralists have partially succeeded in their attempts to control the violence. I will briefly describe how the relationship between the Daasanach and the Nyangatom changed after the proliferation of automatic rifles.

The Nyangatom, who are the northern neighbour of the Daasanach, initially obtained automatic rifles from their ally, the Toposa, in south-eastern Sudan during the civil war in the mid-1980s (Tornay 1993). The Nyangatom attacked neighbouring peoples and exterminated three Daasanach villages on the western side of the Omo River in 1988 and 1989. For example, the Nyangatom entered Salain village before dawn and killed hundreds of Daasanach and raided all their livestock during a few hours. In this battle, a few Daasanach observed some Nyangatom continuing to shoot at dead bodies after their bullets had been exhausted. The Nyangatom were also observed after the battle to be on a nearby mound shooting their guns toward the sky and eating livestock meat raided from the Daasanach. After a normal conflict, groups return to their villages as soon as possible after the raiding of livestock lest they be chased. In this instance, however, the Nyangatom remained near the village for a few hours, as if flaunting their overwhelming power to the Daasanach. Looking back at those episodes, the Daasanach say 'The Nyangatom got drunk with Kalashnikovs'. Fearing the power of the Nyangatom, most Daasanach abandoned the land on the western side of the river and emigrated to the eastern side.

In a more forceful response, the Daasanach demanded that the local government supply them with automatic rifles, but this request was refused. Next, the Daasanach visited their eastern ally, the Hor, after learning that the Hor had obtained automatic rifles via eastern routes. In 1991, after most of the adult males had purchased automatic rifles from the Hor, the Daasanach attacked Nakwa, one of the largest Nyangatom villages. Although the Daasanach were not able to achieve military victory in this battle, the attack proved their ability to fight the Nyangatom as equals (cf. Turton 1994).

After the war, many Daasanach gradually began moving to the western side of the river, which remained a no-man's-land, to herd livestock, and the Nyangatom did not mount an organised attack until 2006. Indeed, the Daasanach even moved north and started to live with the Nyangatom in Nakwa during the late 1990s.

## Spontaneous attempts to maintain local order

Although the proliferation of new arms temporarily intensified the violence of conflicts, relationships among ethnic groups have not become chaotic. This relied on peoples' spontaneous attempts to prevent the spread of violence and maintain local order in the face of fear and want brought about by violence.

In terms of fear, both parties to the conflict between the Nyangatom and the Daasanach responded to their fears by recognising the balance of power and the dangers of using automatic rifles in mutual attacks that result in serious battles; both groups came to share the wish to avoid the excessive use of violence. Among the Daasanach, there is 'a culture of violence' in which a man who achieves military results in battle is regarded as a 'brave man', and a young man mobilises for war in the hope of becoming a 'brave man'. However, several young men said, 'I became a coward through the battle experiences with Kalashnikovs' and voluntarily decided not to go to war again (Sagawa 2009). Such sentiments have contributed to the deterrence of further conflict.

In terms of want, the Daasanach and the Nyangatom had lived together and shared pasture land to facilitate adaptation to an uncertain environment before serious conflict erupted. They also established amicable individual ties across group boundaries. For example in 2006, 71% of the adult males ( $N = 169$ ) had friend(s) who belonged to other groups, and 41% ( $N = 170$ ) had relative(s) who had married a woman from other groups. Friends and members of kinship groups exchanged goods that were scarce in their own communities (Sagawa in press). After the attacks by the Nyangatom, the no-man's-land expanded, mutual visits were suspended, and resources became more limited. After the attack on Nakwa, the Daasanach women and men started to engage in conversations that reflected and reinforced the atmosphere of war-weariness at a community level. For example, they worried, 'This year, where can we herd livestock?' (because of the reduction of available lands caused by conflicts).

However, fear and want alone will not restore amicable relationships; indeed, they may create vicious cycles that lead to the recurrence of violent conflicts as mentioned above. The shift from hostile to amicable relations must include individual initiatives, what I refer to as 'an aspiration for face-to-face interactions with others'. The Daasanach society had no strictly institutionalised process for improving relationships after the war. Thus, peacemaking requires that an individual visits other groups' territory on his own initiative, risking victimisation by possibly vengeful enemies. Those who are the first to visit the lands of other groups typically have personal ties to a member of the 'enemy' group. These individuals visit their friends and/or kin and experience the hospitality of their hosts. Following their visits, other members also visit, and the inter-ethnic relationship will shift from a peace that is passively maintained through the separation provided by a no-man's-land to a peace that is actively developed through trans-ethnic amicable interactions.

The pastoralists have achieved local order on the basis of the complementary

dynamics involving the intra-personal/group push away from fear and want and the inter-personal/group pull towards face-to-face interactions. I refer to this developed order as local order to emphasise that it emerged from the efforts of individuals who shared the physical and mental experiences of want and fear that resulted from violence rather than from the interventions by external forces holding asymmetrical power.

## **State reconstruction and human security in marginalised areas**

With this case in mind, I will now discuss problems with respect to small arms policies. The majority of the international community expects a reconstructed state to monopolise the legitimate use of violence and control the circulation and use of arms in Africa. However, a policy that involves the control of arms from above poses the strong possibility of repeating the marginalisation of pastoralists.

As mentioned above, even though the Daasanach have maintained some measure of amicable relations thus far, international and domestic borders established by governments since the early 20th century have damaged pastoralists' traditional coping strategies and led to the escalation of hostilities between groups. If a policy preventing the influx of firearms from foreign countries relies on strengthening cross-border control and results in stricter restriction on the movement and social networks of the pastoralists, their vulnerability to drought (and thus their want) will increase.

In terms of policies for controlling the possession and use of firearms, we should first consider the many failed disarmament policies that have been initiated since colonial times. Because target groups and areas were determined unevenly and unfairly, disarmed people who were loyal to the government became targets for attack by armed neighbouring groups located beyond the administrative borders.

Given the initial goals of conquest and the more recent disarmament operations, many pastoral peoples have experienced the state as merely a violent and oversized oppressor. Such oppression has been based on and justified by a deep-rooted cultural prejudice towards pastoralists. The majority of citizens in East Africa regard peripheral pastoralists as primitive, savage and warlike. Thus, even if the security sector could be reformed and disarmament operations could be enforced with an 'appropriate' method on an 'appropriate' scale, it is likely that the state would use violence in their relations with disarmed pastoralists because of the prejudice that easily obscures superficial considerations of political legitimacy. We can all too easily provide evidence that naked violence against stigmatised citizens is perpetrated not only by the corrupt governments in Africa, but also by the governments characterised by so-called 'good governance' that have behaved as if they have a right to teach this practice to other governments in Africa. Thus, it is not surprising



that pastoralists have concluded from their historical experiences that the proper way to prevent violent interventions from the state (and thus to quell their fear) is to keep firearms, because, as one pastoralist in Uganda said, 'Where there are no guns, they [the state] use the threat of guns' (Knighton 2003).

## Conclusion

This chapter described how pastoralists in East Africa, operating under a state without the capacity or will to protect its subjects, restored local order after the proliferation of automatic rifles. I also underscored that disarmament, enforced as part of an effort to enable the territorial state to monopolise the legitimate use of violence, intensifies pastoralists' want and fear. This analysis is the reverse of that derived from a Hobbesian perspective, but is self-evident from the local perspective. This view recognises that the people who know the most about the fear and want brought about by violence are those who have experienced these conditions and they always exercise their agency to address problems within the structural constraints. The Hobbesian state is neither more nor less than an intellectual fiction, and we need to reconsider the types and scales of political unit appropriate for the management of violence.

I do not intend to idealise the subjects of my research. The life of the Daasanach is always in danger from a recurrence of armed conflict. I emphasised their spontaneous practices not because we should regard this area as an autonomous peace-forming unit where interventions are unnecessary, but because the international community needs to recognise the local security unit and consider its role in the process of reforming states. I define the local security unit as a unit in which people's experiences and aspirations for face-to-face interactions with others directly contribute to peace-building and to the advancement of human security. Efforts to establish the territorial state as holding a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence will drive marginalised peoples into the palm of the state's hand. It will not be the end of marginalisation but the perpetuation of it.

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