

Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs

Minimal Humanity

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5 Registration

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“In this innovative and grounded study, Joël Glasman reveals how it came to be that the smallest unit of our shared humanity—its least common denominator—is neither you nor me, but the calorie, the liter of water, the metrics of our need in our moments of deepest distress. This fascinating work deserves wide readership and demands deep reflection.”

— *Gregory Mann, author of From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: the Road to Nongovernmentality (2015)*

“Combining a provocative perspective with a meticulous eye for detail, Joël Glasman’s insightful history traces humanitarian efforts to define human suffering through an index of vital needs. Minimal Humanity reminds us of the fundamental complexity of apparently simple matters.”

— *Peter Redfield, author of Life in Crisis: The Ethical Journey of Doctors Without Borders (2013)*

“This is a fascinating historical study of how and why humanitarian organizations quantified basic human needs over the course of the 20th century. Glasman (Univ. of Bayreuth, Germany) provides an engaging intellectual genealogy of the transition from subjective approaches to evaluating suffering to relying on allegedly objective and universal measurements. Using methods such as measuring the left arms of children for malnutrition allowed humanitarian organizations to claim they avoided politicizing assistance. However, organizations frequently debated how needs should be defined, as Glasman describes in detail with the *Sphere Handbook*, a humanitarian needs manual published in the 1990s. Just as humanitarian organizations claimed to be serving a generic humanity not defined by culture or politics, aid personnel also promoted an idea of consensus between the global North and South regarding needs. The author convincingly argues that this aspirational ideal of a common, measurable set of needs actually obscures the financial and political inequities between North and South, using Cameroon as a case study of the political and economic realities of how needs are measured in a humanitarian crisis. Specialists in humanitarianism should definitely read this book.”

— *J. M. Rich, Marywood University, Choice Review, Highly Recommended, November 2020 Vol. 58 No. 3*

“In his insightful and wonderfully jargon-free book, *Humanitarianism and the Quantification of Human Needs*, Joël Glasman delves into the history of what he calls the “bookkeeping of human suffering on a world scale (...) Glasman’s book is much richer than can be described here. It is highly recommended for scholars of refugees, humanitarianism, data, and the production of knowledge. Given his extremely readable writing style, the book can also be recommended to those engaged in the humanitarian field who may not have the time or patience to slog through other academic critiques of their work.”

— *Brett Shadle, African Studies Review*

5 Registration

Refugees and the emergence of the humanitarian field in Cameroon

In March 2016, in a small house in Yaoundé's administrative quarter, a man hunched over an Excel spreadsheet: Frank, an OCHA technician was hired by the United Nations' Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to maintain a database of needs in Cameroon.¹ On a small portable computer fixed with brown tape, Frank entered tables into the OCHA software, the *Needs Comparison Tools* (NCT), in order to calculate the indicators and produce color maps that would inform the final report. This report, the Humanitarian Needs Overview, would become one of the principal tools of communication among the actors of the crisis: The government of Cameroon, the headquarters of UN partners, NGOs and donors in Yaoundé, Geneva, and New York.

In the time of the “data revolution” called for by the UN, the time of “evidence-based humanitarianism” and “data-driven decision-making,”² OCHA must justify the presence of humanitarian agencies numerically. Frank therefore organized into large, colored columns, pieces of information that have been given him by dozens of experts, consultants, and volunteers, not only Cameroonian, but also American, Ethiopian, French, Nigerian, Japanese, and Swiss, on population categories as diverse as the villagers of the tropical forest in East Cameroon, Central African refugees living in Adamawa, displaced persons fleeing Boko Haram in the Far North, the victims of the Sahelian drought at the border with Chad, the victims of floods, and the victims of war.³ These data have been the object of numerous hours of preliminary negotiations between NGOs and other agencies, and they now had to be compiled. Frank added up the heterogeneous numbers produced by a small army of economists, doctors, statisticians, and jurists. His software allowed him to produce a synthesis of “vulnerability” in Cameroon, and to estimate that 2.7 million “people in need” lived in this country: One in ten inhabitants lived below the thresholds fixed by humanitarian agencies.⁴ This number not only permitted the UN to designate its humanitarian goal in Cameroon, but also immediately to locate Cameroon in a worldwide hierarchy of needs. There were, according to OCHA, 125.3 million “people in need” on the planet in 2016.⁵

Where did this number come from? How is the weight of humanitarian needs on the planet calculated? The UN's prose readily speaks about cutting-edge technologies, remote sensing, drones, and big data, but seeing Frank swearing in front of his machine and turning his computer on and off over and over because of

technical issues, one starts to wonder if the reality is more prosaic than the digital dreams of UN brochures. In this chapter and the one that follows, I will attempt to reconstruct the production chain of this humanitarian figure, from individuals, to the local scale, all the way to the global scale. It has to do with observing how actors “rise in globality,” according to Christophe Bonneuil’s expression:⁶ how they construct the global. I will present the construction of this figure as a series of “tests,” relying on a concept of pragmatic sociology. I will thus try to untangle the too-often confused threads of figures and their use, of high and do-it-yourself technology, of knowledge and non-knowledge, and of the certain and the uncertain.

This chapter is primarily interested in the way in which Cameroon has become an object of humanitarian knowledge since 2014. Sections 1 and 2 describe how a “knowledge of crisis” (using the expression of Vincent Bonnacese) emerged, and how the production of numbers became a competitive game among humanitarian agencies. Even if all large humanitarian agencies agree on the principle of impartiality (that is, the idea of assisting first and foremost “people in need”), they do not, however, agree about the way these needs are calculated. On the one hand, some organizations, like the High Commissioner for Refugees, prefer a definition of needs by status. The UNHCR was mandated by the UN General Assembly to “protect” refugees, a category defined according to international refugee law.⁷ For other organizations, like OCHA or UNICEF, on the other hand, needs must be qualified according to “vulnerability” (a vulnerability or needs-based approach). For these agencies, the law says little about real needs: A refugee can be rich, whereas a non-refugee could be in need. After having shown that the definition and the quantification of suffering is a strategic challenge for access to donor resources and access to the terrain, this chapter will consider the quantification of needs according to legal status, first observing how UNHCR agents quantify refugees (Part 3), then other legal categories (Part 4). In the following chapter, we will see how the approach via “vulnerability” is asserted.

The best-established practice of enumerating needs by law is the “registration” of refugees. Registration thus constitutes a heuristic point of entry in the study of “humanitarian government.”⁸ It primarily deals with one of the numbers considered the most “robust” by humanitarian agencies. Whereas other numbers, like the figures of the “host population” or that of “people in food insecurity” are less precise, the refugee figures are much rarely contested by the large agencies. The category of refugees is a long-standing and widely recognized category.⁹ In Cameroon, this figure was produced exclusively by one large agency, UNHCR.¹⁰ In contrast to other countries in the region, like Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or Rwanda, there was no ministry for refugee registration in Cameroon in 2014:¹¹ UNHCR did the work by itself.¹² This UN agency thus enjoyed a monopoly, both in the selection of refugees and in the production of numbers.¹³

In Cameroon, it was not the state that counted refugees, the displaced, the hungry, the living, and the dead. International organizations have intervened for decades in the production of statistics. Since the 1950s, international agencies have furnished advice, tools, and financing for research on GDP and consumption, and

Population by Sector

Sector	NCA refugees	CAR refugees (old)	CAR refugees (>Jan2014)	Refugees of other nationality	IDPs	Returns	Hosts	OTHER PIN	TOTAL PIN	Females	Males	Children (<18 years)	Adults (18-59 Years)	Elderly (>59 years)	
Shelter/NFI	86,000	18,131	112,882	-	159,000	29,000	250,862	-	655,875	347,508	334,394	236,043	26,227	347,508	
WASH	84,176	69,109	107,659	-	133,000	-	343,720	75,412	813,076	414,669	398,407	471,584	308,969	32,523	
Education	49,378	57,814	98,565	-	36,000	-	208,583	-	450,340	229,674	220,667	450,340	-	-	
Nutrition	18,000	14,000	31,684	59	61,000	8,000	75,085	308,000	515,828	294,022	216,648	443,612	72,216	-	
Protection	86,409	100,727	158,418	336	198,889	36,000	448,077	-	1,028,856	545,294	483,562	617,314	370,388	41,154	
L Child Protection	52,000	57,814	90,220	-	122,000	20,000	238,167	-	580,201	295,903	284,298	580,201	-	-	
L SGBV	50,036	56,426	109,970	336	79,000	15,000	144,289	-	455,057	241,180	213,877	273,034	163,820	18,202	
Early Recovery	86,000	100,727	175,108	3,848	198,889	36,000	448,077	-	1,048,649	534,811	513,838	629,189	377,514	41,946	
Health	86,000	100,727	175,108	3,848	198,889	36,000	448,077	484,564	1,533,213	781,939	751,274	812,603	613,285	107,325	
Food	86,000	18,131	175,108	3,848	198,889	36,000	448,077	1,792,187	2,758,240	1,406,702	1,351,538	1,599,779	1,048,131	110,330	
	683,999	593,606	1,234,521	12,275	1,385,556	216,000	3,053,014	2,660,164	9,839,134	5,091,700	4,768,503	6,113,899	2,980,550	698,988	Total
	86,409	100,727	175,108	3,848	198,889	36,000	448,077	1,792,187	2,758,240	1,406,702	1,351,538	1,599,779	1,048,131	347,508	Max
									53%	35%	12%	Percent by Max			
									611,370	298,055	69,899	Sector average			
									62%	30%	7%	Percent by Sector Avg			
									62%	30%	7%	Percent by raw total			
									525,892	236,395	36,839	Median			
						0.24249822			66%	30%	5%	Percent by Median			

Figure 5.1 An Excel sheet from the preparation of the OCHA Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017.

Source: Courtesy of OCHA¹⁴

for creating the population census. But a new era in the international governmentality of certain regions of Africa may have begun: During “humanitarian crises,” international institutions were no longer content with financing research, providing tools, or harmonizing the indicators a posteriori; they at times dispensed with state institutions almost entirely.

How Cameroon has become the object of humanitarian knowledge

Cameroon has only recently become the object of humanitarian knowledge. Since the 1970s, Cameroon has seemed to have escaped the great Sahelian famines, mass violence, and genocidal war. It has long been an example of a country with promise for development, since it has enjoyed important resources (petrol, gold, sea access, fertile land, varied climates). According to one German diplomat, “Cameroon acted as an anchor of stability in the region.”¹⁵ However, the economic takeoff never really took place. Economic growth stayed weak and was poorly allocated.¹⁶ An aging political elite came to monopolize access to resources.¹⁷ Paul Biya became Premier Minister in 1975, at a time when Leonid Brezhnev was leading the Soviet Union, and has been President of the Republic since 1982. He has rarely left his residence outside of Yaoundé, hardly ever appearing in public, often living at the Intercontinental Hotel in Geneva – probably knowing Swiss bankers better than he knows the rural populations of his own country.¹⁸

Biya’s government looked like a textbook case of Foucauldian theory. The president of Cameroon seemed to apply to the letter the separation of powers conceived of by the French philosopher, in every instance: The nation of Cameroon exercised the power of sovereignty in a caricatured manner; it availed itself of the right to “take life and let live” in spectacular fashion, multiplying police raids in the neighborhoods of the big cities, leading lightning raids against Boko Haram in the north of the country, conducting massive torture operations in the prisons, and staging the fiery destruction of rebel or suspect villages.¹⁹ Knowledge of its populations, on the other hand, the management of their well-being, the power of governmentality, that which depends on an assemblage of knowledge about the living and that reserves for itself the right of “make live and let die” – all that has held little interest for Paul Biya. The state progressively disengaged from health services, social services, and education – disengagement in part encouraged by the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).²⁰ Life expectancy in Cameroon has declined from 1991 to 2005, going from 53.5 to 51.5 years.²¹ The poverty figures have increased strongly, going from 7.1 million in 2007 to 8.1 million in 2014.²² Political scientists have dubbed Cameroon’s political regime a “perpetual government,” a “government by negligence,” and a “stationary state.”²³

The Cameroonian state was not preoccupied with accumulating data on its population. Even the most basic information was missing: Birth records were lacking, the personal data records were incomplete, and the population census only took place every ten years.²⁴ This disinterest of the state for governmental

knowledge was not solely the result of a lack of means, it was also the result of a specific history. This state was constructed after the colonial era, not based on a keen understanding of its population, but on the control of external resources: It was the “gatekeeper state” described by Frederick Cooper.²⁵ The colonial and postcolonial state became voluntarily disinterested in information about populations. It delegated this task to other actors:²⁶ political parties, unions, churches, and more and more to NGOs and international organizations. The interest of the latter has become compounded in the last 20 years, as Western states and donors have demonstrated concern in better knowing the peripheral zones (so-called “ungoverned” zones) considered to be potential sources of danger (terrorism, trafficking, epidemics, undocumented migration).²⁷ As Mark Duffield writes, this knowledge of remote government intervenes when the population considered to be “ungoverned people” becomes, in the donors’ view, “unmanageable” and “uncontained.”²⁸

2014 was a turning point. In a few months, Cameroon was classified a “humanitarian crisis situation” by the UN. Before that, Cameroon had already experienced crises – but it had not been the subject of a rapid increase in humanitarian inquiries. There had been regular arrivals of Nigerian and Central African refugees, notably large in 2004, 2007, and 2009. But UNHCR considered the question of Central African refugees in Eastern Cameroon to be almost resolved. The some 102,112 Central African refugees did not seem to be posing any more of a problem in 2013; they lived in the villages or in the cities.²⁹ The UNHCR spoke of “local integration,” a “durable solution,” and an “integration rate” of 80%.³⁰ The UN agency thought that the social and cultural proximity between the Central African refugees and the residents of Eastern Cameroon (of whom many are cattle farmers, Muslim, and Fula-speaking) would facilitate their integration.³¹ At the end of 2013, UNHCR therefore decided to reduce its activities and close its regional office in Bertoua.

It is in January 2014 that the situation changed rapidly in the Eastern region, with the sudden arrival of thousands of Central African refugees. The “anti-Balaka” militias that seized the Central African towns of Berbérati, Carnot, and Bouar at the end of 2013 exercised great violence and provoked a mass exodus.³² In February 2014, UNHCR sent a small team to register refugees in the border stations (Gari Gombo, Kenzou, Gbiti, Toktoyo, Garoua-Mboulai, Gbatoua Godolé, Ngaoui, Yamba).³³ The Red Cross and MSF provided first aid. In March 2014, during the catastrophe, the Cameroonian government created an inter-departmental committee for the sake of the refugee question, to coordinate the emergency response.³⁴ In May 2014, UNHCR counted 83,995 Central African refugees having arrived since January.³⁵

Humanitarian organizations, journalists, and diplomats thus multiplied observational missions in Eastern Cameroon.³⁶ They described an alarming situation. Refugees lived with families, in rented rooms, in schools, hangars, mosques, or outdoors. In Kenzou, the soccer field was transformed into a large camp where the refugees slept on the ground. In other places, they constructed shelters from plastic tarpaulins and raffia leaves. Some refugees came in their personal vehicles, others

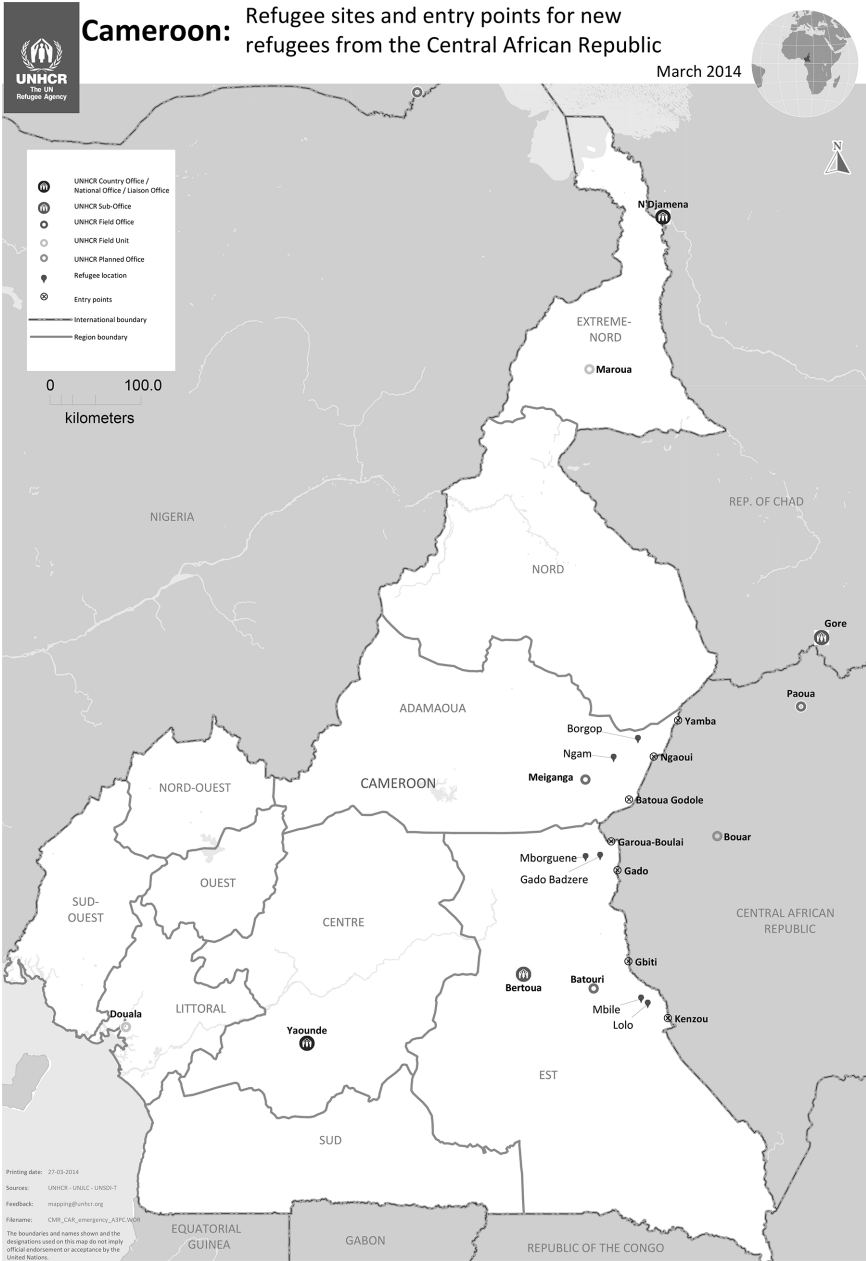


Figure 5.2 Refugee sites and entry points for new refugees from the Central African Republic.
 Source: Courtesy of UNHCR

by bus, packed onto flatbed trucks, others were transported by the African-led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA), still others came on foot and on the backs of cattle, hiding regularly in the bush to escape the anti-Balaka.³⁷ The first reports described the refugees as exhausted, sick, and often injured by machetes. The reports talk about refugees feeding themselves with leaves or roots, or living off of sporadic gifts from different groups; they counted many injured, and many sick with diarrhea, malaria, and measles.

In spite of this situation, aid came late. The UNHCR was not prepared for such a large crisis, and other organizations present in the region had reduced staff.³⁸ The world's eyes were turned elsewhere: The Syrian crisis, the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, the Central African interior. The UNHCR took its time obtaining sites from the Cameroonian government to move the refugees in – UNHCR wanted sites open to the villages, whereas the government wanted enclosed camps allowing them to control entry.³⁹ Bulldozers ended up digging trenches in the tropical forest to establish small tent camps, but the refugee transport from the border posts to these sites (Lolo, Mbilé, Timangolo, Gado, Mborguene, Ngam, and Borgop)⁴⁰ was slow-going. Refugees had sometimes to wait for several weeks or several months at the border stations to be able to obtain their papers and their ration cards. A rough countryside, bumpy laterite roads, and faulty infrastructure put the brakes on operations. The border between Cameroon and the Central African Republic was more than 600 kilometers long; refugees were registered at 29 passage points recognized by UNHCR, but in reality, many people crossed the border in other places. In the towns, infrastructure was overwhelmed – the nutrition center in Batouri, with 12 beds, sheltered more than 100 children – whereas in the villages, the great dispersal of refugees made it hard to replenish supplies. In May, the World Food Programme declared itself soon out of stock and said that it had not received any new donations allowing it to purchase more food.⁴¹

Only in May 2014 did the crisis start to be taken more seriously. A report by MSF demonstrated the gravity of the situation. Having been present in Cameroon for more than 20 years, in different regions of the country (notably for its projects of health, nutrition, and HIV/AIDS), MSF had been involved since the first arrivals of refugees at the border with first aid, support for hospitals, and the management of nutrition centers.⁴² In March, an epidemiologist from MSF led a short, retrospective mortality inquiry at the Gbiti cemetery. Since the tombs of newly arrived refugees were recognizable, he estimated that the mortality rate was a good deal higher than the emergency threshold.⁴³ At the request of MSF Switzerland, *Epicentre* – MSF's center for epidemiological research – thus launched an inquiry on mortality and acute malnutrition.⁴⁴ For three weeks, four inspectors inquired four different sites (the town of Garoua-Mboulai, the camp of Gado Badzere, the town of Gbiti, and the camp of Gbiti).⁴⁵ With the help of four nurses, they supervised the work of 56 “community liaisons” that visited the families (the “households”) and took children's measurements (the brachial perimeter and observations of edemas). The community liaisons were Cameroonian Red Cross volunteers and Central Africans chosen from among the refugees, all trained for three days in rapid techniques to evaluate malnutrition and in collecting data via

questionnaires. Working on the refugee welcome centers, the community liaisons were the intermediaries between the NGOs and the aid beneficiaries – they were those who knew the families best. The investigators counted 60,611 people (refugees and residents) at these sites, and established gross mortality rates and acute malnutrition rates higher than the emergency threshold, concluding the existence of “a high mortality rate and alarming malnutrition rates.”⁴⁶

The report constituted a quantitative critique of UNHCR’s activity: Not only did UNHCR get the number of refugees wrong (in the studied camps, the number of people surveyed by MSF significantly passed the number of refugees registered by UNHCR – in some places, by more than 10%),⁴⁷ but the UN organization also underestimated the gravity of the situation. The MSF report contributed to the accumulation of indices that converged in April – May 2014. The UN’s Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) disbursed an emergency fund of 4.1 million USD for the Central African refugees in Cameroon, and UNHCR made a public appeal for 22.6 million USD for Central African refugees. At the end of May, the WFP and IOM declared Cameroon to be in a state of maximum emergency (level 3, L3).

Two months later, the diagnostic of the Cameroonian humanitarian “three crises” was established: 1) In the East, the crisis of the Central African civil war – with around 253,000 Central African refugees in Cameroon in 2015, essentially spread out in the regions of the East and Adamawa. 2) In the North, the crisis of refugees and the displaced fleeing the war with Boko Haram, with around 65,000 Nigerian refugees and 93,000 Cameroonian displaced in 2015, in the regions of the North and the Far North (also called the Extreme North). 3) Finally, also in the North, the “Sahelian crisis” that combined a structural fragility of agro-pastoral activities in an arid region and weak harvests leading to food insecurity touching a fifth of households and malnutrition rates near the emergency threshold.⁴⁸

Competing for leadership in the humanitarian field

Ever since Cameroon entered this crisis state, UN agencies competed for the leadership of humanitarian operations. In effect, Cameroon posed a problem for the UN’s bureaucracy: Humanitarian actors provided assistance for refugees (Central African and Nigerian) as well as assistance for non-refugees (internal Cameroonian displaced people, Cameroonians in food insecurity, the malnourished, etc.). According to the UN’s rules of action for humanitarian crises, in a *refugee aid situation*, it is UNHCR that ought to bear the responsibility for the humanitarian response. UNHCR was already present in Cameroon and had already been working with Central African refugees since 2007. It enjoyed significant logistical capacity on the ground and a network of local partners. But the organization was late to react to the new crisis and received critique from NGOs.⁴⁹

The headquarters in Geneva reacted by replacing the UNHCR country representative by a new one. In the meantime, the heavyweights of international aid logistics – UNICEF, WFP, WHO – got organized. In February 2015, the UN Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs named the UN’s Resident Coordinator,

Najat Rochdi (who was also the director of the UN's Development Programme, UNDP), as its humanitarian coordinator.⁵⁰ Her responsibility was therefore to coordinate humanitarian action, not only by the UN, but NGOs as well. Despite the critique, UNHCR refused to work with other UN organizations. A power struggle ensued, resulting in a compromise: East Cameroon would be coordinated by UNHCR, whereas in the North, UNHCR and OCHA would share the lead, thus inaugurating a legal innovation: The joint UNHCR-OCHA strategy on "mixed situations."⁵¹

Competition for control of the humanitarian field in Cameroon was fueled by an age-old conflict in the heart of the UN world. Since the 1960s, several UN agencies had affirmed their claim to coordinating humanitarian aid in times of crisis: The UNDP, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), UNICEF, and the WFP were just some of the large agencies that had the means to claim to coordinate large logistical operations on the ground. But in the context of the increase of numbers of refugees and the displaced, UNHCR knew to re-establish itself as an actor from the first plan. From the 1980s on, UNHCR had positioned itself more and more as the natural coordinator of humanitarian crises. The power and the limits of UNHCR resided in a clear mandate, founded on a precise legal definition – the protection of refugees and stateless persons, as written in its mandate of 1951.⁵² UNHCR – unlike UNICEF or the FAO – is not, properly speaking, an "agency" of the UN; it is an administrative service under the authority of one person, the High Commissioner for Refugees, directly linked to the UN Secretary-General.⁵³ This administration was equipped with a vertical structure, "a quasi-military chain of command."⁵⁴ Its legitimacy derived from the figure of the High Commissioner, a known political or diplomatic personality who selects his or her own personnel, over whom he or she reigned with personal and often patriarchal authority (those who were there in the 1950s nostalgically evoked memories of soirées during which all UNHCR personnel gathered around a piano while the High Commissioner played Christmas carols).⁵⁵

From a limited mandate at the start – limited to European refugees before 1951 – UNHCR has expanded its reach – first, to refugees from all continents, then to other legal categories outside of its original mandate: The internally displaced, returnees, host populations (see Chapter 2). UNHCR has been a fast-growing UN agency.⁵⁶ The UNHCR was today in every country in Africa.⁵⁷ It acts as a "global" government for displaced persons.⁵⁸ However, the organization has conserved its original centralized and vertical structure, founded on loyalty to the person of the High Commissioner (relying on its "Country Representatives"), a structure that facilitated negotiations with nations.⁵⁹

Competition for humanitarian leadership became clear in the 1990s. In 1991, the UN General Assembly created a new structure for humanitarian coordination:⁶⁰ It appointed an Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC), who was supposed to be the unique focal point for natural and humanitarian catastrophes. This ERC, which became the Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, was supported by a Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) that became the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in 1998. This UN organization

was doubled by a second structure that brought together UN agencies, Red Cross organizations, and NGOs, called the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).⁶¹ Unity was assured by the headperson of the ERC, who presided over the IASC.

In 2005, the ERC and the IASC launched a “Humanitarian Reform,” the aim of which was to improve the “efficacy” of humanitarian response by improving “predictability, accountability, responsibility and partnership” and which was based on an “agreed division of labor.”⁶² In 2011, after a first evaluation of humanitarian reform, a new reform was adopted: The “Transformative Agenda” that continued to accent the horizontal, egalitarian, and participative character of humanitarian coordination.

The 2005 reform anticipated that throughout the great humanitarian crises, aid actors should group by activity sector, in “clusters.” Each activity sector – nutrition, logistics, health, food, etc. – was coordinated by one organization that was ultimately responsible for the group’s activities.⁶³ This reform thus corresponded to a kind of humanitarian Yalta: On the one hand, it reaffirmed the preeminence of UN agencies in relation to NGOs – only one NGO, Save the Children, had a “cluster lead” role;⁶⁴ on the other hand, it shared tasks among the large competitors for humanitarian leadership – UNICEF, WFP, FAO, UHNCR. At the center of this structure, OCHA played the role of coordinator of the coordinators.⁶⁵

The cluster arrangement was rapidly subject to much criticism: The reform had a multiplier effect on coordination tasks – it multiplied meetings, bid solicitations, partnerships, operational guides, memoranda, groups, sub-groups, and meeting protocols. At the same time, it disconnected the coordination tasks and the operational tasks: The UN agencies were “cluster leads” even in the cases where they were less present on the ground than certain NGOs.

But the bitterest resistance to the cluster reform came from the High Commissioner for Refugees: UNHCR successfully forbade the cluster system to apply to situations in which refugees were involved. The organization accepted the cluster system for all crises that did not involve refugees (and, in their case, UNHCR was content to be the sectorial leader in three areas: Protection, camps, and shelter). However, for crises that involved refugees, UNHCR reserved coordination rights. The UNHCR’s response to the OCHA reform fit into a three-page memo, distributed to its employees in November 2013, in which the High Commissioner explained why UNHCR was not adopting the cluster model, but instead developed its own model, the “Refugee Response Coordination Model.”⁶⁶ The High Commissioner started by placing, as a first step, an important limit on the “Transformative Agenda”: In his view, the Transformative Agenda did not apply in refugee aid situations.⁶⁷ It explained why refugees were a separate case, different from all others because they had particular needs.⁶⁸ By virtue of its mandate, UNHCR was the only organization qualified to coordinate this kind of response. As a second step, UNHCR reserved, in these cases, a specific role for itself in all strategic functions: Direct appeal (that is, the connection with the powers of the host country and with donors), strategic planning (the distribution of funds), refugee consultation (the connection to the aid beneficiaries), and the Refugee Protection Working Group (the connection with the NGOs). The third step: The High

Commissioner specified that it reserved certain prerogatives for itself in “mixed situations” as well, that is, situations where there were refugees, even if the crisis includes non-refugee victims. Even in “mixed situations,” the High Commissioner reserved absolute leadership on the questions of international “protection,” and maintained a direct line of communication, through the intermediary of the representative country, with the government of the host country.⁶⁹

The UNHCR’s aggressive positioning corresponded to a “realist” reading of the humanitarian field considered as a permanent power balance – the High Commissioner wanted to transform his agency into the UN agency for protection in all instances of displacement (refugees, the displaced, or victims of natural catastrophes), in an extremely competitive humanitarian market.⁷⁰ In the 1990s, when the UN General Assembly created a more horizontal and cooperative coordination structure, founded on a bureaucratic culture inspired by New Public Management, aiming at the professionalization of the humanitarian, functional specialization, and evaluation according to indicators, UNHCR led logistical operations on a large scale in the Balkans (1991) and Rwanda (1994). The high ranking functionaries of UNHCR today proved themselves in that period – their legitimacy comes from their effectiveness on the ground, their capacity for logistical organization, and a “hands on” culture.⁷¹

The “joint note on mixed situations” from UNHCR and OCHA was applied for the first time to Cameroon.⁷² Despite the humanitarian reform in 2005 and 2011, UNHCR managed to maintain its preserve: The protection of refugees and displaced persons.⁷³ The joint note anticipated that OCHA and UNHCR should compile a common analysis of the situation, develop a common vision for the response (a “Strategic Response Plan”) with a common appeal, and mobilize and allocate resources in a coordinated fashion. Two lines of responsibilities were maintained in parallel: On the one hand, there was the IASC/OCHA in Geneva, which named a Humanitarian Coordinator in the country concerned, supported by a Humanitarian Country Team that developed a Strategic Response Plan to coordinate the work of clusters or operational sectors. On the other hand, we find UNHCR in Geneva, which named a Country Representative in the country, which developed a Refugee Preparedness and Strategic Response Plan with UNHCR personnel, the on-site operations of which were coordinated by UNHCR.

In 2015, the Cameroonian humanitarian field stabilized: The “Joint Note” was applied to North Cameroon (to Maroua, regarding the crisis of Sahel/Boko Haram); UNHCR continued to reign in the East (for the crisis of the Central African refugees); whereas in Yaoundé, OCHA and UNHCR coexisted, each developing a diagnostic of the situation and a response strategy. The UNHCR thus considered Cameroon the conjunction of two regional crises: It made a plan of action (a “Refugees Regional Response Plan”) on the Central African crisis that included a chapter on Cameroon, and a plan of action on the Nigerian crisis, which also included a chapter on Cameroon. For its part, OCHA produced a plan of action at the national scale of Cameroon (a Humanitarian Response Plan) that proceeded in a sectorial manner – nutrition, food, logistics, etc. – and included a chapter on the protection of refugees and the displaced that was edited

by UNHCR. The situation therefore resulted from a double power balance between OCHA and UNHCR, at once at the headquarters and on the ground, OCHA being the legitimate organization of humanitarian coordination in principle, but since establishing its regional bureau in Dakar, acting with a relatively reduced presence on the ground;⁷⁴ UNHCR, having large logistical means but criticized about its coordinating legitimacy. The belated response from UNHCR to the Central African crisis was “very abnormal” according to some; it may have increased the number of those that died of malnutrition: “it’s a shame,” concluded one UNICEF expert.⁷⁵ It is true, a high-ranking official in UNHCR thus conceded, that “the UNHCR is a somewhat stubborn organization.”⁷⁶ In order to justify its claims over humanitarian leadership, the production of robust figures is key to UNHCR. This starts with the *registration* of refugees.

Needs through the lens of legal status (1): Counting refugees⁷⁷

At the end of 2014, UNHCR had registered “198,890 refugees” from the Central African Republic in Cameroon.⁷⁸ How was this figure produced? Registration is at the heart of UNHCR’s work. The process of registration, verification, and updating of relative information to the persons relevant to UNHCR’s jurisdiction⁷⁹ is the moment of the refugees’ entry into the humanitarian sphere. Registration, as it is conceived by UNHCR, brings together two goals that are never separated: To provide refugees with documents allowing them to assert their rights, and to produce statistics.⁸⁰

During the last 50 years, UNHCR has thus been endowed with specialized tools for this purpose – giving rise to grey literature constituting almost a “science of registration.”⁸¹ This knowledge gave rise to the construction of an agglomeration called the “refugee population” or “refugee community.”⁸² For 20 years, UNHCR statisticians and Microsoft engineers have developed a data processing tool dedicated to registration activity: ProGres software (the ProGres Refugee Registration Platform). This project was born from a pilot project undertaken in Kosovo in 1999 – the “Refugee Registration Field Kits,” a project generalized in 2002 with the launch of Project Profile, aiming at the creating of a unique database. The UNHCR thus fused different instruments and databases (camp populations, protection files, food distribution, repatriation files, relocation files). One of the declared goals of Project Profile was to furnish governments – those of donors and the host countries – with solid figures on refugee numbers.⁸³ ProGres software allowed one to link the collection of personal data, the construction of a statistical aggregate, the production of localized and mappable data, and the production of individual documents for the refugees (the latest versions integrated biometric information: Fingerprint or pupil recognition), all in one single tool.

The UNHCR manuals anticipated that registration occurred in four stages: First, a preparation stage, with information about refugees for a forthcoming registration, and with approximate estimates of the size of the population to be registered. Second, a phase for collecting information and delivering the identity documents. Third, a data-entry phase using the ProGres database. Fourth,

verification and updating of data. The moments of interaction between agencies and refugees (camp visits, food distributions, beginning of the school year, etc.) could be used to update the data.⁸⁴

The UNHCR manuals nevertheless give a too-slick image of registration. Even in critical literature, UNHCR is often presented as a powerful institution, almost omniscient, acting in a rational fashion. The literature on refugee aid, including critical literature that made UNHCR out to be a dominant institution in the service of the Western nations, often tends to overestimate the power of this organization. The near-monopoly of refugee figures confers an aura on UNHCR that tends to make one forget that, on the ground, the grasp on local situations is often fragile and based on trial and error. Let us look closer at one day of registering refugees in Cameroon.

In December 2014, the UNHCR office in Batouri was informed that several hundreds of refugees waited to be registered in Kenzou. Kenzou was located at the border between Cameroon and Central Africa. A township of 16,147 inhabitants before 2014, the town had been one of the principal entry points for Central African refugees since February 2014. At the end of the year, some 40,000 refugees lived in the township, while others had been relocated to the camp in Lolo. But new refugees arrived in November and December, and they had not yet been registered.⁸⁵ Two white Jeeps with UNHCR logos were sent to the border to perform the last registration session of the year.

7:15am

The UNHCR team arrives at the laterite soccer field in Kenzou. Several dozen people are already waiting for them, including women in colorful *boubous* and shawls, some in black, and men in white and cream-colored *boubous*, some in shirts. All of them get up as the white Jeep arrives. They form two rows: One row of men, one of women and children. It is not yet hot, but they are protecting themselves from the sun with large colorful umbrellas. They will wait for several hours – some for several days – before reaching the registration tables.

The eight UNHCR representatives exit the Jeeps: Two protection clerks, Alain and Wlad, accompanied by four United Nations Volunteers (UNVs) and two drivers.⁸⁶ In the courtyard, they greet the refugee volunteers, members of a local “refugee committee,” who will help them, making the connection with the candidates to be registered, and translating from Fula to French.⁸⁷

The materials are installed on the stadium grandstand, a slab of concrete with stairs covered by a sheet metal roof: Two small wooden stables, three plastic tables, a dozen chairs, a large diesel generator to power the portable computers, webcams, printer, and laminator; the whole thing is connected via a converter by a mix of cables and power strips. It is an “open air bureaucracy” – one has to pack everything out: Lists and information sheets, cardstock, laminated sheets, pens, ration cards, sheets, hole punchers, stamps, ink cartridges.⁸⁸ Every omission can cost several hours’ travel to Lolo, the refugee camp where UNHCR stocks

materials. Finally, they set up the divider that defines the work space, the waiting area in the courtyard, and the soccer stadium. Then someone starts up the electricity generator; it makes a hellish racket. One has to shout to be heard.

Registration can now begin. There will be three stations: 1) Screening, which is the purview of the two protection clerks, who seek to establish the candidates' eligibility for refugee status; 2) entry of the candidates' personal data (last name, first name, date of birth, places lived, etc.) in the database, with photos taken; 3) finally, the printing, stamping, and laminating of the AGF or ProGres documents that constitute the refugees' identity cards. The UNHCR delivers one ProGres document per adult, along with one ration card per household. The candidates in the registration process do not proceed immediately from one station to the other – they wait for several hours or several days even to reach the welcome table, leave it with a token (a little slip of green paper), and come back the next day or the day after that for the data entry process, for which they must also wait many hours.

9:00am

At the screening table, the protection clerk interrogates the candidates. Some of them arrive with identity papers – a Central African national identity card, a driver's license, birth certificates. But most have declared that their papers were lost when fleeing. Others still present what they have: A school report card or transcript, an old ration card, a prison release certificate. Sometimes they speak French, sometimes Fula, often both, going from one to the other, repeating words – the noise of the generator obliges them to raise their voices.

The UNHCR registers individuals by household. The organization has a flexible definition of the word – in principle, one can choose to form a household with whomever one likes, there is no compulsion to prove family ties. In practice, the clerks prefer to work with families, since it simplifies the interview. At the



Figure 5.3 Kenzou, December 2014: Asylum seekers waiting to register.

Source: ©Glasman



Figure 5.4 Setting up cables to provide electricity for the laptops.

Source: ©Glasman

beginning of the interview, the clerk reassembles the families and to three women sitting on a small wooden bench, they address the eldest, pointing at the others:

“Who is she to you?”

“She’s the older sister.”

“Whose older sister? Hers? How many are they? Four? Four?” A moment of hesitation, then: “Ah, is there a baby in that scarf?”

A man approaches, accompanied by two women and four children: “That’s your wife? Yes? And she is your wife as well? No, she is her sister? You, go rejoin your husband!”

A small group approaches. The clerk counts 19 people, including two infants, and a young girl who is eating a Plumpy’Sup. He takes ten minutes to sort out the group, having some sit down on the bench where only three people can fit side by side, having others get up, moving children to the left, then to the right. “Who is that?” “That is my family.” [pointing people out] “Who is she to you?” “That’s



Figure 5.5 A diesel generator provides electricity to register refugees.

Source: ©Glasman

my daughter.” “By what mother?” “And who is that?” “That’s her sister.” “Same father, same mother?” The clerk recaps: There is one head of the family (a man), one wife (with seven children), the mother of the head of the family, three sisters of the head, his second wife (with her five children). Now, the man takes two ProGres documents from his pocket – the two wives are already registered as refugees, one of them in Yaoundé. The clerk stutters: “They are already registered? Why are you here?” “To register the two children [two adolescents] who are not registered yet.” Indeed, as UNHCR procedures require, in order to add people to a ProGres card, the whole group must come to have the old documents destroyed and replace them with a new one.



Figure 5.6 Building an open-air bureaucracy: Tables, chairs, printer.

Source: ©Glasman

Once the family connections are established, the clerk wants to know the nationality of the candidates, their town of origin, and the date of their arrival in Cameroon. The procedure adopted in Cameroon is that of *prima facie* reconnaissance – a specific procedure, widely used in Africa by UNHCR, that allows a provisional refugee status to be accorded to individuals provided that they are members of a group.⁸⁹ The ordinary procedure wants to establish that the demand is well-established on a person-by-person basis, to establish that individuals have fled their country due to “a well-founded fear of being persecuted.”⁹⁰ According to the *prima facie* procedure, it is enough to show that an individual is part of a group fearing persecution – which is often much faster to demonstrate.

The clerk thus seeks to establish that the people being questioned have come from Cameroon due to persecution by the anti-Balaka in Central Africa: “How long ago did you arrive? Before or after Ramadan? After the sheep festival? But that was in October – why did you not come to register?” To a young man who is sitting beside an old woman, a young woman, and two children:

“What are you to her?”

“She’s my sister. Her husband left for Yaoundé. He is a logger.”

“And the old woman?”

“My mother.”

[pointing to the young woman] “Why don’t you have the same name?”

“But we don’t have the same father!”

“And the mother?”

“No, not the same mother either. She’s my uncle’s daughter.”

. . .

“And who is your father?”

“He’s Cameroonian.”

“But he was born in Bouar [in Central Africa].”

“Yes, but my brother, he has so often said, ‘I am Cameroonian, I am Cameroonian.’”

“But he’s not Cameroonian!”

“No, he’s Central African.”

Sometimes it takes time to understand each other, to spell out the names of places, to locate towns, asking the translator to show where the places are. Carnot, Berbérati, Bouar – the large towns are known. Sometimes it is more difficult:

“What village are you from?”

“De Gaulle?”

“De Gaulle? De Gaulle is a village in Central Africa? Yes?”

Bursts of laughter. Yes: De Gaulle, also called Kouï, is a village in Central Africa, thus christened by President Bokassa upon the general’s death.

Often, the questions are indiscreet: “Where do you come from? Why? Where do you live? With whom?”

“How long have you been in Kenzou?”

“For five months.”

“Five months?” “Why haven’t they been registered?”

Sometimes, they are intimate, or painful: “How old is the child? One? Does she breastfeed him?” “Are you nursing the child? Since when have you been married? You don’t have a child?” “He is lost.” “Lost?” “Dead.”

The clerk often repeats his questions, because he does not get a response, or because he finds the response too long, or too vague, or too unbelievable. They start to seem like commands: “Where was she born? Where was she born? Where was she born? She doesn’t know where she was born? How old is she?” He repeats his order to the translator, asking him not to suggest responses: “Don’t ask ‘Do you come from Berbérati, or from somewhere else?’ Just ask ‘Where do you come from?’ Don’t say ‘You got here before October,’ but rather ask ‘When did you arrive?’” Sometimes, the clerk is not satisfied with the responses. “But you are Cameroonian!” he says, and refuses to give them refugee status. To others, when he has exhausted his questions, when he has established at the same time the list of family members, he gives them the green token and dismisses them with a wave. Then he says, “Next!”

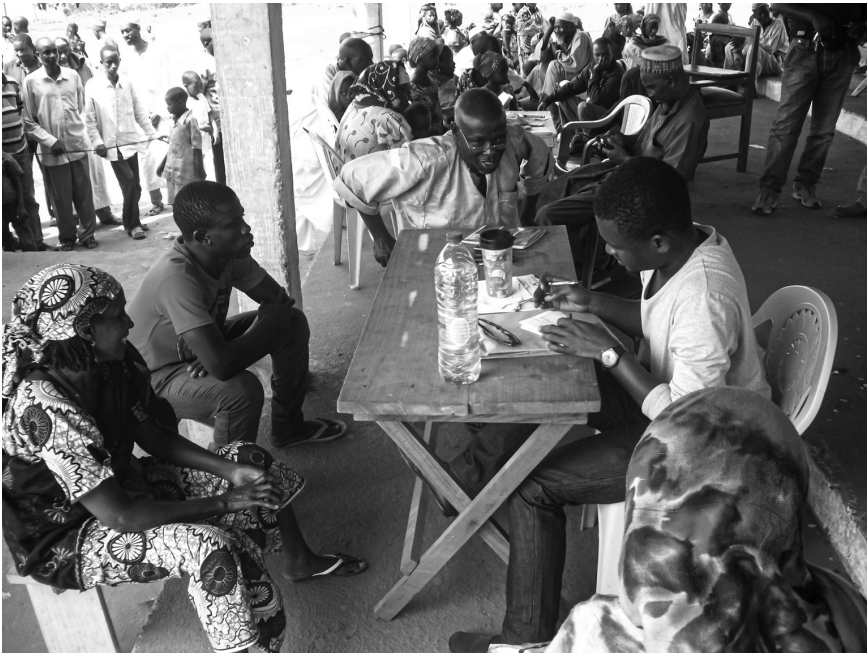


Figure 5.7 UNHCR clerk interview with asylum seeker with the help of an interpreter.

99-1411

Formulaire de référence de cas de protection No.... (12)

A- Personne d'origine non centrafricaine- Nationalité: CAH CASE
 B- Ancien Caseload : Référence (CIR ou ProGres) : NEW CA

Formulaire de référence de cas de protection No.... (12)

A- Personne d'origine non centrafricaine- Nationalité: CAH
 B- Ancien Caseload : Référence (CIR ou ProGres) : NEW CASE
 C- Enregistrement multiple : Num. Carte ou proGres
 D- Réunification familiale : Num. Carte ou proGres pas de CA

Besoins spécifiques 797-74110793

N	Nom individus	Cat	Détail	Commentaires
1	[REDACTED]			7 HA pas En, i plus
2	MARUATON			WIF
3	OLUMEN			SON - IL
4	KOULISSOUN			SON - IL
5	SOULEYMAN			SON - IL
7	IBRAHIM			SON - IL

MOHAMADOU [REDACTED] SON -

Site : Koutzou

Figure 5.8 Handwritten registration sheet.

10:30am

The queue has lost its orderliness. People are sitting in the courtyard, because the podiums form seating, and because the covering offers a little protection from the sun. Sometimes, the clerk asks the people set up near the table to return to the line. Other times, the refugees in the queue get too loud, having stood for several hours, and the refugees of the committee, who try to manage the queue, replace the cord and make the people move back. Once in a while, the two clerks stop the interviews, walk down the courtyard steps, and reconstruct the line.

Some men in *boubous* refuse to wait their turn in line. One after the other, they come to sabotage the line, passing in front of everyone, shunting the line aside. People get upset, raise their voices, push each other. The wait is long. UNHCR protocol did not anticipate having to usher these old men in front of everyone else. It is neither “elderly first,” nor “women and children first.” In the tests, before registration – that is, before special needs are inscribed in the database – all individuals are, in principle, equal. The line makes it spatially clear that there are no priorities.⁹¹ The UNHCR hardly cares about the fine distinctions of local societies. Its social world is flat. Alain, the protection clerk who knows the Mbororo society best because he himself is from a Fula family, tries to translate. Sometimes, he stops the whole process to step aside with a handful of people. They talk at length.

One elderly man threatens him: “I read the Koran!” (= “I know what’s what!”). He responds: “I was born to an old man” (= “I wasn’t born yesterday.”). Another tries to negotiate in order to skip the line: “If I bring my cattle to the bush, will you find me a way?” (= “will you let me cut the line?”).

1:00pm

The other waiting line – that of selected refugees who have received the token – ends at the second station, the table where the data is electronically entered.⁹² A UNV enters the personal data in the ProGres database. The data comes from the family document held by the clerk, but he needs to verify it, spelling the names again, repeating what has already been said. Finally comes the moment when the photos are taken. It is rather happy. It has been long-awaited. Finally, the family climbs onto the platform, underneath the courtyard covering, and they see the light at the end of the tunnel and are relieved. One member of the family holds a small white sheet behind the person to be photographed, then the webcam starts up. “We are rolling!” The aides motion that the scarf or shawl needs to be removed – the family takes advantage of the moment to put itself back together, adjust their clothes, quickly fix their hair. Smile.

Now it is an infant’s turn to be photographed. The mother is seated, the infant on her lap, the father holds the sheet – which must be held between the mother and infant to make a white background. The UNV taps on the screen so that the infant will look straight ahead, in the direction of the webcam. The baby looks right, the UNV taps, the baby looks left, the UNV taps. The crowd laughs. The baby looks at the crowd, the UNV taps.



Figure 5.9 UNHCR-staff enters registration information in the ProGRES databank.

Source: ©Glasman

2:00pm

The waiting line has not gone down. It is sprawling, melting slowly under the weight of the heat and the wait, it breaks down into clusters, sets up under the courtyard covering. It is no longer noisy. The generator is turning. The tension is mounting. It is hot and the wait is long. They understand that the wait could last several days. In the courtyard, people eat and drink, a group of children plays a rhyming game, slapping each others' hands in rhythm. One child cries. An old man has spread out a small mat to sit on, a boy is selling kola nuts. Now the old man chews his kola slowly, sitting up as straight as the letter I in the middle of the commotion.

On the laterite soccer field, the boys are playing with a pink balloon. Further off, the men are bent over in afternoon prayer.

4:00pm

At the third station, a UNV prints the ProGRES (or ACF) documents under the attentive gaze of those who have now officially gained the title of "refugees." The printer prints, the UNV stamps, the laminator laminates the papers. To reach the table, one has to move the cables aside and avoid the power strips or risk unplugging the machine. Other times, because of poor connections, because of dust or



Figure 5.10 While the UN-staff takes the picture, the whole family is helping
Source: ©Glasman

because of the heat, everything stops. So the UNV turns the machine off and back on, taps the power strips, turns off the overheated laminator. Occasionally the line stops and the HP LaserJet Pro400 indicates “blockage in the cartridge zone/open door and remove blockage.” So, while the printer reboots, while someone removes the paper blockage or changes the ink cartridge, they talk amongst themselves – the UNV has made a short list of Fula vocabulary: “Djama?” (“how are you?”).

The noise echoes in the courtyard that acts as a sound box; no one can hear each other. The UNV makes a refugee candidate repeat the name of his daughter: “It’s Ada?” “Adja?” “Awa?” The UNV and the refugee look at each other, they look at the surrounding crowd, and they recognize that they both cannot hear each other, they look at each other, they shake their heads. They laugh. “Adja?” “Ada?”



Figure 5.11 Printing registration documents – creating an official “refugee.”

Source: ©Glasman

Some minutes later, a woman starts gesturing grandly. She has just gotten a ProGres report for herself and the father of her children, who also has children with other women. Now they are on the same household document, so it is official. She is triumphant, laughing loudly: “There’s the marriage certificate!” Everyone laughs.

5:30pm

The sun is going down. A boy sells braised fish in the courtyard. A woman nurses her child. Everyone seems exhausted. The clerk decides to stop registration for today. The refugees must leave. The line of non-registered people is still long. They will come back tomorrow. The president of the refugee committee invites the team members to drink tea at his home. Later, they will drink a beer at the Total station – the only place that sells cold beer. The clerk offers a Guinness to the lieutenant commander of the mobile unit who is talking sloppily with a soldier.

The registration of refugees is thus a “test” – a physical, moral test, a test of waiting for the interview, but also a test of the truth in the sense of pragmatic sociology: We start with an uncertainty, both about the status of individuals and about their number; we pass through interaction, negotiation, power dynamics; then we conclude with a decision, confirmed by a document – one ProGres

document for every adult refugee and one ration card per household. On the one hand, an anonymous crowd, on the other, well-identified individuals; on the one hand, fugitives, on the other, refugees recognized by international law; on the one hand, a movement of masses, on the other, a statistical population disaggregated by age, sex, and ethnicity.

It is not international norms that create refugees, it is the interaction between UNHCR members and the candidates. This interaction is localized: To be registered, one must be there, in Kenzou, on the soccer field, at the moment when the UNHCR team is coming through. Not working in the fields, not being cared for at the hospital, not waiting for a parent who will soon arrive from Central Africa. “If you’re guarding your cattle in the bush, you’re not in Kenzou!” explains one refugee. Several of the candidates who registered in December have been there for several months. In principle, they should already have been registered long ago. But during UNHCR’s last visit, they were simply absent.



Figure 5.12 Will a child unplug the cables feeding the laptops?

Source: ©Glasman



Figure 5.13 UNHCR clerk negotiating with asylum seekers.

Source: ©Glasman

In Kenzou, in one week (from Tuesday afternoon to Friday evening), the little UNHCR team registered 721 individuals grouped into 267 households.⁹³ By Friday evening, the work was not yet done. There were dozens of non-registered people still on the football field. But the team was exhausted. It was December 19, the weekend, the year-end holidays. They decided to stop registration. They would leave the day after tomorrow and return in January. They started to negotiate with the non-registered people. For more than an hour and a half, the small team explained that they had to leave, that it was over, that there were no more ration cards. The non-registered people left the football field in small groups, disheartened to have waited several days for nothing. Others blew up, started to yell. A man in a boubou started threatening the team. Finally, the two white Jeeps left the football field. The last time they finished registration, the non-registered surrounded the UNHCR vehicle to stop it from leaving. This time it went better.

The ordeal of registration is a process at once cognitive (it produces numerical information) and performative: It actually *creates* refugees. Thus, to understand what the refugee statistics signify, one must understand what the refugees can do with this status. The UNHCR presents registration as a beneficial activity for all (the UN, the refugees, the host government, the donors, etc.). It is true that, in accordance with its mandate, the UNHCR offers legal “protection” and

humanitarian “assistance” to refugees: Access to food distribution, access to material aid (tent lodgings, cooking utensils, schooling for children, etc.), free medical care,⁹⁴ help returning for those who desire it, legal protection in the case of problems with the Cameroonian justice system – all that requires that one achieves the requisite refugee status. De facto, in *Kenzou*, one always had to present the *ProGres* document: To the Red Cross to obtain grain, to the pharmacist to get medicine, to the police when one is arrested in town,⁹⁵ to the soldiers to negotiate the price of passage through a checkpoint.⁹⁶

But there are also excellent reasons not to show up for registration. First, because it is restrictive, costly in terms of time and energy, but also because migrants may not necessarily consider themselves to be refugees. In certain border societies, international border crossings may be frequent, and may not be experienced as relevant to exceptional status.⁹⁷ In *Mbororo* societies, reasons to cross the border between Cameroon and Central Africa are numerous: One is visiting a parent, one is going to a ceremony, one is on business.⁹⁸ For some nomadic cattle herders, complex migratory circuits follow the socio-political rhythm of transhumance. Finally, exiles may voluntarily avoid registration, refusing to give personal information – including biometric data⁹⁹ – when they cannot know what will happen to it. They are not necessarily enthusiastic about a mode of registration whose goal is not just protection and assistance, but also control of groups and of people. In principle, UNHCR should treat its data in a confidential manner. But the exiles, coming from an authoritarian state and finding refuge in a no-less authoritarian state, can have a legitimate lack of trust in bureaucratic institutions. There is a non-negligible risk of seeing the data collected by UNHCR being re-utilized by the host state as a means of controlling them.¹⁰⁰ It has happened that groups of refugees refuse census as a unit, identifying it as a technique of domination.¹⁰¹

Conversely, other people may seek to be registered even when they are not supposed to have the right: An old woman sat with three children. She said she arrived in October. She launched into a long monologue under the translator’s attention – a moment during which the clerk takes advantage by talking with one of the children, who speaks French: “Where are you from?” “From *Yokadouma*.” “That’s in Cameroon!” The clerk refused to register the family, which he believed to be Cameroonian. Other times, it was questions about the stated village of origin that aroused suspicion: “Where is this village?” If the responses were too hesitant, or incoherent, the clerk stated that he had revealed an imposter.¹⁰² In *Kenzou*, several dozen people asking for refugee status were Cameroonian, Nigerian, or from Chad.¹⁰³ For certain Cameroonians, the refugee document and the ration card could allow a person to access benefits that were of interest. In addition, for those who tried to cross other borders – those who dreamed of going to Europe, or, even better, the United States – refugee status could be an advantage. Furthermore, certain Cameroonians have also had the experience of exodus from Central Africa. A woman sat on a bench, accompanied by seven children. She said she had arrived from *Berbérati* where she lived for 11 years, and presents her

Box 5.1 Population census in Cameroon ©Glasman

Quantification of “people in needs” only makes sense in relation to overall population figures. The figures on the Cameroonian population were furnished to UN agencies by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This organization worked according to numbers that it co-produced with Cameroonian administrative services: The General Population and Housing Census (RGPH) was conducted by the Central Bureau of the Census and Population Studies (BUCREP), with the financial support and expertise of the UNFPA. But since the population census were outdated (they were taken in 1976, 1987, and 2005),¹⁰⁴ these services were working with projections: They considered a growth of approximately +3% per year, to obtain current figures.¹⁰⁵ In 2017, all the agents thus relied on a report published in 2010 that made estimations based on the 2005 census:

Evolution of the population of Cameroon¹⁰⁶

<i>Date</i>	<i>Population</i>
<i>Census</i>	
01 April 1976	7,663,246
01 April 1987	10,493,655
11 November 2005	17,463,836
<i>Projections</i>	
01 January 2010	19,406,100
01 January 2011	19,892,466
01 January 2015	21,917,602
01 January 2035	33,955.398

These estimates furnished a working basis for humanitarian organization. However OCHA, which needed regional and local figures, really worked on different databases: The first concerned the départements (departments), an administrative unit mostly used by Cameroonian ministries (like MINATD), the second concerned health districts, which were the territorial unit used by health services (and the Ministry of Public Health). The health districts and departments were not the same – some health districts straddle several departments. Yet these two databases did not give the same population numbers. According to the OCHA technician, these “figures do not make any sense.”¹⁰⁷

The two databases on territorial units used by OCHA in 2015

<i>Territorial unit</i>	<i>Administration database</i>	<i>Health database</i>
Admin 0	Country	Country
Admin 1	Region	Group of health districts
Admin 2	Department	Health district
Admin 3	Neighborhood	Healthcare area
<i>Total population</i>	22,179,707	21,917,602

Cameroonian identity card. She said that her husband was assassinated by the anti-Balaka. “Is he dead?” “No, he is in the hospital.” “He is Central African?” “No, he is Cameroonian!” But to be a refugee, it was not enough to have lived in Central Africa, to speak Fula, and to have fled the anti-Balaka militias. One had to be Central African by nationality. The UNHCR frequently wrongly identified nationals wanting to obtain refugee status.¹⁰⁸ In some instances, the UN agency considerably overestimated the refugee population.¹⁰⁹

Needs through the lens of legal status (2): Host population and internally displaced persons

Humanitarian organizations (UN-based and NGOs) united in the IASC have been trying, for a dozen years, to implement a unique method of counting “people in need” (that is, the “humanitarian caseload”). To this end, a working group with a mandate from the IASC suggested separating the “victims” (dead, disappeared, injured) of a catastrophe from the “affected persons.”¹¹⁰ Among “affected persons,” the IASC differentiates between the “displaced” (refugees and asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, other displaced persons) and the “non-displaced” (the population that accepts the displaced, and the “non-hosts”).¹¹¹

Among all of these categories of “people in need,” the category in which the figures were least contested by humanitarian organizations was that of “refugees.” In effect, this category has been the result of a long-standing legal definition confirmed by international treaties and national laws.¹¹² The other categories are less certain: The notion of “internally displaced persons” (IDPs) has been the subject of an international convention of African countries – but many countries, including Cameroon, were not signatories.¹¹³ For governments, to count refugees is to verify that a foreign country is the site of political violence – but to count the internally displaced is to admit violence in one’s own country. Thus, the Cameroonian government refused for several months to establish figures on the internally displaced in the North. Whereas the Minawao refugee camp opened in July 2013 and population movements increased strongly in July 2014, not until 2015 were there first figures of the internally displaced.

It was the International Organization for Migration (IOM) that specialized in estimations of displacement. The organization developed a methodology – the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) – that furnished the numbers used today by other organizations. The first profiling survey took place in April/May 2015 in North Cameroon.¹¹⁴ For ten days, a small team from IOM and UNHCR interviewed 477 key informers in 235 “communities” with a questionnaire with closed questions – representatives of the host community, representatives of the displaced, and specialists in public health and education were all interviewed.¹¹⁵ This first profiling estimated that some 200,383 people were “displaced,” counting among them 81,693 IDPs, 35,957 returnees (former IDPs), and 12,487 out-of-camp refugees.¹¹⁶ This first estimate then made way for regular surveys – four per year – on displaced persons in Cameroon.¹¹⁷

Even if the DTM of IOM purveyed authority,¹¹⁸ the idea of internally displaced persons was a touchy subject. In northern Cameroon – as in the whole region of Lake Chad – movements of populations were inscribed in complex strategies, sometimes old, of responses to violence and to natural disasters. It was often difficult to differentiate among migrants, refugees, and the displaced. The category of “returnees” used by the DTM illustrated the ambiguities of such a count. The “returnees” (who constituted approximately 15% of the displaced in 2015) were defined as internally displaced persons who had returned to their “place of origin.”¹¹⁹ But in a context of serial displacements, the concept of “place of origin” raised questions. What is more, if the returnees came back to where they came from, it was unknown whether it was because the situation had improved in their “place of origin” or if, on the contrary, it had worsened in their host village. The causes of displacement were diverse: In the department of the Mayo Danay, though it was a war zone in the fight against Boko Haram, the principal cause of displacement was flooding. Finally, the category of “displaced” was deadlocked by an important phenomenon of displacement: Some villages were emptied of their inhabitants by night, so that the people could hide in the bush to avoid Boko Haram’s attacks; they returned at dawn.¹²⁰

Since the 1980s, UNHCR has attributed more and more importance to the “host population” – the population eligible for humanitarian aid by virtue of the weight that they must bear in hosting the numerous refugees in their region – in its aid programs. By helping the “host population,” UNHCR responded to one of the criticisms that had been levied against it, according to which the refugees living in the camps benefited from humanitarian aid (especially food aid), whereas the populations that hosted them and live around the camps benefited from no aid at all, even though their material living conditions could be similar or even inferior to those of the refugees.¹²¹ The UNHCR had progressively understood that taking this new category of person into account, far from being limiting, could conversely allow them to inflate their activity statistics and thus justify their own institutional growth.

UNHCR has an interest in demonstrating that the host populations are consequential. In Cameroon, in 2014, UNHCR was generous in its estimation of the number of “host persons”: The organization counted, for every displaced person or refugee, 2.4 host persons. But then a surprising paradox appeared: The number of refugees increased (from 280,000 refugees in 2014 to 323,000 in 2016), as well as the number of IDPs (from 40,000 to 112,000), but at the same time, the number of “host persons” for whom UNHCR took responsibility diminished (from 780,000 to 553,000).¹²²

The decrease in the numbers of the host population did not express the reality of lessened pressure on populations, but rather a new power relation between UN institutions. After the arrival of OCHA in Cameroon and the large aid actors like IOM or the World Food Programme, UNHCR was forced to scale down its estimates of the host population, changing the calculation method. The UNHCR counted 2.4 host persons for each refugee or displaced person in 2014; two years

Table 5.1 People in need in Cameroon according to OCHA

	2014	2015	2016	2017
Cameroonians	1,700,000	1,800,000	2,400,000	2,500,000
Hosts	780,000	783,000	553,000	448,000
Internally displaced	40,000	60,000	112,000	199,000
Foreigners				
Refugees (UNHCR)	280,000	312,000	323,000	368,000
Third-country nationals (IOM)	2400	3000	N/A	N/A
Rounded totals of people in need	2.0 million	2.1 million	2.7 million	2.9 million

Source: J. Glasman, based on OCHA. *Cameroon: Humanitarian needs overview* for 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017. After 2015, the Overview (HNO) was finalized at the end of the year for the following year (December 2015 for the year 2016). This is why, for example, the number of internally displaced persons estimated by the displacement tracking matrix (DTM) of IOM in 2015 figures into the HNO for 2016.

later, it only counted 1.3. The decrease in the UNHCR's influence can thus be read in its need estimation figures.

Conclusion

To follow the chain of the construction of humanitarian figures is essential to obtain the means to clarify two things. First, on the role of technology in the construction of knowledge: The literature on the “data revolution” maintains a flow about the different aspects of the use of figures, collection techniques, calculation techniques, techniques to visualize the data, evaluation and benchmarking techniques, etc. Digital technology, communication technology, and big data are discussed endlessly. But if there is really an affinity between the numbers and high technology, the two are far from being synonymous. Obviously the Excel spreadsheets, the databases, the cell phones, the emails, and the clouds. But most humanitarian quantification is not “digital” at all. It is a material process: It requires cables, Jeeps, generators; everything smells more like gasoline than like silicon. It is often a banal, low-tech process: To interview refugees, one ropes off queues, takes notes with pencil and paper, distributes tokens by hand. Likewise, as will be seen in the next chapter, to take a nutrition survey, one makes little sketches of village cases, the children are measured with a measuring tape, the houses are marked with chalk.

Second, about the question of power. The quantification of human needs is never an operation of pure knowledge (if such a thing even exists). Operations of knowledge are always linked to interventions. For example, in the case of refugee registration, it is an operation at once cognitive and performative. Yet it would be reductive to see in humanitarian government merely a local variety

of a bio-political, neoliberal, or neocolonial power. Of course, the quantification of needs contributes to reification, depoliticization, and naturalization of needs according to the principle of a universalist ontology. But the construction of humanitarian needs leaves wiggle room to the different actors, their trials, and their doubts.

It is furthermore this uncertainty and fragility in the field that seems to be one of the principal challenges of the production of numbers. One of the roles accorded to the quantification of needs is to stabilize the field of humanitarian agencies that are in competition with each other. It has to do with contributing to the pacification of the humanitarian field by means of production numbers, all while distinguishing the field from the political space and that of the aid beneficiaries. The object of needs evaluation is to limit the conflicts between humanitarian organizations (that is, to regulate the competition between the organizations) and to construct a consensus – the subject of the next chapter.

Notes

- 1 Name has been changed.
- 2 See Introduction. See also: Report of the Secretary-General, Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. General Assembly/Economic and Social Council, A/67/89-E/2012/77, May 2012. See also the group's first report: *A World that Counts. Mobilising the data revolution for sustainable development*. Report prepared at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General, by the Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, New York, November 2014.
- 3 The name Boko Haram (often translated as “Western education is a sin/ is forbidden”) has been contested by this movement itself. The group was first called Jama’u Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad and has become the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP) after rejoining the Islamic State in 2015. I use Boko Haram here for simplicity. On the history of the movement, see Loimeier, Roman. *Boko Haram: The development of a militant religious movement in Nigeria*. *Afrika Spectrum* 47, nos. 2–3 (2012): 137–155; Thurston, Alexander. *Boko Haram: The history of an African Jihadist movement*, Vol. 65. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017; Pérouse de Montclos, Marc-Antoine (ed.). *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*. Leiden: African Studies Centre, 2014.
- 4 OCHA. *Cameroon: Aperçu des besoins humanitaires*. Yaoundé: OCHA 2016.
- 5 OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2016*. Geneva/New York. December 2015.
- 6 Bonneuil, Christophe. *La montée en globalité des discours du bon usage de la nature à l’âge des empires, 1870–1930*. Seminar: Du local au global. Paris: Sciences Po, 21 January 2016.
- 7 Even though, as we saw in chapter 2, UNHCR became increasingly concerned with “vulnerability” since the 1980s. See also Chapter 6.
- 8 On the concept of humanitarian government, see Introduction.
- 9 See Chapter 2.
- 10 In Cameroonian institutions, centralization of data about refugees and asylum seekers did not exist in 2014. The National Institute of Statistics (Conseil National de la Statistique, the supreme organ of strategic orientations for the production of statistics in Cameroon) did not have any directive for refugee statistics, and there was no system of coordinated management for statistical data on migration (since there was neither any political documents nor material strategy about migration). There were partial statistics: 1) the General Delegation for National Security (DGSN) produced, from

- figures that were recovered from border posts, a “Registry of population movements at the borders” (“Registre des mouvements de populations aux frontières”), reserved for internal use by the police. 2) The Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) was meant to centralize information from municipalities. And 3) The Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT) was, in principle, supposed to coordinate all the activities related to the production of official statistical data (surveys, census), notably by the National Institute of Statistics (INS). See: Dayang, Romain. *Amélioration des données sur les migrations au Cameroun: Évaluation et recommandations*. Observatoire ACP sur les migrations, ACPOBS/2013/MDA03, 2013. To these, one should add the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinRex), within which a service to deal with the refugee question was created (The Direction of Cameroonians abroad: Foreigners in Cameroon, migratory and refugee questions created by Decree No. 2013/112 of 22 April 2013 [articles 120–127]). However, this service did not register refugees, but rather used the UNHCR’s statistics.
- 11 An agreement signed by the Representative of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Cameroon and Cameroon’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MinRex) anticipated that the task of examining asylum requests and the attribution of refugee status should be transferred to the Ministry starting on 1 August 2016. The UNHCR financed the creation of a ministerial commission to that effect, to the tune of 70 million Cameroonian francs CFA [ca. 106,714 €].
 - 12 The UNHCR played a larger role in Africa than in Europe in the procurement of refugee status. According to Harrell-Bond, there were 60 states for which the UNHCR decided refugee status, even though these states ratified the 1951 Convention (Harrell-Bond, 2015: 14).
 - 13 Technically speaking, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not an agency according to United Nations terminology. However, for the sake of simplicity, I will use this terminology here. Certain governmental authorities could furnish figures, like the Inter-ministerial Ad-Hoc Committee for the Emergency Management of Refugees in Cameroon, chaired under the authority of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD) or the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Regional Development (MINEPAT), but in general they were content to use UNHCR’s figures.
 - 14 This Excel sheet has been produced for the 2017 HNO, which was the year after Frank’s work on the HNO 2016.
 - 15 Interview with a German diplomat, German Embassy, Yaoundé, March 2016.
 - 16 Pigeaud, Fanny. *Au Cameroun de Paul Biya*. Paris: Karthala, 2011: 6.
 - 17 The high-ranking leaders were close to Biya, recruited behind closed doors, the majority of executives and leaders older than 60. Three out of four Cameroonians were under 34 years old and had therefore only known one president. International Crisis Group. Cameroon: Les dangers d’un régime en pleine fracture. *Rapport d’Afrique* 161 (2010): 2.
 - 18 He has not been in Douala, the economic capital, and the largest city in the country, since 1991 (with the exception of a few hours in 2004). Pigeaud, 2011: 62–63.
 - 19 Foucault, 2004. Amnesty International, Cameroon Annual Report, London 2015/2016; Amnesty International, Chambres de torture secrètes au Cameroun. Violation des droits humains et crimes de guerre dans la lutte contre Boko Haram, London, 2017. Among the works on the maintenance of order in Cameroon: Bellomo, Chantal. *L’ordre et la sécurité dans la construction de l’Etat au Cameroun*. PhD diss., Bordeaux: IEP de Bordeaux, 2007; Biculeu, Victorin Hameni. *Politique de défense et sécurité nationale du Cameroun*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2012; Morelle, Marie. La prison centrale de Yaoundé: L’espace au cœur d’un dispositif de pouvoir. *Annales de géographie* 3 (2013): 332–356.
 - 20 According to the official statistics, Cameroon became less and less attractive for foreign workers. The proportion of foreigners in Cameroon diminished by half between 1976 and 2005 (from 2.9% to 1.5%). Dayand, 2013: 8.

- 21 World Health Organization. *Document on health statistics*. Geneva/New York: WHO, 2010.
- 22 Republic of Cameroon/National Institute of Statistics. *Cameroonian survey on households* (Enquête Camerounaise auprès des ménages, ECAM 4), 2014.
- 23 Interview with Achille Mbembe conducted by George Alain Boyomo and Boris Bertolt “plus d’un demi-siècle après notre indépendance, nous en sommes toujours là et presque rien n’a bougé,” *Mutations*, www.diaf-tv.info/achille-mbembe-plus-dun-demi-siecle-apres-notre-independance-nous-en-sommes-toujours-la-et-presque-rien-na-bouge/O; Nguini, Mathias Éric Owona and Menthong, Hélène-Laure. ‘Gouvernement perpétuel’ et démocratisation janusienne au Cameroun: 1990–2018. *Politique africaine* 2 (2018): 97–114; Eboko, Fred and Awondo, Patrick. L’État stationnaire, entre chaos et renaissance. *Politique africaine* 2 (2018): 5–27.
- 24 Mbowou Linjuom, Claude R. *Identification, visibilité et invisibilité dans les marges camerounaises du bassin du Lac Tchad*. Master Paper, Paris: Université de Paris I Panthéon Sorbonne, 2013: 12. In the Extreme North of Cameroon, less than one out of five births was assisted by a healthcare professional and likely to be registered. Mbowou, 2013: 42; Population census took place in 1976, 1987, and 2005.
- 25 This is the “gatekeeper state” described by Frederick Cooper, or the “extraverted” state described by Jean-François Bayart. Bayart, 2000; Cooper, 2002. Breckenridge, 2013; Breckenridge, 2014.
- 26 Gregory Mann demonstrates this fact: Mann, 2015.
- 27 According to the donors’ terminology for certain geographical zones on the margins (notably in the north of Nigeria and Cameroon in the grip of Boko Haram). See Foreign and Commonwealth Office. *The link between ‘ungoverned spaces’ and terrorism: Myth or reality?* August 2014.
- 28 Duffield, 2007: 70–75.
- 29 UNHCR. Statistics of CAR refugees and asylum seekers as of 18 May 2014. www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/UNHCR%20Statistics%20of%20CAR%20refugees%20and%20asylum%20seekers%20as%20of%2018%20May%202014.pdf (Accessed 2019-05-08).
- 30 Interview with UNHCR Protection Officer. Headquarters of UNHCR Cameroon in Yaoundé. November 2014. The UNHCR concentrated its activity on urban refugees, which, in its view, posed a more serious problem. The World Food Programme (WFP) made the same decision. The WFP led emergency food distributions in Cameroon between 2008 and 2011. In 2011, the WFP changed its strategy for a development program: “Food for Work/Food for Training.” The WFP returned to its “immediate response” mode with food distribution in March 2014. Interview with Food Aid Monitor. World Food Programme. World Food Programme Headquarters, Yaoundé. November 2014.
- 31 The other international actors shared this opinion. A report from the U.S. State Department summarizes it thus: “Social integration has been somewhat natural because of the shared ethnicities and nomadic pastoralist culture which occasioned seasonal migrations across the border for many years.” US Department of State. *Field evaluation of local integration of Central African refugees in Cameroon: Evaluating the effectiveness of humanitarian engagement and programming in promoting local integration of refugees in Zambia, Tanzania, and Cameroon: Final Field Visit Report*. Development and Training Service, September 2014: 3.
- 32 In December 2012, a coup d’état by the Séléka overthrew President François Bozize. In March 2013, Michel Djotodia proclaimed himself interim president – which he remained until January 2014. Central Africa was declared a Level Three humanitarian emergency by the UN in December 2013, with the Common Humanitarian Fund in the Central African Republic (CHF-CAR) overseen by the UN’s humanitarian coordinator.
- 33 The UNHCR used an “Emergency Roster” to deal with this kind of situation. It consisted of a small group of UNHCR employees brought together and ready to

- intervene rapidly for a short time (a few weeks to a few months) in emergency situations. Interview with Associate Resettlement Officer, UNCHR Headquarters in Geneva. 14 July 2014.
- 34 Placed under the authority of the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralization (MINATD), this committee reunited the principal Ministries (Foreign Relations, Defense, Public Health, National Security). Decree No. 269 of 13 March 2014, regarding the creation of the Inter-ministerial Ad-Hoc Committee for the Emergency Management of Refugees in Cameroon.
- 35 UNHCR. Statistics of CAR refugees and asylum seekers as of 18 May 2014. www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/UNHCR%20Statistics%20of%20CAR%20refugees%20and%20asylum%20seekers%20as%20of%2018%20May%202014.pdf
- 36 One of the first missions was that of the “UN Country Team” in February. It was followed by numerous others, notably a joint mission of diplomatic corps and UN institutions in Gado and Garoua-Mboulai (the ambassadors of Germany, Brazil, Israel, the United States, France, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland), the European Union, USAID, and the United Nations (6–8 May 2014); one mission of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) at the end of May, led by Ambassador Fouad Maznaie and with Qatar Charity, Islamic Development Bank, Islamic Solidarity Fund, International Islamic Aid Organization, Turkish Red Cross, IHH İnsani Yardım Vakfı, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Islamic Aid; CARE International undertakes a needs mission (CARE International. *Mission report evaluating the needs of Central African refugees in Eastern Cameroon: 28 April to 6 May 2014*. Yaoundé, 2014); International Medical Corps. *Gender-based violence in Garoua Boulai and Gado refugee camp: A rapid assessment*. 14 May 2014. See also Office of the Resident Coordinator of the UN in Cameroon. *Response to Central African refugees. Situation report No. 1*. 17 May 2014; Office of the Resident Coordinator of the UN in Cameroon. *Response to Central African refugees: Situation report No. 3*. 2 June 2014.
- 37 The refugees paid to cross the border. For instance, one refugee said that he arrived from Boda in October 2014 with his family. Having come in a car and a truck with his family (his wife and five children), he said that he paid 620,000 CFA [ca. €945] to the anti-Balaka and 38,000 CFA [ca. €58] to the Cameroonian customs and police officers at the border. Interview with Central African refugee, Kenzou, December 2014.
- 38 Notably UNICEF, WFP, CARE, Caritas, the Red Cross, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the African Humanitarian Agency (AHA), Première Urgence-Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI), and International Relief and Development (IRD).
- 39 This is why the UNHCR continued to talk about “sites,” opened in the villages, whereas other actors continued to use the word “camps.” Interview with UNHCR Protection Officer at Headquarters of UNHCR Cameroon in Yaoundé. 18 November 2014.
- 40 These were small camps (no more than 20,000 inhabitants) generally placed not far from the villages. The Mbougouéré Camp was closed, by MSF demand, because its isolation posed a security risk (for incursions from Central African militias) and a logistical problem (its distance from the Garoua–Batouri road).
- 41 Interview with a medical doctor at MSF, MSF headquarter, Yaoundé, September 2015.
- 42 Interview with MSF Mission Chief Cameroon at MSF Headquarters. Yaoundé, November 2014; MSF Interview with Mission Chief Cameroon at MSF Headquarters. Yaoundé, March 2016.
- 43 Telephone interview with Gignoux, Etienne. MSF/Epicentre in Geneva, February 2016.
- 44 MSF/Epicentre, Gignoux Etienne, Ginsbourger, Maud, Surveillance prospective de la mortalité et de la malnutrition en communauté. Villes de Garoua Boulai et Gbiti, camps de Gado Badzere et Gbiti, Province de l’Est, Cameroun, April–May 2014, Epicentre. Like most humanitarian surveys, the Epicentre survey thus had both the

- goal of understanding and that of intervention: Objectives of advocacy (sounding the alarm to get other actors to come), estimation of needs for planning MSF projects, and first triage of children – the malnourished children being directly “referred” to the camp’s healthcare center.
- 45 To which the small transit camp of Garoua-Mboulaï must be added.
- 46 A gross mortality rate of 1.9 per 10,000 persons per day and a global acute malnutrition rate of 44.9% among children under five in the Gado Badzere camp; a gross mortality rate of 1.5 per 10,000 persons per day and a global acute malnutrition rate of 41.5% among children under five in the Gbiti camp. See MSF/Epicentre, 2014: 4–5. (The WHO fixes the emergency threshold for gross mortality rates at 1 per 10,000 persons per day and the emergency threshold for global acute malnutrition at 15%.)
- 47 In the Gado Badzere camp, the community liaisons counted 8,072 residents versus the 7,200 persons expected according to the numbers furnished by UNHCR. MSF/Epicentre, 2014, p. 19. But the problem of population figures was also posed by cities, for which the numbers – provided by the municipalities – turned out to be equally erroneous. The report concluded on the problem of “data coherence.”
- 48 OCHA. *Cameroon: Humanitarian Needs Overview 2016*. Yaoundé: December 2015.
- 49 Interview with Senior Officer with UNHCR, UNHCR headquarters in Yaoundé September 2015.
- 50 The Humanitarian Coordinator was named by the Undersecretary General of the UN and the Emergency Relief Coordinator, which conferred strong legitimacy to the position.
- 51 Joint UNHCR-OCHA. *Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice*. 2014–04–24.
- 52 Loescher, 2001; Hanhimäki, 2008; Barnett, 2011; Gatrell, 2013.
- 53 The statutes of the UNHCR define the function of the High Commissioner but say nothing of the UNHCR personnel. Article 15 mentions the “staff of the office,” named by the High Commissioner (Gottwald, Martin. *Competing in the humanitarian marketplace: UNHCR’s organizational culture and decision-making process: New issue in refugee research, Research Paper No. 190*. UNHCR, 2010).
- 54 A “quasi-military command structure that was inspired by the League of Nations and the British concept of an independent civil service” (Gottwald, 2010: 1). The author of this phrase – which he applies to the UN in the 1950s – is himself a high-ranking executive in HCR.
- 55 Gottwald, 2010: 12.
- 56 The yearly budget amounts to \$5,307,842,780 [UNHCR employed 7,138 staff worldwide (UNHCR. *Global appeal for 2014–2015*: 3)].
- 57 UNHCR was present in every single country in Africa. It had offices in 449 locations, in 123 countries.
- 58 UNHCR, 2011.
- 59 Martin Gottwald compares the managerial culture of the UNHCR to a “medieval royal court” Gottwald, 2010: 39.
- 60 OCHA. *General Assembly Resolution 46/182*. 1991.
- 61 Also created by the OCHA. *General Assembly Resolution 46/182*. 1991.
- 62 The 2005 humanitarian reform responds to a report ordered by Jan Egeland, then UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, on the state of humanitarianism.
- 63 The clusters were: 1. Water/Sanitation and Hygiene (UNICEF); 2. Nutrition (UNICEF); 3. Logistics; 4. Health (WHO); 5. Food Security (WFP & FAO); 6. Emergency Telecommunications (WFP); 7. Education (UNICEF & Save the Children); 8. Early Recovery (UNDP); 9. Protection (UNHCR); 10. Shelter (UNHCR/IFRC); and 11. Camp Coordination and Camp Management (UNHCR/IOM).
- 64 The two functions of the “cluster leads” (“first port of call” and “provider of last resort”) were deliberately rather fluid.
- 65 The decision chain was as follows: The IASC chooses the ERC of the UN, who chose a humanitarian coordinator (HC) for the country in crisis, who in turn named clusters or sector leaders, who then exercised leadership over the clusters.

- 66 UNHCR. *UNHCR refugee coordination model: Adaptation of UNHCR's refugee coordination in the context of the Transformative Agenda*. New York/Geneva, 2013-11-20.
- 67 The reform of the Transformative Agenda “should be read to include all non-refugee international humanitarian coordination structures established to support Humanitarian Country Teams in line with Humanitarian Reform” (UNHCR Refugee Coordination Model, 2013).
- 68 “Refugees often have specific needs” (documentation, access to housing, health, etc.) (UNHCR *Refugee Coordination Model*, 2013).
- 69 “The principle underpinning UNHCR’s approach in mixed situations is that refugee operations should form an integral part of any overall humanitarian response, while at the same time retaining the flexibility to stand alone for international protection and accountability purposes. (. . .) The High Commissioner will maintain a direct line of communication, through his Representative, with the Government” (UNHCR *Refugee Coordination Model*, 2013).
- 70 Gottwald, 2010.
- 71 Interview with a Senior Officer at UNHCR Headquarters. Yaoundé, March 2016.
- 72 Joint UNHCR-OCHA *Note on Mixed Situations: Coordination in Practice*, 24 April 2014. A mixed situation was defined as a situation “where the populations of humanitarian concern include refugees, IDPs and other affected groups.” This did not cover “refugee-only contexts” where “the affected population is primarily refugees and – for the purpose of preserving asylum space – host communities directly affected by the refugee presence,” the UNHCR had the only lead (there is no Humanitarian Coordinator appointed). But the note also did not apply in places without refugees: In those cases, only OCHA coordinated.
- 73 For example, it is the UNHCR that is responsible for verifying that the state has acquitted itself of its legal obligations toward refugees; that is solely its domain.
- 74 Interview with a Senior Officer at OCHA Cameroon: OCHA Headquarters. Yaoundé, March 2016. At the beginning of the Cameroonian crisis, there was only one person from OCHA on the ground. After several missions organized after Dakar, the permanent OCHA office opened in May 2015.
- 75 Interview with SMART Consultant for UNICEF at the UNICEF Headquarters. Yaoundé, February 2016.
- 76 Interview with Senior Officer at the UNHCR Headquarters. Yaoundé, March 2016.
- 77 This section results from my observations of the work of UNHCR in Cameroon in November and December 2014 (source: Own field notes as well as interviews with UNHCR employees and refugees in Yaoundé, Batouri, Lolo, and Kenzou).
- 78 UNHCR. *Global Appeal: Update January 2015*, Geneva: UNHCR, 2015: 2.
- 79 According to UNHCR’s official definition: UNHCR, *Handbook for Registration. Procedures and Standards for Registration, Population Data Management and Documentation, Provisional Release*, Geneva: UNHCR, September 2003: 6.
- 80 Hence, the two classically distinct functions of enumeration and registration are here united. See also Breckenridge, Keith and Szreter, Simon (eds.). Introduction. In *Registration and recognition: Documenting the person in world history*, Breckenridge, Keith and Szreter, Simon (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013: 1–38, here 18–19.
- 81 Franke, Mark. Refugee registration as foreclosure of the freedom to move: The virtualisation of refugees’ rights in maps of international protection. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 27, no. 2 (2009): 352–369, here p. 356.
- 82 Hyndman, Jennifer. *Managing displacement: Refugees and the politics of humanitarianism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000: 117–147.
- 83 Pääkhönen, E. and Kruithof, D. Project profile: Assignment, AR 2005/ 163/01, Final Audit Report R06/R008, Office of Internal Oversight Services, United Nations, 2006.
- 84 UNHCR. *Handbook on Emergencies*. Geneva: UNHCR 2007: 162–163.
- 85 The security situation remained fragile elsewhere. There were regular incursions by militias near the border and rumors of imminent attacks by the anti-Balaka on refugee

camps. During the night from 2 to 3 December 2014, the Democratic Front of the Central African People, led by Abdoulaye Miskine, invaded Ouli and attempted to kidnap the department's sub-prefect.

- 86 Names have been changed.
- 87 All the members of the team were Cameroonian and worked in French – even if one of the clerks, who comes from West Cameroon, preferred to take notes in English. The other clerk, who came from North Cameroon, also spoke Fula.
- 88 During the emergency phase, in March–April 2014, the UNHCR did registration by hand, with the Red Cross; the Red Cross volunteers took notes on paper, then the UNHCR classified the vulnerable persons and registered them. The data was entered into the computer later.
- 89 Rutinwa, 2002.
- 90 Responding to the definition of refugee status according to Article 1 of the 1951 Geneva Convention (full: Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees). The definition from the Convention of the Organisation of African Unity, in 1969, differed slightly. See Chapter 2 on this point.
- 91 This production, of course, masked other priorities. Certain refugees could skip everyone, according to the local logic tied to their importance for HCR. For example, when the wife of one member of the refugee committee arrived, it would have been very difficult for the clerks to refuse to register her, as their jobs depended on his quasi volunteer work.
- 92 Furthermore, the UN volunteers had, on paper, a master list that allows for comparison, consisting of the following information: Household number, ProGres number, ration card number, name of the head of the household, site, and signature for refugees who knew how to sign.
- 93 The ProGres program stored information in several databases. The refugees registered in Kenzou and on the route between Kenzou – Lolo/Mbilé were registered in the M2 base. They were compared and added, once the team returned to Batouri, with the other databases in the region (one database for the Gbiti–Timangolo route; another for the road to Yokadouma and surrounding villages, etc.).
- 94 In practice, the UNHCR often took so long to reimburse medical centers and pharmacies that they sometimes refused to serve refugees (for example, they claimed that the requested medicine was out of stock).
- 95 It was not unusual for the police to arrest people with illegal status (or even refugees with legal status) and put them in prison until a member of the family came to bail them out.
- 96 Interviews with seven Central African refugees and with the Accounting Commissioner for refugees in Kenzou's soccer stadium, December 2014. Police and Cameroonian military personnel often required a "gift" from people who needed to cross (around 1,000 CAF to pass a checkpoint). The more fragile the legal situation of the concerned person, the more expensive passage could be. The checkpoints – by police, soldiers, or gendarmes – were frequent in Eastern Cameroon. They controlled movement toward the interior of the country (in particular, the entrance and exit of refugees and the eventual incursions of armed militias from Central Africa). In December 2014, I counted 15 different checkpoints between the Central African border and the capital, Yaoundé (two between Kenzou and the Lolo refugee camp, two between Lolo and Batouri, five between Batouri and Bertoua, and six between Bertoua and Yaoundé).
- 97 This is also the case for Somalians in Kenya studied by Hyndman, Fula in Sierra Leone studied by Gale, and Liberians in Ghana studied by Coker. Hyndman, 2000; Dick, Shelly. *Liberians in Ghana: Living without humanitarian assistance?* New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper 57. UNHCR, 2002; Gale, Lacey Andrews. Sustaining relationships across borders: Gendered livelihoods and mobility among Sierra Leonean refugees. *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2006): 69–80.

- 98 Boutrais, Jean. Pour une nouvelles cartographie des Peuls. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 34, no. 133 (1994): 137–146; Boutrais, Jean. Les Foulbé de l'Adamaoua et l'élevage: De l'idéologie pastorale à la pluriactivité. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 34, no.133 (1994): 175–196; Boutrais, Jean. *Mbozo-Wazan: Peul et montagnards au nord du Cameroun*. Paris: Éd. de l'Orstom, 1987; Liba'A, Natali K. and Patrick, Dugué. Transhumance et durabilité des systèmes de production des éleveurs en Afrique sub-humide: La sédentarisation des Mbororo du Nord Cameroun. In *Systèmes de production et durabilité dans les pays du Sud*, Thibaud, Bénédicte, and Alain, François (eds.). Paris: Karthala, 2010: 151–170.
- 99 Biometric registration (with digital fingerprints) was first introduced in Cameroon in 2015. The refugees registered in 2014 without biometrics have therefore been progressively re-registered with biometrics.
- 100 Historically, a state like Zambia could, for example, use such information for police operations: Nyers, Peter. *Rethinking refugees: Beyond states of emergency*. New York: Routledge, 2006: 94. Cited in Franke, 2009: 363.
- 101 Hence the Sudanese refugees in Kakuma (Kenya) who associated registration practices with the techniques for counting slaves (Hyndman, 2000: 128).
- 102 This is the case of one asylum seeker who said she came from Berbérati in Central Africa and found herself denied refugee status by the UNHCR clerk, who accused her of lying about her nationality. As her children attended a Koranic school where there were mostly Chadians and Malians, he thought that she was not from Central Africa and thus should apply to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and not UNHCR. Interview with asylum seeker in Kenzou, December 2014.
- 103 The IOM registered and delivered services to TCNs: These were people (in Kenzou, mainly Chadians and Nigerians, along with some Malians) who had fled Central Africa but were neither Cameroonian nor Central African (and thus ineligible for refugee status since refugees, by definition, must have lost the protection of their country of origin). In Kenzou, many hundred TCNs were probably also registered as refugees.
- 104 A fourth census (“Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (RGPH)”) took place at the end of 2016.
- 105 See BUCREP/République du Cameroun, *La population du Cameroun en 2010. 3ème RGPH*, Yaoundé, BUCREP 2010: 3.
- 106 BUCREP/ République du Cameroun, *3ème Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat*, Yaoundé: BUCREP 2010, Vol. III-Tome3: Projections démographiques, 12.
- 107 Interview with Information Management Officer, headquarter of OCHA, Yaoundé March 2016.
- 108 Hyndman, 2001: 117–119.
- 109 Gaim Kibreab described the situation in the camp of Tog Wojaal, in Somalia, where the population of refugees was overestimated by 55,000 people. See Kibreab, Gaim. Pulling the wool over the eyes of strangers: Refugee deceit and trickery in institutionalized settings. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 17, no. 11 (2004): 1–26, here 3–6. One of the strategies that might be used by asylum seekers is to “borrow” children from another family for registration in order to increase the number of members of the households on the papers (and increase the food ration).
- 110 IASC. Guidance on the Humanitarian Profile Common Operational Data Set. June 2011.
- 111 Affected: Displaced (IDPs, refugees and asylum seekers, others of concern), non-displaced (hosts, non-hosts), and casualties (dead, missing, injured). Among the “total population” of a country, a certain proportion of the population is “affected,” among which a certain proportion can be “in need,” among which a certain proportion can be “targeted” by aid programs, among which a certain population can be “reached,” among which a certain population can be “covered.”
- 112 In particular, the 1951 Convention relative to the status of refugees, with the additional protocols of 1967, and the African Union Convention regulating the particular

- aspects of the problems of refugees in Africa in 1969. In Cameroon, it is Law No. 2005/006 from 27 July 2005 concerning the status of refugees that has introduced the definition from the African Union Convention into national legislation.
- 113 African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention, 2010).
- 114 IOM UNHCR. *Cameroon Far North—Displaced Population Profiling*. 2015-05-19.
- 115 A whole series of results was thus given as a function of the percentage of informants asked about the question: For example, to the question of “Where do IDPs stay,” 36% of key informants replied “in host families.”
- 116 The ad hoc category of “refugees outside of camps,” which in fact included the refugees not previously registered by HCR, showed the effect of the camp’s geography on population estimations.
- 117 IOM UNHCR. *Profiling of persons displaced by the Nigerian Crisis*. Extreme North Region, Cameroon. September 2015; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 1, November 2015; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 2, February 2015; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 3, April 2016; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 4, August 2016; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 5, October 2016; IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 6, January 2017.
- 118 Interview with Senior staff, OCHA Cameroon at OCHA Headquarters. Yaoundé, March 2016.
- 119 Calculated using IOM UNHCR. *Cameroon Far North—Displaced Population Profiling*. 2015-05-19.
- 120 IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix DTM Round 1. November 2015: 5.
- 121 The second International Conference on Assistance to Refugees in Africa (ICARA II 1984) thus affirms that the host population should have been taken into account.
- 122 OCHA. *Cameroon: Humanitarian Needs Overview* for 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017.

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