

Claiming Data through Frictions: Coloniality and Epistemic Violence

Interviewer: Do you know who uses the information you provided and for what purpose?

Interviewee: Actually, I do not know.

Interviewer: Do you know how the information is shared?

Interviewee: I do not know, who knows? – I do not even know where it will stop.

(D&D, NIG.IDP.02.02)

The last chapter embarked upon the ambitious task of moving beyond an anthropocentric approach to the analysis of the claims advanced by people with lived experiences of precarious migration. Exploring the ways in which a series of implicit claims to life and humanity are expressed through things, it suggested that the politics of precarious migration that emerges through struggles in the Mexico–US border region may be better understood in terms of the disruption of coloniality, rather than in terms of an appeal to global citizenship. The chapter also emphasised that a more-than-human analysis of claims can risk further silencing people with lived experiences of precarious migration. The problem of silencing is further considered in this chapter through a focus on the difficulties of making claims in situations that are characterised by the complexity and opacity of data-driven governing practices. Specifically, it explores how a drive to datafication on the part of humanitarian agencies further closes down the space for claims making on the part of people living in camp-like settings in the ‘global South’.¹ As such, ignorance is produced through humanitarian data processes.

The analysis in this chapter focuses on lived experiences of humanitarian data processes on the part of people living in camp-like settings within their

home countries. It focuses in particular on experiences of precarious migration that are commonly referred to as forms of ‘internal displacement’ within north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan – two regions marked by conflict. Here, the analysis shows that data collection generates both ignorance and frictions, with informed consent often appearing to be meaningless due to the coloniality of data processes and the epistemic violence that these perpetuate. As indicated in the quote from a person living in Nigeria that opens this chapter, people in situations of precarity often do not know on what basis their information is collected and used by humanitarian agencies. The quote indicates that it is difficult to know where the production and use of data begins and ends or when the sharing of data ‘will stop’ (D&D, NIG.IDP.02.02). This points to the ways in which data can take on a life of its own, exceeding the original purpose of its production even in the relatively rare cases when this purpose is explained to so-called affected communities. Moreover, there is often an implicit assumption on the part of people in situations of precarity that assistance is reliant on the provision of data, even where this is not the case. Openings for explicit claims thus tend to be closed down, at the same time as which the reach of data entails increased complexity and opacity.

This chapter explores how epistemic violence arises through the production of ignorance by humanitarian organisations involved in practices of data collection. International humanitarian agencies operating in contexts of conflict and emergency in the global South not only provide services and assistance; they also reproduce asymmetries of power through data processes that entrench hierarchies of care and control. Sites such as camps in the global South in this regard might be understood as sites of experimentation for humanitarianism as a form of governance that has become increasingly integral to the management of migration over recent years. This chapter hones in on these relations of power and hierarchy, to show how data-driven humanitarianism also generates *frictions* over the use of data and the provision of assistance. By interpreting such frictions in terms of a range of implicit and indirect – as well as explicit and direct – claims surrounding both the provision of assistance and the development of humanitarian data processes, the chapter suggests that a critique of coloniality and epistemic violence is integral to the politics of precarious migration in the north-eastern Nigerian and South Sudanese contexts.

Research Context

This chapter draws on qualitative research conducted during 2021–22 as part of a large-scale international collaborative project, which was designed to address the practical and ethical challenges that arise through the datafication

of the humanitarian sector. *Data and Displacement* (D&D) explored data-driven humanitarian practices from the perspective of people living in camp-like settings within their own countries – commonly referred to as Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs.² It focused on north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan due to the large numbers of people living in precarity within these contexts, as well as due to the relatively well-established data practices in each location. ‘Internal displacement’ has been a prominent issue in Nigeria for the past two decades, with over two million people affected. Insurgency or attacks by non-state armed groups have exacerbated precarities, particularly for the 1.7 million ‘displaced people’ living in north-eastern Nigeria (IOM, 2024a). High levels of precarity are also evident in South Sudan, where conflict broke out post-independence in December 2013. An estimated 1.84 million people remain ‘internally displaced’ within South Sudan at the time of writing, nearly a third of whom are hosted in camp-like settings (IOM 2024b; see also Squire et al., 2022).

In both north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan, people living in camp-like settings are frequently asked to provide data to humanitarian organisations. For example, a young man told me at one of our project workshops in Abuja that he provided data to different agencies up to five times in one day. This reflects the broad range of actors involved in data collection processes, particularly in camps, where access is relatively straightforward compared to contexts in which people are dispersed within host communities. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been a key data collector in both Nigeria and South Sudan, providing baseline data about needs, vulnerabilities and mobility on a regular basis. The IOM has also played a role in establishing biometric registration in both contexts. Moreover, a plethora of local and international NGOs working in north-eastern Nigeria and in South Sudan collect data for project-specific purposes. State and national agencies as well as academic researchers are also active in each context. This renders the data ecosystem complex, with the purposes of data collection often appearing opaque to people who are asked to provide information.

The D&D project sought to forefront the lived experiences of people living within camp-like settings in the context of a drive towards datafication on the part of humanitarian agencies. The research involved 174 in-depth interviews with a total of 182 interviewees. This included thirty-four in-depth qualitative interviews with forty-two international data experts, donors, and humanitarian practitioners from a range of organisations, which were conducted between April and July 2021. It also included interviews with people living in situations of precarity and with regional stakeholders and practitioners in north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan.³ In 2021 and 2022, the D&D research team conducted in-depth qualitative interviews in north-eastern Nigeria with fifty

people living across five camps in Maiduguri, Borno state. The team also interviewed twenty stakeholders and practitioners working in the region.⁴ Similarly, the research team conducted in-depth interviews in 2021 and 2022 with fifty people in situations of precarity and with twenty stakeholders and practitioners in South Sudan, specifically in Juba and Bentiu. All our interviews were semi-structured and were undertaken face-to-face in two phases to enable a review of initial interview data and questions. Interviews with people in situations of precarity and with stakeholders were usually undertaken in local languages, often with a translator, before being transcribed into English and subsequently analysed. Most of the interviews were recorded directly, and extensive notes were written up in full by the interviewer for those that were not.⁵

People experiencing precarity in their home countries can face various forms of violence, which can be attributed to factors beyond practices of border and migration management discussed elsewhere in this book. These include, for example, intercommunal conflict and abuses of power by governmental security forces or armed groups. Nevertheless, the globalising drive of contemporary governing practices has led to the growing involvement of international humanitarian organisations like IOM in the management of South–North as well as South–South migration (Ahouga, 2022; Geiger and Pécoud, 2010). Camp-like settings for people from the global South in this regard form critical sites of experimentation in humanitarian governance, which has been increasingly shaped by a ‘digital revolution’ over recent years (Duffield, 2018). Humanitarian data practices in north-eastern Nigerian and South Sudan are in this regard important to examine as part of a broader repertoire of governing practices. An analysis of the claims that emerge in these contexts thus enables a broader and deeper perspective on the potential and limitations of global citizenship and coloniality as conceptual frameworks for making sense of the politics of precarious migration.

Data-Driven Humanitarianism and Coloniality

Although a differentiated field of practice that is subject to obstruction as well as facilitation on the part of states (see Plowright, 2024), humanitarianism has become increasingly central to practices of governing migration over recent years. As such, it has also become a key focus of critical border and migration studies scholarship (e.g. Garelli and Tazzioli, 2018; Tazzioli, 2015, 2017; Vaughan-Williams, 2015). This development reflects the growing concern on the part of humanitarians not only with ‘the protection of human life’, but also with ‘the problem of illegal immigration’ (Pallister-Wilkins, 2015: 54). Such developments are indicative of the ways in which contemporary governing practices

combine threat with care (Feldman and Ticktin, 2010), care with control (İşleyen, 2018), care with management (Ilcan and Rygiel, 2015), care with enforcement (Williams, 2015), and care with punishment (Agier, 2011). Unpacking the grounds for the affinity between humanitarian action and practices of border security, Polly Pallister-Wilkins (2022) argues that humanitarianism fosters liberal and paternalist approaches to human suffering in terms that depoliticise border violence. This, she suggests, masks the unequal mobilities that are implicated in the ‘global colour line’. Didier Fassin describes such injustices in terms of a ‘complex ontology of inequality’, which relies on a form of moral ‘humanitarian reason’ that ‘differentiates in a hierarchical manner the values of human lives’ (2007: 519). On similar grounds, Miriam Ticktin argues that humanitarianism is not an appropriate framework for migrant justice because it relies on a binary of victims and saviours and thus provides ‘little impetus to animate political change’ (2016: 256).

A historical perspective sheds further light on the limits of a humanitarian approach as a framework for migrant justice or the politics of precarious migration. Michael Barnett defines humanitarianism as ‘the attempt to alleviate the suffering of distant strangers’ (2014: 243), showing how this was initially connected to displaced refugees after World War One due to international concerns that mass movements were ‘undermining peace and security’ (2014: 245). From the 1970s onwards, he indicates, the humanitarianism of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expanded its reach to those experiencing ‘internal displacement’, as ‘states were rolling up the welcome mat and refusing to let them cross the border’ (2014: 249; cf. Chimni, 1998). Humanitarianism pertaining to displacement in this regard can be understood as a form of global governmentality that is self-serving as much as it is compassionate (Barnett, 2013), and that is functional to a liberal order at home as much as it is interventionist in relation to ‘other people and places’ (Reid-Henry, 2014). While ordering domestic as well as international relations, humanitarian responses to displacement have thus been heavily driven by an impulse to maintain the stability of states in the global North.

Datafication – or the extraction of value through data as part of what Mark Duffield (2018) calls the ‘digital revolution’ – plays an increasingly important role within humanitarian interventions in ‘other places’. The so-called data revolution focuses on innovation and on the proliferation of data solutions, and has become well established within the sector (Burns, 2015; Meier, 2012; Pearn et al., 2022). Duffield (2018) shows how this has led to ‘disaster’ situations forming important locations for trialling new forms of remote management, which are designed to govern increasingly pervasive and enduring forms of precarity. He argues that this has led to new forms of behaviour, cognition

and automation that further promote precarity as a global phenomenon. While Duffield rightly highlights the ways in which precarity is global in reach with datafication effecting us all, scholars of critical migration and border studies have importantly emphasised the unequal effects and the longer trajectories of data practices and the forms of experimentation to which he refers – particularly in relation to biometrics (e.g. Iwuoha and Edgar, 2024; Nishiyama, 2020) as well as in relation to refugee governance (e.g. Rothe et al., 2021) and bordering practices more broadly (Canzutti and Tazzioli, 2023). Mirca Madianou (2019, 2024) refers to this as a form of technocolonialism that reinvigorates longer-standing relations of colonial dependency. Data-driven humanitarianism in this regard can be understood as perpetuating the ‘coloniality of power’, whereby racialised social categorisations and epistemic logics endure beyond colonialism as a historical social formation (Quijano, 2007, 2008; see also Vernon, 2024).

The coloniality of humanitarian data processes has been a key theme in the critical border and migration studies literature over recent years. Scholars have emphasised how such practices involve recurring colonial relations (Lemberg-Pedersen, 2019), including processes of extraction (Aradau and Tazzioli, 2020) and data craving (Lemberg-Pedersen and Haioty, 2020), which are shaped by legacies that both endure and mutate over time (cf. Stoler, 2016). For example, Martina Tazzioli’s (2022) work on techno-humanitarianism shows how datafied processes demand compliance with technological and bureaucratic steps on the part of those reliant on humanitarian assistance (see also Ozkul, 2023). In contexts such as north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan, humanitarian data processes can have the effect of producing individual and social harms while also enacting epistemological closures that exclude people from the global South from processes of knowledge production (see Milan and Treré, 2019). Paying attention to the ways in which datafication reinforces unequal relations of dependence thus brings to bear forms of violence and precarity that are both distinctive to the contemporary context (Frowd, 2017), yet also integral to a longer history of humanitarian reason (Fassin, 2012).

Epistemic Violence and Pernicious Ignorance

Data-driven humanitarianism in north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan involves a series of epistemological closures that can be interpreted as a form of violence that is rooted in knowledge itself. Gayatri Spivak’s seminal work in this area focuses on a Hindu widow’s practices of self-immolation, which enables her to highlight the colonial dynamics of epistemic violence whereby the subaltern ‘cannot know or speak’ (Spivak, 2010 [1988]: 258). This form of violence engenders what Miranda Fricker refers to as epistemic injustices, whereby people are devalued in their ‘capacity as a knower/subject of knowledge’ due to their perceived lack of credence as a

speaker and/or their lack of intelligibility within the dominant episteme (2010: 5). This sense of silencing in which people ‘cannot know or speak’ frequently arose in our interviews with people in situations of displacement. As someone from South Sudan says: ‘we don’t ask [about how our data is used] because we don’t know the system. They didn’t explain it to us’ (D&D, SS.IDP.01.08). Rather than subjects of knowledge, people in situations of precarity are here positioned as non-knowers within the humanitarian episteme (see Squire and Alozie, 2023).

Non-knowledge is integral to the formation of data within the humanitarian sector (see also Jones and Squire, 2025). Scholars in the burgeoning field of ignorance studies highlight non-knowledge as a regular or universal aspect of social life and decision-making. They suggest that non-knowledge can potentially be emancipatory as well as oppressive as this may function as a resource for the marginalised as well as for the powerful (Gross and McGoey, 2022: 4–5). However, non-knowledge perhaps manifests most obviously within humanitarianism in terms of what Kristie Dotson (2011) calls a form of pernicious ignorance. Pernicious ignorance refers to a failure of communicative reciprocity that reflects a relationship of power, which is harmful due to the persistent processes of silencing that ensue. Indeed, this is an issue that some humanitarians openly acknowledge. As an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) representative interviewed by the D&D team indicates: ‘we need to be asking the people that are actually affected and they should be the ones to determine what data . . . not like what data’s being collected but they should be actually involved in that collection effort and have some way to actually own their data, have rights to see it, control it, know how it’s been used, and we’re pretty far from achieving that I think’ (D&D, IO.01.10).

Stefania Milan and Emiliano Treré (2019) argue that theories of datafication need to be decolonised through the development of an alternative approach that is orientated towards data justice. In so doing, they emphasise the ways in which epistemological blindspots deprive ‘the myriad of Souths’ of ‘knowledge, richness and freedom’ (2019: 321, 329). While non-knowledge can play a formative role in situations of conflict or disaster, functioning as ‘an inevitable aspect of the extreme uncertainty in any crisis’ (Pawlak, 2022: 995), the ways in which non-knowledge is shaped through the prioritisation of some forms of data over others is problematic in the humanitarian sector. As a UN agency representative says:

today when we talk about humanitarian data, we tend to refer to quantitative data where, historically, that term may have been taken out in a more qualitative nature and thinking. So, today when you say humanitarian data, people tend to think numbers and statistics.

(D&D, IO.01.01)

Data-driven humanitarianism in this regard risks reducing people to units and prioritising ‘big data’ and algorithmic processing over experiential and contextual forms of knowledge and analysis (Jones and Squire, 2025). Rather than learning from – and *with* – people in situations of precarity, the humanitarian sector here reduces the parameters of who gets to produce knowledge, about whom, and in what terms (Squire and Alozie, 2023).

As ‘a currency of power’ that perpetuates the gap between those who benefit from data and those who do not (D’Ignazio 2017: 6), the production of knowledge not only reaffirms a racialised and classed hierarchy over who gets to speak. It also actively produces ignorance within affected communities regarding processes of datafication. This is evident in an excerpt from an interview with someone living in a camp in Nigeria:

Interviewer: So do you know who used the information you provided?

Interviewee: I don’t know.

Interviewer: And for what purpose?

Interviewee: I don’t know.

Interviewer: Do you know how information is shared?

Interviewee: I don’t know.

Interviewer: When and by whom in what format?

Interviewee: They just write it in a paper and go away with it.

(D&D, NIG.02.06)

Similarly – and extending the quote opening this chapter – another highlights how ignorance is produced through the datafication of the humanitarian sector:

Interviewer: Have you been told what is happening to your data?

Interviewee: They have never told us.

Interviewer: Or how your data is used to make decisions about what assistance you qualify for?

Interviewee: Honestly, we do not know.

Interviewer: Are you able to access your data yourself?

Interviewee: No, almost all the information I have given have not been useful to me.

Interviewer: Do you know anything about your data rights?

Interviewee: No.

(D&D, NIG.02.02)

What these statements point to are failures of communicative reciprocity within humanitarian data processes, which reflect longer-standing relations of

power and hierarchy that persistently silence people who are cast as ‘known’ but not ‘knowers’ within humanitarian reason. Nevertheless, such processes also generate a series of frictions, which are examined in the next section in terms of a range of implicit and explicit claims that challenge the coloniality of data practices and the pernicious forms of ignorance these perpetuate.

Frictional Encounters through Data

The D&D research in north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan did not find any examples of people in situations of precarity openly resisting data collection or actively refusing to enrol in data processes. Rather, we found that perceptions of humanitarian data collection were in many cases assumed to be necessary for the receipt of services and assistance. This was particularly the case in South Sudan, where conflict has conditioned distrust of government and increased reliance on humanitarian organisations. One of the people we spoke to described this as follows:

So, our lives depend on the humanitarian [organisations] and we don’t have doubt [or concern] that they may use that data against us. . . . we just give them all the information needed [and] we never bothered to know what are they going to use that data for, because we believe they are the ones who will bring whatever we want. That’s why we give them that information without asking.

(D&D, SS.02.IDP.19)

The quote here is indicative of the ways in which people in situations of precarity can feel that they have no choice *but* to participate in processes of humanitarian data collection. This is not to say that humanitarian data practices are accepted without hesitation. Indeed, we found various tensions arising around the collection and use of data by humanitarians. These arise through what I here refer to as frictions; frictions which involve claims that implicitly and explicitly critique the coloniality of data processes and the racialised and classed forms of epistemic violence that these involve.

The concept of friction has become increasingly influential over recent years. It was introduced into the field of data studies to highlight the ways in which datasets often do not easily travel or translate in computational or institutional terms, thus requiring communicative efforts or mediation to enable their shared use and scientific collaboration (Edwards, 2013; Edwards et al., 2011). Beyond scientific and computational frictions, critical scholars have also pointed to the social and political dimensions of ‘frictional encounters with

data' (Nafus, 2017, np; see also Metcalfe, 2022). For example, Jo Bates (2017) highlights the ways in which friction can occur at the infrastructural or managerial level, in sociocultural terms, and in terms of regulatory frameworks. Arguing that data frictions can be viewed as a productive opportunity, rather than simply an impediment to data sharing, Bates suggests that a lack of friction and the smooth flow of data is not necessarily ethically preferable since this can override deliberation about how to live in more equitable and just societies. Frictions over the production and use of humanitarian data are important in this regard, 'because they influence what is made visible to and knowable by who, and therefore impact profoundly on the development of future knowledge and social relations' (Bates, 2017: 423).

By exploring the frictions that arise over the production and use of humanitarian data, the next section further unpacks some of the ways in which the blindspots and non-knowledge generated through data-driven humanitarianism are challenged by people living in situations of precarity in north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan. Returning to the consideration of different forms of claims as set out earlier in this book (Chapter 3), frictions are interpreted here as enabling an analysis of demands that are easily overlooked due to their implicit and indirect forms of expression. Paying attention to these can provide an alternative account of global politics, which takes seriously the struggles that arise over the colonality of data-driven humanitarianism. Despite the shift of attention to 'internal displacement' in this chapter, a focus on humanitarian data frictions thus retains significance for a rethinking of global politics. Indeed, frictions enable consideration of what Anna Tsing (2005) refers to as the dynamic interactions between different worlds, cultures or forms of knowledge that shape global processes of development and resistance. Specifically, the D&D research shows how frictions arising through the interactions of humanitarian data collectors and people in situations of precarity involve implicit and indirect claims that expose and challenge the pernicious ignorance of the international humanitarian episteme.

Frictions as Claims

The testimonies that D&D generated with people in situations of precarity indicate that frictions in data-driven humanitarianism arise both around the provision of assistance, as well as around the implementation of data processes. First, concerns about the substantive provision of assistance, or lack thereof, arose frequently in our interviews with people in Nigeria and South Sudan. In north-eastern Nigeria, for example, an elderly woman raised questions about who was prioritised for assistance: 'We are not treated equally, tell anybody. Yes, they select small girls, and give them, not old women, like us. Sometimes

there is no equal treatment' (D&D, NIG.IDP.01.06). Another pointed to the ways in which newer arrivals are overlooked: 'There is no equal treatment in any camp, because of the nature of the influx of IDPs, new arrivals to the camp are not enjoying some incentives like shelters and food' (D&D, NIG.01.IDP.02). Problems in the method of distribution were also emphasised by another person from north-eastern Nigeria, who described how food was: 'not distributed equally, because they are not distributing it according to tents' (D&D, NIG.IDP.01.09). Inequalities in basic needs provision were thus a key concern in the Nigerian context.

The situation for people in South Sudan was particularly difficult when we carried out our research, with food rations limited and floods having led to a further deterioration of living conditions. There were also tensions within the camp, with young men segregated into a separate zone and viewed with fear by some of the other residents. One young man pushed back against this process of segregation:

if we were provided with adequate assistance we would go to school and get work and there would be no instances of the youth engaging in fights and theft. What brings a situation of theft is because what people in the [camp] have is not enough and [they] are hungry . . . If there is adequate assistance all of us would want to go to school and work and not engage in conflicts. If one has a child, one cannot even enrol the child into school. This is what I have to say.

(D&D, SS.IDP.01.10)

Frictions around the limited provision of assistance, as well as between humanitarian perceptions of vulnerability and lived experiences of precarity, here generate explicit claims to basic assistance such as food and shelter. Beyond assistance, concerns around fundamental rights such as education and employment also arose in the South Sudanese case.

In addition to these frictions around rights and assistance, a second series of frictions is also evident from the D&D research in relation to the implementation of humanitarian data processes. These are often articulated in implicit and indirect terms. For example, a man from South Sudan implied that humanitarians incorporate bias in the ways in which they conduct data collection. He said:

I have never spoken to any organisations since the time I was displaced in 2013. However, it may seem that the organisations would speak with women because they are the ones at home and we as men do not stay at home.

(D&D, SS.IDP.01.09)

If this is interpreted as an implicit claim regarding the importance of equality in humanitarian data processes, then the statement of another person from north-eastern Nigeria is indicative of similar concerns regarding the relations of power and hierarchy that exist between humanitarians and people in situations of precarity:

they did not ask my consent . . . It's not compulsory but they did not ask of our consent . . . There is nothing I can do rather than give [information to] them because I am thinking without giving them the information I cannot enjoy anything.

(NIG.IDP.01.11)

Here, a failure of communicative reciprocity within humanitarian data processes appears to silence people in situations of precarity. Indeed, many of the testimonies from the D&D project indicate that frictions emerge precisely due to poor or failed communicative reciprocity between humanitarian 'knowers' and the 'known' people from whom they collect data. Paying attention to implicit and indirect claims, as well as explicit and direct demands, is critical in examining these further.

Many of the people we spoke to in north-eastern Nigeria expressed their expectation that, on providing data, something would – or should – change. The failure to see an outcome from data processes in this regard often generated frustration and anger. For example, one person from north-eastern Nigeria explicitly suggested that data is collected under false promises:

They used to collect people's account number, not any paper to sign, and they have collected many people's account number and there is no response. [We] do not hear anything . . . They are telling lies.

(D&D, NIG.IDP.01.06)

This can be interpreted as an indirect demand that challenges humanitarian organisations for failing to respond to people's basis needs. A similar frustration was echoed by another person from north-eastern Nigeria, who said: 'they will just collect data and go. Our people here have participated in many interviews, but nothing has changed' (D&D, NIG.IDP.01.09). There are various ways in which these statements might be understood. On the one hand, within the humanitarian episteme they might be viewed as a failure to recognise consent procedures or as a misunderstanding of the information provided and the wider humanitarian context. On the other hand, from the perspective of those in situations of precarity they emerge as an implicit demand for equality, for a

meaningful say in data processes and for effective humanitarian action. In terms of the politics of precarious migration, the latter might thus be understood in terms of a critique of the extractivist tendencies of data-driven humanitarianism.

In South Sudan people interviewed by the D&D team also indirectly challenged the epistemic violence and pernicious ignorance produced through data-driven humanitarianism. This is evident in the testimony of a single mother who described what happened when she had shared her information with a humanitarian organisation that had collected data about her living situation. In response to our question about whether permission had been sought to collect her data, she said:

They do ask, but it is not the way you are asking. They come to us at home and they ask us about our needs. They interviewed me and I explained to them that I need the plastic sheeting, malaria drugs and the needs of a household.

(D&D, SS.IDP.01.06)

It became apparent through the interview that this woman had not received everything that she had asked for. On response to our question regarding whether she questioned those collecting her data about what would happen with the information she provided, she replied:

I did not ask them because at that time we were speaking about the repair of the shelter. At that time it was hard to get the plastic sheeting and the sticks for repairing the tent. They eventually gave me the plastic sheeting, but did not give me the sticks. I am here because there is nowhere to go . . . I would want to ask them, but I did not, they came to collect data like you are doing now, but they disappeared.

(D&D, SS.IDP.01.06)

Besides risking the production of false hope on the part of this woman by asking what she required without being about to provide for her basic needs, what this statement suggests is that the very process of humanitarian data production closes the space for people to directly ask questions about such processes. People in situations of precarity here not only have nowhere to go, but also have no one to ask. In this respect, they are effectively silenced. I suggest that this not only generates frictions – it also generates *claims* that are often implicit and indirect in their expression.

Regardless of the pernicious ignorance that our research suggests is enacted through data-driven humanitarianism, D&D still found that concerns surrounding data processes persist. This is evident in an appeal to us for help by the single

mother cited above, which extended to a request for feedback from our research findings. She said:

What I want to ask is, we are here and we have no help. We are just staying, waiting for what we don't see, because the life here is too hard for us and if you are willing to do something or to share this with other people, you can help. There is no feedback from those who had interviewed us, and I hope you will give us feedback.

(D&D, SS.IDP.01.06)

Advanced directly as a demand to D&D as a research team, this woman appeals both for her basic needs to be met as well as for data processes to be more accountable. This claim gestures towards the importance of holding open space for people who are otherwise unable to engage within processes of knowledge production to express their claims. Our research team was not in a position to provide for the needs of this woman or for members of her family and community. However, we were in a position to highlight her demands more widely and to make space for feedback processes at the end of the project, as she explicitly requests. We hosted a series of feedback sessions based on our research, while follow-on work from the project also involved members of the D&D team generating outputs directly with research participants (Squire et al., 2024). For the team, this commitment was critical given the context of claims examined in this chapter.

The demands that emerge from frictions over data-driven humanitarianism are visualised in Figure 4.1. Building on those already mapped in Chapters 1–3, the visualisation here includes three claims. These resonate most strongly with theories of coloniality, hence they are placed along the lower horizontal continuum which now includes the additional category of epistemic justice on the left-hand side:

- **Equal treatment** (above rehumanisation towards repossession): 'We are not treated equally, tell anybody. Yes, they select small girls, and give them, not old women, like us. Sometimes there is no equal treatment' (D&D, NIG.IDP.01.06).
- **Adequate assistance** (above repossession): 'if we were provided with adequate assistance we would go to school and get work and there would be no instances of the youth engaging in fights and theft. What brings a situation of theft is because what people in the [camp] have is not enough and [they] are hungry . . . If there is adequate assistance all of us would want to go to school and work and not engage in conflicts. If one has a child, one

cannot even enrol the child into school. This is what I have to say' (D&D, SS.IDP.01.10).

- **Feedback** (above epistemic justice): 'What I want to ask, is we are here and we have no help. We are just staying, waiting for what we don't see, because the life here is too hard for us and if you are willing to do something or to share this with other people, you can help. There is no feedback from those who had interviewed us, and I hope you will give us feedback.' (D&D, SS.IDP.01.06)

There remain ambiguities within these claims that are once again indicative of the ways in which a framework of global citizenship is not necessarily always antithetical to a critique of coloniality. For example, if we consider the first claim to 'equal treatment', this initially appears to be in line with a claim to rights, status and membership. However, when considered more carefully what is clear is that this statement is not explicitly presented as a positive claim, but rather as an implicit chastisement of humanitarians for their failure to treat people equally: 'they select small girls, and give them, not old women, like us' (D&D, NIG.IDP.01.06). I thus interpret this claim as an implicit appeal for recognition and resources in line with the categories of rehumanisation and repossession. This is positioned towards the bottom right of the visualisation and in a mid-tone to represent the somewhat oblique reference to aid organisations that it implies.

Similarly, there is ambiguity in the second claim regarding 'adequate assistance'. This could again be placed either in the upper or bottom half of the visualisation. On the one hand, claims to go to 'school and work' fit under the categories of rights and membership and are closely associated with citizenship and human rights. On the other hand, the claim is more directly framed in terms of the need for meaningful opportunities: 'if we were provided with adequate assistance we would go to school and get work and there would be no instances of the youth engaging in fight and theft. What brings a situation of theft is because what people in the [camp] have is not enough and [they] are hungry' (D&D, SS.IDP.01.10). If we interpret this claim as a critique of the segregation and ultimately of the dispossession of young men within the camps, then this statement resonates more closely with the category of repossession. As such, I have placed this towards the lower middle part of the visualisation, coding it via a slightly darker tone given the more direct reference to humanitarians and government it appears to assume.

The third claim of feedback' that has been included from this chapter is firmly positioned in the bottom half of the visualisation, although it could potentially have been placed towards the top right under participation. To account for this

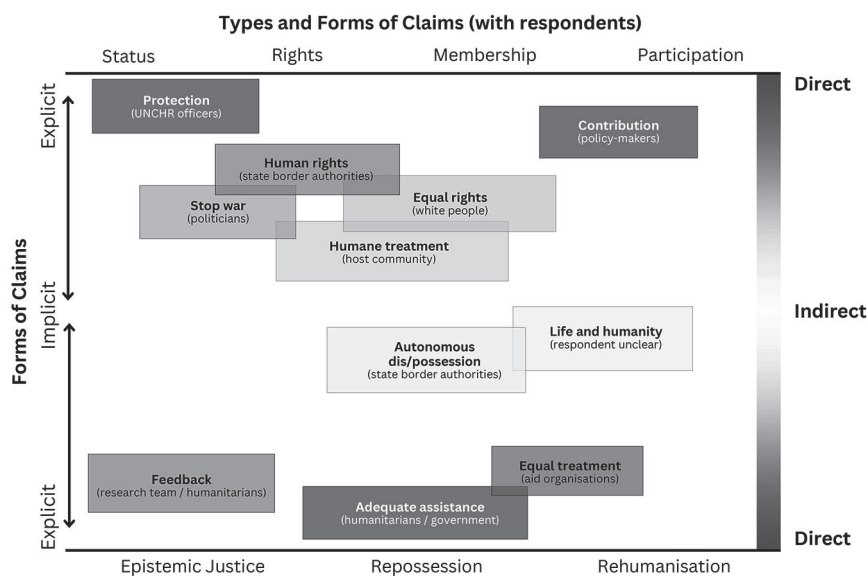


Figure 4.1 Types and forms of claims (with respondents) – including frictions as claims.

claim, I have added a new category along the horizontal line associated with the critique of coloniality that is particularly pertinent to the research within this chapter: epistemic justice. Notably, an appeal to global citizenship is not evident in this instance in any clear-cut way. On the one hand, the demand for feedback is an explicit appeal that is directly articulated towards the D&D research team: 'I hope you will give us feedback' (D&D, SS.IDP.01.06). On the other hand, this appeal also implicitly and indirectly refers to the need for feedback from humanitarians who collect data from people in situations of displacement: 'There is no feedback from those who had interviewed us'. An appeal to epistemic justice is palpable here, even if it is advanced in implicit and indirect terms. The D&D research team is directly identified but humanitarians are not; hence I use a mid-dark tone to represent this ambiguity. A methodological framework that enables appreciation of implicit and indirect claims is again critical here in enabling appreciation of how people in situations of precarity and north-eastern Nigeria and South Sudan collectively advance a critique of the coloniality of data-driven humanitarianism.

Conclusion

The analysis in this chapter has examined lived experiences of humanitarian data processes on the part of people living in camp-like settings in north-eastern

Nigeria and South Sudan, suggesting that these serve as key sites of experimentation for practices of humanitarian governance. It first considered how data-driven humanitarianism can be understood as grounded in longer-standing hierarchies of humanity, through which humanitarians are situated as those with the capacity to know. Rather than subjects of knowledge, people in situations of precarity are by contrast positioned within this humanitarian episteme as non-knowers – or those who are ‘known’. The chapter has shown how this racialised and classed hierarchy serves as a condition for the failure of communicative reciprocity, through which people with lived experiences of precarious migration are subject to persistent processes of silencing. Humanitarian data processes here close spaces for people in situations of precarity to ask questions about the practices within which they are enrolled, leaving them with nowhere to go and no one to ask – and thus effectively silenced. I have suggested that humanitarian data processes in this context generate both ignorance and frictions, with informed consent often meaningless due to the epistemic violence and pernicious ignorance that is perpetuated through data-driven humanitarianism.

While the chapter has shown how epistemic violence is integral to humanitarian reason or the humanitarian episteme, it has also shown how data processes generate a series of claims through the frictions that arise between humanitarians and people with lived experience of precarity. More than simply frictions, these have thus been viewed in this chapter as claims. These are not only conceived as *disruptive* of the violence of governing practices, but also as productive opportunities for an analysis of demands that can easily be overlooked due to their implicit and indirect forms of expression. Specifically, the chapter has examined frictions that generate a range of claims surrounding both the provision of assistance and the implementation of humanitarian data processes. These have been interpreted as operating in three key ways in this chapter: as claims to rehumanisation, as claims to repossession, and as claims to epistemic justice. Global citizenship plays an ambiguous role here. On the one hand, global citizenship *in the making* as an expansive analytical framework helps to make sense of appeals to rights and assistance while, on the other hand, global citizenship as a theory gives way to theories of coloniality. In this regard, we could say that global citizenship is both made and unmade through the politics of precarious migration. The final part of this book further explores these processes of making and unmaking global citizenship. Specifically, it turns to consider the ways in which abolitionist claims constitute the politics of precarious migration through generating *alternatives* to governing practices along with the racialised and classed hierarchies of ‘the human’ within which these are grounded.