Herders, Guns and the State: Historical Perspective of the Dassanetch Frontier Areas and the Politics of Arms in Northern Kenya, 1909-1997

MA Dissertation

By

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Declaration

I.....**James Mbugua Ndung'u**

Declare that this is my original work and that it has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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This study has been submitted for examination with our approval as university supervisors.

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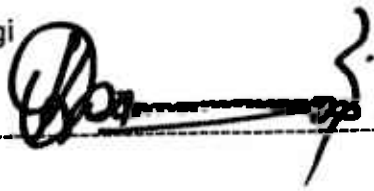

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Dedication

There are communities in Kenya that consider themselves forgotten folks. The Dassanetch are one of these. Their gruelling experience in the so-called 'forgotten badlands' has been conspicuous in its absence in many academic discourses of frontier communities. This dissertation is dedicated to them in the hope that it will contribute to the understanding of their experiences with both the colonial absolutist state and the post-colonial state in the Northern Kenya in general and their contribution to the politics of arms in the Dassanetch frontier areas in particular.

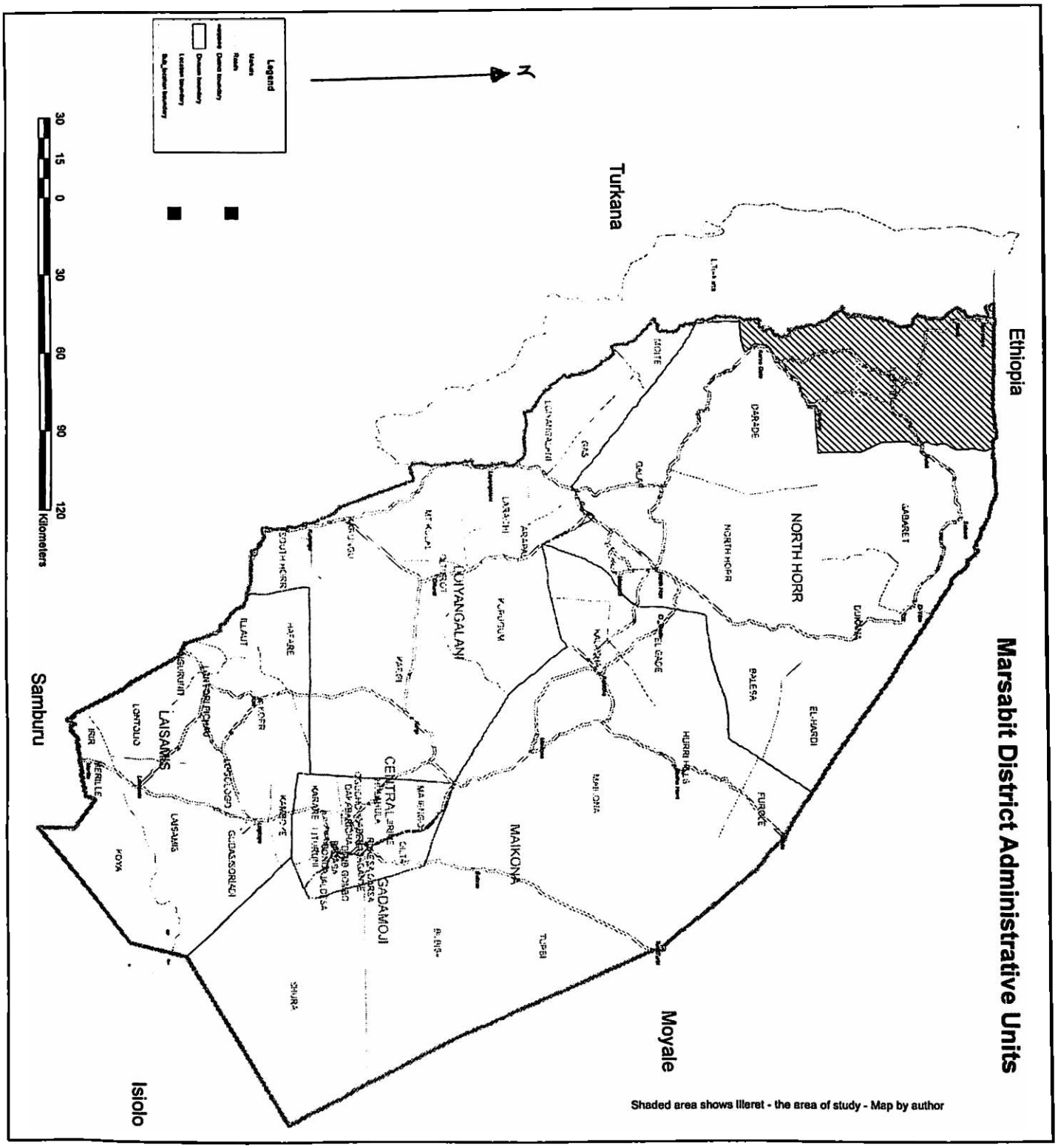
Acknowledgement

The process of writing this dissertation was a humbling experience. I would like to first and foremost thank the members of the teaching staff of the Department of History, University of Nairobi for challenging me not only to be critical in thinking but also original in generating and contributing new ideas in the academic world. In writing this dissertation, I learnt one humbling lesson; producing a satisfactory Masters dissertation requires hard work, flexibility, consistence and clarity of thought. To this, I am indebted to my supervisors Dr. Ken Ombongi and Dr. George Gona for their consistent and unfailing supervision of this work. Working with my supervisors was not mere fulfilment of the supervisory role but a real opportunity to learn. Every moment of producing an advanced draft of this work was preceded by premium time of quality conversations with the supervisors and am thankful for this. Several other members of the teaching staff in the history department contributed to the shaping of this dissertation too. I thank Mr David Kyule, Dr Mary Mwiandi, Dr Ephraim Wahome, Ms Margaret Gachihi and Mr Herbert Misigo for their contribution particularly in shaping the very initial drafts.

I would like to thank Messrs James Galgalo and Hilary Halkano for facilitating my travel to the distant Dassanetch frontiers through the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and Development Office – Marsabit Diocese. Special thanks also go to the Missionary Fellowship Aviation (MAF) for according me the privilege to fly under the banner – *Verona Fathers* - thereby reducing the cost of my travels to Marsabit. I thank Tom Onyango of the Catholic Aid for Foreign Development (CAFOD) and Safia Abdi of CORDAID for sponsoring all my visits to Marsabit. Tuye Galgalo of North Horr facilitated my field interviews and was a key informant throughout the process of data collection. I thank him and all those I interviewed in the field particularly community elders and government officials. Thanks to the Ministry of Education for providing authorisation for this research. I acknowledge the services of the Kenya National Archives' staff as well as Jomo Kenyatta Memorial Library's staff. To my fellow students at the History department, I remain ever thankful

for your invaluable support in form of encouragement and critique during the presentation of my proposal. Finally, to my wife Stella, thanks for your support during my many days of absence from the house and the challenge you gave me to finish this work and proceed to the next level. I take the challenge.

Map of the study area



List of abbreviations

AP	Administration Police
CAFOD	Catholic Aid for Foreign Development
CDM	Catholic Diocese of Marsabit
CORDAID	Catholic Relief for Development Aid
DC	District Commissioner
DO	District Officer
EAR	East Africa Rifles
GOK	Government of Kenya
GSU	General Service Unit
HQs	Head Quarters
KAR	King's Africa Rifles
KNA	Kenya National Archives
KP	Kenya Police
KPR	Kenya Police Reservist
MAF	Missionary Aviation Fellowship
NFD	Northern Frontier District
ODO	Outlying District Ordinance of 1902
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
PC	Provincial Commissioner
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SDA	Special District Administration Ordinance of 1932
UON	University of Nairobi

Definition of Terms

Borders and Frontiers: According to Mwagiru borders delimit the physical territorial demarcation of states - and regions within a state, while frontiers refer to the zone of contact of a state. While the inner limit of a frontier touches the neighbouring states, the outer limits of the frontiers of a state extend well beyond the immediate neighbours, and affect and concern states, which are not geographically proximate.[1] In the context of this study, the term frontier means the area extending from the tip of Lake Turkana where it touches the border with Ethiopia and extending all the way to Forole where Marsabit district touches Moyale. On the Ethiopian side, it refers to the areas astride River Omo down to where the river drains into Lake Turkana in Illeret location, Marsabit district as the map on page vii shows. This should therefore not be confused with the colonial Northern Frontier District that was wide and occupied by mainly Somali-speaking people.

Colonial and post-colonial periods: According to Frederick Cooper, the conventional dividing line between colonial and post-colonial history is misleading as it suggests a neat break from one system to another. Instead, the only transformation that occurred was mere change of personnel within structure of power that remains colonial.[2] In delineating main trends since the terminal colonial period, Crawford Young suggests closing the historical parentheses around the African post-colonial state, around 1990 "because the silent incorporation of many defining attributes of the colonial state in its post-independence successor for three decades validated the post-colonial characterisation."[3] This study focused on the period 1909 – 1997.

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[1] Makumi Mwagiru. (29 August - 2 September 2000) 'Borders, Frontiers and Conflict in the Horn of Africa: Some Preliminary Hypotheses.' Paper presented during an Expert Workshop held by the Development and Peace Foundation (SEF) in collaboration with the Katholisch-Soziales institute (KSI) in Bad Honnef.

[2] Frederick Cooper. (2002) *Africa since 1940, the past of the present: New Approaches to African History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 4.

[3] Crawford Young. 'The end of the post-colonial state in Africa? Reflections on changing African political dynamics.' *African Affairs* (2004), 103, 23-49 – Royal African Society. P. 25.

Conflict: The concept conflict denotes a situation in which two or more parties, acting singly, or as a group, are in disagreement with another because they are both pursuing goals and objectives that are mutually incompatible. According to Coser Lewis, conflict refers to the struggle over values or claims to status, power and scarce resources, in which the aims of the groups and individuals involved are not only to obtain the desired values but also to neutralize, injure, or eliminate rivals.[4] In this study, the term conflict is used in reference to differences between the Dassanetch and their neighbours and state agencies.

Dassanetch: is a semi-nomadic ethnic group, which is the centre of focus of this study. They are found in Illeret location of Marsabit District. Illeret is in North Horr constituency and neighbours Ethiopia to the North and Lake Turkana to the West (See map of the study area). They have eight sub-ethnic groups namely Sher, Elile, Oro, Narch, Inkurya, Rendele, Koro and Rele.[5] Their language, though Cushitic, is not of the Oromo group. When Count Teleki, an Austrian explorer encountered the Dassanetch in 1888, they were referred to by many names. Earlier travellers called them Reshiat, Turkana call them Merille, Ethiopians call them Geleb or Geleba, Borana and Gabra call them Gelluba or Shangilla. Until today, these names are still used. The community calls itself Dassanetch. They consider other names derogatory. In the Kenyan population census, they have so far been lumped together with other minorities and therefore the state knows them as "others". However, as Uri notes, their name as far as they are concerned is Dassanetch. This is the name I use in this research.[6] There are various spellings of this term in reference to the ethnic group. Uri uses Dassanetch.[7] Nene Mburu uses the same term.[8] Paul Tablino uses Daasenetch.[9] Despite these disparities, the

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[4] Coser Lewis (1956) *The Function of Conflict.* New York: Free Press. P.8
[5] Gebre Yohannes, et al. *Addressing Pastoralist Conflict in Ethipia: The case of the Kuraz and Hamer Sub-Districts of South Omo Zone.* 2005, Saferworld – London.
[6] Uri Almagor (1977) *Pastoral partners affinity and bond partnership among the Dassanetch of southwest Ethiopia.* Manchester: University of Manchester.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Nene Mburu. (2001) 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000 *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): pp 148-162
[9] Paul Tablino (1999) *Christianity among the Nomads: The Catholic Church in Northern Kenya.* Nairobi: Paulines Publications. P.33.

terms refer to one and the same ethnic group. In this study, I use the spelling Dassanetch.

Ethnic group will be used to refer to a people that holds a subjective belief in their common descent. Their identity is presumed, which means that it is artificially or accidentally associated with a set of characteristics such as physical appearance, customs, common memories, language, religion etc.[10]

Fora: among the pastoralists in Northern Kenya is a grazing zone especially where herders camp for some time. A *fora* normally has greener pastures and is near watering points. Kobi Fora site museums, for example got their name from pastoralists as it serves them as a dry grazing zone when pastures elsewhere are exhausted.

Gun culture: In this context, is used to denote the replacement of traditional weapons such as spears, bows and arrows with guns that has made the gun an essential weapon among some communities to such an extent that carrying it has become common – almost a way of life to them.

Intractable Conflicts: These are conflicts that remain unresolved for long periods of time and then become stuck at a high level of intensity and destructiveness. They concern an intricate set of historical, religious, cultural, political and economic issues. These matters are central to human social existence and typically resist any attempts at resolution. In fact, parties often refuse to negotiate or compromise with respect to such issues. As a result, each side views the rigid position of the other as a threat to its very existence. They may develop a mutual fear of each other and a profound desire to inflict as much physical and psychological harm on each other as possible.[11] This term is only applicable when reference is made to the over a hundred years old conflict between the Dassanetch and the Gabra found in the area of study.

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[10] Max Weber. (1968) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology.* New York: Bedminster Press, pp. 389-398.

[11] Peter Coleman. 'Intractable Conflict' in Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman (2000) *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. pp. 428 – 430.

Lagga: Among the pastoralists in Norhern Kenya refers to a dry river. Pastoralists use this to demarcate grazing areas or territories.

Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW): The most commonly used definition of SALW is by the United Nations. Broadly speaking, small arms are those designed for personal use and light weapons are those designed for use by several persons serving as a crew.[12] From this definition, the study is primarily concerned with small arms as opposed to light weapons. The main small arms found in the area of study are AK-47, G3 and general rifles of the type 303. Reference is also made of antique weapons, which refer to old type hunting rifles. Other types of firearms mentioned include Fusil Gras, Mannlicher, Lebels and Oggrats rifles issued by the Italians to the Dassanetch. In this context, illegal arms mean those held without licence from the government of Kenya's Firearms Licensing Bureau as provided for by the Firearms Act Cap 114 of the Laws of Kenya enacted in 1954. This law has gone through various amendments since then. These include the introduction of tougher penalties against illegal ownership of guns.

State: A State may be defined by its organization and functions as an operational political entity with legally acquired authority and autonomous institutions for looking after the interests of its subjects within a unified geographical territory and outside it. Key characteristics include the recognition of its sovereignty, a formal government with legitimacy, and organized and recognizable means of policing the society. Thus, statehood implies the existence of one centre of power and unquestionable authority. Arguably, a State ceases to exist after a credible parallel alternative exists that imposes its authority on sizeable portions of the society and denies the constituted State access to the same. Such situations exist during incipient insurgency and are a constant prelude to the disintegration of the State.[13] In this study, the term state refers to the central government of Kenya and its administrative and security organs. State withdrawal means minimal presence

[12] United Nations General Assembly 52/298: Report of the Panel of Government Experts on Small Arms of 27 August 1997, Para 26.
[13] Nene Mburu (1999) 'Contemporary Banditry in the Horn of Africa: Causes, History and Political Implications' *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8(2): 89-107

of the state, thinly distributed security agencies and lack of its penetration in the Dassanetch frontier. Therefore, presence of chiefs and police reservists is not indicative of state presence because state's presence should include enabling its officers to provide services and security to the communities. In addition, the spread of gun culture that allows pastoralists to carry arms without concern by the state reflects some degree of acquiescence by the state to the status quo of lawlessness.

Security: While this term has broader meaning that includes social, economic, political and environmental aspects, it is used to mean prevalence of conditions in which people live without fear of being physically harmed or losing their property mainly cattle, grazing areas and traditional territories. Lack of these conditions means insecurity.

Security dilemma: This is the theoretical perspective within which this study is conceptualised. When applied to ethnic relations in ethnic conflicts, the argument is that, intense ethnic conflicts are caused by collective fears of the future. These arise when states lose their ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantee of protection for groups making them seek alternative means of protection.

Chapter 1

Introduction

A vast number of actors have increasingly high access to highly lethal weaponry facilitated by opening up of borders, arms surpluses from the Cold War, the rapid expansion of free trade and disintegration of state institutions.[14] Arguably, firearms have become dangerous tools that fuel conflicts and define inter-communal and state relationships. The research that led to this dissertation investigated how firearms availability and ambiguity of national borders and frontiers in the northern frontier of Kenya are related and the influence this has on state impenetrability and insecurity in the Dassanetch frontier areas.

While this research is not about quantitative aspects of arms, their availability in the Dassanetch frontiers cannot be isolated from the global perspective. Local problems of illegal arms are linked to an intricate network of global arms transfer seldom understood by those who use them. The global picture of arms is alarming. There are about 639 million small arms in the world or one for every ten people on earth. The majority, 59%, are in the hands of civilians. 38% are owned by government armed forces, 2.8% by police and 0.2% by armed groups. The category of armed groups has not been clearly defined. Estimates in the *Small Arms Survey 2001* put the figure at close to 100 million arms in Africa alone.[15] Sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to have 30 million Small Arms and Light Weapons, which is just about 5% of the global stockpile.[16]

According to the Small Arms Survey 2003, Kenya has a national small arms inventory of 530,000 - 960,000. Armed insurgents and ethnic

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[14] International Committee of the Red Cross (1995). *Arms Availability and the Situation of Civilians in Armed Conflicts*. Geneva: ICRC. P.7.
[15] Jasjit Singh (1995) *Light Weapons and International Security*, Indian Pugwash Society, New Delhi.
[16] University of Oxford. (2004) *Small Arms Survey*. Oxford University Press. P. 8-9

groups are believed to possess 12,000 - 24,000 small arms.[17] These figures are, however, conservative. A study conducted in 2003 estimates that there are about 127,519 arms in the North Rift (West Pokot, Samburu, Turkana and Baringo) region alone. The study indicates that among the nomadic pastoral communities, almost every male adult is armed.[18] The fatality of these guns is well illustrated by Keegan when he writes that 'soldiers of the 14th century found the mysterious power released by gunpowder far too volatile to treat it with anything but distant respect.'[19] Mao Zedong observed that 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.'[20] Since accessing firearms, the Dassanetch have attached great importance to the ownership of automatic rifles because unlike the traditional weapons like bows, arrows and spears, automatic rifles significantly increased their pastoral power and gave them a special position in the society that allowed them to compete with other actors for power including the state for almost a century.

Focus on inter-ethnic relations and quantitative aspects of arms proliferation has not only ignored the contribution of the Dassanetch in arms' history but also overshadowed other important aspects in the politics of arms in the Northern Frontiers. This research traces the historical factors that have defined the essence of gun ownership in the Dassanetch frontiers focusing on key historical watersheds of the gun problem among the Dassanetch. This research focused on the historical factors that defined the essence of gun ownership in the area of study with emphasis on key historical watersheds of the gun problem among the Dassanetch. These watersheds include 1907 – 1913, which marked the rise of the Dassanetch. The two World Wars' periods

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[17] University of Oxford. (2003) *Small Arms Survey*. Oxford University Press. P.80-81
[18] Jan Kamenju, Singo Mwachofi and Francis Wairagu (2003) *Profiling Small Arms and Insecurity in the North Rift Region of Kenya*. Nairobi: Oakland Media Services.
[19] John Keegan (1994). *A History of Warfare*. London: Pimlico. P. 328.
[20] Mao's Tse Tung concluding speech at the 6th plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the *Selected Works* Vol. II (1939) p 224, as quoted in 'Problems of War and Strategy' online at http://art-bin.com/omao5.html accessed on 19th July 2007.

during which a considerable number of automatic weapons were issued to the Dassanetch following their participation in these wars. 1930s to late 1940s, which marked an important period of the Dassanetch resistance to British colonial policies of forceful disarmament and confinement to limited grazing zones. Towards, independence, the Dassanetch began to pay tax and this was seen as an endorsement of their Kenyan citizenship. The period after independence was marked by state repression, apparent withdrawal from the periphery and emergence of armed conflicts in Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia bringing in regional dynamics to the problem of arms as the various communities engaged in local arms racing and accessed more arms that in the long run brought about parity in gun ownership. The historical perspective is important because, as Cooper notes, the unfolding of a process over time is essential to understand the present.[21]

The Dassanetch land lies within a gun trafficking corridor that runs from Somalia to southern Ethiopia, southern Sudan and northern Uganda. Their importance in the history of arms is the menace they caused through raids because they were well armed early enough to assert their influence over their neighbours and the colonial state. They, for instance, sustained a protracted conflict with the Gabra of Marsabit, occasionally raided the Turkana and gave the colonial administration a hard time due to their gun power. As this research found out, due to unlimited access to arms, the Dassanetch had a sporting dimension to arms in which they would sell guns to their neighbours and steal them to test their prowess.

By the close of the historical parenthesis of this research in 1997, I observe that, the apparent state of neutrality the early European explorers found the Dassanetch living in with other communities is experienced again almost a century later following some sort of parity

[21] Frederick Cooper (2002) *Africa since 1940, the past of the present: New Approaches to African History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p. xi.

in gun ownership. This was occasioned by access to guns by the neighbouring communities, which helped them to reconstruct their devastated pastoral systems following decades of raids by the Dassanetch. At the moment, both Kenya and Ethiopia appear to be only primarily concerned about safeguarding their interests largely territorial and as long as these are not threatened, maintaining the traditional status quo in which the Dassanetch from both sides serve as security buffer zones will remain the general practice.

Statement of the Research Problem

The availability of small arms, attendant gun culture and subsequent insecurity among communities has been attributed to state failure. While accessibility to illegal arms by pastoralists has the potential to undermine the traditional role of the state of providing security, the apparent broad focus of research on arms proliferation in Kenya appears to have obscured details that could shed light on our understanding of the arms problem in the frontier areas. While researchers have written on issues of conflict and arms proliferation and suggested ways of removing illegal arms from illegal holders, the phenomenon of gun ownership and why it has become normal among certain communities has not been understood.[22]

The Dassanetch's contribution to understanding the problem of arms in the frontiers has been minimised by researchers. This omission loses

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[22] For example, Gebre Yohannes, Hadgu Kassaye and Ambaye Zerihun (2005). *Addressing Pastoralist Conflict in Ethiopia: The case of the Kuraz and Hamer Sub-Districts of South Omo Zone.* London: Saferworld. Kurimoto Eiti and Simon Simonse. (1998) *Conflict, Age and Power in North Eastern Kenya: Age Systems in Transition.* Oxford: James Carrey. Kennedy Mkutu (2003), *Pastoral Conflict and Small Arms: The Kenya-Uganda Border Region.* London: Saferworld. Farah Mohamed (1993) *From Ethnic Response to Clan Identity: A Study of State Penetration among the Somali Nomadic Pastoral Society of North Eastern Kenya.* Uppsala. Hussein Tadicha (2006) 'Historical and Current Perspectives on Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Northern Kenya' MA Thesis, Department of International Environment and Development Studies - University of Life Sciences, Norway. Joshia Osamba 'The Sociology of Insecurity: Cattle Rustling and Banditry in North-Western Kenya.' *Africa Journal in Conflict Resolution* - No. 2/2000 http://www.accord.org.za/web.nsf/. John Galaty et al. (eds.) 1980. *The future of pastoral peoples.* Nairobi: IDRC.

the regional context of the Dassanetch, which could provide insights into understanding the evolution of gun culture. Furthermore, it has not been demonstrated how communities sustain gun acquisition and how for instance, they keep up to date with the modernisation of guns. By the same token, while arms are the tools that perpetuate conflict, they have been overshadowed by analyses based on ethnic relations in conflicts.

The contribution of the Dassanetch to the history and politics of arms in Kenya has not been fully utilised to unravel the problem of illegal gun ownership. For example, while historians have written a lot on arms trade in East Africa, they have given little attention to the contribution of specific communities to the problem of illegal arms in the frontier areas. To further compound this limitation, available historical analysis of arms is characterised by some inconsistencies. For example, in illustrating the patterns and dynamics of arms flow in Kenya, researchers[23] suggest that the Turkana were the first to access guns through ivory trade. However, Dassanetch's earlier contacts with the European travellers casts a shadow of doubt over this suggestion. Thus, the answer to the question who pioneered in accessing firearms remains an issue of conjecture. This study addresses this historical doubt by bringing the Dassanetch's historical contribution to the evolution of arms problem in the frontiers to the fore.

The absence of the state control over certain areas of its jurisdiction is a subject that has been broadly studied by some scholars who have tried to explain the effectiveness or lack of it of the state in performing its traditional roles such as the provision of security.[24] The question as

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[23] Jan Kamenju, Francis Wairagu and Singo Mwachofi. (2003) *Terrorised Citizens: Profiling Small Arms and Light Weapons in the North Rift Region.* Nairobi: Oakland Media Services.

[24] For example Gebre-Wold Kiflemariam, (2002). "Understanding the Demand for Small Arms in the Horn of Africa" in the BICC Brief 23 *Small Arms in the Horn of Africa: Challenges and Perspectives.* Bonn International Centre for Conversion. Crawford Young. (2004), 'The end of the post-colonial state in Africa? Reflections on changing African political dynamics.' *African Affairs* 103, 23-49 – Royal African Society.

to whether there is a relationship between the withdrawal of the state from the periphery, insecurity and the rise of a gun culture among the Dassanetch is what this research sought to address. It has always been speculated that the absence of the state in the Dassanetch frontier areas has led to instability. Similarly, there has not been clarity about the possibility of a gun culture consequently mushrooming and flourishing due to state withdrawal.

This research was prompted by the fact that most studies on arms tend to focus on wider geographical areas like North Rift, Northern Frontier District, and Karamoja. [25] As a result, the complexity and ambiguity of frontier areas has only largely been alluded to and therefore not thoroughly investigated thereby minimising an important variable in research related to arms availability and proliferation.

A review of literature on the problem of gun ownership identified various questions that remain persistently unanswered. For example, how do communities sustain gun-acquisition? Why do states tend to withdraw from armed communities? Have the Dassanetch got any contribution to understanding the history and dynamics of arms in Kenya? If yes, why have researchers not considered them as an important actor when mapping out arms proliferation? The complexity and ambiguity of borders and frontiers have only largely been hinted to. Therefore, this research primarily focused on finding out how the ambiguity of borders and frontiers and arms availability create conditions of state 'withdrawal' from armed groups. To address these, the research sought answers to the following key questions:

1. How do communities sustain gun acquisition?

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[25] For example Jan Kamenju, Francis Wairagu and Singo Mwachofi (2003) *Profiling Small Arms and Insecurity in the North Rift Region of Kenya.* Nairobi: Oakland Media Services. Kennedy Mkutu (2003) *Pastoral Conflict and Small Arms: The Kenya-Uganda Border Region.* London: Saferworld. Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young 'Pastoral Politics in the northeast periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent.' *The Journal of Modern African Studies.* 38 (3) (2000) pp. 407 – 429). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2. What is the relationship between gun acquisition and state impenetrability in the frontiers?
3. How does the ambiguity of borders and frontiers contribute to arms availability?

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the reasons behind gun ownership and factors contributing to sustainability of this among the Dassanetch
2. To investigate the extent of state penetration and establish its link to gun ownership among the Dassanetch
3. To establish the link between frontiers' ambiguities and availability of guns among the Dassanetch.

Research Hypotheses

The outcome of the research revealed that not all the original hypotheses fully stood as there were some missing links as explained below.

1. The acquisition of guns among the Dassanetch is a function of insecurity and state withdrawal from the frontiers.
2. The post-colonial state's impenetrability in the area has nurtured a culture of gun ownership.
3. The access to and availability of arms in the Dassanetch frontiers is a function of the ambiguity of the borders and frontiers.

Justification of the Study

Most small arms studies in my view have not focused on the Dassanetch frontiers to establish the extent of Dassanetch access to arms yet they occupy a regional context with vast frontiers that inform arms flow across borders as a result of limited presence of the state and lack of assertiveness by the same to address the issue of illegal arms. The fact that researchers have ignored the community provided a strong basis for this study.

This study demonstrates the implication of state 'withdrawal' and how the gun has shaped relationships between pastoralists and the state and therefore generates knowledge and awareness of the same to fill in the gap in the understanding of the subject. Due to its historical nature, the study contributes immensely in understanding the history of arms among pastoralists of Northern Kenya. Although it is not a policy research, its utility lies in informing interventions in Kenya aimed at finding long- term solutions to the problem of illegal guns.

This study focused on key historical watersheds of the colonial and post-colonial periods with a historical parenthesis defined from 1909 which marks a period of Dassanetch's rising access to firearms to 1997, the year of the infamous Kokai massacre in which the Dassanetch from Kenya and Ethiopia massacred over 90 people mainly the Gabra and over 10 police officers in a fora (grazing zone) near Kobi Fora. Around this time there appears to have been a balance in arms ownership among pastoral communities in the frontiers due to their continued access to weapons from countries in conflict like Uganda, Sudan and Ethiopia thereby creating some form of 'local arms parity'.

Scope and Limitations

The research was conducted in Illeret and North Horr locations of Marsabit District as well as Southern Ethiopia's Omo River Delta where the Dassanetch are found. The Southern Ethiopia region referred to here means the area neighbouring Illeret location but not the whole of Southern Ethiopia. The study covers the period 1909 – 1997.

A number of limitations affected the research. Firstly, I had limited financial resources required to cover the vast areas travelling from Nairobi. Secondly, there was insecurity in the areas due to the post-election violence. This delayed field visits. Thirdly, the massive distances covered to access the areas due to their geographical location in the periphery of the District Head Quarters in Marsabit were intimidating. Finally, language barrier necessitated the use of a translator, which meant added cost. The challenges related to post-election violence could not be addressed and the research had to be delayed until there was calm in the area. The challenge of distance was addressed by working with local partners and provincial administration who provided transport as they conducted their field visits. By conducting field interviews within the programmes of the organisation I work with, the problem of finances was largely solved.

Literature review

Research on arms has taken various perspectives. There are researchers who focus purely on the motivations behind gun culture and make analysis at individual level focusing on individual security or self-defence and protection of property.[26] Others take a statist approach to the problem and see the inability of the state to exercise its authority over particular areas of its jurisdiction as the main cause of the emergent gun culture.[27] Researchers have also examined the historical, socio-cultural and economic aspects related to the problem of arms. The review of literature for this study points out historical gaps, highlights and identifies the weaknesses of social cultural and economic arguments. It also examines the relevance of state-centric approach to the problem of arms and singles out the gaps that need to be addressed within the existing pool of literature.

Before colonialism, pastoralists in the northern frontiers had been accustomed to the independence and freedom of openly carrying firearms they had for many decades obtained from Ethiopian gunrunners and Arab and Swahili slave traders, poachers and merchants from the East African coast.[28] There were sprawling gun markets in Maji, south-western Ethiopia, before the partition of Africa by west European countries to the extent that ammunition was used as

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[26] For example, Gebre Yohannes, Hadgu Kassaye and Ambaye Zerihun (2005). *Addressing Pastoralist Conflict in Ethiopia: The case of the Kuraz and Hamer Sub-Districts of South Omo Zone.* London: Saferworld. Kurimoto, E. and Simonse, S. (1998) *Conflict, Age and Power in North Eastern Kenya: Age Systems in Transition.* Oxford: James Carrey. Mkutu (2003), *Pastoral Conflict and Small Arms: The Kenya-Uganda Border Region.* London: Saferworld. Farah Mohamed (1993) *From Ethnic Response to Clan Identity: A Study of State Penetration among the Somali Nomadic Pastoral Society of North Eastern Kenya.* Uppsala.

[27] For example Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young. 'Pastoral Politics in the northeast periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent.' *The Journal of Modern African Studies.* 38 (3) (2000) pp. 407 – 429). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[28] The Earl of Lytton, (1966) *The stolen desert.* London: MacDonald Press and Henry Darley. (1926) *Slaves and ivory.* London: H.F. & G Witherby quoted in Nene Mburu 'The Proliferation of Guns and Rustling in Karamoja and Turkana Districts: the Case for Appropriate Disarmament Strategies'Online *Nordic Journal of African Studies* accessed on 23/06/2007.

local currency. In the first half of 1888, the East African coast had been the conduit for as many as 37,441 assorted firearms, mainly Breech-loaders and Winchester rifles.[29] While historians have written a lot on the problem of arms, the contribution of the Dassanetch has not received adequate attention.

Nene Mburu alludes to the contribution of the Dassanetch to the problem of arms in Kenyan frontiers when he explains that "their lack of stringent administrative control from Ethiopia [and Kenya] has increased their liberty to use firearms." He notes that "whereas the Turkana remain the most populous community in northern part of Kenya; their lack of adequate firepower has prevented them from regaining their pre-colonial military dominance or achieving some military parity with the Dassanetch."[30] Nene underlines the importance of the Dassanetch in understanding the problem of arms in the frontiers but his main concern is the military decline of the Turkana and he does not tell us more about the Dassanetch.

Two closely related, if not similar concepts, are discernible as far as the motivation for gun ownership is concerned. These are economic investment and capital accumulation. Mkutu explains that pastoral communities seem to have been arming for economic investment.[31] Mkutu's argument is similar to Abdurahman who argues that automatic weapons can be seen as a new means of capital accumulation contributing to the ongoing process of economic differentiation between pastoralists. He suggests that inter-group interactions are determined by the ready availability of small arms that lead to escalation of conflict in pastoral areas.[32] The dividing line between these two concepts is

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[29] Raymond Wendell Beachey, (1962) .'The Arms Trade in East Africa in the late Nineteenth Century' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. III, No. 3, pp. 453.
[30] Nene Mburu. (2001) 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000' *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): 148-162
[31] Kennedy Mkutu (2003). *Pastoral conflict and small arms: The Kenya-Uganda Border Region.* London: Saferworld. P.13.
[32] Ame Abdurahman. (April 2006) "Cross-border livestock Trade and Small Arms and Conflict in Pastoral Areas of the Horn of Africa: Case Study from Southern Ethiopia and Northern Kenya" A paper to IASCP's Eleventh Biennial Conference p.7.

very thin because if guns are acquired as means of economic investment, the end is capital accumulation. While these arguments explain partially why communities arm themselves, the emphasis on the economic dimension is not necessarily applicable to all the communities across the board. Communities may not primarily arm themselves for economic reasons. It would appear that most communities arm themselves for their security. Communities could also arm themselves to contain or resist state repression or for other reasons. For example, the Dassanetch would sell guns to the Turkana and steal them to test the military prowess of their warriors thereby introducing a sport dimension to the politics of guns.[33]

Gun ownership has been linked to cultural practices of certain communities. With the historical transformation of conflicts, arguements have been advanced that allude to conflict or war as part of culture. Scholars like John Keegan argue that "in the history of humanity, war seems to have been very fashionable from the Stone Age to the present" and that 'among many other things it maybe the perpetuation of culture by its own means.'[34] Keegan's work emphasises more on the history of warfare than arms. His observation triggers us to ask ourselves if guns, the most preferred tools in armed conflict are some of the means of perpetuating violence especially because the emergence of gun culture appears to have made it common business for pastoralist communities to own firearms, carry them openly and use them whenever need arises. If war can be viewed as a perpetuation of culture, can gun ownership itself be seen as perpetuation of another culture as well? What can be said about owning a gun as a way of life (a culture) and a gun as a means of sustaining violence? Is there evidence to support this?

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[33] Nene Mburu. (2001) 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000' *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): 148-162

[34] John Keegan (1994). *A History of Warfare.* P. 46.

Gebre Yohannes, Hadgu Kassaye and Ambaye Zerihun have argued that pastoralists feel profoundly humiliated if an attack on them is not revenged. Retaliatory acts receive positive reactions and are often rewarded by the community. The feeling of humiliation and the subsequent retaliatory measures are usually perceived as collective responsibilities of the entire ethnic group concerned. The ethnic groups reward acts of killing and looting and honour the war actors and heroes.[35] What these researchers fail to tell us is how these cultural dimensions influence communities to acquire firearms. Instead, they focus on how these cultural aspects fuel conflicts.

One of the studies that have sought to adopt a social perspective to gun ownership is by Mirzeler and Crawford who analyse the politics of pastoralists in northeast Uganda periphery.[36] They focus on AK-47 as a change agent. The duo discusses the changing dynamics of the relationships between the pastoralists and successive state formations which have sought to assert authority over them. They argue that although low intensity violence, above all revolving around cattle raiding, has been an enduring element in the region, the influx of automatic weaponry has transformed its nature, intensified its human cost and transformed a range of societal relationships. They also demonstrate how from a cultural point of view, AK-47s transformed the warriors' ethos and changed the ethics and strategies of the traditional form of warfare waged by the spears. The researchers argue that the large-scale infusion of AK-47s after 1979, introduced a new dimension; favouring the emergence of warlords and the decline of the elders' authority.[37] They point out that this caused disrespect for the will and power of the elders in favour of the will and power of weapons. However, by apportioning the largest blame to the warriors, the

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[35] Gebre Yohannes, Hadgu Kassaye and Ambaye Zerihun. *Addressing Pastoralist Conflict in Ethiopia: The case of the Kuraz and Hamer Sub-Districts of South Omo Zone.* 2005, London: Saferworld.

[36] Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young. 'Pastoral Politics in the northeast periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent.' *The Journal of Modern African Studies.* 38 (3) (2000) pp. 407 – 429.

[37] Ibid. p. 420.

researchers fail to tell us if the elders themselves find guns important or not. They also give little attention to the potential role of elders in sanctioning gun acquisition and use and if this contributes to the decline of a traditional authority they are supposed to preside over.

Mirzeler and Crawford's paradigm of 'the gun as a change agent' is relevant to this research. There are a number of related issues in their thesis that this research has further investigated. Firstly, like the Karamoja region they studied, in the Dassanetch frontier, limited presence of the communities in the central sites of power or economy, and the lack of resource magnets in the area combine to render the place isolated from the rest of the country. However, the two areas are different in the sense that Uganda as opposed to Kenya is a highly militarised society that has the military playing policing roles. In addition, unlike the Karimojong, the Dassanetch have maintained their corporate solidarity in the last century having not experienced a territorial split or disruption of their military leadership by the state. This makes the case unique as Mirzeler and Crawford's explanations of the arms phenomenon do not apply to all pastoral contexts.

Secondly, two similar sources inform the arms flow in both Uganda and Kenya that provide an important chain of arms flow. The sudden fall of Idi Amin Dada's regime at the beginning of 1979 saw his units flee the Moroto Garrison leaving the well-stocked armoury undefended, as well as small one in Kotido. The Karimojong looted the arsenal and acquired for the first time a significant supply of automatic weapons and ammunition. Consequently, it has been demonstrated that some of the arms from Moroto barracks found their way to Kenya through the Turkana who sold the same to neighbouring communities for commercial gains.[38] Throughout their discussion, Mirzeler and Crawford hint to the ambiguity of borders in the region as they highlight

[38] Jan Kamenju, Francis Wairagu and Singo Mwachofi (2003) *Profiling Small Arms and Insecurity in the North Rift Region of Kenya.* Nairobi: Security Research and Information Centre, Oakland Media Services.

the flow of arms from Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia but do not advance this argument further. Their study is also limited in telling us more about the history of arms in specific terms. For instance, they don't demonstrate to historians a clear evolution of arms technology in terms of the types of weapons used before the acquisition of modern AK-47 rifles. The findings of this research clearly illustrate the historical phases of arms acquisition by the Dassanetch over more than half a century.

In an argument related to Mirzeler and Crawford's allusion to the issue of ambiguities of regional frontiers and borders, Nene Mburu leaves the issue hanging when he writes:

> Better than any regional country today, Uganda has the combat competence, logistics, and motivation to effectively police its northeastern frontier with the Pokot and Turkana of Kenya as well as the Toposa of Sudan. However, Ugandan troops could feel constrained because the authorities in Khartoum will not co-operate and will only suspect them of propping-up the SPLA. Kenya suffers similar frustration as Dassanetch raiders always avoid punishment by withdrawing deeper into Ethiopia where Sudan will not bother them and Kenyan patrols cannot pursue them without violating Ethiopia's sovereignty.[39]

Many other scholars have hinted at the complexities of Kenyan borders and frontiers but have not provided further explanations on how they relate to the problem of illegal arms. For instance, Knighton argues that the only livelihood option for most Karamojong is to maintain the herds and this cannot be done without arms to protect them from potential raiders on or inside the long Kenyan border.[40] Mkutu talks about the complexities of 'trans-national criminal networks' and inadequate policing by the state along the borders that facilitate local arms race.[41]

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[39] Nene Mburu. 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000 *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): 148-162 (2001)

[40] Ben Knighton. "The State as raider among the Karamojong: 'Where there are no Guns, they use the threat of Guns'. *African Journal of the International African Institute. Africa 73(3)2003 p.428.*

[41] Kennedy Mkutu (2001). *Pastoralism and conflict in the Horn of Africa.* London: Africa Peace Forum, Saferworld and University of Bradford pp ii and vii.

In another argument, the Ploughshares Monitor Report, states that due to porous and expansive borders, weak governments and ineffectual national security systems, firearms are difficult to control. For instance, among cross-border pastoral communities, arms are acquired overtly for security purposes but become facilitating instruments in traditional practices of livestock raiding.[42] Like Mirzeler and Crawford[43] the Ploughshares Monitor report only mentions about porous and expansive borders and gives a general example of pastoralists but does not advance the argument to demonstrate how these relate to the problem of proliferation of illegal arms. Is it just a question of their porosity and expansiveness or are there other factors like the multiethnic nature of the frontiers?

Further, the magnitude of the frontier problems is alluded to by scholars who look at the African leadership in the post-independence era that failed to correct the ills of the colonial state responsible for haphazardly drawing the African borders. The ambiguity of the regional frontiers and borders is very evident in their arguments and appears to be a key variable that cannot be minimised yet it has not been well advanced. For instance, Abdel-Fatau links the problem of illegal firearms to the collapse of the post-independence state due to the failure of the first generation African leadership to rise above the arbitrarily imposed colonial borders and to transform inherited structures to meet popular aspirations for human security and peaceful transfer of power.[44] Jeffrey Herbst argues that "the traditional view of African boundaries is that they are a critical weakness of African states because they have remained unchanged despite the fact that the original colonial demarcations were done in a hurried manner that often

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[42] Ploughshares (2002) *Ploughshares Monitor.* www.ploughshares/org. Access date - March 2007.
[43] Mustafa Mirzeler and Crawford Young. 'Pastoral Politics in the northeast periphery in Uganda: AK-47 as change agent.' *The Journal of Modern African Studies.* 38 (3) (2000) pp. 407 – 429). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[44] Abdel Fatau Musa (July 2001). "Africa, the Political Economy of Small Arms and Conflict" in DPMN bulletin *Development Policy Management in Sub-Saharan Africa, Conflicts in Africa: Resolution, Management and Peace Building.* Vol. VIII No. 1

did not account for local political, sociological, economic, or ethnic factors"[45] and "were not encouraging frameworks of unified, legitimate and capable states", adds Jackson and Roseburg.[46] Unfortunately, laments Davidson those who recognised that the colonial partition of Africa inserted a framework of purely artificial and often positively harmful frontiers did not come to the fore.[47]

Some state-focused arguments have been advanced on why communities arm themselves and why the problem of arms is unending. While these arguments are very enriching to the subject, their generality have been their main limitation. These arguments are mainly founded on the need for alternative means of seeking individual and collective security as a result of state failure to provide it. This is seen as a fundamental right morally endorsed by international law.[48] Consequently, various scholars have attempted to offer explanations concerning the state's failure to assert and exercise authority over its territory without facing competition from armed groups, which challenge its authority.[49] Central to some of their arguments is the state's role of providing security to communities.[50] Azarya sums up the disconnect between the state and communities when he illustrates the potential social distance between the two in his argument that "when a state action seems restrictive or oppressive rather than rewarding, certain groups may attempt to organise their life beyond, or at the margin of the state's influence. They may try to keep their distance or disengage themselves from the state."[51] Azar Edward hypothesises that:

> "... the source of protracted social conflict is the denial of those elements required in the development of all peoples and

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[45] Jefferey Herbst. (2000) *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control.* Princeton: Princeton University Press. P. 25.
[46] Robert Jackson and Carl Roseburg (1995) quoted in Herbst (2000) p.25
[47] Basil Davidson (1992) quoted in Herbst (2000) p. 25.
[48] For example the UN *Universal declaration of Human Rights of December 10 1948.*
[49] See for example Taya Weiss (2003), Crawford Young (2004: 25), Frderick Cooper (2002: 156), Ayoob Mohammed (1997: 38) and Carl Rosberg (1982:17).
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] Victor Azarya. (1996). *Nomads and the State in Africa: The Political Roots of Marginality.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

> societies, and whose pursuit is a compelling need in all. These are security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity, and effective participation in the processes that determine conditions of security and identity and other such developmental requirements.[52]

Kurimoto and Simonse point out that in northern Kenya, one notices a classical retreat of the state and the superficiality of, first its existence and second, its lack of penetration. In this light, violent and sometimes indiscriminate interventions by the security forces in the form of recovery of firearms or livestock appear very much as primarily directed towards re-establishing the state's unique right to violence and only secondarily towards conflict resolution.[53] While this argument seems to indicate state repression, the two researchers do not demonstrate how communities respond to this either through acquisition of arms or non-cooperation with the state. Weiss could have offered an answer to this when she argues, "when the state fails to consolidate political power, insecurity drives competing groups' demands to acquire and use weapons," but in citing communities in Marsabit, she fails to tell us more about which communities in the district are isolated and how, to back her arguments. She leaves us wondering if she refers to the main antagonists – Gabra and Borana - in Marsabit conflicts. If this is the case, the communities in the periphery of the district appear not to feature in her argument.[54]

Crawford Young contends that the dramatic erosion of stateness itself in many cases in the Weberian sense of the routine capacity to exercise ultimate authority within the territorial domain of sovereignty opens space for a multitude of actors, which operate with varying

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[52] Edward Azar. 'Protracted international conflicts: Ten propositions' in Edward Azar and John Burton (eds) (1986). *International conflict resolution: Theory and practice.* London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO. pp. 147-148.

[53] Eisei Kurimoto and Simon Simonse (1998) *Conflict, Age and Power in North Eastern Kenya: Age Systems in Transition.* Oxford: James Carrey.

[54] Taya Weiss (2003). 'A Demand-Side Approach to Fighting Small Arms Proliferation.' *African Security Review* Vol 12 No 2, Pretoria: Institute of Security Studies.

degree of autonomy interacting with state agents.[55] Similarly, Max Weber quoted in Jackson and Rosberg argues that most Sub-Saharan states have lacked empirical statehood that requires centralised control of the means of force and an ability to exercise control of a territory.[56] Mohammed sees consolidation of the territorial and demographic domain under a political authority, maintenance of law and order in the territory and routine administration that deepens the state's penetration of the society as being at the core of state making.[57]

Tilly notes that the obsession with regime security and the need to suppress populations' aspirations for economic well-being and democratic protection led to the conversion of the typical post-colonial state into a security racket.[58] These arguments would appear to be true of mostly militarised and authoritarian states in Africa with hitherto little democratic space. While post-colonial Kenyan state was concerned with the security of the regime and was also largely authoritarian, the introduction of democratic space in the country does not appear to have changed the state of affairs in the periphery.

Kiflemariam contends that the problem of arms in the Horn of Africa has to be understood in the context of the reality of the state's presence in the region. According to many ethnic groups, national law cannot be secured [sic] by local police or other armed forces in rural and isolated areas. Many people believe that the only way they can

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[55] Crawford Young, 'The end of the post-colonial state in Africa? Reflections on changing African political dynamics.' *African Affairs* (2004), 103, 23-49 – Royal African Society.
[56] Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg (1982) 'Why Africa's Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood.' *World Politics* 3 (15): 1-24.
[57] Ayoob Mohammed. 'State Making, State Breaking and State Failure' in Chester Crocker, Fen Osla Hampson with Pamela Aall (1997): *Managing Global Chaos: Sources of and Responses to International Conflict.* Washington DC: United States Institute for Peace (USIP).
[58] Charles Tilly (1985) "War Making and State Making as Organised Crime" in Peter Evans, Rueschemeyer, D and T, Skocpol (eds) *Bringing the State Back In.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 169-186.

avoid disaster and fend off attack is by arming themselves.[59] The perceived inability of the law enforcement agencies to provide security in part of the country is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of demand for arms in the region. The root causes of the demand for small arms, he contends are poverty and disparity and selective arming of ethnic groups. These two have brought about marginalisation and a sense of community ownership of security sending an unambiguous signal to communities that they should take care of their own security.[60]

Overall, ineffectiveness of the state in performing its traditional roles can be seen from Cooper's perspective when he points out that "most of the African states are governed by institutions familiar to those in the west and which do not fit the realities within their borders."[61] While these statist arguments are important in pointing out the limitations of the African state, they have one limitation in common; they are largely general and disparate and necessitate development of cases for application to demonstrate how effective the state is or otherwise in performing its traditional roles. This is because these arguments cannot be considered to apply universally to all cases across the board in Africa as different countries have gone through different historical experiences of state formation.

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[59] Gebre-Wold Kiflemariam "Understanding the Demand for Small Arms in the Horn of Africa" in the BICC Brief 23 (2002) *Small Arms in the Horn of Africa: Challenges and Perspectives.* Bonn International Centre for Conversion.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] Frederick Cooper. (2002) *Africa since 1940, the past of the present: New Approaches to African History.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 4.

Theoretical Framework

This research is conceptualised primarily within the security/insecurity dilemma theory.[62] This concept derives from the realist tradition of international relations and is applied to the special conditions that arise when proximate groups of people suddenly find themselves nearly responsible for their own security. According to Barry Posen, a group suddenly compelled to provide its own protection must ask the following questions about any neighbouring group: Is it a threat? How much of a threat? Will the threat diminish or grow over time? Is there anything that must be done immediately? The answers to these influence chances of conflict.[63] In the broadest sense of the concept, the security dilemma is understood to follow axiomatically from anarchy. Under anarchy, states are dependent upon self-help for their security and must therefore maintain and perhaps expand their military capabilities. This can threaten others who react by maintaining and expanding their capabilities, creating a spiral of arms-racing and hostility. The dilemma follows from the inability of the two sides to observe each other's intentions directly. If each party knew the other was arming, strictly for defensive purposes, the potential spiral would be cut short. But because actors cannot know the intensions of others with certainty, what one does to enhance one's own security causes reactions that in the end can make one less secure and this is the security dilemma.[64]

When applied to ethnic relations in ethnic conflicts, the argument is that, intense ethnic conflicts are caused by collective fears of the future. These arise when states lose their ability to arbitrate between groups or provide credible guarantee of protection for groups. Under this condition, which Barry Posen refers to as 'emerging anarchy' due

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[62] Barry Posen. 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict' in Michael Brown, (1993) *Ethnic Conflict and International Security*. Pp 103 -124. London: The MIT Press.
[63] *Ibid.*
[64] *Ibid.*

to 'disappearance of sovereigns', physical security becomes of paramount concern.[65] When central authority declines, groups become fearful for their own survival. These groups must pay attention to the first thing that states have historically addressed – the problem of security – even though many of these groups still lack many of the attributes of statehood.[66] Brian Job uses the concept insecurity dilemma and argues that weak states are confronted with an 'insecurity dilemma' within their borders. What results in such a contentious environment is better characterised as an insecurity dilemma. The consequence of the competition of the various forces in society being; less effective security for all or certain sectors of the population, less effective capacity of centralised state institutions to provide services and order, and increased vulnerability of the state and its people to influence, intervention, and control by outside actors, be they other states or communal groups.[67]

Ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs operating within groups build upon fears of insecurity and polarize society. Political memories and emotions also magnify these anxieties driving groups farther apart.[68] As groups begin to fear for their safety, dangerous and difficult to resolve strategic dilemmas arise that contain within them the potential for tremendous violence. Communities invest in and prepare for violence and thereby make actual violence possible. These investments come in form of acquisition of weapons including firearms for offensive and defensive purposes. Logically speaking, tensions created by the security dilemma, increases the demand for weapons.

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[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Brian Job. (1992). (Ed). *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States.* Lynne Rienner: Boulder Co.
[68] David Lake and Donald Rothchild. (1996) 'Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict.' In *International Security.* Vol. 21 No. 2 pp. 41-75. Harvard: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Methodology

Before commencement, a research permit was obtained from the Ministry of Education. Due to the sensitivity of the study, clearance from the Kenya Police head quarters and the Office of the President was obtained. A courtesy call to the District Officer in North Horr and the District Education Officer was made as per the requirements of the research permit. Prior arrangements were made with a contact person in Marsabit who set appropriate dates for fieldwork.

Targeted respondents included community elders, women, youth, government officials, development agencies, cattle traders and members of the community. In total, 79 respondents were interviewed individually and in focused group discussions.[69] The respondents were interviewed in their respective locations except for pastoralists with whom arrangements were made to establish the appropriate time due to their migration patterns. The fieldwork took two weeks. Respondents were selected using stratified random sampling techniques. In addition, snowball sampling was useful in identifying more respondents through the identified informants.

The research used both primary and secondary data. A review of literature as a secondary source was used for comparative purposes. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the relevant secondary data sources such as official documents, reports, journals, newspapers, and published books was undertaken. Online journals and Internet resources were used as well. The secondary data was captured using templates and was sourced from government offices, agencies working in the area of study, universities and other relevant institutions.

For primary data, the research relied on Marsabit district's colonial administration correspondences, annual and handing over reports and

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[69] See list of people interviewed in bibliography section. Some respondents sought anonymity.

notes to assemble relevant historical facts related to the problem of arms. These were obtained from the Kenya National Archives and were complemented with primary data from the field. By design, the research minimised the use of structured questionnaires and focused on informal focused discussions using interview guides to collect primary data. This was due to the sensitivity of the subject of investigation. It was felt that questionnaires could potentially hinder free participation of respondents. Some of the informal discussions where were tape-recorded for further analysis and transcription after interview sessions. This was in addition to note taking. Photography was used, as supporting evidence but only where permission was granted particularly where pastoralists were found in possession of weapons. The research also used participant observation techniques by attending inter-community peace meetings, government *barazas,* market days and other community socio-economic activities.

Data was analysed mainly qualitatively using descriptive narratives and is presented in a systematic timeline.

Chapter 2

A History of arms among the Dassanetch

One of the key characteristics of the colonial state in Africa in general and in Kenya in particular was its central and pervasive involvement in social and economic life – the result of conscious and deliberate interventions which increased steadily as the state grew from an initially simple administrative apparatus of control into an increasingly differentiated complex of institutions of social control and economic management in the post-1945 era.[70] The colonial state's approach of conquest and control in the Dassanetch frontiers had fundamental contradictions. While the British tried to 'rehabilitate' the warring Dassanetch, their continued access to arms from the Ethiopians and Italians tremendously enlarged their pastoral power that not only challenged the authority of the colonial state but also gave the Dassanetch leverage over the neighbouring communities like the Turkana whom the British systematically disarmed. This chapter takes a historical journey and traces the problem of gun ownership among the Dassanetch under the colonial state from as early as 1888 when Count Teleki, an Austrian explorer arrived among them.

What weapons were used by the Dassanetch before the advent of the firearms? When exactly did they first access and own firearms and how? What factors contributed to their access to guns? How did the colonial government approach the age-old raiding culture of the Dassanetch? What was the state of affairs towards the end of the colonial state in the Dassanetch frontiers? These questions are addressed in this chapter within a context of dominant and restrictive policies of an assertive colonial state's administration primarily focused on conquest and control, highly complex and ambiguous ethnically

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[70] Bruce Berman (1996) *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya – The Dialectics of Domination.* London: James Curry. Pp 1-9.

defined borders and frontiers, repression and attendant insecurity in the frontiers.

2.1. Historical background of arms in the Dassanetch frontiers

The problem of guns in the Northern Frontier has a long history. When small arms were introduced in Kenya at the beginning of the 19th century by European explorers, they were mainly used for hunting.[71] Small arms were apparently not subject of concern, because they posed no major problems associated with the security of persons and their property at that time. The weapons used then are today referred to as antique weapons and they included hunting and fossil gras rifles.

As early as 1902, East Africa Rifles' troops were armed with single shot rifles. These were rusted up for lack of a rifle range on which to fire. But the regiment's adversaries, the peoples of Kenya were not very warlike. They were stateless peoples without standing armies. Having only recently met Zanzibari traders, few of them had learnt the use of guns. Raiding was seen by young men as a legitimate means to acquire cattle.[72] Warriorhood was the moment to evade the elders' control by investing stolen stock in marriage. Youthful leadership paid off in later life in the ability to marry more wives, to enlist male dependants and to tend the alliances that protected trade in the products of home, pasture and field.[73]

Arms became a serious problem at the beginning of the 20th century in the face of growing resistance against the colonial state by various

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[71] Jan Kamenju. 'Combating illicit arms and landmines: A historical perspective' in Jan Kamenju and Godffrey Okoth. (2006) *Power Play and Policy in Kenya: An interdisciplinary Discourse.* Nairobi. Oakland Media Services. p. 239 – 269

[72] Jeffrey Fadiman (1976). *Mountain Warriors.* Athens: Ohio University Centre for International Studies.

[73] John Lonsdale, "The Conquest State of Kenya – 1895 – 1905" in Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale (1992) *Unhappy Valley – Conflict in Kenya and Africa – Books One and Two.* London: James Curry. p 21.

ethnic groups. At the time, the territory now known as Kenya had no regulations controlling the ownership and use of firearms. It was during the World War I (WWI) that Africans were on a large scale introduced to firearms when they were engaged as hired soldiers to fight in the war. The post-WWI period was marked by a clear focus by the colonial administration on the problem of arms, which were left in the hands of the hired African soldiers after the war. This period is characterised by thorough and periodic intelligence reports concerning civilian possession of arms.[74]

The Dassanetch from Abyssinia (present day Ethiopia) and Kenya were among the first communities to be armed. When Count Teleki, an Austrian explorer arrived among the Dassanetch in 1888, he learnt that they lived on both sides of Omo River, the greatest part on the western bank. He noticed that they mainly had weapons of inferior type consisting of spears, bows and arrows, a shield made of a kind of wicker-work, more rarely of a buffalo hide and a pretty looking club with a goat-skin cover. The arrow-head was exceptionally heavy compared with arrow heads of other Kenyan communities like the Akamba. The iron-head arrows were obtained from their neighbours Nkamar or Hamar as the Dassanetch did not manufacture their own metal instruments. The spear blades were covered with a small leather sheath and it was the custom to carry them pointing downwards in peacetime whilst holding them up was significant of hostile intentions. At that time, the Dassanetch were not considered more war-like than any other of the surrounding ethnic groups.[75] They were fairly powerful and able to hold their own with other ethnic groups around the North of Lake Rudolf (Turkana) and along the Omo River. No better but no worse armed than others, they lived in a state of armed neutrality with their neighbours.[76]

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[74] These reports are mainly in form of hand over notes of Marsabit districts in the Kenya National Archives, which provide part of primary data for this research.
[75] KNA, PC/NFD/4/1-6 (1932) "A Short History of the Gelluba Border East of Lake Rudolf from April 1888 – June 1932 by J. K. Thorpe."
[76] Ibid

The publication of VoHÖhnel and Count Teleki book titled *Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stephanie* in 1892 encouraged rumours that the region contained Africa's rich resources of ivory. This, combined with rivalry between Great Britain and Ethiopia over their spheres of influence, brought travelers, hunters and military expeditions to the area from 1894 onwards.[77] These early contacts between the Dassanetch and the European colonialists and explorers marked the beginning of a process that systematically contributed to the social political influence of the Dassanetch and other neighbouring communities on the politics of arms in the frontiers. Access to guns meant enlarged pastoral power and influence and increased opportunities to accumulate capital in form of cattle. Lack of access to guns meant declined influence and subjugation. The early travelers and explorers brought guns with them and often times employed and armed community militia from among the indigenous communities. Similarly, the Abyssinian merchants competed with Swahili traders coming from the East African Coast and both trained and armed elements of the Turkana, Dassanetch, and Karimojong to protect ivory caravans moving through the Karamoja region in Uganda from their commercial rivals and local populations that might have attacked them. These armed local militias were quite sizable and, in some cases, were deemed to pose a threat to the British who in 1911 sent military expeditions to defuse the tension caused by their presence on the border of Turkanaland, Sudan and Ethiopia.[78]

One of the communities that benefited from the introduction of arms in the frontiers was the Dassanetch. Their land was formally included in Ethiopia by the Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of 1907, which demarcated the borders between Ethiopia and British East Africa Protectorate. At the

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[77] Uri Almagor (1977) *Pastoral partners affinity and bond partnership among the Dassanetch of southwest Ethiopia*. Manchester: University of Manchester p. 4.
[78] Barber, James. 1969. Imperial frontier: A study of relations between the British and the pastoral tribes of northeast Uganda. East African Publishing House quoted in Darlington Akabwai and Priscillar Ateyo (2007) *The Scramble for Cattle, Power and Guns in Karamoja*. Boston: Feinstein International Center pp. 12.

close of the 19th century the equilibrium of the area in which the Dassanetch lived in a state of neutrality with their neighbours - for they had not armed themselves enough to destabilise the area - was rudely upset by the coming of the Ethiopians in the Dassanetch land. The Dassanetch had of necessity thrown in their lot with the Ethiopians and by assisting them in raiding others gradually amassed wealth and arms and purchased more guns from the Ethiopians with the looted stock they began to accumulate through the raids.[79] Historically, raiding, killing and fulfilment of rites of passage particularly marriage have been deeply entrenched and form the centrality of gun ownership among the Dassanetch. These practices have shaped the history of Dassanetch relations with their neighbours.

By 1909, there were Ethiopian posts with a total strength of about 40 troops along the border. Around this time, the Dassanetch acquired more arms from traders and Ethiopia army deserters.[80] Meanwhile, the British colonialists were getting concerned about armed communities along the frontiers who could potentially undermine the 'civilising mission' of the colonial state. To address these concerns, the British employed the so-called prefectural governors who had at their disposal immense powers related to decision-making on security matters. Prefectural governors were the principal field agents of the concentration of centralized state's power exercising primary responsibilities for the collection of taxes, the protection of property, the stimulation of production and trade, and the maintenance of public order. Stationed in all of the outlying regions of the national territory, they were expected to be skilled in their exercise of power using force if necessary and to literally 'hold the line' for the regime. Thus, the prefects represented the uniformity and consistency of statutory law and the commitment of the central state to locate, enumerate and tax

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[79] KNA, PC/NFD/4/1-6 (1932) "A Short History of the Gelluba Border East of Lake Rudolf from April 1888 – June 1932 by J. K. Thorpe."

[80] Uri Almagor (1977) *Pastoral partners affinity and bond partnership among the Dassanetch of southwest Ethiopia.* Manchester: University of Manchester p. 6.

all subjects of the realm and extract labour and military service from them. [81]

Thus, the British field agents began disarming the Kenyan communities including the Boran and Turkana who were perceived to undermine the British 'civilising mission'. The Dassanetch were not disarmed because of lack of clarity over who between Italy and Britain should control them yet they were living on both sides of the frontier. This left them militarily superior to their hostile neighbours to the south. The Dassanetch have a rich oral tradition depicting this period as one replica of successes that included their acquisition of arms. This was clearly reflected by a whole series of successful campaigns and retaliations against the Boran, the Rendille and the Turkana.[82]

The introduction of firearms radically changed the pattern of inter-tribal warfare and raids. The number of casualties rose, livestock was looted in large numbers and small rifle-armed parties could and frequently did carry out massacres in isolated villages. In particular, the introduction of firearms catapulted what had been mere local clashes into serious threats to large sections of neighbouring communities.[83] The first independent raid by the Dassanetch was on the Rendille in 1913 when they penetrated Samburu near Kulal, stole livestock and killed a few herders. The success of this raid gave the Dassanetch confidence that they could advance from the frontiers to the interior of Kenya and raid neighbouring communities. The Dassanetch became so powerful and gained an ascendancy over the more numerous but less armed Turkana, Rendille and Samburu. These ethnic groups maintained their integrity by pushing southwards with the advent of the Dassanetch but lost the chance of obtaining arms in return for 'very adequate British

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[81] Bruce Berman (1996) *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya – The Dialectics of Domination.* London: James Curry. Pp 74.
[82] Claudia Carr (1977) *Pastoralism in crisis: the Dassanetch and ther Ethiopian lands.* Illinois: University of Chicago. Pp 11-12
[83] Uri Almagor (1977) *Pastoral partners affinity and bond partnership among the Dassanetch of south-west Ethiopia.* Manchester: University of Manchester p. 6.

protection'. When the first raid was successfully executed in 1913, the Dassanetch probably numbered 2000 – 3000 souls.[84]

The outbreak of the World War I in 1914 brought a new dimension in the politics of arms in the frontiers. With Britain facing Italy, the Italians issued rifles to the Ethiopian Dassanetch who were encouraged to attack communities within the British territory primarily to undermine British war efforts. This added to the already existing arms held by the community. The Dassanetch also acquired magazine rifles from the Italians.[85] This development brought an administrative dilemma to the British. First, the British did not like the idea of communities arming themselves. Instead, they promoted the principle of 'protection'. Secondly, the British had no firm control over the Dassanetch due to their tri-territorial status as they were found in Sudan, Kenya and Ethiopia. In essence therefore, while the pastoral power of the 'protected' communities namely; the Gabra and the Turkana in Kenya decreased under the British control policies, that of the Dassanetch continued to increase exponentially. Consequently, with the acquisition of more guns, the Dassanetch's belligerence evidently increased in the 1920s. This period 1920s - 1930s was marked by a large and highly significant war between the Dassanetch and the Turkana with the Dassanetch having the upper hand. Following these conquests, the Dassanetch expanded their territories considerably.[86] Warriors armed with rifles became so powerful that they dominated the military arena. In 1925, for example, tired with constant raids by the Dassanetch, the DC Marsabit proceeded to the frontiers with a King African Rifles force and raided the Dassanetch killing forty of them. Seven thousand goats, two hundred head of cattle, a hundred camels and twenty donkeys

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[84] KNA, PC/NFD/4/1-6 (1932) "A Short History of the Gelluba Border East of Lake Rudolf from April 1888 – June 1932 by J. K. Thorpe."

[85] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: and "The Merille/Gelluba 1932.," Kenya National Archives – PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[86] Claudia Carr (1977) *Pastoralism in crisis: the Dassanetch and the Ethiopian lands.* Illinois: University of Chicago p.12

were taken and handed over to the Gabra as compensation for their past losses occasioned by Dassanetch raids. By taking this approach, the colonial state was engaging itself in a reconstruction of the pastoral systems of the 'British-protected' Gabra whose diminishing pastoral power was devastated by decades of attacks by the Dassanetch. This was however counter-productive because the 1925 raid against the Dassanetch planted seeds of enmity that led to Gabra massacre of 1932 in which ninety-two Gabra were murdered in Illeret.[87]

It was difficult to estimate the amount of ammunition, which the Dassanetch possessed, but there is no doubt that they had sufficient for their needs and could easily replenish their stocks. In an engagement with the Turkana for example in the 1930s in the area east of Lake Turkana, it was reported that they had about three quarters of a belt of ammunition at the beginning and a quarter at the end of the fight. As they had carried out several raids a month previously and expended a considerable quantity of ammunition, it was a clear indication that they owned fairly large supplies.[88]

By 1933, 80% of the Dassanetch fighting men were armed with rifles. The arms consisted of old Fossil Gras, which fired a heavy bullet. Shackleton estimated that 2000 men could be put in the field.[89] In 1937, the Dassanetch land was occupied by an Italian force that remained there until 1941. The Italians were extremely friendly with the Dassanetch supplying them with guns and other material aid and the

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[87] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton:and "The Merille/Gelluba 1932."," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[88] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 and "The Merille/Gelluba 1932." KNA. "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[89] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 and "The Merille/Gelluba 1932." KNA. "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

Dassanetch regard this period as the only one when foreigners have operated as their friends.[90] Apart from re-arming them with modern rifles the Italians also trained the Dassanetch in modern warfare. The Italians further tried to negotiate for some extension of their hegemonic control before their armed conflict with the British and this was seen by the Dassanetch as support to the Dassanetch's claims to their traditional land. The new arms introduced by the Italians were Mannlicher rifles which replaced Lebels and Oggrats rifles. The Italian census estimated that a total of 2635 Dassanetch men could be mobilised.[91]

While the Dassanetch continued their aggressive attacks, the British were not dissuaded from disarming communities like the Turkana, a process they completed in 1939, the year the Turkana lost 260 unarmed people killed by the Dassanetch. Such was the plight of the Turkana up to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. During the Second World War, Turkana warriors enrolled in large numbers as *askaris* (police) for the King's African Rifles not primarily to fight for the King and country as to acquire military skills and weapons for the purpose of punishing their northern neighbours.[92] This marked the beginning of an attempt by the Turkana to destabilize the local arms leverage the Dassanetch had over their neighbours. The Turkana realized that the so called 'British protection' could not guarantee their security in the context of uncontrolled aggression from the armed Dassanetch whose administration was unclear due to rivalry between the British and the Italians on the one hand and complexities of the Kenya – Ethiopia frontiers where the Dassanetch lived astride the common border, on the other hand.

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[90] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 and "The Merille/Gelluba 1932." KNA. "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[91] Ibid.

[92] KNA, DC/ISO/2/5/5: "Isiolo District Report"

By disarming the Turkana and imposing laws that prevented them from rearming or freely conducting cross-border reciprocal raids on their traditional enemies; and failing to effectively protect them, the British created a security vacuum which generated an arms race hitherto unprecedented within the framework of pastoral relationships. Previously, raids were mainly for cattle. Nevertheless, after the disarming of the Turkana, firearms became a significant cause of conflict to the extent that the Dassanetch were selling rifles to the disarmed Turkana and then stealing them back to test the courage of their warriors. Raiding for sport was a new phenomenon in pastoral relationships that was only possible due to the military imbalance created by the disarming of the Turkana.[93]

Fully armed as they were with rifles of various patterns, and with a considerable quantity of ammunition, the Dassanetch became almost the scourge of Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan raiding everywhere with little or no opposition and completely dominating the neighbouring communities that the latter rarely if ever attempted to retaliate. At some point for example, they drove the Turkana 100 miles to the south in Kenya Colony. The unarmed Boran speaking groups were unable to protect themselves against these raiding parties. Previously, the Turkana by sheer weight of numbers combined with their renowned fighting qualities, not only served to hold the Dassanetch to check but in all probability to dominate them. With the disarming and controlling of the Turkana, the Dassanetch were left masters of the situation.[94]

Meanwhile, the British continued to strengthen the Gabra through various compensations. Between 1940 -1943, the Gabra had been compensated by the British for the losses incurred following raids by the Dassanetch. They were paid British pounds £ 2880 as gratuities for 96 deaths in forces, £1600 for 800 cattle, £1250 for 500 camels, £166

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[93] Nene Mburu. 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000 *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): 148-162 (2001)
[94] KNA, PC/NFD/4/1-6. "The Gelluba Affairs".

for 555 sheep and goats and £24 for 12 donkeys stolen.[95] By 1944, this process of reconstruction militarily elevated the Gabra so much that they could raid the Dassanetch on their own. In July 1944, Gabra from North Horr raided a Dassanetch manyatta in Illeret, killed 24 and wounded 8. Some Gabra in North Horr were arrested and charged with murder. The British were enraged because after years of bloodshed, the administration had earlier succeeded in bringing about a 'satisfactory truce'. The Gabra had been assured of safety and increased grazing areas. In one sure and certain stroke, the Gabra had severed the good relations then existing between the British and the Dassanetch and had done their best to re-open their feud with the Daasanetch.[96]

The British officials viewed Dassanetch military success as a result of two factors – availability of firearms and lack of effective government control. They argued that although communities such as Turkana and Gabra were also able to obtain some arms, none was able to acquire them as easily and in such large quantities as the Dassanetch. Furthermore, the Ethiopian government did not effectively control the Dassanetch. According to Uri Almagor, Dassanetch military success derived from three main factors. Firstly, their ability to adopt the use of firearms without altering their traditional offensive tactics of small raiding parties. The new weapons combined with remarkable *esprit de corps*[97] and efficiency of their age groups gave their raiding parties a great rigour. Such parties struck the Turkana, the Gabra, the Samburu and the Rendille at places in their country considered safe. Uri's key argument is that the large ethnic groups of the area for instance the Gabra and the Turkana lost numerical advantage that they had had prior to the introduction of firearms and failed to organise retaliatory groups as efficiently as the Dassanetch.[98]

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[95] Ibid
[96] Ibid
[97] A feeling of pride, fellowship, and common loyalty shared by the members of a particular group.
[98] Uri Almagor (1977) *Op cit.*

Secondly, several features of the Dassanetch social and economic systems as compared to those of the Turkana and the Gabra gave them a military advantage. The Dassanetch live in thickly populated settlements and their main political institution is highly centralised. The fertile riverbanks provided a secure base to attack from and fall back to. They did not have to drive their stock to distant and isolated pastures and expose them to the risk of raids. Their large home settlement patterns allowed the gathering of considerable force either for offensive or defensive purposes unmatched by other communities. Whereas, in sharp contrast, the Gabra and the Turkana live in small-dispersed settlements and have to undertake long distance pastoral nomadism and above all have less centralised militarily effective age group organisations.[99]

Thirdly, the introduction of arms made the traditional objectives of raiding, looting, killing and kidnapping of young girls suddenly easy to attain. The effective Dassanetch raids, in which entire camps were slaughtered, were so dramatically horrifying that the neighbours to the south feared them. Simply becoming known as fanatical fighters in itself became a strong military advantage.[100] Thus, happy in their territorial vastness, the Dassanetch went on being a problem for the greater part of half a century, no government being able to decisively deal with them. They were all-powerful in their own area and were far enough from the seat of any government to avoid attracting any real interest in the highest quarters.

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[99] Ibid
[100] Ibid.

2.2. The colonial state's response to and policy towards the Dassanetch

The British response to the Dassanetch can be seen broadly from the control and accommodation policy, which the colonial state practiced towards other communities in Kenya. According to Bruce Berman, the colonial state's politics of conquest and control had salient patterns that involved physical occupation and accumulation of allies drawn from collaborating communities, bureaucratisation of force and reconstruction of pastoral and agricultural systems of British indigenous allies. These he argues on the one hand enhanced British occupation and on the other eventually increased the collaborating communities' power and influence. He cites for example the reconstruction of the Maasais' pastoral systems in the aftermath of 1890s scourges of rinderpest and famine to enhance British penetration into the Rift Valley Highlands, the establishment of the forward bases of conquests in Machakos, Fort Smith and Mumias to facilitate food supplies and safe passage of caravans and the use of force to counter Nandi resistance.[101] These patterns are also discernible from an analysis of British policy towards the Dassanetch.

The British approach to the Dassanetch was quite pragmatic. Where the Dassanetch were deemed useful, the British were careful not to affect their relations with the community. For example, while the Kenyan Dassanetch were often seen as troublemakers by the colonial government, they were regarded as serving a useful purpose as a means of contacts with the Ethiopian Dassanetch who might otherwise have become dangerous. Conversely, the British approach to the Dassanetch was reactive - sending punitive military expeditions against them. For example, at the end of 1941, the British army forced the Italians out and defeated the Dassanetch and established a no-man's

[101] Bruce Berman (1996) *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya – The Dialectics of Domination*. London: James Curry. Pp 26-27.

land around them to end tribal warfare. A buffer zone to the west in the area called the Ilemi appendix was established and various police posts set up. This deprived the Dassanetch of their traditional western dry season pastures.[102] In 1941, an order was issued to disarm the Dassanetch. An economic blockade of the Omo against the Dassanetch was started. The idea was to prevent them from using certain grazing grounds unless they gave up so many rifles. This effort only yielded 146 rifles. In October 1943, it was decided that the north-western part of Marsabit district should be occupied by the Kenya police with the object of putting a stop to the Dassanetch raids. Early in 1944, this area was occupied and no effective raids were made, thus fully justifying the new policy.[103]

In an attempt to address the challenges posed by the Dassanetch, Shackleton, a colonial District Commissioner in the 1940s in Turkana and Marsabit published a blue print for the subsequent administrators to deal with the Dassanetch. In his work - *The Gelluba Affairs* he described the Dassanetch war tactics and made proposals for a future policy to deal with the age-old raids on the border.[104] Following the publication of Shackleton's work, the British government on June 18 1947, adopted a policy to disarm the Dassanetch. This policy was to observe firmness coupled with caution and no promises could be made in return of the guns unless they could be met. The policy however did not encourage disarmament on a large scale as it was seen not to be practical. In addition, the policy provided that no search of weapons could be made unless there was a European officer present.[105]

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[102] Nene Mburu. (2001) 'Firearms and Political Power: The Military Decline of the Turkana of Kenya 1900 – 2000 *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 10(2): 148-162

[103] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/6 'Frontier Affairs: Gelluba Policy'.

[104] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[105] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

According to the Provincial Commissioner – Northern Frontier Province, it had to be considered that the Dassanetch astride the frontier possessed many hundreds of rifles and that to dispossess a dozen would not make any difference to the political situation.[106] With the knowledge that the Dassanetch were heavily armed, the colonial government decided to adopt a more friendly approach thereby signifying a change of policy towards the Dassanetch. As a result there were two policy options in consideration.

The first policy aimed at excluding the Dassanetch from all British territory including part of what was formally their normal grazing ground. The British calculated that policing would be simplified because any person seen in British territory could be regarded as a potential raider. In addition, conflicts would be reduced between Kenyan and Ethiopian ethnic groups. There would not be possibility of Ethiopian government wrongly blaming Kenyan Dassanetch for raiding in Ethiopia. The disadvantage would be that having excluded the Dassanetch from their customary grazing grounds that extended into Kenya, they would tend to become hostile. [107]

The second policy option was to allow Dassanetch who wished to stay in Kenya to do so. The advantages would be that there would be every prospect of remaining on friendly terms with the Dassanetch and preventing them from raiding Kenyan communities. Since they valued the grazing in Kenya, their use of it could be curtailed if their misbehaviour warranted it and having stock in Kenya south of police outposts would naturally tend to make them well behaved.[108]

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[106] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/6 "A letter from the PC Northern Frontier District to DC Marsabit on 18th June 1947".
[107] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/6 "A letter from the PC Northern Frontier District to DC Marsabit on 18th June 1947."
[108] KNA, PC/NFD/4/1-6 "The Gelluba Affairs."

In terms of policing, the British effectively employed the practice of bureaucratised force in two ways; placing the police and home guards under British command and observing strict policies on civilian arms' possession. First, it was considered that police posts should be established at Lug Banya (Illeret), Buluk and El Yibo with a reserve at North Horr each with 50 men. It was thought that with the establishment of police posts in strategic areas, the remaining frontier area could be adequately controlled by a mobile patrol according to seasonal ethnic movements.[109]

Regarding the arms, there was to be no demand for rifles from the Dassanetch. The reasoning behind this was that any attempts at disarmament by searching *manyattas* (semi-permanent houses) or other means would result in an unnecessary bloodshed thereby destabilising peace in the area. The common practice along the Kenya/Ethiopia border was to ensure that communities did not cross either side of the border while armed and where this happened, the relevant authority would confiscate the arms and impose a fine in accordance with the Outlying District Ordinance. However, this was not always possible because the two sides failed in their efforts to seek a firm border settlement that could safeguard their grazing interests in the disputed grazing areas. Ethiopia was particularly happy to create a long-term impasse as it continued to dispute the exact locations of the various border points.[110] The Dassanetch were warned that possession of arms in Kenya was both forbidden and punishable severely. The policy on arms was therefore directed towards inducing the Dassanetch to leave the guns in Ethiopia with their friends and relations rather than to hand them to the British. This lack of clarity in dealing with the problem of arms strengthened the Dassanetch's

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[109] KNA, Ref. no. 3/4/1 Vol. III. "DC Marsabit letter to the Officer in charge Northern Frontier, Isiolo – 20th July 1943."
[110] KNA, BB/1/216 – "Registration and Licensing of Firearms." BB/1/216

resolve to continue arming.[111] Civilians were hardly given firearm licences.

The policy regarding licensed possession of arms in the frontiers was very restrictive. Where the police or game department could afford adequate protection of people and livestock, official application by civilians to hold firearms legally would not be granted. People wishing to hold firearms for whatever reasons had to apply to their provincial commissioner through their district commissioner. This was a very tedious process and applicants were not sure whether their applications would get the attention of the administrators.[112] Formal applications to hold firearms normally came under three categories namely; those required for personal defence, in connection with the applicant's employment and for sporting purposes.[113]

The above approach largely exempted pastoralists who needed protection of their livestock. It was always wrongly assumed that the KPRs attached to the herders were enough to protect them. A thorough scrutiny of the colonial government's registration and firearm licensing files shows that most applications were mainly from business people and those formally employed by the government. There were also considerable applications for license renewals of sporting rifles and those obtained as war trophies.[114]

African natives were hardly considered except in rare cases where such applicants worked for the colonial government mainly as policemen. Where these applications were granted, they were mainly replacements for old weapons in possession of applicants with new

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[111] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6 "Gelluba Affairs 1927-1947 by Shackleton." See also Shackleton: "The Merille/Gelluba 1932," KNA, PC/NFD4/4/1, PC/NFD4/4/2, PC/NFD4/4/3, PC/NFD4/4/4, PC/NFD4/4/5, PC/NFD4/4/6

[112] KNA, BB/1/216 – "Registration and Licensing of Firearms." BB/1/216

[113] Ibid.

[114] KNA, BB/1/216 – "Registration and Licensing of Firearms and ." BB/1/216 – Applications to hold firearms" files.

ones but of the same types. Where new applications were granted, weapons of inferior types were issued. Ownership of automatic and self-loading weapons was restricted to the whites. These restrictions were mainly based on the need to reduce the number of firearms in civilian possession, which might otherwise have been used against the state.[115] Thus, the colonial policy of managing firearm possession was not only discriminative but also restrictive. This approach was hitherto continued by the post-colonial state and encouraged a culture of illegal gun-ownership among the pastoralists because it was considered impossible to get licensed firearms due to the strict policies. The communities were also aware that even if exceptional cases were considered, the weapons issued would not march those in the illegal market, which were easily available and did not require elaborate formalities to own. By highly bureaucratising the instruments of force, the colonial state in effect was seeking to reduce the influence of the Dassanetch and other communities on the power relations in the frontiers.

In an attempt to establish formal control over the Dassanetch, in 1958, the Dassanetch were informed that they would have to pay tax and supply stock to the police at Illeret and Sabarei locations. The rationale behind this was that if a form of control was established either by coercion or through Dassanetch's own submission to the authority of the state, then they could be accommodated in the colonial territory. In 1961, it was doubtful on the part of the government if they could ever get rid of the Dassanetch. Instead, they were strictly confined to the area allotted to the north of Illeret and encouraged to return to Ethiopia. The British policy on Dassanetch was therefore based on no man's land buffer state – the Dassanetch living to the north of it and the other ethnic groups to the south. It was proposed that the Ethiopian government must occupy the Dassanetch country across the frontier and exercise some form of repression or control there and the British

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[115] Ibid.

the northwest corner of Marsabit district, hitherto administered or else hand it over to Ethiopia and insist that they do so. This would enable the colonial administration in Kenya to exercise control over the Dassanetch raiders and provide room for other ethnic groups living in Kenya to graze. It would also help to confine frontier problems in the frontier rather than in the middle of the district.[116] By independence, the British had only managed to exercise some form of control in Illeret area only.

Controlling the Dassanetch was very challenging for a number of reasons. First, the Abyssinians had never been able to deal with them. While the colonial administration in Kenya prevented the communities from raiding into Ethiopia, there were no checks whatsoever on activities on the other side of that boundary. Secondly, the Dassanetch were astride River Omo and lived partly in Kenya, partly in Ethiopia, and partly in Sudan. This tri-territorial vastness made it difficult to control them. Finally, they were very far away from Marsabit and there was no adequate communication.[117]

2.3. The state of affairs in the Dassanetch frontiers towards independence

The settlement of a common border between Kenya and Ethiopia took a long time to accomplish due to disagreements between the two states mainly over grazing and watering areas for pastoralists. The Anglo-Ethiopian agreement between Ethiopia and Kenya's colonial government agreed upon in 1907 to demarcate the common border and give the frontier nomads trans-frontier grazing rights.[118]

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[116] Ibid
[117] KNA, PC/NFD4/4/4 "A Short History of the Gelluba Border East of Lake Rudolf 1888-1942" by Thorp, J.K.R.
[118] KNA, BB/1/261. "The Anglo-Ethiopian Treaty of December 1907" Nairobi.

In 1908, the Emperor Menelik of Ethiopia agreed to despatch of a commission for the final delimitation of the southern frontier of Abyssinia in accordance with the provisions of the 1907 agreement. Consequently both governments were to send commissioners to delimit the exact line of the frontier. However, the actual ratification did not take place immediately. Thus the Anglo-Ethiopian Agreement of 6th December 1907 remained the only treaty in existence concerning the northern frontier of Kenya recognised by the Ethiopians and the Kenya colonial government as the *de jure line.*[119] The *1947 Exchange of Notes* between Kenya and Ethiopia abrogated the 1907 treaty and the 1950-55 demarcation was carried out on the basis of this exchange of notes. The Kenya – Ethiopia boundary commission was formed in 1947 to define the common boundary on the ground. Although the official boundary was sketched on the maps, it had never been surveyed on the ground and descriptions were based on the topographical features.[120]

The vagueness of the Dassanetch frontiers presented various challenges that became causes of continued disputes between Kenya and Ethiopia and of conflicts among the nomads. One of these challenges was related to tax collection. Before the ratification of the common border for example, the Italians had imposed a controversial tax equivalent to 3% of a person's cattle that was paid annually for accessing grazing and watering points by communities from either side of the frontier. This was due to what the Italians described as the impracticability of dealing separately with various units of the same ethnic groups when they lived astride the frontier. This made the British subjects to remain in Ethiopia to avoid the annual tax and only come back to Kenya when conditions were favourable for grazing. The British were unhappy due to potential loss of revenue and the threat of losing

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[119] KNA, BB/1/260. 'Anglo-Ethiopian Frontier 1910-52.' Nairobi. BB/1/261 and 'Ethiopia Frontier Affairs – Major Gwynn's Report.'

[120] KNA, BB/1/261. 'Anglo-Ethiopian Frontier 1910-52.' Nairobi. BB/1/261 and BB/1/260 'Ethiopia Frontier Affairs – Major Gwynn's Report.'

negotiating power for the impending ratification of a common frontier favourable to Kenya.

2.4. The multi-ethnic nature of the frontiers

The Dassanetch frontiers are inhabited by many ethnic groups. These include the Dassanetch, the Hamarkoke described as stubborn, aggressive and brave fighters, the Gabra camel nomads and the Borana.[121] The colonial treaties delineating the 1907 boundary between Ethiopia and British East Africa Protectorate not only undervalued the centrality of water and pasture to the above communities but the vagueness of the treaty also opened an opportunity for resource conflicts in one clause which states that:

> "The tribes occupying either side of the line shall have a right to use grazing grounds on the other side as in the past, but during their migrations it is understood that they shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the territorial authority. Free access to the wells is equally accorded to the tribes occupying either side of the line".[122]

The treaty not only facilitated open conflicts but also became the basis of territorial claims by the Dassanetch. In 1943, the PC Northern Frontier District Mr. Turnbull had acquiesced in Dassanetch exercising clause 2 of the treaty granting them trans-frontier grazing rights in Kenya. At that time, it was extremely difficult to tie them down to precise geographical areas because none of the various boundary lines was physically demarcated. When the border line was finally demarcated in 1953, it was decided subsequently not to move the Dassanetch to the north of it in case this proved a provocation to

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[121] KNA, "Ethiopian Frontier Affairs – Delimitation and Kenya Ethiopian Boundaries" – BB/1/173 and "Frontier Affairs Boundaries – the *de facto* line 1949 – 1961" – BB/1/176.

[122] KNA, BB/1/261. "The Anglo-Ethiopian Frontiers, 1907 – 1952." BB/1/261. See also BB/1/173 "Ethiopian Frontier Affairs – Delimitation and Kenya Ethiopian Boundaries" – BB/1/173 and BB/1/176 "Frontier Affairs Boundaries – the *de facto* line 1949 – 1961" – BB/1/176.

Ethiopia, thus prejudicing the colonial government's chances of getting the border line ratified.

With the ratification of the borderline, it was assumed that the trans-frontier grazing rights were extinguished and a proposal was made to return the Dassanetch to Ethiopia. Apart from the trans-frontier grazing rights, the Dassanetch had also been allowed to stay in Kenya because of their 'value' to Kenya Police at Illeret fort as informers about their raiding brethren from Ethiopia. In 1958, they were instructed to pay Kenya tax and supply meat to the police at Illeret fort. This was cancelled in 1959 because it was thought absurd to allow them any grounds upon which to claim that they were Kenya citizens.[123]

Thus, the Dassanetch had been in Kenya under the Menelik treaty clause 2 of 1907 when the frontiers with Ethiopia were extremely vague. It was always the intention after the '1947 exchange of notes' that following the ratification of the physically demarcated boundary, they should remove themselves permanently to Ethiopia to rejoin the main part of their ethnic group under Ethiopian administration.[124] The only reason they had not been removed was the 8-year-old squabble with Ethiopia over ratification of the borderline extending from 1955-1963.[125]

For a long time, the colonial government practiced a policy of great tolerance to avoid unnecessary disputes connected with minor incidents along the Dassanetch frontiers. For example, if mild trespass happened, the police would simply drive back the cattle. With time, however, it was apparent that unless the frontier nomads were dealt with in firmness, they would continue to raid each other with impunity. For example, between 1945 and 1963 – the Dassanetch executed 33 raids against the Gabra, resulting in 144 deaths and 4070 head of

[123] KNA, BB/12/50. P.E. Walters's Personal and Confidential Letter in 'Law and Order in Marsabit' 1964
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid

livestock stolen.[126] Consequently, the government reinforced the policy of controlling grazing and movement of people. Often times, hostile communities would be pursued across the borders, forced to pay fines and if armed, which was often the case, their arms confiscated.

Despite the cancellation in 1959 of any grounds on which the Dassanetch could claim Kenyan citizenship including payment of tax, the government in 1961 was doubtful whether controlling them was tenable. The Special District Administration Ordinance (1932) was a step towards controlling pastoralists' movement, grazing areas and watering points. Following its enactment, the Dassanetch were confined to the Illeret area. This piece of legislation played a very important role in the day-to-day administration of the nomadic people. Former P.C. for Northern Frontier District Mr. Walters described it as 'a piece of legislative administration.' Section 7 of the Act gave powers to the DC to seize stock from communities who acted in a hostile manner. All proceeds from sale of seized stock and calling in of bonds reverted to a fund called 'the special district fund' and the money was only used in the district for the betterment of the people.[127]

Section 19 of the legislation empowered the civil secretary to issue orders for reserving grazing areas and water facilities for particular communities, and also to prohibit communities from using certain areas and water. Any communities who transgressed these orders committed an offence under section 20 of the Act. This legislation was effectively used in an attempt to tame the Dassanetch with the aim of sending them back to Ethiopia. Thus, in 1961 the PC Northern Frontier District P. E. Walters took a legal step to confine the Dassanetch. Through Special District Administration (SDA) Ordinance Order no. 17/61 he rescinded the trans-frontier grazing rights given by the 1907 Anglo-Ethiopian treaty and moved the southern limit of their grazing

[126] KNA, BB/3/141. D.K.H Dale (outgoing DC Marsabit) to Hassan Mgalla (incoming DC) Handing Over Report – Marsabit District 5th September 1964
[127] KNA, BB/12/50. 'Law and Order in Marsabit'

concession from the Lug Tullu to Lug Illeret (now Illeret location). Legally speaking therefore, the Dassanetch were seen as a part of an alien Ethiopia who had been permitted under SDA ordinance order no 17/61 to graze in a small part of the Marsabit district. In terms of section 4 of the SDA Ordinance, and legal notice 331 they were not considered communities of Marsabit district because the PC's order 17/61 was by way of a concession and if rescinded, the Dassanetch were to return to Ethiopia from whence they originally came.[128]

The decision was therefore left to the Civil Secretary to rescind the order and immediately enforce the return of the Dassanetch to Ethiopia while reinforcing the Illeret police post for some appreciable time to avoid retaliation.[129] This did not happen and the Dassanetch remained in their territory. Evidently, the colonial state used the Dassanetch as a tool to negotiate for boundary concessions from the Ethiopians and Italians and as a source of revenue to sustain the police stations at Illeret. They were also seen, if controlled, as a buffer zone against attacks from Ethiopian hostile nomads.

The continued imposition of tribal grazing boundaries through the SDA Ordinance effectively brought to a halt the peaceful means of contact and exchange which had bred familiarity and allowed individuals to extend their networks of social relationships, through marriage alliances and bond partnerships across societal boundaries as a means of insurance against localized destabilizing crises. By confining the Dassanetch to 'tribal grazing areas' and emphasising their identity as a community separate from their neighbours, a need for increased self reliance emerged and promoted the need to arm for survival. The creation of fixed borders did not only limit Dassanetch's free access to grazing land and water, but also increased their social conflicts with other communities. The borders hindered their free movement and

[128] KNA, BB/12/50.. 'Law and Order in Marsabit' Nairobi.
[129] KNA, BB/12/50.. H. K. Dale Regional Government Agent, Marsabit District – Letter in 'Law and Order in Marsabit' 1964

livestock since their mode of nomadic life results from ecological demands necessitating mobility to balance ecological heterogeneity. The attempt by the Dassanetch to ignore the colonial boundaries and interpret them according to traditional ecology exacerbated tensions between them and other pastoralist communities in the frontiers. They for example continued to graze freely without due consideration to border line which they did not recognise as described in this example which shows how clearly defined and marked border points were ignored:

> On 1st may 1962, a section of 10 Kenyan police officers under the charge of Corporal No. 4640 Mohammed was patrolling along the Kenya/Ethiopian border between ITALIAN KEEP (HBH 7890) and Banya (HBH 6490). About 10.00am, that day, tracks of five men were seen about four miles south of Border Post No. 46 at approximately Map reference (HBH 7492). The patrol followed the tracks which led them towards the border and as they approached, large number of goats, sheep and cattle were seen grazing within Kenya less than a mile from the border. On progressing closer to the border, the patrol saw five men on top of a hill close by the border but still in Kenya. Each of the five men was armed with a rifle. As the patrol approached the hill, they were apparently seen by the five men who ran over the border into Ethiopia. The grazing stock was then driven into Ethiopia where they were herded together after which a number of men and herd boys returned to the cut border line watching the police. The number of men and boys were estimated to be anything from 125 – 200.[130]

The Dassanetch were not allowed further south of the demarcated borderline. However, they remained in contact with the Ethiopian Dassanetch, Borana, and Hamar nomads, with whom they never recognised borders in an area they had been roaming for a long time following rains and grazing areas regardless of the borderlines. This

[130] KNA, BB/1/170– "Frontier Affairs, Gelluba and Boran Incursions by Ethiopians." BB/1/170

was the state of affairs in the Dassanetch frontiers when Kenya got independence in 1963. Thus, the post-colonial leadership inherited a state with borders and frontiers that were; multi-ethnic in nature but ethnically defined, unofficially demarcated following years of disputes with Ethiopia, inadequately policed, vast, insecure, porous and awash with illegal arms. This presented a major challenge to the post-colonial administration in the Dassanetch frontiers as discussed in the next chapter.

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Chapter 3

The Post-colonial state's administration of the Dassanetch Frontiers

The post-colonial government did not primarily concern itself with frontier issues except where they were seen to have a bearing on regime and state security. There was no major change in the running of the state despite the change of leadership after independence. Instead, the new regime was more concerned about securing the interests of the emerging political class through accumulation of capital.

In the first years of independence, Kenya continued with the colonial policies towards the Dassanetch in the frontiers. A year after independence, the country still had colonial DCs operating in the frontiers. D.K. Dale was still the DC Marsabit and in handing over the leadership of the district to his successor, Hassan Mgalla, he insisted that the Dassanetch in Kenya were a forward base for attacks from Ethiopia and needed to be sent to Ethiopia:

> "Under no circumstances should any further concession be granted to these people. I beg you to keep these people strictly confined to this area. Furthermore, if you can do it, get these people back to Ethiopia. I have been trying to do this for a long time without success"[131]

Following this policy direction, a decision was made to confine the Dassanetch in the north of Illeret location and encourage them to return to Ethiopia. Though the post-colonial state did not fully want to recognise the Dassanetch as Kenyans, the decision to confine them in Illeret somehow officially endorsed their Kenyan citizenship and effectively defined their territory. At independence, therefore, the

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[131] KNA, BB/3/141. D.K.H Dale (outgoing DC Marsabit) to Hassan Mgalla (incoming DC) Handing Over Report – Marsabit District 5th September 1964.

Dassanetch had two main advantages over their neighbours; their territory had now been officially and clearly defined in Kenya and they still had arms amassed during their colonial years of impunity. They therefore occupied a strategic location along the frontier and became the gate keepers of the main corridor leading to Ethiopia where guns – the sources of pastoral power - were available in plenty

As opposed to the colonial state's broader policy of control and accommodation, the post-colonial state gradually adopted a policy of preventive operations in strategic areas accompanied by close administration. Four key features are discernible from an analysis of the post-colonial state's response to the Dassanetch frontier problems; a primary concern with state and regime security; an apparent incapacity of the provincial administration to administer the frontiers; an apparent silent endorsement of gun ownership and official neglect of the frontiers by the state.

3.1 Concern with regime and state security

The post-independence government appears to have been more concerned with internal and external threats to the security of the state and that of the regime than addressing security challenges in the Dassanetch frontiers. By extension, this concern was mainly for the protection of the interests of the emerging political class. This is well illustrated by the state's repression of shifta rebellion in the Northern Frontier District and the ruthless application of the preservation of public security act. The government effectively adopted a policy of preventive operations in strategic areas accompanied by close administration. While the former focused on regular security operations, increasing the number of police officers and enhancing joint patrols between the Kenya Police, Administration Police and the civilian home guards, the latter focused on creating more administrative units.[132]

[132] KNA, BB/3/144 'Marsabit annual report 1978' p. 3.

These approaches were primarily geared towards containing external aggression from Ethiopia and Somalia and only secondarily towards protecting the civilians. Similarly, while the additional administrative units were ostensibly created to bring services closer to the people, the primary purpose of this initiative in the frontiers was to monitor peoples' movements with a view to ensuring there was no subversion against the state. In most cases, the creation of these units along the colonial borders further fuelled inter-ethnic conflicts over grazing zones because consideration was not made in areas where ethnic groups' shared boundaries overlapped administrative units.

In 1964, for example, the boundary commission had placed around Godoma wells (HBE 9983) a "box', the idea being that for the next ten years, both the Kenyan and Ethiopian peoples would have a joint right to enter this box and water therein. After ten years, the wells were to revert to Kenya. The complication with this was that the Godoma wells were placed on the regional boundary between eastern and north-eastern regions along the international frontier. An outgoing DC for Marsabit noted that there was potential trouble over this unless the wells were fairly and squarely in one region or the other.[133] In 1965, the Kenya Ethiopia boundary was demarcated giving Godoma wells to Kenya and Gadduma wells to Ethiopia. In 1974, there emerged a dispute between Marsabit and Wajir over the Godoma wells which by that time fell under constituency number 31 called Wajir West while administratively, the wells fell under Marsabit district.[134]

Conflicts over territorial grazing areas and water continued between the frontier nomads as a result of historical errors that did not take into account traditional resource utilisation methods which emphasised

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[133] KNA, BB/3/141. D.K.H Dale (outgoing DC Marsabit) to Hassan Mgalla (incoming DC) Handing Over Report – Marsabit District 5th September 1964

[134] KNA, BB/3/143. 'Eastern Province Handing Over Report' – Marsabit – 9th February 1974.

sharing - something that was not corrected after independence. The initial pre-occupation of the state with the protection of its existence and that of the regime overshadowed the security of the frontier communities which continued to arm and had little knowledge of what was going on beyond their territory after independence.

According to frontier communities, the coming in of the post-independence government made matters worse for them. The colonial government was seen by many to have been more established among the communities and effective than the post-colonial one because there was effective control of grazing and other resources like water. Security was considered a priority for every area. Police used to patrol and pursue raiders. The colonial prefectural chiefs were more powerful than modern day DCs and the authority of the state was revered. After independence, the government was not seen to be in firm control and the frontiers remained a semblance of autonomous enclaves.[135] Lack of control of the Dassanetch frontiers by the state was further demonstrated by the continued free movement of armed pastoralists across the borders. Mass exoduses of pastoralists from Kenya to Ethiopia and vice versa were common. Sometimes the pastoralists stayed for months before they came back. They possessed identity cards for Kenya and Ethiopia and continued over the years to vote in both countries during elections. The government's grip of this region after independence was almost non-existent.[136]

The government's apparent official neglect of the Dassanetch frontiers seems to have been motivated by a number of factors. Firstly, the area was relatively poor and like other arid areas was not self-sustaining. The government did not see any immediate returns to justify development initiatives. It was therefore seen as an economic liability. The Dassanetch land is over 400km from the District HQs in Marsabit and is connected by rough roads, has no good health and education

[135] Interview with Galgalo Tuye – North Horr – July 2008
[136] Ibid.

facilities and a majority of the population is ignorant.[137] To police this vast area that is awash with illegal firearms would have required massive resources, which the government might not have been willing to commit. Secondly, for as long as the communities confined their problems to the frontiers, the government appeared comfortable watching over its own interests.

The government's main objective in the frontiers therefore was primarily to protect the integrity of the state by securing the borders while at the same time controlling pockets of the productive sector. This was demonstrated by the state's firm grip on areas around Lake Turkana in the early 1970s consisting of the Sibiloi National Park and the Site Museums of Koobi Fora. The strategic establishment of a GSU camp in Illeret location and the creation of various administration police outposts as opposed to police stations was meant to protect state interests. The state's over-reliance on the Administration Police as opposed to the Kenya Police was significant in many ways. Firstly, the AP was locally seen as the armed wing of the provincial administration that enforced government authority on people. The Administration Police Force was easily manipulated by the state. Secondly, their adaptability to harsh environment meant that they could easily and effectively be deployed in strategic areas without using massive resources as otherwise would have been the case with the Kenya Police.

The post-colonial state's inability to control the frontiers left a security vacuum that was effectively filled by the Dassanetch and other groups, which continued to challenge its authority. Apparently, the state acquiesced to the *status quo* of lawlessness and left the frontiers poorly policed with high numbers of illegal firearms in the hands of civilians. As a result, communities found 'security' in the gun. As one herder observed: 'with my rifle, I trust no one. I cannot let go of it. It is

[137] Interview with Hilary Halkano – Diocesan Secretary – Catholic Diocese of Marsabit in July 2008 in North Horr.

my security.'[138] This is not only reflective of the security dilemma that has faced frontier communities over the years but also how embedded the gun culture has been among the Dassanetch and the social distance that has existed between them and the state which they do not trust as far as their security is concerned.

Field interviews and other primary sources, indicate that there was no major improvement in the state of affairs in the Dassanetch frontiers after independence. The authority of the state continued to be challenged and its grip on the frontiers continued to falter. While mobile patrols by police continued, years of impunity did not change the mindset of the Dassanetch. They strengthened their primordial identity as tribal enclaves within the newly formed state and the traditional raids did not end. They continued to operate in a state of lawlessness that only reinforced a gun culture that fuelled 'local arms' race. Their neighbours replenished their arsenals with modern rifles in a desperate attempt to tilt the balance of power. This state of affairs is well illustrated by the series of raids the Dassanetch carried out in the period after independence mainly against their neighbours – the Gabra.

3.2. Reconstruction of pastoral systems

By independence, the Dassanetch's old enemies – the Gabra had not amassed enough arms to challenge the Dassanetch because they could not penetrate the main sources of arms in Ethiopia due to hostilities of the surrounding communities. It is reported that by 1964, very few firearms were recovered from the Gabra.[139] Indeed, the Dassanetch ridiculed the Gabra by referring to them as the *'people of the spear.'*

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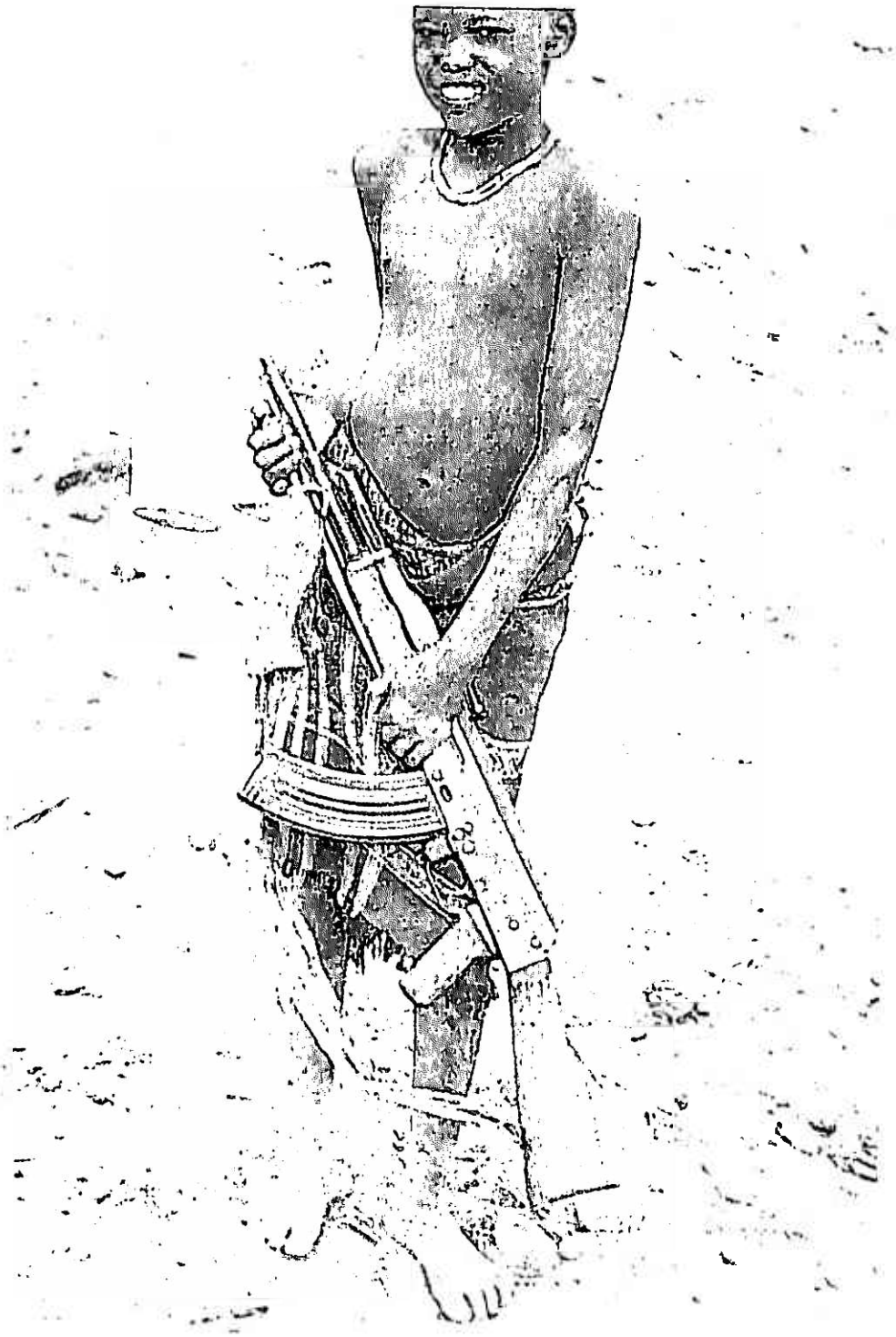
[138] My own encounter with a herder in Southern Ethiopia Omo River Delta bordering the area of study. See map on p vii.
[139] Interview with Galgalo Tuye – North Horr – July 2008.

The year 1968 marked the beginning of an independent reconstruction of the Gabra and Turkana pastoral systems that gradually increased their power and influence in the politics of arms in the frontiers. The Gabra got access to guns on a large scale due to contacts with the Somali irredentists who provided them with arms. The need to execute revenge against recurrent raids by the Dassanetch; ever-increasing attacks from neighbouring communities and lack of adequate security from the state reinforced the Gabra's determination to arm. There was a remarkable increase in arms smuggling in the 1970s due to regional conflicts in the Sudan, Uganda and Ethiopia. So uncontrolled was the situation in the frontiers that in 1973, the district governor from southern Ethiopia in a consultative meeting with Kenya pointed out that the free carrying of firearms in Ethiopia had been traditional and that it had been difficult to effect an exercise of disarming as had been done on the Kenyan side stressing that people were only arrested when they committed a crime with the firearm and not otherwise.[140] Carrying of guns freely among the frontier Dassanetch in Kenya as can be seen in picture 1 is common and to the herders interviewed, this practice is comparable to Maasai carrying a sword.[141]

[140] KNA, BB/1/154. "Kenya – Ethiopia consultative Meeting 1966 – 1976"
[141] Picture by James Ndung'u – taken April 2005 courtesy of Fr. Florian, Catholic Diocese of Marsabit, Illeret Parish.

Picture 1



The sudden fall of Amin's regime at the beginning of 1979 saw his units flee the Moroto Garrison and Kotido leaving the well-stocked armouries undefended. The Karimojong looted the arsenal and acquired for the first time a significant supply of automatic weapons and ammunition. These sources provided the Turkana and the Gabra with substantial weapons.[142] The Gabra also obtained their guns from Ethiopia's Yabero and Mega from mainly the Borana with whom they speak the same language and share common cultural beliefs and values.

By late 1970s, the Dassanetch's influence in the frontiers was facing new challenges. Their land had declined due to the rise of Lake Turkana waters that covered grazing fields and the ever-increasing government protected areas of the Museum Sites of Koobi Fora. This seriously constrained herders who were left with very limited grazing areas. This problem was compounded by the fact that the Ethiopian Omo river delta, which would otherwise have been an alternative, was tsetse fly-infested and therefore not conducive for grazing. The Dassanetch therefore found themselves facing a duo challenge of increasingly armed neighbours and declining grazing territories. The politics of arms in the frontiers gradually changed as more actors accessed guns.

Apparently, because of the realisation that protecting the communities from attacks was difficult, and that quite a considerable percentage of the population owned guns, the government seems to have implicitly endorsed gun ownership among these communities under the rubric of self protection and protection of the property. The government was also aware that other armed communities from Ethiopia and Sudan surrounded the Dassanetch frontiers and they therefore could serve two unofficial purposes on behalf of the state. Firstly, the fact that they were armed served to create a security buffer zone against external

[142]See Jan Kamenju, Singo Mwachofi and Francis Wairagu (2003) *Profiling Small Arms and Insecurity in the North Rift Region of Kenya*. Nairobi: Oakland Media Services.

aggression. Secondly they took care of their own security. By performing these unofficial duties on behalf of the state, they not only made its work easier but also asserted themselves as the unofficial government in their own territory. This argument is reinforced by the reluctant approach of the government towards disarmament. There was not any serious commitment by the state to disarm the frontier ethnic groups. This approach was similar to the one taken by the colonial state specifically towards the Dassanetch with whom the British wanted to maintain friendship as they were seen to serve defensive role against hostile groups from Ethiopia. It is possible that the number of guns owned by the Dassanetch and their neighbours was not only superior to but also more than that in law enforcers' possession in the same area. This explains why, the communities have historically had very low regard of the state, as they see themselves as the government. As one interviewee reasoned; "what is a government? A government is a gun and if we have the gun, we have the power. Why should we be afraid of the government?"[143]

The reconstruction of the Gabra pastoral systems through the acquisition of arms towards the end of 1968 had an immediate effect. It enhanced Gabra's position in pastoral relations with the Dassanetch and the Turkana. Raids continued along the frontiers between the Dassanetch and the Gabra from 1968 to 1997. While this new development challenged the position of the Dassanetch, the Dassanetch still had an upper hand. The major attacks were in 1971, 1985 and 1997 with the Gabra being the victims. On 29th April 1971, the Dassanetch raided Gabra at Malabot – 15km from North Horr in an incident that led to the killing of 59 people. The assailants fled to Ethiopia but were later allowed back by the DC on condition that they surrendered their guns. 153 out of estimated 300 rifles and 853 rounds

[143] Interview with a civic leader in Illeret in July 2008.

of ammunition were surrendered by 1st September 1971. Several attempts by the Gabra to revenge did not succeed.[144]

Following the above incident, the government took two actions. Firstly, it cunningly attempted to disarm the Dassanetch by asking them to hand in their guns for routine servicing. The guns were not returned to them. This led to increased demand because the Dassanetch felt not only cheated but also knew they had a readily available source in Ethiopia. Secondly, there was a modest attempt to increase the number of administration police officers in 1972, to only 107 for the whole of Marsabit district, which also included Moyale.[145] It is reported that the total number of Administration Police in the entire Marsabit district, which included Moyale, was raised from 229 in 1977 to 242 in 1978 and more outposts established in various locations.[146] Only a few of these policemen were posted in the frontier areas. Around the same period, the government was training civilians for self-defence at manyattas and home guards to protect livestock, which in itself indicated an acknowledgement by the government of its very limited deployment of security agents in the frontiers.[147]

3.3. Decline of state authority

The government efforts appear to have had very minimal impact on the administration of the frontiers. The state control in the frontiers continued to sharply decline and it is evident that by the beginning of 1980s, the government had not established its authority over the Dassanetch. This is supported by a handing over report by the outgoing Marsabit DC Mr. Tom Ogechi in 1979 when he described the Dassanetch thus:

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[144] KNA, BB/3/142.. 'Marsabit District Handing Over Report – 1971'. BB/3/142.
[145] KNA, 'Marsabit District Handing Over reports 1971 – 1975', (BB/3/143), 1979 (BB/3/144), 1984 – 1987 (BB/3/145), 1988 (BB/3/149) and 1992 (BB/3/146)' See also 'Eastern Province Annual Reports – 1981 (BB/3/130), 1984 (BB/3/131), 1985 (BB/3/132), and 1992 – 1994 (BB/3/140)'
[146] KNA, BB/3/144. 'Marsabit annual report 1978' p. 3. Nairobi.
[147] Ibid. p. 5.

> This is a fearless tribe living around Illeret. Quite a number of them possess illegal firearms, which they hide in bushes in defence especially from an Ethiopian tribe known as the Hamarkoke. This is a very backward tribe and they need to be motivated so that they can change. Since the posting of a DO to North Horr division, they have now tried to recognise the existence of the government and more emphasis should be made at least to effect certain changes on them.[148]

The provincial administration in the frontiers was not only overstretched but also inadequate and lacked the necessary resources to meet the security needs of the district (Marsabit), which by 1980s was about 11% of the total size of the country. Unlike the colonial prefectural agents who had immense decision-making powers, the post-colonial administrators were highly manipulated by the central authorities in Nairobi. Until today, police are seen to represent the interests of the state of securing the borders against external aggression as opposed to protecting the communities. According to frontier residents, rarely does a District Commissioner get time to visit distant places like Illeret. According to a former DC Marsabit, the operational costs of administering these areas appear to have overwhelmed the administrators due to limited resources allocated to them.[149] In one of the Administration Police Camps in the Dassanetch frontiers which has four police officers each armed with a G3 rifle, those who have been posted there describe it as 'Maximum Camp of Humiliation and exploitation' as can be seen in picture 2 below.[150]

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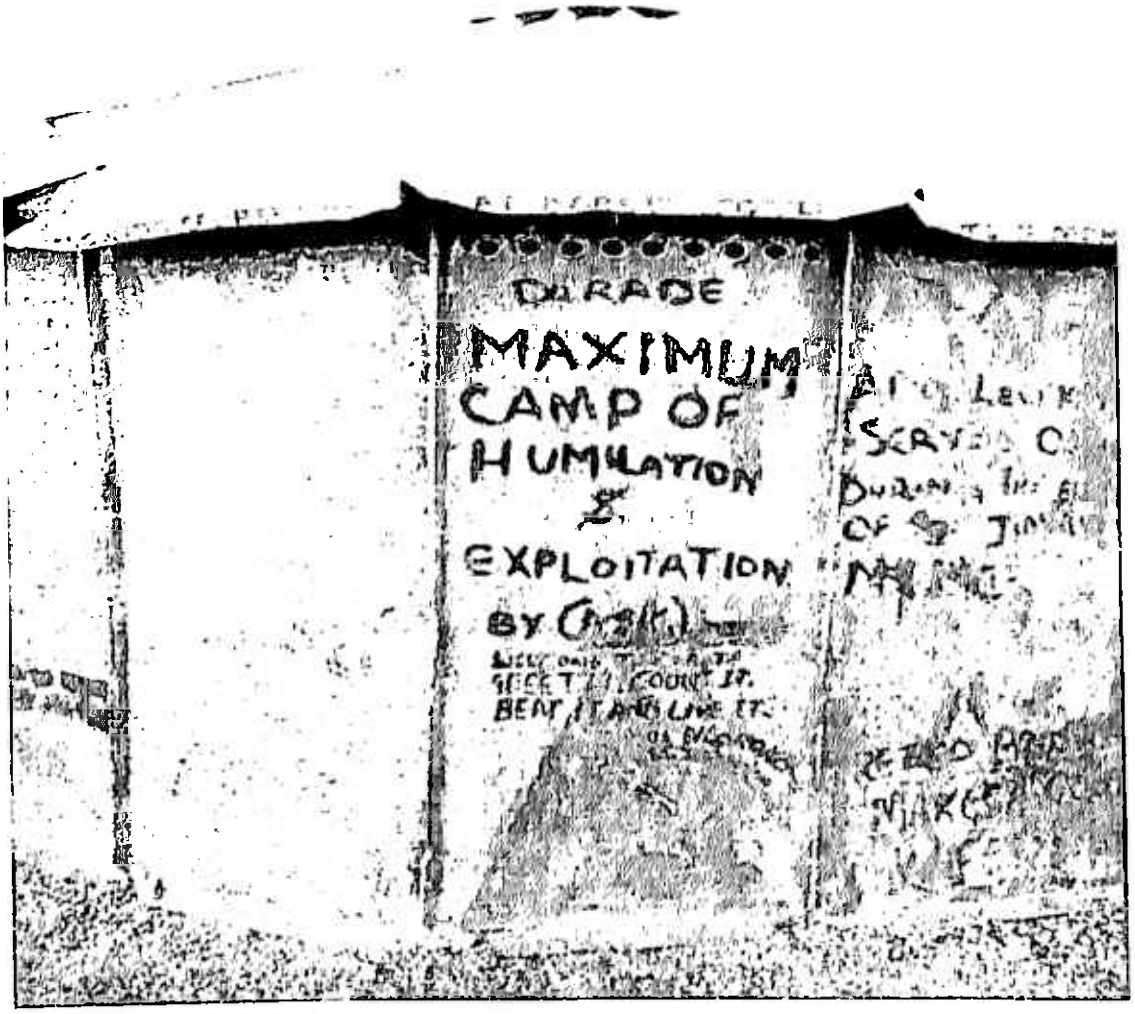
[148] KNA, BB/3/144. 'Eastern Province Handing Over Report 1979 by outgoing DC Mr. Tom Ogechi.' BB/3/144

[149] Interview with a former Marsabit DC in Nairobi in August 2008.

[150] Picture taken by James Ndung'u in Darate near Illeret – Marsabit District in July 2008.

Picture 2



Nothing much was done by the state to improve the state of affairs in the Dassanetch frontiers. Indeed the number of Administration Police officers stood merely at 274 covering the whole of Marsasbit district in 1980.[151] This was a very slight increase from 242 officers in the same area in 1978. As if to demonstrate their unmatched resilience and resolution to challenge the authority of the state following the

[151] KNA, 'Marsabit District Handing Over reports 1971 – 1975', (BB/3/143), 1979 (BB/3/144), 1984 – 1987 (BB/3/145), 1988 (BB/3/149) and 1992 (BB/3/146)' See also 'Eastern Province Annual Reports – 1981 (BB/3/130), 1984 (BB/3/131), 1985 (BB/3/132), and 1992 – 1994 (BB/3/140)'

disarmament of 1970s – 1980s and increased deployment of security officers in the frontier areas, on 18th February 1985, 100 Dassanetch warriors raided Gabra manyattas at Racha and Galgalo in North Horr and killed 40 people (12 men, 13 women, 15 children). They stole 7000 sheep and goats, 1800 camels. During the raid, 8 civilians were injured, and a 303 rifle stolen from a Kenya Police Reservist.[152]

More arms continued to flow into Kenyan territory. In the 1990s, the Ethiopian government armed the Dassanetch with new AK47s in recognition of their vulnerability to the Kenyan Turkana and Sudanese cattle rustlers.[153] The conflicts in Ethiopia between the government and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) led to mass exodus of armed civilians and deserting soldiers fearing for their lives. In 1992 for example, a group of refugees from Ethiopia crossed into Kenya with 1521 rifles, 275 pistols/ revolvers, and various types of explosives, mortars, bombs, grenades, rocket launchers, anti-personnel mines, anti-aircraft bombs, magazines, magazine carriers, and back-sets for communication and other assorted gadgets pertaining to military operations. Most of these were confiscated by the government but quite a good number disappeared.[154]

From 1986 – 1990s, the state focused on enhancing civilian defence through the Kenya Police Reservists (KPRs) in the Dassanetch frontiers. By 1993, the government had issued 140 rifles of the type 303 to KPRs in an attempt to boost communities' self defence for the whole district.[155] However, in 1994 a Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee's (DSIC) meeting noted that vast areas along the border with Ethiopia had no single KPR and in this regard made an

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[152] KNA, BB/3/132 "Marsabit District Annual Report, 1985."
[153] Nene Mburu 'Delimitation of the Elastic Ilemi Triangle: Pastoral Conflicts and Official Indifference in the Horn of Africa' Africa Studies Quarterly. On http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v7/Mburu#Mburu accessed on 11 May 2006.
[154] KNA, BB/3/140. Minutes of the Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee meeting held in the DC's office on 2nd September 1993 at 2.30 pm.
[155] KNA, BB/3/140. Minutes of the Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee meeting held in the DC's office on 2nd September 1993 at 2.30 pm.

appeal for 200 MK4 guns from the Permanent Secretary in charge of internal security through the eastern province PC.[156] The civilian defence through KPRs did not stop communities from arming for a number of reasons.

Because of their nomadic lifestyles, a considerable amount of time of the KPRs was spent with the herders in the field leaving other members of the communities without protection. This necessitated the need for extra guns to protect this section of the community against aggression – particularly women, children and elders who might have been left behind when herders travelled to distant places in search of water and pastures.[157] Since not all herders were assigned KPRs, there were those who acquired guns to fill in this gap or just because they felt the KPRs were insufficient. Most of the KPRs were issued with old .303 rifles, which fired a bullet at a time. These guns were considered inferior and did not meet the demands of the pastoralists in an area that was awash with AK-47 rifles. In addition, because KPRs' guns were periodically monitored by the police including how they used ammunition, they were not favoured because they did not leave enough room for communities to carry out raids as a cultural practice whenever they wished to do so.[158]

The disarmament efforts against the frontier communities that started in 1993 continued in an effort to avoid a potential Gabra revenge mission against the Dassanetch attacks of 1985. This was a big blow to the Gabra who had only recently considerably amassed illegal arms after decades of raids by the Dassanetch. The relative calm of the period 1985 – 1995 is attributed to disarmament of the communities and massive recruitment of civilian home guards. However, unknown to the state, the gatekeepers of the frontiers – the Dassanetch had taken

[156] KNA, BB/3/140. Minutes of the Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee meeting held in the DC's office on 18th October 1994 at 2.30 pm.
[157] KNA, BB/3/140. Minutes of the Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee meeting held in the DC's office on 18th October 1994 at 2.30 pm.Ibid.
[158] KNA, BB/3/140. Minutes of the Marsabit District Security and Intelligence Committee meeting held in the DC's office on 18th October 1994 at 2.30 pm.Ibid.

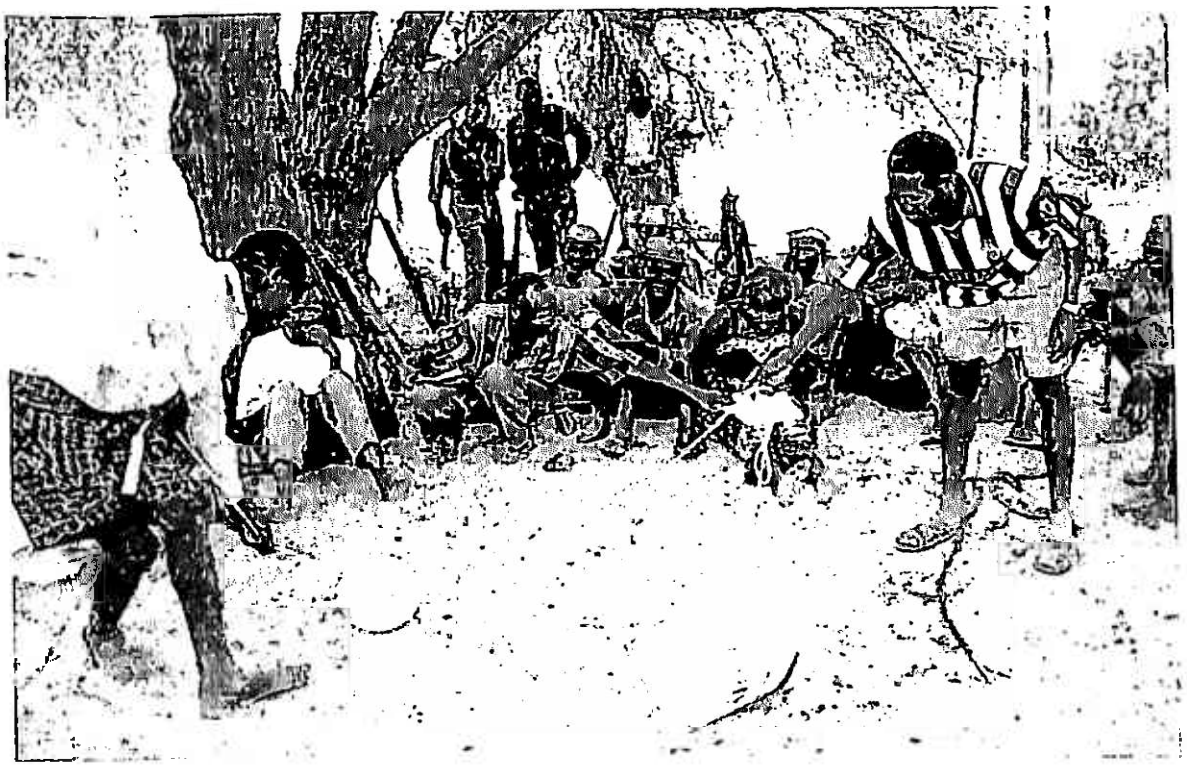
the time to obtain more arms. The government action had left the Gabra vulnerable by exposing them to the Dassanetch who had readily available sources of arms in Ethiopia.

The aftermath of the government's action to disarm was a build-up of low scale raids and counter-raids that culminated into the Kokai massacre of 1997, in which a combined party of Dassanetch raiders from Kenya and Ethiopia killed over 90 Gabra herdsmen in their sleep in a single attack at Kokai. During the raid, over 10 policemen were killed raising concerns over state's ability to protect people.[159] The immediate government reaction was to set up a permanent General Service Unit camp in Illeret to enhance its visibility and tame Dassanetch raiders. These historical experiences perpetuated a sense of insecurity among the communities and consequently increased local demand for arms as means of coping with the security uncertainties and dilemmas.

In seeking to address the problem of illegal gun ownership among the Dassanetch, the state seems to have been faced by local and regional dilemmas. The fact that there were other hostile communities that were armed meant that efforts to disarm the Dassanetch would lead to their vulnerability unless all the communities were disarmed simultaneously which was impossible. Lack of commitment by the neighbouring countries to seriously disarm communities logically meant that no single government would want to take lead in destabilising the existing balance of power occasioned by the possession of arms by the ethnic groups. A government officer admitted that the government is very much aware of the significant number of illegal weapons in civilian possession but 'cannot blindly disarm without considering many factors in a particular context.'[160] This observation pointed to the apparent unofficial position of turning a blind eye on laws governing illegal arms possession among the pastoralists. In addition, the state's continued

[159] Field interview with a group of elders in North Horr in July 2008.
[160] Interview with a government officer in Marsabit – July 2008.

exemption of pastoralists from enjoying gun ownership within the existing arms regime, its inability to guarantee security of the people and their property, its apparent official minimalist approach and an implicit acquiescence to the status quo of illegal ownership of guns are the key factors that perpetuate a culture of gun ownership and statelessness in the frontier areas. As picture 3 below illustrates, while the government continues to strengthen civilian defence through KPR, here seen in the background, it has not taken decisive action to remove illegal firearms like the ones leaning on the tree in the same picture below.[161]



In conclusion, it is evident that, historically there has been a general and silent policy of disregarding the problem of arms in the Dassanetch frontiers. Both Kenya and Ethiopia appear to have been only primarily concerned about safeguarding their interests largely territorial and as

[161] Picture taken by James Ndung'u in Koobi Fora/ Bura Asuma areas of Illeret location during a Gabra and Dassanetch peace-building meeting organised by Catholic Justice and Peace Commission of Marsabit Diocese in July 2008.

long as these were not threatened, maintaining the traditional status quo in which the Dassanetch from both sides serve as security buffer zones remained the general practice.

It was noted in the preliminary sections of this research that when Count Teleki, an Austrian explorer arrived among the Dassanetch in 1888, he discovered that they had mainly traditional weapons like bows, arrows, shields and spears and as a result lived in a state of armed neutrality with their neighbours. Today these types of weapons appear to be only serving ornamental role. For over a hundred years now, the Dassanetch have owned guns, which have had a significant impact on their relations with the state and their neighbours to the south of Lake Turkana. Other communities like the Turkana and the Gabra have also over the years amassed a considerable amount of weapons thereby creating some sort of balance in gun ownership in the frontier areas.

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Chapter 4

Conclusion

This research started from the premise that acquisition of guns among the Dassanetch was as a result of insecurity and state withdrawal from the frontiers, which consequently presented the communities with a security dilemma to address.

This dilemma is one characterised by; a security vacuum in which the Dassanetch find themselves taking care of their own security; serving as frontier security buffer zone for both colonial and post-colonial state and enjoying a tri-territorial status which placed them partly in Kenya, partly in Sudan and partly in Ethiopia. Consequently, the Dassanetch effectively assumed the role of frontier gatekeepers performing roles akin to those of the state and thereby becoming objects of Kenya-Ethiopia frontier politics. Importantly, they also became formidable actors competing with the state over control of firearms as instruments of force.

My starting point for this study, which assumed a general withdrawal of the state from the frontiers, did not distinguish between the state during the colonial and post-colonial period. It was found out that this was not necessarily the case in the case of the colonial state as it was deeply involved in the social political life of the frontier Dassanetch. The Dassanetch had also by chance acquired weapons from early explorers and colonialists having made early contacts. As the guns were provided to them as armed militia to protect the interests of the explorers, thus, their acquisition of guns was the making of these same colonialists and explorers.

Three inter-related factors inform the state of affairs in the Dassanetch frontiers as far as security or lack of it is concerned. These factors are;

expansive, multi-ethnic and porous borders and frontiers; availability of illegal firearms and lack of state control of the frontiers, which is characterised by a history of impunity among the Dassanetch. These factors create a situation of statelessness in the frontiers as communities take charge of their own security acting as autonomous enclaves. Both the colonial and post-colonial state advanced various policies towards the Dassanetch with varying degrees of success. These policies do not seem to differ though their application during the colonial era appears to have been more intense than in the post-colonial period.

The main difference between the colonial and post-colonial state was the level of penetration in the Dassanetch frontiers. On the one hand, the colonial state in Kenya was centrally and pervasively involved in the social and economic life of frontier pastoralists. On the other hand, the minimalist post-colonial state was less involved in the affairs of the frontiers due to its concerns in securing the interests of the emerging political class and the security of the regime. This difference seems to have influenced the approaches of the two states in dealing with the frontier problems. While the colonial state employed a broader policy of control and accommodation, the post-colonial state used preventive operations in strategic areas accompanied by close administration to contain the increasing pastoral power occasioned by the availability of firearms in the frontiers.

The post-colonial leadership inherited a state with borders and frontiers that were; multi-ethnic in nature but somehow ethnically defined, unofficially demarcated following years of disputes with Ethiopia, inadequately policed, porous and awash with illegal arms. One observes four key features from an analysis of the post-colonial state's response to the Dassanetch frontier problems; a primary concern with state and regime security; an apparent incapacity of the provincial administration to administer the frontiers; an apparent silent endorsement of gun ownership and a quasi official neglect of the

frontiers by the state. By doing little to address the security challenges in the frontiers, the state effectively left a vacuum that was filled by the Dassanetch and other communities in the frontiers.

The Dassanetch sustained their gun ownership through a history of impunity that was evidently acknowledged and tolerated by both the colonial and the post-colonial state. There was no firmness of policy to contain them. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, the colonial state's policy towards the Dassanetch oscillated between inclusion and exclusion of the Dassanetch in and from the Kenya territory respectively. There were no concrete decisions regarding disarmament and this strengthened the Dassanetch's determination to arm. Thus, the policies towards frontier Dassanetch were indecisive and inconsistent and this gave them undue advantage over the other communities in the frontiers.

By using the Dassanetch as a security buffer zone along Ethiopia, Sudan and Kenya frontiers, the colonial government created a no man's zone effectively occupied by the Dassanetch, which in effect thrust upon them a tri-territorial status within which they operated with impunity. This situation did not fundamentally change after independence. The continuation of colonial policies by the post-colonial government and its apparent occupation with state and regime security in the first decades following independence is to blame for the state of lawlessness in the Dassanetch frontiers. The distance between government field agents in the frontiers and the central authority continued to perpetuate a situation of policy vacuum due to inaccurate feedback from the field agents to the central authority as they became adaptive to local dynamics to make their work easier.

It is quite clear that the state was unable to take control of the frontiers and appears to have silently accepted the situation and unofficially handed over its responsibilities of protecting lives and property to the communities who have effectively armed themselves. As a matter of

fact, borderlines do not exist in the minds of the frontier nomads who wander across the borders depending on weather patterns. Therefore the demarcation of the frontiers did not have any meaning to the pastoralists as resources are considered communally owned. The exercise served to disrupt traditional resource utilisation methods that encouraged sharing.

As far as arms are concerned, there appears to have been a silent government policy of allowing illegal arms in the frontiers due to state's apparent realisation of the hostile environments the frontier nomads lived in. The arms regime in Kenya was very restrictive and did not leave room for pastoralists to own guns legally for accountability purposes. It can therefore be argued that, the state's exemption of pastoralists from enjoying gun ownership within the existing arms regime, its inability to guarantee security of the people and their property, its apparent official withdrawal from and minimal presence in the frontiers and an implicit acquiescence to the status quo of illegal ownership of guns are the key factors that perpetuate a culture of gun ownership and statelessness in the frontier areas.

At the beginning of this research, I noted that early explorers found the Dassanetch living in a state of armed neutrality with other communities, as they had not amassed a significant number of guns. Evidently, the state of neutrality the early European explorers found the Dassanetch living in with other communities was experienced again almost a century later following some sort of parity in gun ownership. This was occasioned by access to guns by the neighbouring communities, which helped them to reconstruct their devastated pastoral systems following decades of raids by the Dassanetch.

In the course of this research, there were dimensions of gun problem that emerged and need further research. It is quite apparent that the institutionalisation of gun ownership through the Kenya Police Reservists ostensibly to protect frontier nomads facilitates a cycle of

demand and supply that sustains availability of arms and their subsequent misuse. The vagueness of the Dassanetch frontiers and lack of formal clarity by the state of the Dassanetch position in Kenya present trans-frontier dilemmas for further exploration. As things stand, one thing that is evident is that unless Kenya and Ethiopia exert authority in the frontiers, the problem is unlikely to end soon. A history of relations in the frontiers between the two countries discussed in this study confirms what appears to be primary concerns by the two states of safeguarding their interests largely territorial and as long as these are not threatened, maintaining the traditional *status quo* in which the Dassanetch from both sides serve as security buffer zones will remain the general practice in the unforeseeable future.

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Eva Darare – Catholic Justice and Peace Commission Marsabit
Chachu Tadicha – Community Initiatives Facilitation Assistance (CIFA) Marsabit
Hussein Tadicha Wario Marsabit - husstwario@yahoo.co.uk
Tuye Galgalo – Councillor – North Horr
Fr. Florian – Illet Parish – Diocese of Marsabit
James Galgalo – Development Office – Catholic Diocese of Marsabit
Amos Gathecha – Former District Commissioner – Marsabit
Beneah Odemba – Formerly working with the Netherlands Development Organisation - SNV
Fr. Hubert - (North Horr Parish)
Br. Yego – Illeret
Rev, Jeremiah Omar – former Chairman Marsabit district peace committee
Mohamed Sheikh – Senior researcher in Conflict resolution – Practical Action

Gabra elders and herders from North Horr interviewed during peace meetings

Ali Wario Gano
Barille Yara
Basaye Gollo
Berea D. Jiba
Boru Dido Fora
Boru Durma
Boru Wolde Bashalle
Chule Sharamo
Cllr. Guyo Adano
Elema Adano
Galgallo Tuye
Godana Dido Bora
Guyo Huka
Guyo Boru Mamo
Horo Mamo
Huqa Dabelo Adano
Jillo U. Dokhe
Kalla Tuye
Koso Ali Godana
Kulula Abudo
Kuni Karani
Lawrence Wario Bulle

Mamo Doko
Mamo Fana Adano
Molu Budha Kuyayo
Peter Bonaya
Silvini Saleba
Sora Tullu
Tuye Malicha
Umuni Worabu
Yatteni Racha

Dassanetch elders and herders from Illeret interviewed during peace meetings

Abbolo Losogo
Abbolo Loyeris
Achie Imdi
Achie Immoi
Achie Chaada
Arbolo Losogo
Arr Nakandinyang
Asha Loureny
Dherete Helekuwa
James Gurite
James Hakurtilia
Jennifer Lonyaman
Kitona Arkoi
Kuute Kalla
Kworo Nyekimel
Lochea Derete
Loki Dherete
Lokerum Dergech
Lomasia Kutte
Marko Akuya
Moroto Lomulinga
Paul Higithe
Paul Goosh
Phillip A. Diba
Phillip Arkoi
Sieso Kongodei
Terekar Lenges
Titus Turumbeta
Wasit Kiuten
Yerikas Lenges

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Annex 1

Interview Schedule

Guns and Politics

1. What is the size of Illeret location?
2. What is the population in Illeret location?
3. Do people own guns?
4. Why do people own guns and what are they used for?
5. When did the automatic guns start infiltrating?
6. How were they introduced? Government arms through KPRs + Politics of by-elections
7. How many per household?
8. What determines the number of guns owned?
9. How do people acquire guns?
10. Do traditional leaders have any role to play in issues of guns?
11. Has gun ownership affected traditional leadership?
12. What weapons were used before the guns were introduced?
13. What has changed since the introduction of guns?
14. Has there been any disarmament exercise?
15. What are the key sources of illicit guns?
16. Are there any cultural issues related to weapons both traditional and automatic rifles?

State penetration

17. How far is the police station from your area?
18. How accessible are the government officials?
19. Why did the government consider it important to start a GSU camp at Illeret?
20. How often are the police or other government officials seen?
21. Who takes care of the safety and security of the people?
22. How is the relationship between the community and the government?
23. Who are the actors in development? Government? Non-governmental? How are they perceived by the communities?

Frontiers and borders

24. Who are the neighboring communities?
25. Do you have any relationship with them?
26. How extensive is the border with Ethiopia?
27. Do communities recognize the borders or do they cross over freely?
28. To what extent can communities penetrate to either side of the border?

Annex 2

Timeline

1888 – Count Teleki, an Austrian explorer arrived among the Dassanetch and discovered that the Dassanetch had mainly traditional weapons like bows, arrows, shields and spears

1892 - The publication of VoHÖhnel and Count Teleki book titled *Discovery of Lakes Rudolf and Stephanie* brought travellers and merchants who introduced guns.

1902 – The Outlying District Ordinance enacted

1907 – the Anglo-Ethiopian treaty formally demarcated the Dassanetch land between Ethiopia and British East Africa along the so called "*the red line*". This upset the arms equilibrium because the Dassanetch amassed wealth and arms from the Italians and their counterparts in Ethiopia

1909 - The Ethiopian posts along the frontiers had about 40 troops. The Dassanetch acquired more arms from traders and Ethiopian army deserters

1911 – The Turkana were disarmed by the colonial government weakening their position in the region and giving the Dassanetch an upper hand

1913 – Having acquired a considerable number of arms, the Dassanetch conducted the first raid against the Rendille

1914 – With the outbreak of the World War I, Italy issued more rifles to the Dassanetch to boost their war efforts against the British

1920s – Continued fighting between the Dassanetch and the Gabra

1930s – Eighty percent (80%) of the Dassanetch fighting men were armed with rifles.

1934 – The Special District Ordinance enacted

1937 – The Dassanetch land was occupied by the Italians (until 1941) who trained them in modern warfare and supplied new Manlicher rifles.

1939 – The British completed disarmament of Turkana. The Turkana however enrolled in the British Army in the World War II mainly to gain

fighting skills to punish the Dassanetch for past raids. Meanwhile, the Dassanetch continued raiding as a sport by engaging the Turakana to measure their fighting skills

1941 – The British Army forced the Italians out and defeated the Dassanetch. A *cordon sanitaire* to the west of the illemi appendix was established and various police posts set up to tame the Dassanetch. This effectively deprived them of their traditional western dry season pastures

1944 – An order issued to disarm the Dassanetch – this effort yielded 146 rifles only

1947 – Another small scale disarmament order was issued against the Dassanetch

1950 – Commencement of the public order act CAP 56

1954 – Commencement of the firearms act CAP 114

1958 – Dassanetch required to pay taxes and supply stock to the Illeret and Sabarei police posts

1961 – Doubtful about controlling the Dassanetch, the government strictly confined them in the North of Illeret and encouraged them to go back to Ethiopia. During the same year, the preservation of public security act CAP 57 commenced

1963 – Kenya gained independence and inherited borders and frontiers that were not clearly defined

1963 – 1970s – Shifta affairs in the NFD bring more arms in the frontiers as the Gabra (traditional enemies of the Dassanetch) for the first time in 1968 access guns on a large scale in the face of shifta disturbances and continued raids from the Dassanetch.

1968 – Following a chance landing, Richard Leakey and the National Museums of Kenya started a museum and research centre at Koobi Fora and this marked the beginning of a continuous expansion of the park thus significantly reducing Dassanetch and Gabra traditional grazing areas

1971 – A Dassanetch raiding party of about 500 armed men raided the Gabra in Malabot – 15km from North Horr killing 59 people. Government issues a stern warning that saw the Dassanetch surrender

153 out of estimated 300 rifles and 853 rounds of ammunition by 1st September 1971

1973 - Sibiloi (next to Dassanetch frontiers) was first gazetted as a park under *National parks of Kenya Act (*now *Wildlife Management Act).* The park was then referred to as *East Rudolf National Park.* Its establishment greatly reduced Dassanetch grazing areas.

1979 – Fall of Idi Amin government led to a raid in Moroto Barracks from where automatic rifles were stolen. Some of these guns later found their way in Kenya through gun trade adding to the existing arms

1982 – Attempted coup in Kenya makes president Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi and his handlers more serious on security implications of arms held by civilians leading to concerted efforts towards disarmament

1992 – First multiparty elections held after the re-introduction of multi-partyism in Kenya. Communities in the Rift Valley allegedly armed to protect Moi's 'threatened' presidency further increasing illegal arms in circulation in the frontier areas

1993 – Due to continued incidents of raids by the Gabra, the government disarms most of them

1997 – The Kokai Massacre - a raiding party of the Dassanetch kills over 90 Gabra including some policemen in Kokai

Annex 3

Research Authorisation documents

UNIVERISTY OF NAIROBI
BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

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P. O. Box 30197 - 00100
Nairobi, Kenya

12 February 2008

NDUNG'U JAMES MBUGUA
Dept. of History
FACULTY OF ARTS

Dear Mr. Ndung'u,

RESEARCH PROPOSAL AND SUPERVISORS

This is to inform you that the Director, acting on behalf of the Board of Postgraduate Studies has approved your research proposal titled: "**Herders, guns and the state: Historeal perspective of the dassanetch frontier areas and the politics of arms in Northern Kenya, 1909 – 1997.**"

He has also approved **Dr. Ken Ombongi and Dr. G. Gona** as supervisors of your thesis.

You should therefore begin consulting them and ensure that you submit your thesis for examination on or before end of October 2008.

ODERA S.O. (MR)
FOR: DIRECTOR, BOARD OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

c.c. Dean, Faculty of Arts
Chairman, Dept. of History
Chairman, Faculty of Arts, PSC
Dr. Ken Ombongi
Dr. G. Gona

SOO/an

REPUBLIC OF KENYA

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NAIROBI

When Replying please quote

Ref. MOHEST 13/001/ 38C 428 /2

23rd July 2008

James Mbugua Ndung'u
University of Nairobi
P.O. Box 30197
NAIROBI

RE: RESEARCH AUTHORIZATION

Following your application for authority to carry out research on, ***'Herders, Guns and the State; Historical Perspective of the Dassanetch Frontier Areas and the Politics of Arms in Northern Kenya,***

I am pleased to inform you that you have been authorized to carry out research in Marsabit District for a period ending 30th July, 2009.

You are advised to report to the District Commissioner and the District Education Officer Marsabit District before embarking on your research.

On completion of your research, you are expected to submit two copies of your research report to this office.

Pt **M. O. ONDIEKI**
FOR: PERMANENT SECRETARY

Copy to:

The District Commissioner
Marsabit District

The District Education Officer
Marsabit District