CONFLICTING NARRATIVES AND DEPENDENCY SYNDROME

An anthropological study of humanitarian assistance in the Southwest of Côte d'Ivoire

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Abstract

This master's thesis is concerned with the socially constructed narratives that surround humanitarian assistance in Tabou Department, in the Southwest of Côte d'Ivoire. In Tabou, humanitarian organizations (HOs) implement a multitude of projects for the benefit of repatriated refugees and other vulnerable groups. Easily observable is the fact that beneficiaries of these projects are not always satisfied. Meanwhile, HO staff is frequently frustrated with beneficiaries' attitude and behavior. I observed what seemed to be a mismatch between beneficiaries and HO staff's understanding of what was 'really' going on in Tabou. Hence, **the research question** guiding the analysis is as follows: How, why and with what consequences do beneficiaries and HO staff construct different narratives about their social reality?

The methods applied are anthropological, which allowed me to gain a deep and rich understanding of the everyday lives and struggles of the people living and working in Tabou. During three months of fieldwork I was immersed in their social reality, which allowed me to observe patterns in behavior, and stereotypes in speech. **The empirical material** consists of 24 semi-structured interviews, everyday conversations, and participant observations. This material is analyzed through a social constructivist lens, with 'narratives' as the bearing analytical concept. A narrative is not just an objective account of events, but a way of making sense of what has happened and why. It is a framework for interpretation, which brings together a multitude of different situations in a socially meaningful way.

The results of my analysis show that beneficiaries have constructed two narratives in regard to assistance and life opportunities in Tabou – a narrative of hopelessness and a narrative of unfair assistance. In stark opposition to those, HO staff has constructed a narrative of cultural laziness and a narrative of dependency. These narratives have different consequences, and the most important is that they limit the HO staff's ability to identify underlying structural causes, which can explain the lack of development in Tabou Department. In other contexts, researchers have shown that a belief in the dependency syndrome has had this consequence of obscuring 'real' causes and blaming beneficiaries instead. Hence, after deconstructing the dependency syndrome I propose alternative concepts, which better acknowledge structural causes and individual agency.

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Abbreviations

ASAPSU – Association de Soutient à l'Autopromotion Sanitaire et Urbain

DRC – Danish Refugee Council

FCFA – Franc Communauté Financière Africaine (currency in Côte d'Ivoire)

HO – Humanitarian Organizations

IGA – Income-Generating Activities

NFI – Non-Food Item

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PC – Protection Committees

SAARA – Service d'Aide et d'Assistance aux Réfugiés et Apatrides

UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

WFP – World Food Programme

1. Introduction

Colleague: "It is pure neglect! These parents should take responsibility for their children and make sure to get the birth certificates right when they are born. It is free for God's sake"

Me: "Maybe the parents do not understand the procedure or why birth certificates are important?"

Colleague: "Of course they understand. There have been so many information campaigns in this area about the importance of ID papers, the risks of statelessness etc. Everyone knows how important it is, but they neglect their responsibility. They cannot even remember to go to UNICEF to pick up the birth certificates that were made especially for them, free of charge!"

Me: "Could it be because the information campaign was lacking something important? Was it communicated both in French and a local language? Could there not be another explanation than neglect?"

Colleague: "The campaigns were very good. There was nothing wrong with them. There really is no other explanation. People are lazy here in Tabou, they don't take responsibility!"

This reconstruction of a discussion, between me and a local employee from Danish Refugee Council (DRC), took place during my first week in the town of Tabou, in Southwestern Côte d'Ivoire. I had arrived in Côte d'Ivoire a few weeks before to do fieldwork for this master's thesis. Subsequently, I was offered a part time internship with DRC, which became central for my research.

Still in Denmark, while preparing for the fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire, I had read about the arbitrary violence suffered by civilians and the deep political cleavage between pro-Gbagbo and pro-Ouattara groups during the two civil wars in the country (approx. 2002-2011). I therefore expected to meet returning refugees marked by trauma and severe mistrust to the 'enemy' group, making it interesting to investigate the difficulties they encounter in reintegration. Throughout my first weeks in Côte d'Ivoire, more specifically in Abidjan and Tabou, I asked everyone I met about social

tension, mistrust, reprisal attacks, and discrimination aimed at returning refugees, but overall everything seemed to be peaceful. This was of course a happy discovery, but it also meant that my initial research topic (social, ethnic, and political tension in small communities) was rather unimportant.

The discussion quoted above spun my attention in another direction, as I could not quite grasp why my colleague seemed to refuse to understand the challenges related to birth registration and ID papers. I soon discovered that beneficiaries' behavior was often a source of frustration and incomprehension for the staff of humanitarian organizations (HOs). Not surprisingly, when I met with beneficiaries, they told the story much differently. The following research question thus stems from this mismatch that I observed in the field:

Research question

How, why and with what consequences do beneficiaries and HO staff construct different narratives about their social reality?

The question is academically relevant from a social constructivist perspective, which explores how groups understand the social reality differently. Furthermore, from a critical and activist standpoint, research can provide a well-informed basis for decision-making, which in turn can ensure better interventions. Critically reflecting on the consequences of socially constructed narratives is thus relevant and important, if the wish is to promote sustainable development and increased welfare among vulnerable populations.

Using an anthropological approach, I conducted 3 months of fieldwork in Côte d'Ivoire. The research question will be answered based on the 24 interviews conducted in Tabou, the everyday conversations with DRC staff, and participant observation as an intern with DRC during my time in Abidjan and Tabou.

Central to my analysis are the two groups, which I speak of as *beneficiaries* and *HO staff*. HO is an abbreviation for humanitarian organizations, which in this case primarily refers to staff members from DRC and UNHCR. These were the two

organizations that I mainly interacted with, but I also met employees from other NGOs during my fieldwork. Regarding the group of beneficiaries, it is important to note that this group is not as clear-cut as one might think. The people I met and interviewed during my fieldwork were a mixed group. Some were repatriates, which means that they are former refugees, who have returned to Côte d'Ivoire with the help of UNHCR. Some had returned from Liberia without international assistance and were thus called returnees. Some were currently benefitting from assistance, while others were not. Moreover, while the large majority of beneficiaries are repatriates, vulnerable families from the host community are also targeted by humanitarian and development projects. Hence, some beneficiaries had never fled Tabou. I only interviewed repatriates, though. I have decided to refer to this group as beneficiaries, because this is the term HO staff used.

In the next chapter I will show how social constructivism has provided a framework for my research and analysis. My fieldwork and ethical considerations will be elaborated in Chapter 3. Then a brief presentation of Côte d'Ivoire and more specifically Tabou will ensue in Chapter 4. The analysis starts properly speaking in Chapter 5, and continues through Chapter 6 and 7. In Chapter 8 I elaborate on some of my critical reflections in regard to my methods, analysis and capabilities as a researcher. I conclude my analysis and answer the research question in Chapter 9.

2. Social constructivism

The questions asked, the methods applied, and the conclusions made are always defined and limited by the ontological and epistemological convictions of the researcher. Questions, methods and conclusions have to adhere consistently to the same philosophy of science to be considered valid and convincing (Juul and Pedersen 2012, 13-17). This master's thesis is informed by social constructivism, which I understand as the following:

> *"Social constructivism with respect to a given phenomenon is the view that the latter does not possess an independent existence but is 'constructed'— that is, generated and maintained through collective human action, thought, discourse, or other social practices."* (Collin n.d.)

Obviously, there are many branches of social constructivism, but the above quote gives an overarching definition, which serves well enough the purpose of framing my research.

Hence, the social world does not exist independently of men, but is continuously constructed, maintained and reconstructed by their everyday practice. To the individual, the social reality might seem as an objective structure limiting and guiding behavior and interaction, but what is revealed by social constructivist research is that the status quo is not natural or given – the social reality can be deconstructed, criticized, and changed by individuals. What is usually debated more vigorously is whether or not the physical world is also a social construct, but this is irrelevant to my research (Collin n.d.).

The above describes the constructivist ontology. What defines a constructivist epistemology is the fact that knowledge is always knowledge from a certain perspective. Knowledge can never be detached from the researcher and thus, objective knowledge is refuted by social constructivist thinkers. There exists no neutral point from which we can explore the world, and there are no rigorous methods, which can neutralize the positionality of the researcher. Therefore, validity is achieved through transparency in all steps of the research and analysis, continuous reflection on the

researcher's positionality and coherent arguments leading to a convincing conclusion (Pedersen 2012, 227-229). Consequently, I will now shortly elaborate on how social constructivism is reflected in my research question, methods, empirical material and conclusions.

My research question, *How, why and with what consequences do beneficiaries and HO staff construct different narratives about their social reality?,* is concerned with socially constructed convictions, stories and stereotypes. The aim is not to reveal the 'true nature' of these two groups, but to understand the narratives and perceptions that these two have of each other. Moreover, I do not ask whether these narratives are close to 'reality' or not. What matters are the socially constructed ideas that shape the individual's behavior and interaction with other people in everyday life.

My methods are qualitative and anthropological, which will be further elaborated in Chapter 3. At present it should just shortly be noted that my anthropological approach values the deep and rich understanding of culture and people. It furthermore highlights the subjective and interpretative nature of knowledge, which is well in line with social constructivism.

Social constructivists do not have the same view on empirical material as realistic philosophies of science. The empirical material is not understood as objective data, which is ready to reveal a hidden truth if the right method is applied. On the contrary, when interviewees answer my questions it is part of the construction of their social reality. My notes and summary of the interviews is my attempt to recreate that social reality, as the interviewees saw it. Hence, I did not check if their statements about certain situations were true, and I did not assess whether or not they were right to think as they did. My only concern is to understand why they say certain things, what the patterns are, and how it fits with other statements.

The conclusions of this paper are also impacted by the ontological and epistemological convictions of social constructivism. The social world is always open to interpretation, and regardless of my efforts to stay objective it remains my interpretation. Nevertheless, by applying scientifically sound qualitative methods I hope to have come closer to a thorough understanding of the ideas and perceptions

constructed by the two groups of interest to the research question, and I claim to present this analysis as objectively as possible, while always being critical and aware of my own bias and prejudges as a white, privileged, female researcher.

Hopefully, at this point there should be no doubt for the reader, how my research is guided and limited by social constructivism.

3. Anthropology – Fieldwork and methods

Social anthropology has a long tradition of studying peoples and cultures. Anthropology is most often associated with qualitative methods, but in practice anthropologists can combine multiple methods, both quantitative and qualitative. My social constructivist perspective guides me in the direction of the qualitative methods. Anthropology is furthermore associated with the researcher's immersion into the culture in question during an extended period of time (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 161-162). As previously mentioned, I spent a few months in Côte d'Ivoire to do fieldwork. On the following pages, I will discuss in depth how I approached the field, the methods I used, and the challenges encountered.

Preparing for fieldwork

Before leaving Denmark, I had read about the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, the current refugee situation, the political climate etc., but without defining the research topic. I specifically chose an abductive approach, to keep an open mind and let the empirical material decide the direction of my research (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 28). This approach allowed me to stay alert to several different, possible research topics and it let me discover interesting dynamics between the HO staff and beneficiaries, which I would not have seen if my mind was already tuned in on specific theories.

When arriving in Abidjan, it was still not very clear to me how I would get to meet repatriates. I had beforehand sent emails to several organizations working with refugees and repatriates in Côte d'Ivoire, but without much luck. By pure coincidence I met a Danish woman working for DRC and she quickly facilitated a meeting with the Country Director. Apart from a very interesting discussion on security, the political situation and government policies, the Country Director also offered me a part time internship, which I accepted.

The internship has been pivotal for my research. It has provided me with better insights into the practicalities of social and economic reintegration of repatriates, and it allowed me to follow the DRC staff in their everyday tasks. More importantly, the internship acted as a gatekeeper to repatriates in the villages. DRC suggested that I visited their office in the Southwest, in the town Tabou, where they could offer me

accommodation and security. During the office hours, staff members were ready to facilitate meetings with repatriates. Furthermore, I was able to discuss specific challenges with my new colleagues, and if I had any doubts about how to address the interviewees or how to ask a specific question, they were always ready to help.

In Chapter 4, I will describe the location for the fieldwork in more detail.

Methodological and ethical considerations

Before going to Tabou, I closely considered a number of things – not only because these 'things' can affect my research findings, but also because I, as a researcher, can affect the field in unintended and undesirable ways. On the following pages, I will reflect on my positionality, the principle of 'do no harm', payment for interviews, and informed consent. These reflections and considerations are inspired by Daniel Hammet, Chasca Twyman & Mark Graham's book on anthropological research (Research and Fieldwork in Development 2015).

Considering positionality

When entering the field you are not just an objective tool of research, which does not influence the people around you. You unavoidably step into a web of power relation and social expectations colored by culture, history, gender, and race (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 51-52). Even more so when it comes to research in a developing country, because you are most likely more privileged than the people you study. Some theorists even argue that research is a new form of colonialism and exploitation of resources:

> "*Critical reflection on development research highlights how power inequalities between the privileged (white) Northern researcher and the (black) Southern researched serve to replicate historical inequities and manifest a new form of extractive industry – knowledge extraction – in which knowledge and data are 'mined' from countries and communities in the South and appropriated and exported by Northern scholars who use this knowledge to advance their own careers"* (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 91)

My positionality in Tabou is first and foremost defined by my skin color, and my relation to DRC. As a white person they would (rightfully) assume that I have the economic means to help out with a difficult situation. Furthermore, as I would often come accompanied by DRC staff, they would (wrongfully) also assume that I would have the power to influence the distribution of assistance. There are no white tourists in Tabou, so the very few white people who come there, come on missions with humanitarian or development organizations.
It is highly possible that this has affected the interviews. If they think that they can gain access to resources through me, they have an interest in exaggerating their problems and belittling the assistance they have already received. This must be considered when analyzing the interviews with beneficiaries. It is possible though, that beneficiaries are careful about criticizing the assistance received, due to my perceived relationship with DRC.

My role as a researcher is also important in defining my positionality, but it is much less significant than the factors mentioned above, because the people in Tabou perceive me not as a researcher but as an employee of a humanitarian organization. Nevertheless, as a researcher it is crucial for me that they accept to talk to me, that they feel comfortable in the conversation, and that they dare to be honest with me. Hence, they also hold a certain power.

Gender is usually something to pay close attention to, and therefore I also discussed this with DRC staff (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 52). They did not think that my gender would have an impact on the interviews, and they also assured me that there were no taboos when talking to men. Again, I was first and foremost defined as a white, privileged person with access to DRC resources.

Do no harm

Opinions and practice has changed over time, but today it is widely recognized that anthropological studies should help us understand the challenges, cultures and dynamics from the perspective of the people studied, in order to enable a fair and just future for the people living in difficult conditions (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 165). Thus, *"we ultimately have the well-being, dignity, and rights of those who*

participate in our research with us as our primary goal" (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 88).

Before going to the field, I was concerned about being confronted with traumatic experiences and the interviewees' grief or despair. In order to avoid provoking psychological stress I was very careful not to ask questions about their experience during the war/the flight unless it was relevant for my research. Whenever the interviewee would invoke something traumatic (like rape, the murder of a husband, etc.) I would show empathy, but not dwell on the subject. It is of course difficult to know their state of mind after the interviews, but my impression is that it did not result in further stress. Only once I experienced that the interviewee got emotional due to her difficult situation, which deeply affected me.

DRC staff stressed several times that it was crucial not to give them any false hope during the interview. This is also closely linked to positionality, i.e. access to DRC resources, as described above. Nevertheless, interviewees would often say things like *'Please can you make sure to tell them that I need a shelter'*, *'If you could give me just a little something it would be very kind'* or *'I really hope that, now you know, you can get assistance to the village'*. When these comments were made, I would as clearly as possible state that I was only an intern with no decision-making power in the organization and that, unfortunately, I would not be able to assure more assistance. I would at the same time underline that I hoped they would get the help they needed to improve their situation.

In regard to my effect on the local community, my research has in some way again highlighted the divide between privileged and under-privileged. They were used to humanitarian organizations conducting surveys on them, and their experience was that a lot of questions were asked without any tangible results. As described in the quote above on knowledge extraction, I often felt that I took advantage of their difficult situation – I came, saw, took what I needed for my thesis (knowledge) and then left.

Payment for interviews and giving back to the community

Paying for participation in research holds many dilemmas (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 106). I decided not to pay my interviewees for their participation, but it

was difficult to hold on to this decision when you get to understand how they struggle. I made the decision first and foremost for one reason; I have not received any funds for research and I was already spending my private savings to be able to live in Côte d'Ivoire. On the other hand, the interviewees also use their private time to tell me their story and they have even less money than me.

During my fieldwork, another risk occurred to me. One day I had been out in the town conducting interviews. A few days later, one of the women came by the office with a younger friend, who had not been home the first day. This was obviously very nice for me, as it resulted in an interesting interview, but it was also clear that the objective for stopping by the office was to expose their problems and get access to assistance. The young woman had even brought the refugee card of another friend, who was very sick and needed assistance to pay for her medical treatment. It is easy to imagine that if I had paid the interviewees, rumors would spread quickly and I would have people waiting outside my door to speak to me and then collect their 10,000 FCFA (115 DKK). Furthermore, should I pay the same for a long, interesting interview, as for 10 minutes with no relevant information? Should I pay more to the vulnerable interviewees, who had not yet received assistance or should I pay the same to everyone? And what about valuable information received through informal conversation?

Another option, which was envisaged, was to give a donation to the Protection Committee (PC) of Tabou. The committee had been set up by DRC, and the members do voluntary work to help protect and assist the most vulnerable. On several occasions, it was a member of the PC that followed me around in the town and facilitated the encounters. By giving a donation to this committee I could ‘give back to the community’ as a whole and avoid creating tension. The PC would also ensure that the money was spent helping the most vulnerable, and repatriates would not seek me out personally. However, DRC did not agree with this idea for several reasons. They were afraid that it would create confusion, because they had already informed the PC that no more funds were available. DRC were moreover afraid that it would blur the principle of voluntariness, if the PCs suddenly experienced that they were getting paid for their help.

Theoretically, not paying the interviewees saved me some trouble and it removed the risk of playing into power structures or creating tension between interviewees and other locals. Thus, I have done no harm, but I have done no good either.

Informed consent and confidentiality

As will be described more thoroughly in Chapter 4 on Côte d'Ivoire, political rivalry and social tension still exists and some analyses highlight the fragility of the peace and stability of the country. Nevertheless, it quickly became apparent that the fear of reprisals and arrests are not a preoccupation for people living in Tabou. Furthermore, it is important to note that the large majority of people, who fled from Western Côte d'Ivoire, were civilians who feared the arbitrary violence, and not high-level officials or politicians who were targeted for political reasons. To be on the safe side, I have still chosen to anonymize the interviewees and inform them of this. Even then, many repatriates showed me their refugee ID card without me asking for it.

Informed consent is regarded as one of the core principles of ethical research, but it is not always as simple to ensure in practice as one might think (Hammett, Twyman and Graham 2015, 99). I had planned to approach it very thoroughly and make sure to obtain the consent before starting the interview. I expected that some interviewees might be illiterate, so a verbal consent would be good enough. It turned out to be more difficult in practice. During the first couple of interviews, I explained that I was doing research for a university project, that their participation was completely voluntary, and that at any moment they could choose not to answer. Unfortunately, it was clear that they did not grasp the meaning of this, and they did not really seem to care much either, as they would never ask me any questions. Instead I asked DRC staff or members of the Protection Committee to properly introduce me and the conditions for the interview, as they might easier get the message across. Unfortunately, they would skip the formalities and simply just ask the repatriates to sit down with me and answer my questions. I would then again do my best to shortly explain my study and obtain consent, but whether it was well understood, and fully voluntary can be debated.

Doing fieldwork

I arrived in Côte d'Ivoire in the end of March 2017 and will stay in the country until mid-November 2017. My part-time internship with DRC took place from mid-April to mid-July, of which I spend approximately 2x2 weeks in Tabou. During my time in Côte d'Ivoire, I have written down field notes whenever I experienced, observed or talked about something remotely relevant to my research. I have written down conversations, notes from interviews, reflections, difficulties etc., which ensures transparency and documentation. My field notes will not be attached to this paper, but will be available during the examination. Summaries of the formal interviews can nevertheless be found in Appendix 2, and the interview guides in Appendix 1.

The qualitative data on which my analysis relies is collected through participant observation, informal everyday conversations and formal semi-structured interviews. These methods are all important tools in anthropological research.

Participant observation

The participant observation was made possible by my internship with DRC. As an intern it was easy to ask questions about what happened in the office, without raising suspicion, I could observe the interactions between staff members and beneficiaries, who came to the office, and I was invited to meetings, workshops, and other interesting activities.

I had hoped to be able to join my colleagues for many more of their activities in the villages, but unfortunately transportation was difficult. Due to security reasons I was not allowed to ride the motorbikes outside the town of Tabou, and most activities were in the smaller, surrounding villages. I was only able to join if the one functioning car was available, but this was rarely the case. Instead I would sometimes, during the day, walk around in Tabou, to get a better feel of the place and the people living their.

Everyday conversations

I obviously spent a lot of time with my DRC colleagues, which was a good opportunity to discuss different topics like the political situation, their experiences

during the war, their opinion on humanitarian and development assistance, life in Tabou, traditions and religion, family etc. Conversations took place during office hours, in the car to different activities or during the 11-hour ride from Abidjan to Tabou, during evenings when they would invite me out for dinner, during social activities in the weekend etc. All of these conversations provided me with a deeper understanding of the political, economic and social context I was working in. Moreover, these conversations, along with a few formal interviews with my colleagues, make up an important part of data for my analysis.

Formal semi-structured interviews

I conducted 19 interviews with beneficiaries, including one group interview. Due to the change of subject, the first three interviews are focused on social tension and social reintegration, whereas the latter have been slightly changed to focus more on humanitarian aid, organizations, and relations with HO staff. The first three interviews have thus functioned as pilot interviews, where I was able to test my questions, the relevance of the subject and the way interviewees react to the situation in general.

Furthermore, I conducted five interviews with HO staff members, including two with DRC staff, one with UNHCR staff and two with members of the Protection Committees in the area. The need for formal interviews with staff members was much smaller than with repatriates, because of the many informal conversations and observations made in the office. The members of the PCs have a very special position in regard to the relations between HO staff and beneficiaries. PCs are made up of locals, and often they are themselves repatriates and beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. At the same time they work closely together with DRC, and are specifically educated to understand the humanitarian principles and administrative issues. Consequently, they have a foot in each camp.

I decided to use semi-structured interviews because of my relatively short stay in Tabou. Hence, it would have been difficult to obtain enough information on the subject of interest if it was only through observations and informal conversations. The semi-structured form assures that the interview is easily guided in the right direction, while leaving plenty of space for the interviewee to develop their own story and their own thoughts. It was nevertheless a challenge to get the beneficiaries to speak freely.

They would give extremely short answers, and rarely describe any details or start telling a story. Several times I discussed this problem with my colleagues, but they were not able to offer me advise on how I could change my approach.

I would always try to ask many follow-up questions, and make sure that the interviewee understood that there were no right or wrong answers. Nevertheless, especially the women were often shy and uneasy about the situation. I believe that there are three reasons for this challenge; 1) they are used to NGOs asking them closed questions and wanting very precise and short answers. Therefore, my method was new and confusing to them; 2) language barriers were often an important challenge. Interviews were conducted in French, and only twice was the interview translated. During many of the other interviews, my 'guide of the day' would sometimes intervene to explain a specific question; 3) interviews were always conducted with either a DRC staff member or a member of the PC present. As mentioned earlier, this could result in the beneficiary either being too positive or too negative about the assistance received. It could also be a reason for their shyness, as they might be nervous to say something 'wrong'.

Summary

How, why and with what consequences do beneficiaries and HO staff construct different narratives about their social reality? This research question is base on a wondering, which arose a few weeks after I had started my fieldwork. I will answer the question from a social constructivist perspective and through an anthropological approach. Committing to social constructivism and anthropology opens up for some perspectives and limits of others. Methodologically it involves being sensitive to my role and positionality as a white, 'resourceful' researcher. It means collecting empirical material through interviews and participant observation, which produces qualitative data that values subjective interpretations of events, opinions and emotions. Analytically it involves being critical to taken-for-granted knowledge and being aware of power relations.

4. Context of the research

According to social constructivist theory, as well as anthropology, knowledge is always situated in a specific historical and geographical context. Anthropologists do not search for universal and objective laws, which can be generalized across time and space. Consequently, I will not pretend that my conclusions can be generalized to other countries or even other parts of Côte d'Ivoire, as we shall see later.

To properly situate my research and analysis, I will now go on to briefly present the political history of Côte d'Ivoire, and the current socio-economic situation in Tabou.

The political history of Côte d'Ivoire

In short, the political developments of Côte d'Ivoire since the beginning of colonial rule can be summarized into five periods:

- Colonial rule and forced labor migration (1893-1960)
- Independence and the Houphouët-Boigny era (1960-1993)
- Economic decline and political power struggles (1993-2002)
- Armed conflict (2002-2011)
- Reconciliation and reconstruction (2011-2017)

In 1893, the territory of Côte d'Ivoire was declared a French colony, which became a great economic asset with vast areas being transformed to cocoa and coffee plantations (Bjarnesen 2013, 51-53). In large parts, the workforce came from other French territories in West Africa, but these migrants were never registered as citizens or rights holders in the territory they left, nor in Côte d'Ivoire that they were forced to move to (Keller 2014, 101-102).

When independence came peacefully in 1960, the first president, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, continued to promote labor migration, thereby ensuring great economic growth and political stability. Important to note is the fact that migrants (and their children) were unofficially given the same rights as citizens, including property and voting rights. The large migratory movements only started creating problems when the economic growth slowed down. Houphouët-Boigny was successful in avoiding

social and ethnic problems, but when he died in 1993, tension was rising and a political power struggle broke out (Bjarnesen 2013, 59).

In the following years, presidents and military dictators tightened the definition of who were true Ivorians based on the concept of *ivoirité* and autochthony – the territorial origin of a person's ancestors (Bjarnesen 2013, 64-68). Presidential candidates used these concepts to exclude their political opponents, e.g. Alassane Ouattara who was ruled out of the 2000-elections based on his father's Burkinabé descent. Laurent Gbagbo won the election and further tightened the criteria for citizenship (Bjarnesen 2013, 68-69). This, together with the continued economic decline, triggered the outbreak of civil war in 2002 between pro-Gbagbo and pro-Ouattara supporters.

Several peace agreements were signed by the fighting parties, but none were truly respected. Finally, a new election was held in 2010 and Ouattara was declared the winner with 54% of the votes. The result was confirmed by the UN, but as Gbagbo refused to admit defeat, the violence escalated again. Both UN and French troops were deployed to support Ouattara, and on April 11, 2011, Gbagbo is seized from his official residence (Bjarnesen 2013, 74-76).

The arrest of Gbagbo spurred reprisal attacks, but violence decreased quickly. Gbagbo and one of his military officers are being charged with crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court (ICC) (Duerr 2016). His wife, Simone Gbagbo, was sentenced to 20 years of prison for crimes against the state in March 2015 (Human Rights Watch 2016). Furthermore, at least 80 pro-Gbagbo and 20 pro-Ouattara men have now been charged in Côte d'Ivoire with crimes during the conflict (Freedom House n.d.), but the Ivorian government is still being criticized by human rights groups for closing their eyes on crimes committed by their supporters – politically motivated beatings, gang rape, and destruction of 'foreigners'' property, just to mention a few (Human Rights Watch 2011).

The current situation

The decade long conflict resulted in approximately 2.3 million IDPs (UNHCR February 2016, 68), and 300,000 still remain internally displaced today (UNHCR

April-May 2015). The post-election violence in 2010/2011 resulted in approximately 250,000 refugees to neighboring countries, in addition to an uncertain number of refugees before the 2010-elections. As of December 31, 2016, still 49,600 Ivorian refugees remain mainly in Liberia (UNHCR 2017, 3). Hence, the large majority of both refugees and IDPs have now returned home as a direct result of the stabilized security and political situation.

On the surface at least, the security situation in the country has significantly and rapidly improved. When I ask Ivorians if they are worried, many state that "*Ivorians do not like war, we are a peaceful people*", and none of the repatriates I have met have expressed fears of reprisals. Everyone, both locals and HO staff, agree that refugees have no reason to be afraid to return to Côte d'Ivoire (Field notes, 15.04.2017, Save the Children employee; Field notes, 13.04.2017, DRC Chef de Base; Field notes, 18.04.2017, DRC guard).
Freedom House describes Côte d'Ivoire as 'partly free' and the 2015 presidential elections are considered free and fair by international observers. Only minor problems were reported. Freedom of the press and freedom of speech are generally upheld (Freedom House n.d.).

On the other hand, there are still important problems with former rebels, who have been integrated into the national security forces. Latest in January and May 2017, former rebels launched a mutiny, which quickly spread to many of Côte d'Ivoire's largest cities. Only few were injured, and the shootings and roadblocks only lasted for a few days, until the government had negotiated a deal with the former rebels, ensuring them a large payment of bonuses (Bayle 2017; Field notes 05.04.2017, DRC Country Director). Furthermore, former rebel commanders today have control over illicit gold mines and secret stocks of weapons, and they hold small armies of loyal ex-combatants. A worrying UN report shows that "*one former rebel commander possesses enough weapons – from surface-to-air missiles to millions of rounds of ammunition – to outgun the Ivorian army*" (Bavier May 7, 2015, 2).

Economic tension is also on the rise. Unemployment rates are high, especially among the youth, and as the global price on cocoa is drastically falling, this could easily

accentuate the problems in the near future (Field notes, 03.05.2017, DRC Security Advisor).

Fieldwork location – Tabou

(Picture: World Climate Guide n.d.)

Tabou is a small town in the Southwestern region of Côte d'Ivoire. Approximately 200,000 people live in Tabou Department, including 40,000 in the town itself. In Tabou there is a small local market where they sell eggs, tomatoes, onions, chili, fish, and chicken. There is also an insignificant supermarket, a gas station, several *maquis*[1], a police station, prison, city hall, hospital, churches, a mosque and schools. The nearest bank is two hours away by private car. Large plantations with coconut, palm oil, and rubber trees surround Tabou. The main road through the town is with asphalt, but the rest are red dirt roads and people mostly get around by foot or motorbike. Some houses are made of bricks and cement, while others are made of wood and clay. In Tabou Department are also many small villages, which are only accessible by very bumpy dirt roads. In the rainy season access can be almost impossible for several days

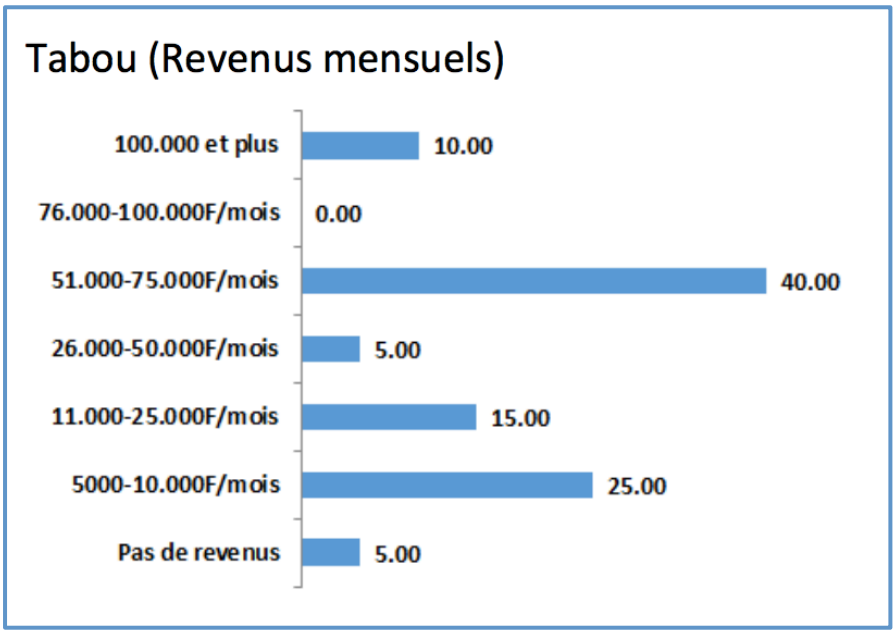
[1] Small open-air restaurant/bar

in a row. Many of these villages do not have electricity or running water. Some do not even have a well or water pump with potable water.

The Western regions of Côte d'Ivoire were those most heavily affected by the armed conflict, and Tabou Department has had to deal with the large movements of migrants, Liberian refugees, Ivorian IDPs, and now returning refugees. As a result, Tabou Department is also facing many socio-economic problems.

Socio-economic description of Tabou Department

The national poverty line in Côte d'Ivoire is set at 737 FCFA[2] per day, or 22.110 per month (Institut National de la Statistique n.d.). According to a UNHCR survey on 51 repatriated households in Tabou Department, almost 45% thus live under the poverty line:



(Picture: Ilunga Sulu February 2016, 74)

There is access to primary and secondary education in the town of Tabou, but if you live in the surrounding villages it is very difficult for children to get to school regularly. And even though schools are officially free, 67% of households in the survey state that they pay 5.000-25.000 FCFA per year to have their child attend school (Ilunga Sulu February 2016, 77), which can pose a problem to extremely poor

[2] This corresponds to 8.40 DKK or 1.3 USD

families. Besides, it is not uncommon that parents pull their children out of school to have them work in the fields or do chores at home. Thus, 36% of the people in the survey were illiterate, and only 27% had finished secondary education (Ilunga Sulu February 2016, 72).

Agriculture is by far the main occupation in Tabou Department, and small-scale commerce is the second most important occupation (Ilunga Sulu February 2016, 67-68). The survey further documents that 65% of the households live in food insecurity in Tabou (Ilunga Sulu February 2016, 71).

Humanitarian and development organizations in Tabou Department

Ever since the Liberian refugees started crossing the Ivorian border in 1990, the humanitarian and development organizations have been massively present in Tabou Department. Currently you find DRC, Caritas, Association de Soutien à l'Autopromotion Sanitaire Urbaine (ASAPSU), International Rescue Committee, Save the Children, Search for Common Ground, and UN agencies (WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF) working in the area. They work to alleviate suffering of the most vulnerable Ivorians, both repatriates and host communities. Their programs cover a wide range of themes; Sanitation, community infrastructure, housing, food distribution, food for work, health assistance, income generating activities, social cohesion, human rights, children's rights, gender based violence, and statelessness.

Moreover, there are also minor public projects for development, and important government institutions are present in the area, but their impact is limited due to insufficient budgets. According to the DRC Country Director, the Ivorian government is willing to work with NGOs to improve the repatriation and reintegration of repatriates, as it tells an important story about the stability and progress of Côte d'Ivoire. At the same time, it is far from a priority when it comes to allocating money (Field notes, 05.04.2017, Country Director).

The above is intended to give an impression of the multitude of organizations in Tabou Department, and the web of assistance that has covered its residents through many years. Obviously, as is most often the case in the context of humanitarian crisis and development, it is not enough to cater for all vulnerable households.

5. Conflicting narratives

The previous chapter described the historical and socio-economic context, as well as the local and international structures in which beneficiaries and HO staff have to navigate. It is this context and these structures that the two groups have to make sense of, and give meaning to through their socially constructed narratives. Not surprisingly, beneficiaries and HO staff have developed very different narratives about life opportunities and assistance in Tabou. In the following chapters I will develop my argument concerning these narratives, and I will show how they conflict and contradict each other.

What is a 'narrative'?

A 'narrative' is the bearing analytical concept through which I analyze my empirical material. I was inspired to describe my findings as narratives after reading part of Simon Turner's book, *Politics of innocence* (2010). In chapter 4 he explains how certain stories about moral decay, loss, and social relation in a refugee camp in Tanzania, helped refugees make sense of their new situation. He uses the term *standard narrative* and *tales* to describe these socially significant, collectively shared stories, but does not present a clear definition. My own understanding of the concept is based on what can be deducted from Turner's analysis, supplemented by the definition of the word in Oxford Dictionaries.

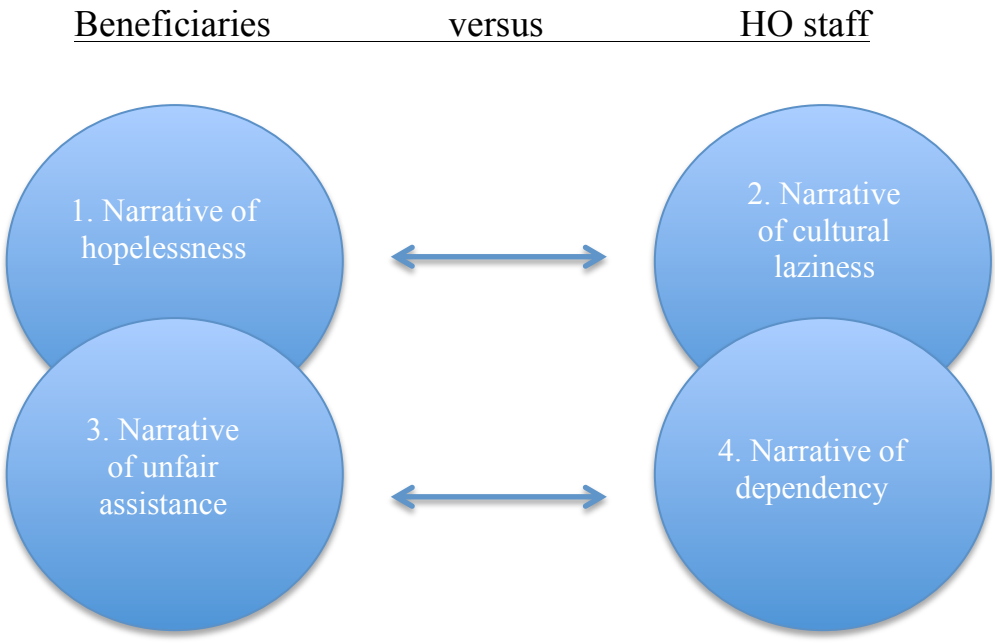
A narrative can be defined as *"a representation of a particular situation or process in such a way as to reflect or conform to an overarching set of aims or values"* (Oxford Dictionaries n.d.). Thus, a narrative is not just an objective account of actual events, but a way of making sense of what has happened and why. It is like a master story or a framework for interpretation, which brings together a multitude of different events and situations in a socially meaningful way.

In Turner's analysis there is also an important difference between what objectively is going on and how this is interpreted and retold. This distinction is apparent for example when he writes: "*In the camp I heard a number of tales about the social and moral decay that was allegedly taking place"* (Turner 2010, 65, emphasis added). Thereby, it becomes apparent that the term is based on social constructivism, which

puts emphasis on individuals' interpretation and creation of the social world, instead of trying to dig out the objective reality.

Furthermore, narratives are shared by a community or group of people, and will continuously be reinforced and reconstructed through everyday communication and interaction with peers and 'opponents'. According to Turner, the narratives can be instrumental in these groups' struggle for power, privilege and identity (Turner 2010, 4). The verb 'to narrate' is to tell a story, so in that sense a narrative is something that appears through the oral expression of stories or experiences. As will become apparent in the analysis, the narratives identified are not explicit in the way that it is the exact same story that is told over and over again. Narratives are implicit and will therefore only become apparent after a certain time in the community, when it is possible to see the similarities and patterns in different stories.

During my fieldwork I identified four major narratives used to interpret life opportunities and humanitarian assistance in Tabou. In the figure, I have tried to graphically present the narratives and their relations to one another.



The two narratives being maintained by beneficiaries relate to *hopelessness* and *unfair assistance*. In opposition to those, HO staff has constructed narratives about *cultural laziness* and *dependency*. What I want to illustrate with this figure is that the

narratives are not independent from each other. They oppose and contradict each other, but at the same time the narratives are closely related and feed off one another. First of all, this means that narrative 1 and 3, as well as 2 and 4 complement each other. The values and world-views created by the narratives are aligned and support each other. For example, the narrative of hopelessness is in part maintained by the fact that beneficiaries understand the humanitarian assistance as unfair.

Secondly, as the graphic shows, narrative 1 and 2 strongly oppose each other. The same goes for narrative 3 and 4 of course. But when I say that they also feed off one another, it means that when the narratives clash, in the interaction between beneficiary and staff, they will most likely be reinforced. For example, when a beneficiary complains to a staff member that it is unfair that he/she has not been accepted on the shelter project, the staff member will interpret this according to the narrative of dependency. Hence, in the clash between these two narratives, the staff member will be even more convinced that beneficiaries always ask for more assistance, instead of taking responsibility for their own lives.

Thirdly, the order is not arbitrary and there is a good reason why narrative 1 opposes narrative 2, and not narrative 4. This is because the two narratives, which oppose each other, relate to the same perspective. Hopelessness and cultural laziness is concerned with the general functioning of society and the life opportunities in Tabou specifically, whereas unfair assistance and dependency relates directly to the system of humanitarian assistance in Tabou. Of course there are times when arguments and rationales overlap, and therefore the narrative of hopelessness sometimes also opposes the narrative of dependency.

On the following pages I will analyze these narratives and discuss them one by one.

A narrative of hopelessness

My first interview was with a young woman, who had returned to Tabou in 2016 after five years in Liberia. She was living in a classroom in an abandoned school building, where she had put up big pieces of fabric in an attempt to create some privacy around her bed – a thin madras on the floor. Apart from the classroom clearly not being a proper place to live, she was also afraid that the local authorities would soon throw her out. Her husband had left her and their two small children when they came back to

Tabou, and he was now living in their former house. A serious lung disease prevented her from doing physical work, and consequently she found it very hard to earn money. Simply getting through the daily tasks of collecting water and wood was a challenge. Apart from food and hospital bills she also needed to find a way of paying the unofficial costs, when her first child should soon start school. She did not even think about trying to save money to rent a house. She was thin and weak (Appendix 2, Interview 1).

Later, I met a teenage girl who had repatriated with her mother and younger siblings. Their house had been burned down during the armed conflict and because they lived in a non-intervention zone, they had not benefitted from the shelter projects. She worked at a *maquis* all day long, including the evenings, and only earned 500 FCFA[3] per day. Her mother was also working, but they still did not have enough money for food every day. As many other repatriates, she had lost her ID papers, which gave her problems at check-points, whenever she wanted to leave the village. What this teenager really wanted was to go to school. She had not been able to attend school during her five years in Liberia, and now she was told that she was too old to enroll in Côte d'Ivoire. She could not read and write (Appendix 2, Interview 23).

I also interviewed a middle-aged woman, who had repatriated in 2016 with her four children. She had suffered a serious accident in Liberia, when she was out to collect wood in the forest. She did not have enough money to pay the hospital for the necessary treatment, and so she was still in a lot of pain. She had been accepted for a shelter project by CARITAS, but she was very worried about how she could provide the needed materials[4]. Apart from paying the school fees for her four children, and her own medical bills, she needs to save up 50,000 FCFA[5] to buy a plot of land for the house. She desperately explained that she would have to produce the bricks herself and carry sand to the construction site as well, because she does not have enough money to pay someone else. She was afraid of the physical pain she had to endure to get this done (Appendix 2, Interview 19).

[3] 5,6 DKK
[4] UNHCR, DRC, and CARITAS demand that the beneficiary participates in the construction of the house by providing half of the materials (gravel, sand, bricks) and buy the plot of land.
[5] 560 DKK

These three stories show in some detail the most common difficulties that repatriates experience in Tabou. The main problems, that they interviewees evoked, were 1) lack of jobs resulting in poverty, 2) lack of proper housing, 3) untreated illness or injuries. On top of that women often also struggle with the loss or abandonment of a husband, which might create challenges in regard to property rights.

Without doubt, many repatriates experience hardship when they return to Tabou. The problems though, are not strictly related to their repatriate status, but are mostly developmental and affect the whole population of Tabou Department. As explained earlier, many live under the poverty line, and the area has been heavily affected by the armed conflict. But even though life in Tabou is not easy objectively speaking, it is not evident that it is perceived of in terms of hopelessness. That interviewees talk about their troubles and challenges is not in itself a narrative of hopelessness. What transform these personal stories into a narrative of hopelessness is the way in which they are framed, and the way in which they relate to opportunities and the future. In short, most interviewees did not see a future. They were not able to see any opportunities, which could better their situation. They would never say for example *"If I could just get a job, then everything would work out*" or *"In a few months I have saved up enough to start building my house"*. This is particularly important as it shows that they did not dare to hope or plan for a better future. It was as if all they could see were the problems they faced here and now, and the task of overcoming these challenges was just too much. It was a hopeless task.
The attitude of many interviewees also reinforced the narrative. They would express sadness, resignation or anger towards their situation and often also towards the NGOs.

Secondly, it was interesting to discover that almost all interviewees would state that they had no job, but when I asked follow-up questions I would often find that they actually did engage in economic activities. Many sold vegetables or charcoal at the market, or they would buy corncobs or cassava, which they cooked and then sold. This omission can also be interpreted as a way of constructing a narrative of hopelessness – even small improvements or opportunities are not viewed as such. These activities are seen as so insignificant that they do not present an opportunity to do a difference in their lives. When life is interpreted according to a narrative of

hopelessness, it is difficult to be optimistic or grateful for even a small source of income.

Thus, the narrative of hopelessness if filled up and constructed around these personal life stories and difficult situations. But other research has shown that even in situations of great suffering, the socially constructed narratives can be very different. Liisa Malkki has, for example, shown how Burundian Hutu refugees construct different narratives about their collective past and present, depending on whether they live in the city or in the camp (Malkki 1996). The camp refugees had constructed a narrative about their past, which made them value their identity as refugees. The refugee experience, regardless of the loss and suffering, was viewed in a positive light and as a necessity to become stronger as a nation:

> *"The camp refugees saw themselves as a nation in exile. And they thought of exile as an era of moral trials and hardships that would enable them to reclaim their 'homeland' in Burundi at some moment in the future"* (Malkki 1996, 380)

Likewise, Turner investigated the lives of Burundian refugees in Nairobi, and he found yet another narrative being constructed about their hardships. Instead of hopelessness and despair, these refugees interpreted their lives according to a narrative of hope and faith in God (Turner 2015). Again, these Burundians suffered and had an extremely difficult life, but when talking about their everyday challenges they would describe their life in terms of hopes for a better future, and the need to trust in God:

> *"I observed what appeared to be patient, hopeful waiting for the future among the young men in Nairobi who could do nothing – they said – but to wait for miracles"* (Turner 2015, 176).

Others have found evidence that hopelessness is a recurrent sentiment among refugees, which might be a result of the way camps are administered. When refugees are forced to stay in camps without being allowed to work, it fosters passivity, takes away the individual's autonomy and creates total dependence on assistance. According to Barbara Harrell-Bond, this way of life results in hopelessness (Harrell-

Bond 1994). Furthermore, as many have argued, humanitarian organizations, media and HO staff often represent refugees as helpless victims, without agency or political will (Malkki 1996, Nyers 2006, Harrell-Bond 2002). To be considered a true refugee and to be considered worthy of assistance, refugees are expected to act has helpless victims. It is easy to imagine that these individuals, after years of being framed as helpless, also start believing that they actually are helpless. And the moment you consider yourself helpless, then there seems to be little hope for the future.

A narrative of cultural laziness

The narrative of hopelessness is strongly refused by HO staff and contradicted by their narrative of cultural laziness.

In Tabou Department, people originally belong to the Kroumane ethnic group. Often, HO staff would tell me *"Kroumanes are lazy"*. The narrative is constructed around this stereotype of Kroumanes. Naturally, HO staff would not use the term 'cultural laziness', but simply say lazy, not involved, not motivated, not interested, not proactive etc. I have decided to call it cultural laziness, because my interviewees explained the laziness by referring to it as being specific for Kroumane culture. Whenever HO staff said that the laziness was due to culture, I would ask them to explain further, but I did not get other explanations. My DRC colleagues said that it was *"juste quelque chose de culturelle"* – just a cultural thing (Appendix 2, Interview 11). During another interview, the subject of laziness and culture was brought up by the interviewee, when we discussed the attitude and behavior of repatriates:

> *"There is a cultural element. We have to do with a community, which is pretty lazy. The Kroumanes are very lazy. So, is this laziness a product of the continued presence of NGOs? I do not know. Was it like this before the NGOs? I cannot say. But looking beyond the assistance we provide, even in everyday life you realize that the Kroumanes are lazy"*[6] (Appendix 2, Interview 24)

[6] *"Il y a un élément culturel. Nous avons à faire avec une communauté qui est assez paresseuse. Les Kroumanes sont très paresseux. Alors, est-ce que cette paresse a été instaurée au cours de la présence continue des ONGs, je ne sais pas. Est-ce que c'était comme ca avant les ONGs, je ne saurais le dire. Mais même au delà de l'assistance que nous faisons, même dans la vie pratique, tu te rends compte que les Kroumanes sont paresseux"*

The narrative is constructed around different stories about how the Kroumanes will always choose the easy and fast way to earn money, instead of the smartest, sustainable way. For example, HO staff complained that the majority of Income-Generating Activities (IGA) was not sustainable. Instead of making a sustainable plan for how to use the materials received from DRC, Kroumanes would allegedly sell everything straight away to get easy money (Appendix 2, Interview 11).
The Kroumanes' laziness also appeared to be a challenge in other development projects. Food for Work or loan groups, two types of projects, which require collective work and engagement, were very difficult to put in place in Tabou Department. According to HO staff, Kroumanes did not like to work collectively, because nobody wanted to do an effort for the others to benefit. For example, they would start working in the fields, but quickly they would stop showing up and let the others do all the work. Fewer and fewer would then continue the work until the project could no longer be continued (Appendix 2, Interview 17).

Moreover, the cultural laziness also permeated the life outside development projects. According to HO staff, there were quite a few jobs to find in the big hevea and cocoa plantations as well as the adjoining factories. But these jobs were said to be occupied mainly by other ethnic groups or Liberians. The same was the case at the local market place, where you would hardly find any Kroumane people working. One of my colleagues illustrated this by saying that *"without the Liberians, the Kroumanes would starve"* (Field notes, 12.06.2017, in the car with DRC colleague).
The Kroumanes should actually be the best off in Tabou, because they originally come from this region and thus they also owned the land. But today, most of them have sold their lands or big parts of the plantations to other ethnic groups (Appendix 2, Interview 17). This 'fact' also fits into the narrative of cultural laziness. HO staff interprets it as an example of how the Kroumanes always throw away the opportunities for a better life, only because they do not have the motivation to work.

To reinforce and justify this narrative, my interlocutors would sometimes draw on their personal experience from other regions. Both DRC and UNHCR have regional offices in the Northwest, in the town of Guiglo, which I visited on one occasion. Several staff members had previously worked in Guiglo, and they would explain to

me that the same problems were not to be found there. In general, the Guérés in Guiglo worked more, they were more proactive in development projects and they were good at working collectively (Appendix 2, Interview 24). HO staff would underline that this attitude existed regardless of the fact that Guiglo had received the same assistance as Tabou.

It is not surprising that HO staff has constructed a certain narrative and stereotype of the beneficiaries, because this helps them understand and respond to different situations at work. Other researchers have also discovered stereotyping of beneficiaries. As Turner explains, expatriate staff working in a refugee camp in Tanzania, had constructed different stereotypes according to nationality: The Burundians lacked initiative, the Rwandans were difficult and criminal, while the Congolese were seen as more proactive (Turner 2010, 48). An analysis of the relations between civil servants and asylum seekers in Sweden showed the same tendency to stereotype according to nationality. In this case the civil servants had constructed what the author calls an 'emotional cartography', mapping the emotional reactions of different nationalities: Rumanians are paranoid, Bangladeshis hide their feelings, and Lebanese cry easily (Graham 2003, 208-209).

It is interesting though, that these stereotypes are often negative. The narrative of cultural laziness that I discovered definitely held a lot of negative perceptions and feelings towards the Kroumane beneficiaries. The staff I talked to felt that the assistance provided did not have the expected impact because of this laziness, and that all their work had been for nothing, because the Kroumanes did not take it seriously. To explain this negativity, Harrell-Bond brings to attention the difficult conditions that HO staff works under. Often, expatriate staff has not been psychologically prepared to face the tragic and depressing fate of the population they are sent out to help. This, together with insufficient budgets and stressful or even dangerous working environment, forces staff members to develop defense mechanisms. Blaming the beneficiary is one such mechanism:

> *"In addition to blaming politics, their superiors, the donors, the bureaucracy, or the host government, they also begin to blame the victims. […] 'refugees cease to be people with problems; refugees become the problem'"* (Harrell-Bond 2002, 73)

That refugees, or in this case repatriates, become the problem seems applicable to the HO staff's attitude in Tabou. Two crucial differences exist, though, between the case investigated by Harrell-Bond and the situation in Tabou. First of all, Harrell-Bond mainly speaks about expatriate staff, whereas the majority of staff members in Tabou are Ivorian and a minority from nearby countries, e.g. Togo and Guinea. It is thus fair to assume that they are used to see people live in extreme poverty. Furthermore, Harrell-Bond is concerned with the situation in a refugee camp, where the security situation is worse and the sense of emergency much stronger than in Tabou Department. Notwithstanding these differences, I argue that there are similarities and parallels to draw, even though it might take longer before staff members in Tabou develop this defense mechanism. The fact that many are Ivorians, and maybe even originate from Tabou themselves, could also reinforce the blaming – they have managed to get a good job and take good care of their family, so they assume that it is possible for everyone in Tabou to achieve the same.

A narrative of unfair assistance

The second narrative constructed and maintained among beneficiaries was the narrative of unfair assistance. In general though, the beneficiaries had a rather good image of humanitarian organizations in Tabou. I did not hear any bad rumors or stories about negative experiences with HO staff. Whenever I asked interviewees about their impression of staff, they would always tell me that everyone had been kind to them, listened to their problems and understood the challenges. Often they would add that regardless of the kind staff, they usually could not do anything to help them. Consequently, they felt that they did not get the help they desperately needed.

In theory, my interviewees acknowledge that humanitarian organizations have limited budgets and therefore not everyone can get help. But the discourse changes whenever they talk about their personal needs and experiences, and the narrative of unfair assistance surfaced. They do not understand why they are not being assisted, while other repatriates with the same problems get plenty of help.

One day I was visiting a smaller village in Tabou Department and I had the opportunity to meet some repatriates. During the group interview they explained to me why their village was no longer part of the shelter projects. According to them, DRC had decided to stop the project last year because of one beneficiary, who did not finish his house as agreed with DRC. Not surprisingly, my interviewees found it extremely unfair that they were being denied assistance because of what another beneficiary had done. They told me that the neighboring village had received at least 20 houses through the DRC shelter project *"but we know these people, and they are not more vulnerable than us. We have the same problems as them"* (Appendix 2, Interview 5).

I tried to verify this with a DRC colleague, who denied the story about the incompliant beneficiary. The reason was that the village was no longer part of DRC's intervention zone. My colleague explained that in order to work as effectively as possible, they needed to limit the intervention zone to those villages that received most repatriates, because it would be impossible to evaluate the needs of every single repatriate in Tabou Department. This is a rational choice when DRC needs to prove their efficiency and cost-effectiveness to the Danish government and other donors. Since the late 90's, humanitarian organizations have been increasingly concerned with accountability towards donors, and the institutionalization of HO's has resulted in standardized, rationalized responses to crisis, which to a lesser degree is able to take into account local needs (Barnett 2005, 725). It is argued that donors' demand for accountability, shifts the focus to the donor away from the beneficiary, and therefore also clouds the humanitarian core principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence (Barnett 2005). Is unfair assistance then, the price to pay for more accountability and effectiveness? Is it fair that repatriates in one village are not even considered for the projects regardless of their needs? On the other hand, is it fair that less people receive assistance, because the HOs need to spend more resources on assessing needs?

Hence, the need for proper housing was a major theme, which evoked feelings of unfairness. Another theme was medical assistance. The narrative of unfair assistance was often constructed around the lack of medical assistance, or the almost impossible task of getting medical bills reimbursed by one of the many organizations working in Tabou Department. My interviewees would very often complain that the

organizations would only cover medical expenses during the first three months after repatriation, and only in the case of emergency. To the beneficiaries, this three months limit did not make sense, because they felt every bit as vulnerable after 6 months as when they first repatriated. This was also the case for a repatriated man, whom I met during my first stay in Tabou. He had repatriated from Liberia in the beginning of 2016, together with his brother and children. He had been fortunate enough to benefit from both the shelter project and the IGA. I actually met him while he was sitting in this new house, working on his new sowing machine. He nevertheless maintained a narrative of unfair assistance, because he had trouble paying the medical bills related to his lung disease and his daughter's operation. X-rays, medicine and hospitalizing cost a lot of money, which he did not have. At first he was told that a local NGO would reimburse him, but now they allegedly refused to pay him back, because he had repatriated more than three months ago (Appendix 2, Interview 9).

This leads us to another set of stories, which were often part of the narrative of unfair assistance. It seemed to be a recurrent problem that the information given in Liberia did not correspond to the reality of assistance in Tabou. The man from the story above told me that UNHCR Liberia had informed them that they would be taken care off *"until everything is well"*. It was only upon arrival in Tabou that they were explained about the three months limit. Many beneficiaries confirmed that they were given the impression by UNHCR Liberia, that the humanitarian organizations in Tabou were ready to assist them for a long period of time, until they were well back on their feet:

> *"Before our departure from Liberia, UNHCR Liberia told us that when you arrive in your country, UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire and DRC will take care of those of you who are vulnerable. And I see now that it is not like we were told in Liberia [...] I cannot get what has been promised me"* (Appendix 2, Interview 1)[7]

Another young woman felt that she had been misinformed on several points, too. When I asked her why UNHCR would give wrong information she answered:

[7] *"Avant notre départ du Liberia, le HCR du Liberia nous a dit que lorsque vous allez arriver au pays, le HCR de la Côte d'Ivoire et le DRC va prendre soin de vous, vous qui êtes vulnérables. Et j'ai constaté que ce n'était pas comme on nous avait dit au Liberia […] j'ai pas pu obtenir la promesse qu'on m'avait fait."*

> *"Perhaps UNHCR has decided that there are no more refugees in Liberia. Because over there, they tell us things, which they do not respect here. It is a way of lying to us and forcing us to leave. And now when we have come home, they abandon us"* (Appendix 2, Interview 4)[8]

The fact that beneficiaries feel misinformed adds an important layer to this narrative. Not only is the assistance limited to a small amount of people because of budgetary restrains, which most beneficiaries can understand to some point, but they have also been lied to, either intentionally or due to bad management.

Fairness and justice has been the subject of many philosophical, economic and political discussions in literature. In regard to the analysis of a narrative of unfair assistance, I find it interesting to discuss fairness and justice from different perspectives: a structural, a moral and a practical perspective. These perspectives can give us different arguments as to whether assistance in Tabou should be regarded as fair or unfair. The structural perspective is concerned with the organization of society. The moral perspective investigates the question of why and how much assistance one should give. The practical perspective looks at the act of delivering and allocating assistance.

The structural perspective

From a structural perspective, justice is linked to policy, institutions and market forces, which affect the prosperity and opportunities of people. John Rawls has presented a very influential approach to justice in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), in which he discusses what constitutes a just and fair society. Rawls concludes that a just society is one, which is organized by people behind 'a veil of ignorance'. The veil of ignorance prevents people from knowing to which class in society they belong, and they will therefore choose to organize society in a way that benefits the worst-off. According to Rawls, this will result in a society where liberties are promoted, where everyone has equal access to public office, and where social policies are implemented

[8] *"Peut-être HCR a décidé qu'il n'y a plus de refugiés au Liberia. Parce que là-bas ils nous disent des choses qu'ils ne respectent pas. C'est une manière de nous mentir et nous forcer à partir. Et quand on revient chez nous, maintenant ils nous abandonnent."*

to promote the well-being of the vulnerable (Blake and Smith 2015). The scenario with a veil of ignorance is of course only possible in theory, but this ideal provides us with a means to assess the degree of justice in a society. Through this lens, Côte d'Ivoire is not a very just or fair society, mainly because of the lack of social welfare policies, and a strong security net to help the most vulnerable.

What is really of interest though, when analyzing the narrative of unfair assistance, are theories of international distributive justice. Rawls himself maintains that his theory only applies to the nation-state, but several philosophers and political thinkers have argued against this. They have noted *"the apparent contradiction between the universalism of Rawls's moral theory and the localism of its realm of application"* and argue that nationality is morally arbitrary (Blake and Smith 2015). Hence, the international society should be organized according to the same rules and principles as Rawls described for the state. International institutions, global economic forces, colonialism, etc. are thus relevant in the analysis of justice among nations.
In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, you could consider the debt they have to the World Bank and other credit institutions[9], you could consider the French interests in the country and the way they supported Ouattara during the civil war[10], you could even consider the colonial times when West Africans were forced to move to and work in Côte d'Ivoire, which has had serious consequences in post-colonial times. You could also consider the economic relations that Côte d'Ivoire has to the rest of the world; they are one of the worlds biggest producers of coffee and cocoa, but do not benefit much from this; furthermore they do not hold much power over their currency, because it is printed and controlled by France. It can thus be argued that the institutions and global economic forces, that Côte d'Ivoire is entangled in, works against the welfare and prosperity of its people. International assistance could help turn this tendency around, but the amount of assistance provided to Côte d'Ivoire is not near the amount needed. Consequently, a narrative of unfair assistance can be upheld by referring to Rawls' theory, because it is highly unlikely that people behind a veil of ignorance, would

[9] In 2015, Côte d'Ivoire had an external debt of 7241.9 million USD, or 23.4% of GDP. The biggest creditors were London Club and IMF (IMF & IDA Nov 2016, 2)
[10] Many are convinced that the UN and the French interventions to save Ouattara, is due to the president's good links with the West and his international approach to economics, as opposed to Gbagbo, who wanted to follow a protectionist economic policy (Field notes, 30.03.2017, meeting with NGO ORA).

organize global economics, politics and assistance in this way, if they risked belonging to the group of vulnerable people in Côte d'Ivoire.

The moral perspective

Looking at justice from a moral perspective, Peter Singer has written a famous article on our responsibility to help the vulnerable and suffering of the world. His point of departure was the then ongoing famine in East Bengal in 1971. Singer is revolted by the lack of solidarity and the fact that no one in the West seems to feel a responsibility to help starving and dying people in other parts of the world. His argument is simply as follows:

> *"If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it"* (Singer 1972, 231).

Hence, if I can save someone from starvation, without thereby putting another person's life in danger, I ought to do everything possible to do so. According to Singer, there are no other limits to this obligation. He agrees that we might psychologically feel more responsible to help someone physically near to us than someone we have never met, but morally there is no difference. Furthermore, one can never be released from this obligation merely because many others bear an equal responsibility to help (Singer 1972, 232). This position has been challenged by others, who argue that it will create an overload of moral duties, and result in indifference (Van Wyk 1988, 76). Robert Van Wyk introduces the concept of 'fair share' to find the middle ground between Singer's arguments and the critique thereof. Most importantly, the burden of helping should be distributed fairly, which means that the need for help must be calculated and divided among the world's population. This amount per person must then be collected through taxes (Van Wyk 1988, 81). If the state has not put such consideration into their tax systems, everyone is still required to personally estimate his/her fair share, and at least donate this amount to humanitarian organizations:

> *"[N]ot to recognize a duty to give a fair share is to indicate that one believes either that it is not important that the needs of those in distress should be met (perhaps*

because they do not have subsistence rights) or that others should do more than their fair share" (Van Wyk 1988, 82).

Based on Singer and Van Wyk's theories, a narrative of unfair assistance still seems valid, because the assistance does not meet the substantial needs of the population. The fact that many people still struggle in Tabou can thus be interpreted as a sign that the wealthier populations do not live up to their moral obligations.

The practical perspective

Lastly, fairness and justice can be discussed from what I call a practical perspective. Regardless of humanitarian organizations' view on moral obligations and international distributive justice, their task is to allocate assistance based on the donations they receive from donors. Distributions can of course be done according to different principles – equality, equity or need. The principle of equality demands that everyone receive the same, whereas the principle of equity demands that one gets what he/she deserves (Hegtvedt 2016). The allocation of humanitarian assistance is always based on need, which derives from the principle of impartiality – one of the principles to which HOs must adhere (Barnett 2005, 724). Those who are in need should all be assisted regardless of their political, ethnical, religious or other affiliations, but because of limited budgets, HOs often need to choose who should have their needs covered. It is furthermore necessary to consider the impact, especially when donors demand to see results if they should continue funding a project. Giving assistance to all those who live up to the vulnerability criteria in Tabou Department would probably mean that the assistance is stretched too thin to have any impact. Hence, the more or less arbitrary selection among needy, vulnerable individuals might not be fair or just according to the philosophical theories presented here, but it might be the most reasonable line of action under the current circumstances. The following quote shows that situations like this also appears challenging to HO staff:

"When you see the number of people with a need for assistance, the help is pretty pathetic. For example, just this year we have already received 1004 Ivorians in Tabou, and they continue to arrive […] Despite that, we only have a budget for 73 houses. […] In addition to that, there is the selection of 73 persons among the 1004.

So we say to ourselves that we will choose these people based on the vulnerability criteria, but unfortunately we are not going to find only 73 vulnerable, we will find many more, but you have an obligation to make a decision […] And the other vulnerable? What will their life look like? It's not at all logical, and it sometimes makes you worry..." (Appendix 2, Interview 24)[11]

A narrative of dependency

The dependency syndrome has been described in much academic literature, is crucial in the planning of development programs, and it is certainly also prominent in the minds of HO staff in Tabou Department (Kibreab 1993, Turner 2010, 49). The staff often explained how beneficiaries expect NGOs *"to take care of everything"*, and how they never hesitate to ask for more assistance. The explanation is that after 27 years of assistance in Tabou, people have become too used to it and too dependent on it. HO staff of course also acknowledges that some families have so severe problems that it cannot be expected of them to be independent from assistance. According to my interviewees, dependency on assistance is not a bad thing in itself – the HOs are there exactly because people need assistance – but when beneficiaries start to show certain 'pathological' behavior, opinions and expectations towards HOs, it is considered symptoms of the dependency syndrome, which is inherently bad. HO staff often explained that beneficiaries first and foremost sought to get more assistance, instead of searching for durable solutions and taking responsibility over their own lives (Field notes, 25.04.2017, discussion with DRC staff; Appendix 2, Interview 11 and 12).

The narrative of dependency became apparent on many occasions during my fieldwork in Tabou. One day I was following DRC staff around Tabou Department and observing them inform village chiefs and PCs about the closure of DRC

[11] *"Quand tu vois le nombre de personne avec un besoin d'assistance, l'assistance est assez minable. Par exemple tu verras que cette année, nous avons reçu 1004 ivoiriens à Tabou jusqu'à aujourd'hui, et ils continuent à venir […] malgré ca nous avons seulement l'assistance accordée pour construire 73 maisons. […] En plus de ca il y a le choix des 73 personnes parmi les 1004. Alors on se dit qu'on va faire le choix selon les critères de vulnérabilité, mais malheureusement nous n'allons pas trouver seulement 73 vulnérables, nous allons trouver beaucoup plus de vulnérables, mais vous avez une obligation de prendre une décision […] Et les autres vulnérables? Quelle est leur vie? C'est pas du tout logique, et ca donne parfois beaucoup de soucis… "*

programs. During these visits, some chiefs asked DRC for 'one last gift' (Field notes, 25.04.2017, visiting villages). Later, I participated in a workshop organized jointly by UNHCR and DRC for PCs and public institutions with the goal of reinforcing communication and collaboration on protection and reintegration issues. The goal was also to explain why DRC closed their programs. In the end, members from different PCs asked DRC to provide them with new materials before the close of the program, including log books and new cell phones (Field notes, 20.04.2017, workshop). The requests for 'a last gift' and new materials were denied by DRC on the grounds that the totality of the budget had already been spent. At the same time they highlighted that beneficiaries need to prepare themselves for the moment when there is no more assistance, and that they should be capable of financing their plans themselves. HO staff always explained this in a polite and neutral manner, but afterwards they would show frustration, disappointment and almost anger that beneficiaries in Tabou took it for granted that they could depend on international assistance. This is what constitutes the narrative of dependency.

A story that many staff members evoked was the problem of the uncollected birth certificates. Some time ago, UNICEF had led a project, which provided free birth certificates for children whose parents had not asked for a certificate in the three months following the birth. UNICEF and partners collected the necessary information in the villages, and later the parents were able to go to different offices to collect the certificates. The only problem was that a big part of the certificates were never collected, causing huge frustration and incomprehension among HO staff (Field notes, 25.04.2017, discussion with DRC staff; Appendix 2, Interview 12). According to staff, the uncollected birth certificates were symptomatic of the fundamental problems in Tabou – cultural laziness and dependency syndrome. It represented all the wrongdoings of beneficiaries and the impossible task that HOs were confronted with. One particularly upset staff member described the beneficiaries of this UNICEF project as 'stupid' and 'negligent', and further said that it was 'a crime' not to declare your child because it is a human right. I asked about other plausible explanations than stupidity and neglect, but according to him, the only explanation is that people in Tabou wait for the organizations to take care of everything (Field notes 15.06.2017, discussion with DRC staff).

The concept of gift-giving can help explain why asking for more is viewed so negatively by HO staff. Humanitarian assistance is charity, which means that it can be received with no strings attached, but at the same time HO staff also interpret the assistance in terms of gift-giving. A gift is a moral exchange. It helps maintain social relations and imposes expectations of reciprocity on the recipient. It furthermore puts the giver in a superior power position to the recipient as long as the gift has not been reciprocated (Harrell-Bond 2002, 54-57):

> *"There is thus a special relationship of the power of the person who distributes the 'handouts' (as they are often disparagingly described) with the refugee who must passively receive. The power of the helper is further 'legitimized by its implicit association with altruistic compassion' "* (Harrell-Bond 2002, 56)

Reciprocity can both occur in material and symbolic terms, but in the context of humanitarian assistance it is always symbolic. As noted in the quote, refugees must receive passively, and they ought as well to be grateful for the altruistic compassion shown to them. Making demands and never being satisfied does not fit well with this perception of assistance as gift-giving. Hence, when 'the gift' is not symbolically reciprocated with expressions of gratitude and responsibility, it is interpreted as low moral standards, pathological behavior, and a symptom of the dependency syndrome.

Another way in which HO staff constructed the narrative of dependency was by referring to situations where beneficiaries would cheat and manipulate the system of assistance. There were stories about an uncertain number of Ivorians who were officially registered as refugees in Liberia at the same time as they would continuously cross the border between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. These Ivorians were allegedly already doing business, rebuilding their houses or cultivating their fields in Tabou Department, while they were waiting for official repatriation with UNHCR and thus benefitting from the cash grant and food distribution which follows repatriation (Appendix 2, Interview 18 and 24; Field notes, 25.04.2017, discussion with DRC staff). Once, I was told that some women collected children from their village and send them to Liberia. From there the children would seek family reunification and participate in the repatriation program. Hence, when the children are reunited with their 'mother', she will receive the cash grants from UNHCR and the children will get

paid a little for their participation in the trick (Appendix 2, Interview 18). Another situation, which seemed to occur regularly, was problems with the sustainability of IGAs and Food for Work. It often happened that beneficiaries only participated in the beginning. They cultivated the fields as long as they received food distributions, but stopped cultivating the moment the food distributions stopped and they were supposed to continue the cultivation without support from the HOs. This behavior cannot be strictly defined as cheating, but HO staff would often regard it as such. According to staff, beneficiaries took advantage of the assistance without taking it seriously and without making sure that they would be self-sufficient after the project ended, which was of course the goal.

Cheating and manipulating the system in order to receive more assistance was interpreted as yet another symptom of the dependency syndrome. According to HO staff, not only is cheating wrong, but it also illustrated how beneficiaries would focus on humanitarian assistance instead of looking for sustainable, responsible solutions. Manipulation of humanitarian assistance is not solely a problem in Tabou Department, which could be due to a general problem with the system of assistance as such:

> *"It should be stressed that this is not due to some peculiar moral deficiency of refugees, but represents a normal response to an impersonal system to which they feel no formal obligation. In other words, refugees do not feel accountable to the donor since there is little or no obligation to them. The absence of mutual obligations stems from a system that generally fails to meet their needs adequately, is unaware of the capacities of refugees to exploit economic opportunities outside the confines of the assistance programme"* (Harrell-Bond, Voutira and Leopold 1992, 211)

The moment beneficiaries do something 'wrong' according to HO staff, there seemed to be a tendency to forget that beneficiaries might still have legitimate needs. It could very well be, that cheating the system is seen as the only means of providing for their family, because their efforts to find a job, pursue further education etc. has failed. Searching for ways to get access to more assistance might be a logical choice, when all other options seem much less certain and much less profitable. Secondly, much research points to the fact that beneficiaries of assistance are not just passive victims

without agency, but on the contrary they are creative, proactive and entrepreneurial (Kibreab 1993, Harvey and Lind 2005, 22).

Summary

The empirical material is analyzed by applying the concept of narratives. This concept is well in line with social constructivism as they both highlight that the social world is constructed and given meaning through interaction and language. The analysis has shown that HO staff maintains a narrative of cultural laziness and a narrative of dependency. Opposing these, beneficiaries maintain a narrative of hopelessness and a narrative of unfair assistance. I have supported this analysis with many examples from my fieldwork and discussed my findings against studies from other countries.

The fact that I present only four narratives is because the perspective applied focuses on humanitarian assistance and life opportunities. A researcher with another perspective would find other interesting narratives, for example on gender, children's rights, politics and so forth.

6. The purpose and consequences of narratives

As a social constructivist, my task is not to evaluate whether or not these narratives are 'truthful' and correspond to an objective reality. What is important is that beneficiaries and HO staff perceive the narratives as true and therefore act accordingly. My task then, is to reflect on how individuals use the narratives, and how the narratives benefit some groups, while they have consequences for others.

The point of departure for the analysis in this chapter is my normative standpoint. I believe that assistance should be provided in order to ensure everyone a life in safety and dignity. Anthropology and social constructivism acknowledges that the researcher is never objective and normative perspectives can thus be allowed. A different point of departure could have revealed other consequences.

A vicious circle of negative attitudes

It would be easy to assume that these negative narratives work as a vicious circle, making the two groups more and more negative towards each other as future situations will be interpreted according to these narratives and reinforce them. Such a vicious circle of negative behavior has been noted by other researchers, who argue that a war of rules erupts (Turner 2010, Harvey and Lind 2005, 41):

> *"[D]ue to the bureaucratic imperative to count and control, a tug of war would often take place between staff and refugees. Relief staff would spent most of their time making rules and systems for ensuring that the refugees did not break them, while refugees would spend their time trying to bend the rules which they found unfair"* (Turner 2010, 47-48)

Harrell-Bond has likewise written a disturbing article on the inhumane treatment of refugees in camps, spanning from mistrust, to beatings and letting people die of illness because they did not follow procedures (Harrell-Bond 2002). It was, fortunately, not my impression that the narratives resulted in this negative behavior. While working in Tabou I never experienced rude behavior from HO staff or beneficiaries, and I would often hear that especially DRC was renowned for the close relations and deep understanding that their staff has of the local community. Many of the staff members working in Tabou were originally themselves from Tabou

Department, and thus they felt a deep connection, responsibility and sympathy for the community. My impression was that they all took their jobs very seriously, but this also meant that they were greatly frustrated whenever the projects did not have the intended effects. As the analysis of the narratives of cultural laziness and dependency has shown, HO staff perceived the attitude of beneficiaries as the cause of failure. Hence, as a consequence, whenever staff members would talk to beneficiaries or at workshops, they would always underline the personal responsibility, personal motivation and community engagement as key to development. They would be openly critical to what they understood as neglect of these responsibilities, but never disrespectful.

An important observation in regard to beneficiaries is that the narratives they have constructed relate more to the system as such, and to a lesser degree to the individual staff member. Notwithstanding that staff represent and implement the rules and regulations of humanitarian organizations, the beneficiaries still make a distinction between the individual and the system. They find the system unfair and sometimes difficult to understand, but they acknowledge the fact that HO staff has to comply with the rules. As a consequence, beneficiaries could still have a good relationship with staff members. On the other hand, it could be assumed that this distinction between the system and the individual, made it easier to cheat and manipulate the system, because it was perceived as impersonal. This has been discussed in the previous chapter.

A struggle for resources

Narratives, as a way of ordering and giving meaning to the social world, can be used in power struggles. In the case investigated by Turner, the narratives were used in a struggle of social positioning and respect in the refugee camp, where social relations seemed to be turned upside down (Turner 2010, 4). In Tabou it was a struggle for resources, and in the end a struggle for physical and economic well-being for both beneficiaries and staff.

It is easy to see how beneficiaries can use their narratives in the struggle for resources. The narrative of hopelessness and unfair assistance can be used to persuade

HO staff that beneficiaries ought to receive more assistance. Simply being grateful for what has been received, does not help improve their situation further.

Staff uses the narratives to hold on to their power and access to resources, both in terms of salaries and social position. The narrative of cultural laziness helps explain why projects in some cases do not work, and thus avoids bringing attention to the implementing staff. If the narrative changes, and suddenly failure is perceived as lack of skilled staff, employees in the humanitarian organizations risk loosing their jobs. Local HO staff is relatively well paid compared to other jobs in Tabou. At the same time, there are very few job possibilities in Tabou Department and the unemployment rate in Côte d'Ivoire is high. It is therefore very important for local staff to keep their job. The narrative of dependency underlines the fact that humanitarian and development projects are still needed. If, on the contrary, HO staff told the story of well-established, independent and proactive beneficiaries, it would be more difficult to uphold the argument of continued assistance. Of course it is a delicate balance, because HO staff also needs to show results.

Moreover, a job in a humanitarian or development organization also comes with a certain social position. It is a job to be proud of. The narratives implicitly construct the HOs as doing good, because the narratives focus on the wrongdoings of beneficiaries and not staff. Hence, they have constructed their own position as one of charity and goodwill, which gives them social power.

Ideally, HO staff and beneficiaries should have the same goal – to ensure the reconstruction and sustainable development of Tabou Department. The impact of the narratives is that instead of working together towards this common goal, they often end up working against each other.

A missed opportunity

What I found to be the most important consequence of the narratives maintained by HO staff is that it prevented them from looking for the 'real' reasons and hence the effective solution to development problems. The narrative of dependency and the narrative of cultural laziness put the focus on the beneficiary, when sometimes the focus ought to be elsewhere.

Firstly, the two narratives were effective in shifting the blame away from program failures. My conversation with a DRC colleague about birth certificates, which is reproduced in the introduction of this paper, clearly shows that the narratives makes it very difficult for staff to be critical of their own role and possible deficiencies in the programs. The lack of birth certificates and statelessness is a major problem in Côte d'Ivoire (Manby 2016), but the problem is difficult to solve and the staff members I talked to did not seem to recognize any problems in HOs' approach. Likewise, HO staff seemed to agree that the Kroumanes did not want to work collectively, and they nevertheless tried to implement projects, which require collective commitment, because *"it makes more sense to work collectively"* (Appendix 2, Interview 17).

Secondly, when HO staff tells the story of too lazy and too dependent beneficiaries, they shift the blame away from underlying structural causes, i.e. poverty, ethnic/political conflict and corruption. HO staff would often complain that beneficiaries did not care about making their income-generating activities sustainable, because they were too lazy to work and because they expected NGOs to help them economically again (Appendix 2, Interview 12). Another possibility is that the economy in the area is just too weak to support new traders selling shoes and fruits, or more hairdressers and seamstresses etc. Another example is the critique of PCs, who would sometimes ask for money or new materials (Field notes, 28.04.2017, workshop). HO staff interpreted this as a clear sign of the dependency syndrome, but maybe other factors should be considered. Members of the PCs are working voluntarily and thus must have a paid job on the side. Knowing how low the salaries are in Tabou Department, it is understandable that voluntary work is not valued as highly among locals as HOs might wish.

This critique has also been noted by other researchers in regard to the dependency syndrome (Kibreab 1993, Harvey and Lind 2005). Apart from missing the opportunity to deal with the structural causes of underdevelopment and vulnerability, the risk is also that humanitarian assistance is stopped too soon. There are many examples where food rations are cut down and aid pulled out too soon, in order to avoid that beneficiaries develop the dependency syndrome (Harvey and Lind 2005, 16-17). I have not specifically asked why food and healthcare assistance to repatriates stop

after three months, but I observed that this caused trouble for many of the repatriates that I met.

Thirdly, the dependency syndrome is a widely used argument for switching from humanitarian to development assistance, which entails a more participatory approach (Harvey and Lind 2005). In Tabou, the participatory approach was also seen as a means of avoiding dependency and laziness. The staff members I talked to claimed that contributions from beneficiaries were crucial if they wanted to avoid irresponsible behavior (Appendix 2, Interview 11, 12, 24). The risk of this strategy, which I observed several times during my fieldwork, was that the most vulnerable were excluded from participation in for example shelter projects, because they were unable to buy the plot of land and half of the materials needed for the house. Consequently, due to the narrative of dependency and cultural laziness, the most vulnerable were excluded from these programs.

In the end, the consequence is that a lot of funds have been spent in Tabou Department without many tangible results. Funds will run out as donors loose faith, and the chance to create sustainable development is missed. By end of July 2017, DRC has closed down their projects in Côte d'Ivoire, and UNHCR is also openly planning to pull out of Tabou Department soon.

Summary

According to social constructivism, social constructs are important because they appear as real and objective structures and have physical consequences. In this chapter I have discussed the uses and consequences that I argue are results of the identified narratives – a vicious circle of negative attitudes, a struggle for resources, and a missed opportunity to address structural causes.

I identified the narrative of cultural laziness and dependency as the most damaging. These narratives had the effect of hiding the underlying structural causes, which could and ought to be addressed by the assistance provided to Tabou Department. The narratives shifted the blame away from program failures, and at the same time the most vulnerable were excluded due to the participatory approach.

Entangled in the narrative of dependency is the belief in the 'dependency syndrome'. There exists much literature on the dependency syndrome among beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance, and therefore I have decided to elaborate this subject further in the next chapter.

7. Deconstructing the dependency syndrome

> *"Despite the lack of evidence, the concept of a dependency syndrome has remained remarkably persistent, and continues to influence aid agency and government policies."* (Harvey and Lind 2005, 22)

In this chapter I will dig deeper into the narrative of dependency by deconstructing the concept of 'dependency syndrome'. The dependency syndrome is especially interesting because it is a contested concept, which at the same time has had an important influence on policy and program design in the humanitarian field. There exists much literature on the subject, but the concept is ill-defined, and researchers and practitioners do not agree on its relevance.

Deconstruction is an important exercise in social constructivism, which highlights that concepts, categories and 'truths' are socially constructed and not naturally given. Deconstruction opens up a concept, discusses its meaning and influences, and how it came to be. It means that the researcher must be critical of what is usually taken for granted, and must propose new and alternative ways of dealing with the subject (Patrick, et al. 1995, 10, Pedersen 2012, 407).
On the following pages, I will discuss definitions and understandings of the dependency syndrome, explore the origin and evolution of the concept, reflect on its consequences, and suggest alternatives.

Dependency can be discussed at different levels. Dependency theory and discussions of a state's dependency on international assistance looks at dependency at a national level. To maintain a red thread from my previous analysis, and to be able to link the discussion in this chapter to my empirical material, I will only discuss dependency on an individual level.

Discussing definitions

First of all, it is interesting to consider what the actual words 'dependency' and 'syndrome' mean. The meaning of 'dependency' is rather straightforward – it is to rely on something or someone. A 'syndrome' has more diverse meanings and is used both in regard to social phenomena and medical issues. In the context of humanitarian

assistance, the dependency syndrome is of course a social phenomenon, but the word's relation to health issues is extremely important. In pathology and psychiatry, a syndrome is *"a group of symptoms that together are characteristic of a specific disorder, disease, or the like"* (Dictionary.com n.d.). Hence, when 'syndrome' is used about a social phenomenon, it has connotations of something sick, abnormal and wrong.

Secondly, it is of course crucial to understand how researchers, politicians and practitioners use the concept. It is nevertheless rare to find an explicit and coherent definition of dependency syndrome in literature and policy papers concerned with the topic. Based on a literature review and interviews with HO staff, Paul Harvey & Jeremy Lind identify two ways in which the concept is used:

> *"[1] Relief risks creating a dependency mentality or syndrome in which people expect continued assistance. This undermines initiative, at individual or community levels. […] [2] Dependence on external assistance as one of the features of extreme poverty, and associated with a sense of shame or defeat"* (Harvey and Lind 2005, 10)

Gaim Kibreab, who has challenged the existence of a dependency syndrome among camp refugees in Somalia, gives the following definition:

> *"[I]t implies the lack of capability to function independently and to take initiatives in order to attain short and long-term self-sufficiency even in the presence of enabling intervention or when an opportunity to earn an income exists […] A community that suffers from dependency is incapable of critically assessing its own situation and of working out solutions to its own problems"* (Kibreab 1993, 330, original emphasis)

From the above definitions it can be concluded that the dependency syndrome implies that an individual 1) relies on humanitarian assistance, 2) expects continued assistance, 3) lacks initiative, 4) does not choose sustainable options 5) should feel shame, 6) is unable to understand his/her own situation. Hence, it has to do with the material and economic situation of the individual, but at the same time the individual lacks important moral standards, and a sense of responsibility.

There is, nevertheless, a rather problematic omission in these definitions. When is a person considered to be dependent? Is it when the person relies 100% on humanitarian assistance? Or is 20% enough, for example? In extreme cases of e.g. famine, just a small supplement to the individual's food consumption can literally make the difference between life and death (Harvey and Lind 2005, 19). No one seems to define dependency syndrome in terms of percentage, which indicates that the moral aspect of the concept is maybe even more important than the material aspect.

The moral aspect was certainly crucial in the understanding of the dependency syndrome among HO staff in Tabou. They would not use the term 'dependency syndrome', but they would often say that beneficiaries were too 'dependent' on assistance. Furthermore, they described the same 'immoral' and 'irresponsible' behavior as is mentioned in the above definitions. The HO staff's understanding of the dependency syndrome among beneficiaries in Tabou is already elaborated with many examples in Chapter 5. Hence, to avoid repeating myself, I will simply conclude that their understanding of the concept corresponds very well to the definitions presented by Kibreab (1993) and Harvey & Lind (2005).

Origin and evolution of the concept

The idea that free handouts create dependency and laziness is seen already in the English Poor Laws dating back to 1601:

> *"[T]he necessity of separating the deserving from the undeserving poor was emphasized by the belief that all charitable relief ultimately contributed to the development of permanent and often intergenerational dependency"* (O'shea 2006)

As mentioned in the above quote, these laws were underpinned by strong ideas about the deserving and undeserving poor. The deserving poor were individuals who were disabled, mentally ill or weakened by old age. The undeserving poor were considered responsible for their own poverty and had to be re-educated in workhouses. In short, they were not worthy of free help, so they were forced to work on public projects in order to become eligible for assistance:

> *"While conditions varied, the underlying purpose of the workhouse was to punish the poor and thereby discourage poverty."* (O'shea 2006)

Many of the same ideas still exist in modern welfare policies, where the poor are looked upon with suspicion. It is often claimed from right-wing politicians that the help provided should not be too generous, because it will create welfare dependency and idle citizens. Debates on welfare dependency tend to stigmatize recipients as irresponsible, opportunistic and as people who will do their utmost to avoid working (O'shea 2006, Harvey and Lind 2005, 11).

The same ideas, logics and labels have been translated to the humanitarian field, where assistance substitutes the welfare that the underdeveloped state does not provide successfully. The dependency syndrome was first discussed in regard to food aid. Extensive literature exists on the negative effects of free food, which allegedly undermines local markets, and destroys incentives to produces food. Food aid produces a vicious circle, which breaks down local food production and traps the population in chronic dependency (Harvey and Lind 2005, 10, Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott 2005, 10-11). Hence, it appeared to start from a real concern about market forces and economic theory, but it turned into a moral issue. Beneficiaries were described as neglecting their fields and choosing the easy way of receiving free food, instead of taking responsible and sustainable choices.

Dependency was described as a problem in refugee camps, too. Not only would refugees receive free food in the camp, but UNHCR and partner NGOs take care of everything. Among others, Harrell-Bond argues that camps forces refugees to become passive recipients and leaves them no choice but to depend completely on assistance (Harrell-Bond 1994). In strategic papers and articles, UNHCR has made the same observation, and has specific recommendations as to avoid dependency. Programs must be development-oriented and designed in a way that promotes self-sufficiency from the outset. If assistance is given as free handouts without obligations or participation it creates a vicious circle. Furthermore, also in regard to urban refugees the risk of the dependency syndrome is very important. Food aid to this group of people should thus be limited to maximum 6 months (Crisp and Mayne 1995, UNHCR 1994). Turner and Kibreab have likewise noted that the belief in the

dependency syndrome is strong among staff in refugee camps as well as among researchers (Turner 2010, 48, Kibreab 1993, 323).

In Tabou Department, HO staff simply explained the dependency syndrome as an effect of the many years of assistance in the area. I do not recall anyone blaming the camps in Liberia, which is interesting seen in the light of the above discussion.
As described in Chapter 4, the assistance in Tabou covers a broad range of subjects, which are both humanitarian and developmental in nature. Except from food distributions and the start-package received upon return from Liberia, the projects demand different kinds of participation, which sometimes is rather challenging for the beneficiaries. In literature and policy papers, participation is described as the wonder-tool, which prevents the development of the dependency syndrome, but according to my interlocutors this was apparently not the case. It can therefore be argued that HO staff in Tabou understands more or less *all* assistance to create dependency. Hence, in this case, the concept has evolved from solely being a concern of humanitarian assistance, to being an important risk to consider in long-term, development-orient programs, too.

Purpose and consequences of the concept

Maybe the most interesting aspect of the dependency syndrome is that there seems to be very limited proof that it exists. When researchers engage with the subject it has usually been to criticize it and prove its non-existence (Harvey and Lind 2005, 7). Harvey & Lind cite many such examples, including an Oxfam study in Ethiopia, which concludes that food distributions are too irregular and too limited for households to count on uniquely (Harvey and Lind 2005, 19). Kibreab's study of camp refugee in Somalia showed that refugees were innovate and proactive. They were ashamed to need assistance, and worked hard for almost no returns in order to improve their situation just a little (Kibreab 1993, 332). Harrell-Bond points to the fact that most refugees live outside camps and survive without international assistance (Harrell-Bond 1994, 18). Even WFP acknowledge that there is mixed evidence on the effect of free food on local markets (Lentz, Barrett and Hoddinott 2005, 10-11). My empirical material does not allow for such assessments of the beneficiaries in Tabou,

but in light of the above studies, claims about beneficiaries' dependency probably ought to be more nuanced.

Regardless of the fact that there are well-founded objections to the existence of the dependency syndrome, humanitarian organizations hold on to the concept. HOs, with resources, experts and political backing, is a much more powerful actor than vulnerable populations. Thus, HOs holds the defining power and will construct concepts and ideas about the social world, which serves their purpose. Consequently, the idea of a dependency syndrome is resilient to critique because it has an important function for HOs (Harvey and Lind 2005, 15). In Chapter 6 I have already identified and discussed consequences and functions of the four narratives, including the dependency syndrome. To avoid repetition I will only shortly mention the functions here. The dependency syndrome is utilized by HOs in order to;

- Shift the blame away from underlying structural causes – the consequence is that beneficiaries are blamed instead;
- Shift the blame away from program failures – with the same consequence as above;
- Justify reduced assistance (time, coverage and amount) – the consequence is that beneficiaries do not get their needs covered and sustainable recovery is thus delayed;
- Use a participatory approach, in order to avoid free handouts – the consequence is that the most vulnerable individuals cannot benefit from the project.

The above does not only apply to Tabou Department, but is recognized as being applicable to many different contexts (Harvey and Lind 2005, 15-17). The consequences can be severe and even counterproductive to the mission of HOs. The overall consequence of the belief in the dependency syndrome is that sustainable development is not achieved. It is therefore crucial to start reflecting on alternative and better ways of framing beneficiaries.

Alternatives to the dependency syndrome

After deconstruction, the exercise of *reconstruction* is when the researcher proposes alternative ways of dealing with the issue at hand. A reconstruction of the concept allows for an integration of the critique, and can help avoid negative consequences.

I suggest that more precise definitions are needed, and that these definitions must highlight that individuals are dependent in very different ways. First of all, it must be made clear that in difficult circumstances dependency on aid is positive. Almost per definition, humanitarian assistance is provided when other options for a healthy life are non-existing. Therefore, being able to depend on assistance in situations of crisis is desirable and should be regarded as a success. This kind of positive dependency furthermore protects beneficiaries from engaging in dangerous activities and relationships, e.g. working for warlords, getting money from loan sharks, earning money through prostitution, selling important livestock, which ensures sustainability in the future, etc. (Harvey and Lind 2005, 35-37).

In opposition to the positive dependency, I suggest the term 'negative dependencies'. I argue that negative dependencies should first and foremost be divided into a moral/behavioral and an economic/material category. In the moral category you will find 'lack of initiative', 'lack of responsibility', 'passive recipients', 'not searching for durable solutions', 'always asking for more', 'manipulating the system' etc. In the economic category you will find for example negative effects on local markets and local production. Using this terminology will help clarify and distinguish causes and solutions to different dependencies. Talking about economic dependency can help address underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability in a society, which prevents beneficiaries from leading sustainable lives. At the same time, the distinction makes it possible to talk about dependency without automatically stigmatizing beneficiaries as immoral and irresponsible.

Other concepts could also be useful, when describing beneficiaries' behavior and attitude towards assistance. Concepts like 'survival strategies' and 'rational coping mechanisms' highlight the individual's agency and acknowledge their struggle in difficult situations. As discussed in Chapter 5, HO staff in Tabou tends to forget that beneficiaries live difficult lives and have legitimate claims to assistance when

beneficiaries do something 'wrong', i.e. ask for more assistance or manipulate the system. Notwithstanding, it could very well be that cheating the system is seen as the only means of providing for their family, because their efforts to find a job, pursue further education etc. has failed. Searching for ways to get access to more assistance might be a logical and rational choice, when all other options are much less certain and much less profitable. Obviously, cheating the system cannot be tolerated, but it will make it easier for HO staff to understand and remedy this behavior if the problem is framed as survival strategies.

Another interesting concept is 'co-dependency' The concept of co-dependency underscores the fact that everyone are dependent on other people and structures, which in turn also are dependent on others to survive and lead meaningful lives. Consequently, it is not only beneficiaries who are dependent. HO staff is likewise dependent on beneficiaries, because without them they will have no jobs. This challenges the negative perception of dependency, because it is impossible to uphold such a negative understanding of the word if it is acknowledged that everyone is dependent on one another.

Summary

This chapter is an important addition to the analysis of the narratives in Tabou. It elaborates on the understanding and consequences of the narrative of dependency, and at the same time it serves to link my analysis and empirical material with a broader discussion on the dependency syndrome.

From a social constructivist perspective, deconstruction is important because it questions 'truths' about our social world, and the way we interact with each other. The deconstruction of the dependency syndrome has revealed four main points, which I wish to highlight again:

- The idea of lazy and unworthy beneficiaries has a long history dating back to the English Poor Laws;
- Definitions of the concept encompass both a moral and economic aspect;
- There is not agreement among researcher whether the syndrome exists;
- The concept has important consequences for beneficiaries.

To avoid negative consequences, I suggested concepts, which take into account structural cause and beneficiaries' agency. At the very least, the word 'syndrome' should not be used to describe this phenomenon of dependency, because it produces a harmful and wrongful link between dependency and mental disorder.

8. Critical reflections and limitations of the study

In this chapter I will attempt to reflect more critically over my findings and the limitations of the study. Anthropology is not an exact science, where results can be tested and verified easily, and therefore it is crucial that the researcher remains critical towards his/her own research. This consideration is also well in line with social constructivism, which highlights that analysis and knowledge production is highly dependent on the researcher's personal experiences.

Study design limitations

As has already been described in Chapter 3, being associated with DRC greatly facilitated this study, but it also made it impossible to appear independently before beneficiaries. They might have found it difficult to speak freely, a problem that I could have resolved by speaking several times with the same beneficiary. Notwithstanding, DRC argued against this, because they were afraid that beneficiaries would misunderstand the situations and that expectations for assistance would rise.
It is also possible that the interviewees have used the narratives as a strategy to get access to assistance. Because I am white, and because they think that I am employed by DRC, they believe that I have the power to ensure further assistance. Long-term observations among beneficiaries in Tabou could have made it possible to judge whether or not this narrative is a result of my presence.

Obviously, not all the stories and explanations fit a hundred per cent with the four narratives analyzed above. For example, not all the repatriates I met expressed hopelessness. Those who seemed more optimistic and happy were often younger and were currently waiting to receive their DRC kits to start a small business. Once, an interviewee directly stated that he did not consider himself vulnerable, that he was confident that he would be able to build his own house, and that he knew that others needed the assistance more than him (Appendix 2, Interview 5). One of my DRC colleagues also expressed doubts whether or not the participatory approach to the shelter projects excluded the most vulnerable as a result. By acknowledging that some repatriates are simply too vulnerable to buy their own plot of land and provide the sand and bricks demanded, she was contradicting the well-established narrative of cultural laziness and dependency, which she maintained at other times.

There are always ambiguities and contradictions to be found, but the analysis is based on my assessment of what permeated the interviews and observations. It was the world-view of these four narratives that most of the people I met would agree on and interpret their social world according to.

Researcher's limitations

Some say that anthropological methods cannot be learned from lectures, but must be learned through experience. The fact that this has been my first time conducting an anthropological study obviously impacted the data collection and analysis.

My sensitivity to the narrative of hopelessness could be due to the fact that it is my first time being directly confronted with loss and hardship in a post-conflict context. If I had had previous, similar experiences, I might have been able to develop a different perspective on this narrative. Maybe they present the hopelessness in a specific way, which is different from how hopelessness is presented in other countries. Maybe this narrative of hopelessness is much more explicit among repatriates in other cultures, and thus I give it too much importance in this case only because, as a person, I have been profoundly touched by it. This problem of lack of experience in post-conflict settings of course also applies to the three other narratives, but the impact is without doubt most important related to the narrative of hopelessness, because it touches upon something fundamental – sympathy, empathy and a willingness to help.

The narratives identified focus very much on the negative aspects of life and assistance in Tabou. It is possible though, that I have reinforced this negative attitude, by showing interest in these narratives and asking a lot of questions. I realized later that I did not ask specifically for positive stories. Instead, I tried to challenge the narratives of laziness and dependency, and I always did my best to ask neutral and open-ended questions, like 'what is the attitude of beneficiaries?' instead of asking 'are beneficiaries lazy?'. Regardless of my efforts, it is possible that my questions were biased towards developing the negative narratives, because at first sight they seemed most interesting.

Lastly, it should be noted that the interviews and observations sometimes suffered from language barriers. Obviously, it limited my ability to interpret some situations and some answers. Moreover, the language barriers sometimes made interviewees uncomfortable, which clearly had an impact on their willingness to develop their stories. Better language skills might have resulted in better and richer interviews and hence a more nuanced understanding.

Generalizability

Reflecting on the generalizability of my results, it is important to remember that anthropological studies do not search for universally applicable theories. It investigates the context specific and unique. That my conclusions are not generalizable to all contexts does not make them less valid or less interesting for anthropologists.

I argue that the four narratives identified in the analysis are to some extent specific to Tabou Department. Similar narratives might appear in other parts of Côte d'Ivoire, because the life conditions and experiences of war and refuge in Liberia are comparable across the country. One exception is of course the narrative of cultural laziness, which is specific to the Kroumanes living in the Southwest. Another reason why similar narratives might appear in other areas of Côte d'Ivoire, is because much of the HO staff circulates from one office to another whenever needs change. Hence, when interacting with other staff members they are able to spread their understanding of humanitarian assistance and life opportunities.

A 'narrative' is an analytical concept and not something that exists 'out there'. Consequently, this concept can also be applied to other contexts, but the content of the narratives will probably not be the exact same as in Tabou. I have nevertheless referred to several studies, which indicate that the content of the narratives (laziness, dependency, dissatisfaction with assistance, and hopelessness) are recurrent themes in other countries.

9. Conclusion

My overarching goal was to understand how beneficiaries and HO staff relate differently to life opportunities and humanitarian assistance in Tabou Department. Social constructivism provided me with an analytical lens, and I chose 'narratives' as the bearing analytical concept, because it allowed me to understand why tension and misunderstandings arise. The narratives could furthermore give me a detailed understanding of the way in which these two groups interpret their social world differently. Narratives are not objective accounts of actual events, but a way of making sense of what has happened and why. It helps individuals interpret their social world by bringing together a multitude of different events and situations in a socially meaningful way.

The precise question that I have sought to answer through this paper is as follows: *How, why and with what consequences do beneficiaries and HO staff construct different narratives about their social reality?* In order to write a clear and concise conclusion, I will answer this question by breaking it down into three sub-questions.

How are narratives constructed? The narratives are constructed, maintained and deconstructed continuously through interaction and conversation with peers and 'opponents'. Through interviews, participant observation and everyday conversations I identified four different narratives related to life opportunities and humanitarian assistance. My analysis shows that a narrative of hopelessness and a narrative of unfair assistance is maintained by beneficiaries. In stark opposition to those, HO staff has constructed a narrative of cultural laziness and a narrative of dependency. In Chapter 5 I have shown how the narratives were created and upheld by a multitude of examples from everyday situations, which were interpreted in a very specific way. The narratives are also constructed through the expression of feelings like resignation or frustration, which was especially significant in the narrative of hopelessness and dependency. For example, I argued that the personal stories of struggle are framed as a narrative of hopelessness, exactly because the interviewees never expressed any hope or optimism about the future. Instead, they would express defeat or anger towards their situation. Narratives are furthermore reinforced by the fact that they leave out situations, which cannot be interpreted to fit with the narrative. For

example, HO staff would always highlight the failures instead of success stories, in order to maintain the narratives of cultural laziness and dependency.

Why are narratives constructed? First and foremost, narratives serve the purpose of giving meaning to the social world. Situations, which would not make sense, suddenly appear as meaningful and can be fitted into a frame. The narratives thus justify certain actions or inactions. For example, beneficiaries can justify manipulating the system, because they understand their life situation as hopeless and the assistance provided as unfair and insufficient. Likewise, HO staff can justify using a participatory approach, because it is meant to prevent dependency and laziness, which staff perceives as major problems in Tabou Department. Asking vulnerable families to pay relatively big amounts of money for materials etc. in order to participate in the shelter projects therefore appears as necessary and fair.

The narratives are furthermore used in the power struggles between beneficiaries and HO staff. I have argued that staff uses the narratives to hold on to their power and access to resources, both in terms of salaries and social position. Beneficiaries, on the other hand, do not possess much power, but their narratives can be used to gain access to more assistance, which in turn can strengthen their social and economic position.

What consequences do the narratives entail? Socially constructed narratives have real and physical consequences, because they appear as true. I have identified different consequences, including the risk of entering into a vicious circle of negative attitudes and behavior. The major consequence, I argue, is that HO staff's narratives limit their ability to address 'real' reasons for underdevelopment.

Especially the narrative of dependency entails a multitude of negative consequences, which in the end hinders sustainable development. The dependency syndrome is the focal point of the narrative, and my deconstruction of this concept reveals its long history, and its relations to morality and mental health issues. Regardless of the inconclusive evidence of the dependency syndrome's existence, the narrative of dependency has consequences for the assistance provided on the ground. The consequences include shifting the blame away from program failures and structural causes like poverty and corruption, which might explain beneficiaries' actions or inactions. Interpreting the social reality according to the narrative of dependency and

cultural laziness furthermore makes it reasonable to limit the assistance in terms of amount and timeframe, which has a serious impact on beneficiaries' well-being.

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11. Appendix 1 – Interview guides

Interview guide for HO staff

Introduction

- Which programs are you responsible for?
- How long have you been working with DRC / UNHCR?
- How long in the humanitarian field?

Repatriates' attitude and behavior

- What is your impression of repatriates in Tabou?
- Can you think of 2 positive and 2 negative characteristics?
- How is the ideal beneficiary / the ideal behavior?
- Have you heard about Ivorians going back and forth between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, before official repatriation?
- What do you think of that? Why are these people doing this?
- Do you know other stories about people manipulating the system?

Justice

- Do you think that assistance is fair?
- An example - Village A received assistance while Village B received nothing. Do you think it's okay?
- Do you see any negative things in the approach of DRC / UNHCR or other NGOs?
- How can assistance be improved?

Communication and misunderstandings

- How can it be explained that repatriates have the impression that NGOs will take care of them 'until everything is fine'?
- What is the most difficult for repatriates to understand in regards to assistance?
- What do they complain about?
- Have you experienced misunderstandings between you and beneficiaries?
- Have you heard stories of beneficiaries who have reacted badly?

Vulnerability

- What do you think of the vulnerability criteria?
- Do returnees understand the criteria?

Participatory approach

- Do you think you have enough time to listen to beneficiaries' problems?
- What do you think of the fact that beneficiaries have to buy the land and provide some materials for the construction of houses?
- Is it fair or too much to ask?

- What do you think of DRC's exit?

Interview guide for beneficiaries

Introduction

- Can you start by introducing yourself briefly?
- Why did you decide to repatriate?
- The return, is it consistent with your expectations?
- What was easy and difficult about the return?

Assistance

- Have you received any assistance after the return?
- Was it easy to get help?
- Have you been satisfied?
- Who / what structure do you ask if you need more help?
- Have you been to the DRC or UNHCR office to ask for help?

Participatory approach

- Do you feel that the staff are listening to you, and understand your problems?
- What do you think about the fact that the beneficiaries must buy the land and provide materials for the construction of houses?
- Is it fair or too much to ask?

Staff members' attitude and behavior

- How are NGO staff and their attitudes towards the returnees?
- Can you say 2 positives and 2 negative things about the staff?
- Do you feel comfortable going to offices, asking for help etc.?
- Have you experienced misunderstandings between you and the staff?
- Have you heard stories of bad behavior?

Dependency

- How could you have done if there was no assistance?
- What are you doing now to stop needing help?
- Do you know people who are dependent on the assistance and who do not try to provide for themselves?
- Have you heard about Ivorians going back and forth between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, but who is still in the repatriation program with UNHCR?
- What do you think of that? Why are these people doing this?
- Do you know other stories like that? (cheating the system)

Justice & vulnerability

- Village A receives assistance while Village B receives nothing. Do you understand why there is this difference?
- Do you find UNHCR / DRC assistance fair and equitable?
- Why do you think there is a difference among repatriates?
- Do you know how NGOs choose the beneficiaries?
- Do you know the vulnerability criteria?
- Do you consider yourself vulnerable?
- Do you understand why NGOs cannot help all repatriates?

Communication and misunderstandings

- What information did you receive before repatriation?
- Did you receive all the necessary information?
- Was the information correct?
- Were there misunderstandings or false promises? How come?
- How do you think the UNHCR / DRC approach can be improved?

- Do you know that DRC have finished all their activities in Côte d'Ivoire? And that UNHCR wants to leave too. What do you think of that?

12. Appendix 2 – Summary of interviews

I conducted 24 semi-structured, formal interviews during the weeks spend in Tabou. On the following pages I will briefly present the context of the interviews and the main points discussed.

Because I changed subject a few times, the interviews are not all done with the exact same interview guide. Interviews 1-3 are based on an interview guide focusing on social reintegration and conflict. Interviews 4-24 are based on the interview guide from Appendix 1. In the end, it turned out that the first interviews are also relevant and interesting when analyzing narratives.

19.04.2017

I had arrived in Tabou a few days before and I had spent the time getting used to the town, the office and my new colleagues. I had met with a member of the Protection Committee in Tabou to discuss my interests and approach. Today, he came and picked me up at the DRC office. We walked around the town, and whenever we passed some repatriates that he recognized we would stop and ask for an interview, either at their house or in front of their shop. The interviewees had not been contacted in advance.

Interview 1

Duration: 32 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 30 years old, alone with two children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in an abandoned school building, where she lives. There is a wooden bench, a wooden table, two chairs and some large pieces of fabric that divide the classroom into smaller rooms and gives some privacy.

Her husband has left her when they came back to Tabou. She has a serious lung disease, which makes it dangerous for her to do physical work. She has no regular income and therefore do not know how to pay for school for her children. She is desperate.

Upon arrival, like every other repatriate, she received 75.000 FCFA and a NFI kit (Non-Food-Item) to get started. She has also received food assistance from DRC and UNHCR. But apart from that she has not received much help from any agency.

According to her, UNHCR Liberia had promised that they would take care of vulnerable repatriates until they were well and able to provide for themselves. She finds it very unfair that this has not happened, and it creates tension with repatriates who have received a lot of assistance. She finds it difficult to understand why some repatriates have gotten so much help. The inequality is difficult to accept.

To get a house from UNHCR/DRC the beneficiary needs to participate by buying a plot of land and providing certain materials. This was not explained to her before and she finds it impossible, as she has no real income. Furthermore, she was told that DRC would reimburse her medical expenses, but this has not been done yet. She has been to the office a few times to ask for it, but she does not understand what is going on.

She explains that in the camp in Liberia she was taken well care of and that the situation was easier than in Tabou. But she decided to return, because she wanted to go 'home' and it was important for her that her children go to school and learn French (whereas in Liberia the official language is English). In the camp she was 100 per cent dependent on UNHCR, but in Tabou she feels more independent and she can find ways to survive.

Regardless of her desperate situation she is happy to be home, people in Tabou received her well and she has good relations with other inhabitants. She does express some disappointment related to the local community, as she explains that they have not been ready to help her, but she does not explain this further.

Interview 2

Duration: 16 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 30 years old, alone with 3 children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to April 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in the back of a small wooden shelter/shop selling fruits and vegetables. It is unclear whether she is working there or just together with some friends. Some women and children are hanging around, listening to the interview.

She decided to return to Tabou, because life was too difficult in Liberia and she did not feel at ease. She was very well received by everyone in the town, and she has not experienced any problems, socially speaking. At Tabou everything seems to be back to normal, and they do not talk much about the conflict. She prefers to forget it.

She does not have a job and thus it is not easy to take care of her family. Even though the school is officially free, she has to pay for different things all the time. It is very important that DRC and other NGOs help repatriates find a job.
When she returned to Tabou, her home was occupied by someone else and she had to stay at her parents house. She was lucky to be able to participate in DRC's shelter project, but she still does not live in her new house. There was no cement for the floors, so she is waiting for DRC to take care of it (it is the responsibility of the beneficiary to do the floors).

Interview 3

Duration: 10 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 25 years old

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in an empty room in the house where she lives, and some small children are listening to the interview. Sometimes my guide had to translate. Upon arrival she was cooking in front of the house.
She wanted to repatriate, because it is always better to be home. She was happy to return and there has not been any conflict or tension. Tabou is not like other villages, which experience many problems. She was well received.
Her house was destroyed while she was away. Now she is renting a room in a house, but she would prefer to get her own house with the help of DRC.
Like all other repatriates she has received food assistance. She has received food four times (usually the assistance is only for 3 months/3 times).
She has participated in an IGA, so in December 2016 she was able to open a small *maquis,* where she makes *attieke* and different sauces. That way she earns a bit of money, but not nearly enough to get a house.

21.04.2017

I was working at the DRC office, when the woman from the first interview comes to see me. Together with her is one of her friends, who is also a repatriate. She has a lot of problems and thinks that I might be able to help. I explain that I am not in a position to provide any assistance, but she still accepts the interview.

Interview 4

Duration: 49 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 24 years old, has a baby, but no husband

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to March 2017

Main points: The interview takes place in my living room in the DRC guesthouse, just besides the office building.

She left because she was afraid of being raped. 'They do not kill women, but they rape.' But it was very difficult in Liberia too. The security in the camp was not good and they did not dare go to the fields etc. She repatriated with the help of UNHCR together with her baby and younger brother. She wanted to go home because 'it is better to suffer in your home country than to suffer elsewhere' then at least 'your heart is at peace'. She also wanted to continue school in Côte d'Ivoire. She was told that the school was free, but now she has been asked to pay 110.000 FCFA. She cannot pay this much, so for now she is just following the classes unofficially.

Upon arrival they received food and NFI kit, but they did not know where to sleep and UNHCR did not assist them. She lives in the abandoned school buildings, and she feels isolated because of this. There are many families who live there, but it is not a good place.

Her brother is helping her out financially, but he is also struggling. She is selling small cakes, but it does not give a lot of money. She wants to work as a hairdresser or with IT, but she finds it very difficult to take decisions alone. She does not know how to get back to school, which kind of work to aim for, and at the same time take care of her baby. She has to buy milk because she cannot breast feed.

UNHCR Liberia had promised that UNHCR would follow up on repatriates and support them until they were doing good. While in Liberia they did not get any details, but were just told that everything would be taken care of by UNHCR. She thinks that information was held back because UNHCR wants refugees to return. They are pushing people to go home and it is easier if the refugees think that everything will be good. But it could also just be a mistake by the staff. UNHCR Liberia and UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire are different organizations.

UNHCR Liberia said that they would get help to build a house, but they were not informed that they had to buy the plot of land themselves. She does not know how to get the plot, because she has no family that can assist her. They share the food they

receive from NGOs with the other people they live with. It is important that the NGOs help repatriates find shelter, because it is their first preoccupation when returning.
They were informed that health assistance was only for emergencies. Her brother is sick and needs an operation, but it is not an emergency so they cannot get help.
She knows different kinds of vulnerability – old people, women without a husband or family, orphans. She considers herself as vulnerable, because she does not have a husband. She feels different from people who did not flee.
It should be easier to get in contact with the organizations. She needs more advice, support and council because it is difficult to take decisions alone. It would be a good idea to have one specific contact person in UNHCR or DRC who is directly responsible for a specific number of repatriates. The employees need to go to the field to see what is actually going on, instead of just sitting in the office.

25.04.2017

DRC is closing its office in Tabou on the 30th of June, and all activities will stop the 15th of June 2017. Therefore beneficiaries and leaders must be officially informed and letters to village chiefs and Protection Committees are being handed out. I was invited one day to drive to four different villages in Tabou Department, to hand out these letters together with my colleagues. At the last village, after meeting with the local chief, a member of the Protections Committee assembled a small group of repatriates. He did not stay during the interview.

5. Interview (group interview with 4 repatriates)

Duration: 35 minutes

Interviewees: Two young women (in their early 30s or late 20s) a young man (probably mid 30) and an elderly man (70ish).

Refugee status: Refugees from 2011 to 2016/2017

Main points: We were sitting under a tree, in front of some small houses. Other villagers came by and listened to the conversation, but it did not seem to affect the participants.

They did not really want to come back, because they knew that their houses were ruined and it would take a lot of time before their fields would start producing any crops. They were convinced to return because UNHCR promised to assist them, give

them houses and give them food for three months. But until today, they have only received 1 ration of food, and they have not been able to get an answer as to when the other food is coming. They have not received any housing either and are all currently living with family. They heard a rumor about another repatriate who had not followed the rules of the shelter projects, and thus DRC had stopped the project in their village. They find it very unfair that the neighboring village has received 20 houses, because they are equally vulnerable. According to them, assistance should not be limited to an area, but must always be given based on personal needs and vulnerabilities.

They explain that NGOs have not kept their promises. Apart from problems with the shelter projects, they had not been informed about the limited medical assistance before returning either.

Only the youngest women, who returned in 2017, is missing ID papers for her children. But she has not yet taken any steps to remedy this and has not contacted SAARA.

They seem to understand the vulnerability criteria. One of the women lost her husband during the war and is now alone with 4 children. The elderly man is also considered vulnerable because he is weak and not able to work. The young man acknowledges that he is not vulnerable, as he is strong and able to provide for himself. They do not agree whether or not it would have been better to stay in Liberia, but they definitely expected things to be easier in Tabou and they trusted the NGOs and UNHCR to help them. If they could change anything, they would have liked more direct contact with responsible employees in the NGOs. It seems like there are too many intermediaries and information gets lost. The PC has been very helpful though.

27.04.2017

A few days before, DRC had conducted a three-days workshop for IGA participants. During the workshop they had taken note of which participants were the most outspoken and they proposed that I go meet them. It is unclear whether they had been informed about my visit before I arrived with a DRC colleague. We were driving around Tabou town on a motorbike and my colleague would stay during all the interviews, but only intervene if translation was needed.

6. Interview

Duration: 22 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 30 years old, with one child.

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2016

Main points: The interview took place under a tree in front of a few small houses. There was a small fire and some women were cooking close by.

She had a difficult time in Liberia and there was no work. It was very different from Côte d'Ivoire so she preferred to return home. She was well received by the community, but it was difficult to participate in NGO projects. Sometimes you need to be a big family and she is alone with her child. For example the shelter projects require at least 3 family members, so instead she is renting a house. She had been informed about this by UNHCR Liberia, so it was not a surprised but it still makes it difficult. She feels that she had been well informed on all aspects before leaving Liberia, and she has received what has been promised, e.g. cash grant, plot of land to cultivate, and food assistance. She agrees that sometimes there is misinformation, but it is because UNHCR Liberia and UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire is not really the same organization.

She does not consider herself vulnerable and in general it is going okay, but she still finds it unfair that some repatriates receive a lot of assistance while others do not. She does not understand why small families cannot participate in the shelter projects because '*after all we are all repatriates'*.

According to her, housing and access to school are the most important aspects of reintegration, which NGOs should assist with. She is happy with the assistance she has received from DRC and she is excited to get the materials and start her IGA.

7. Interview

Duration: 33 minutes

Interviewee: Man, 64 years old, with wife and children

Refugee status: Refugee from November 2010 to April 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in the shadow under a tree, close to his new DRC house. There are no people around to listen to the conversation.

He explained how life in the camps in Liberia was very difficult. The food rations were too small, the food was raw, and they did not have enough money to supplement the rations with e.g. fish. He found work in sugar fields and also made charcoal to sell

at the market, but he earned very little. So he decided to return when the rumors of attacks died out, because it was better for the family.

He participated in two go-and-see visits with UNHCR. The first in 2013 did not convince him of the safety in Tabou.

In his experience the information in Liberia was correct, but he finds it unfair and very insufficient that medical assistance is only for a few months. His daughter has epilepsy and needs help, but now they do no longer get any. He thinks that the assistance should cover the first 2 years after repatriation.

Upon arrival he received NFI kits, food and cash grants. He has also participated in the DRC shelter project, but they do not yet have enough money to buy cement for the floor. It was also a difficult task to pay the sand for construction, and he had to carry all of it himself a long distance.

He knows the vulnerability criteria very well and considered himself vulnerable because he is old and does not have a good job with stable income. He has been able to get a loan and buy an oven to make charcoal, but it does not give enough money.

He finds it normal that there are some differences among repatriates, because it is impossible to help everybody. But according to him the assistance could be better if the food assistance continued as well as medical assistance.

He is happy with the work DRC does and feels that the staff is always available and ready to help.

8. Interview

Duration: 19 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, 24 years old, with a husband and children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2010 or 2011 to 2016

Main points: We met her at the market, where she was selling vegetables. The interview was conducted at her sister's *maquis*, just beside the market place. Her husband was sometimes translating and giving his inputs, because the young woman was very shy and found it difficult to understand my questions.

They wanted to repatriate because life is easier in Tabou. There were no surprises or problems upon return. Everyone received them well. All was as expected and all information was good.

They are renting a room in a bigger house, but they are not satisfied with this. It is expensive and DRC is not helping them pay the rent. It is too expensive to participate

in the shelter projects and they cannot buy the land for the house. It is unfair that it is so difficult to participate. NGOs forget that when you flee, you loose everything. She his happy to participate in IGA and is currently waiting to receive chicken and materials for her poultry farm. But even with this she does not expect to earn enough money to buy a plot of land. Her husband is fishing. Before the war he had his own canoe, but now he needs to share with a friend. It is difficult to get enough money just to buy food. It is a hard life.

She only considers sick people as vulnerable, and as she is not sick she is not vulnerable either.

According to her, there is a difference between repatriates because some are not very proactive, they do not or cannot do anything. If she ever has a problem she would be at the UNHCR office straight away to tell them about it and ask what they can do. She would make sure to get the help. She does not know any other NGOs than DRC.

9. Interview

Duration: 31 minutes

Interviewee: Man, in his 40s, with children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to January 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in his DRC house, where he is working on a sowing machine.

He decided to return because Tabou is his home, and life was too difficult in the camp. He knew that his former home had been destroyed and that a new school had been build on his plot of land. So he was a bit worried and wanted to go home as soon as possible to find a solution. He was also worried about health assistance in Tabou, because he has a lung disease. In the camp, because of this illness, he was considered vulnerable and got good assistance. In Côte d'Ivoire he was referenced to ASAPSU and he was told that they could pay for him. But now he has been to the hospital and they say that his illness is not urgent and serious enough, so he has to pay himself. Afterwards DRC agreed to pay half of the medicine, but only this once. His daughter has been operated recently, but since they repatriated more than 3 months ago he will not get assistance and he does not know how to pay. In Liberia they were told that they would get health assistance and be helped until everything is well. It was only upon arrival that they were informed of the details, which is a big problem. Someone advised him to ask for assistance at the city hall, but he has given up.

His children do not have ID papers, so he was told to go to court and get a *jugement suppletif*, which costs 13,000 FCFA. He does not have this much money yet, so it has to wait.

They were well received by the community, and they were given a plot of land for their new house. There were no tension and everyone has been helpful. He has not yet paid the 50,000 FCFA for the land, so he does not have any official paper proving that it is his, and he does not know how to get the money. He found it a little difficult to provide the materials for the shelter project, but he managed.

He is aware on the vulnerability criteria, but he does not understand why some repatriates receive a lot of assistance while others less. In general the assistance is fair, but health assistance needs to be improved and they need bigger cash grants.

Before the war he owned a small shop at the market, where he made clothes. Until know he has lent a sowing machine from a friend, but he will soon receive a new machine and materials from the DRC IGA project. It is not very good to work in his house, so he hopes to get a new shop, but he does not have the money yet.

10. Interview

Duration: 15 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, in her 30s, not married with three children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to April 2016

Main points: The interview takes place in a small wooden shelter with low wooden tables and chairs. At another table are a woman and a few children.

She wanted to come back because Tabou is her real home. Her house was burned when they attacked the city. She has participated in the shelter project, but it was a struggle to provide and pay for the materials. The house is almost done, but she cannot get the money to finish the floor. So she still lives with her aunt.

Before the departure they were informed that they would receive NFI kit and food for 3 months, but they only received for one month. She has not asked for the rest of the food and do not understand why it has not arrived.

Whenever she has a problem she will first talk to her family, but when she needed a job, she went to the DRC office. She is now participating in an IGA and is waiting for the materials to arrive so she can open a small *maquis*. According to her, the NGOs' most important task is to help repatriates find jobs so they can feed their family.

She does not know why all repatriates do not receive the same amount of assistance, and she does not know if it is fair.
She has heard of the vulnerabilities but she cannot explain them. She considered herself vulnerable because she is not married.

13.06.2017

The day before I had arrived for the second time in Tabou. At this point in the process I had realized that it would be useful with a few formal interviews with HO staff, so I got the permission to conduct interviews with my DRC colleagues and I also contacted UNHCR to check if they were available.

11. Interview

Duration: 20 minutes

Interviewee: DRC staff member

Main points: The interview took place in the shared office space at the DRC office.
He has worked 7 years in different development and humanitarian organizations, and 3 years with DRC on their protection programs. His impression of beneficiaries here in Tabou is that they lack engagement and motivation. It is difficult to make them participate wholeheartedly in programs. He explains that it is a cultural thing that they are not motivated, and don't work collectively. Individualism has been an important obstacle to implementation.
He can see that many think they should be privileged just because they are repatriates. But DRC always mixes beneficiaries, repatriates and non-repatriates, for reintegration and social cohesion. Beneficiaries tend to forget that assistance is only for a limited period of time. According to him, repatriates wait for and expect organizations to do everything, probably because they have been told so in Liberia. He explains that the ideal is to inform about the participatory approach and intervention zones before departure from Liberia. If not, it is normal that they get confused and frustrated.
He tries to convince the newly arrived repatriates to save the cash grant to buy a plot of land and get materials for the housing project. Like this, he estimates that most families should be able to participate in the project.

He highlights the importance of the participatory approach, because without participation it is not durable. Beneficiaries will not take care of the things they receive.
(The interview was cut off, as he had to leave for a meeting)

14.06.2017

One of the members of the PC, who had been my guide during the very first interviews, had agreed to meet and help me again. He had also agreed to being interviewed. After his interview, we went for a walk in the town and, like the first time, he would ask the repatriates we met to sit down with me.

12. Interview

Duration: 46 minutes
Interviewee: Man, in his 50s, with children, member of Protection Committee Tabou
Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to June 2013
Main points: The interview took place in the living room of the DRC guesthouse, where I lived.
He had worked with protection issues in the camp in Liberia so it was natural for him to continue the work with DRC, when he returned to Tabou. The PC works as an important focal point, because people often do not know who to contact if they need help or protection.
Upon return he participated in the shelter project. It was not a problem for him, but he sees that many beneficiaries find it hard to provide the materials and buy the land. He was lucky to have friends who could help him, but others are all alone. Nevertheless, he explains that the cash grant should be more than enough for the house. The participatory approach is crucial.
'Il faut savoir qu'il y a des gens ici qui aime la facilité. C'est l'ONG qui doit tout faire'. According to him, many Kroumanes, both young and old, do not want to make an effort. They will wait for NGOs to do everything, they make bad choices, and spend they money wrong. Beneficiaries are never satisfied and they depend too much on aid. He acknowledges that some of course are more responsible, and some have too many problems to be independent

He explains that people in Tabou do not know how to run a business, make it profitable. That is why IGAs often collapse. Beneficiaries will just accept the donation and sell the materials without making it sustainable.
He has never heard beneficiaries complain about staff's behavior. Of course there have been problems with projects, but not personal issues. They are always professional and have a very good reputation. It will be chaotic when DRC leaves.
He has heard of Ivorians who cross the border and at the same time participate in the repatriation program. It is a good strategy to check the situation in their home villages and prepare their return. At the same time he understands that organizations perceives it as cheating.
He knows that many parents did not pick up their children's birth certificates because there were spelling mistakes. It is a common issue that people find it difficult to spell names. He also points to the fact that the project did not demand participation, so beneficiaries did not take it serious. When the beneficiaries are asked why they do not pick it up, they do not have any good explanation, only bad excuses. He is convinced that everyone knows that ID papers are important.
The vulnerability criteria are very useful. Non-intervention zones are necessary, because DRC and HCR cannot help everyone.
He sees IGAs as the most important programs. This is what helps people the most.

13. Interview

Duration: 20 minutes
Interviewee: Woman, in her 70s, 12 children, deceased husband
Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2017
Main points: The interview took place in front of her house, where she was preparing dried fish. There were a couple of young people and many children around, who observed the interview closely.
When she returned to Tabou, she found her house occupied, but with the help of the village chief the occupants left the house without trouble. The house is in a bad shape though and gets ruined by the rain. She is angry and disappointed that UNHCR has not been able to give her a new house, but she has not tried to go to the office and ask.
She explains that the cash grant was used to buy charcoal to sell on the market, but it turned out to be difficult to sell and she does not earn a lot on it. Her two adult

children do not have work either. There is not enough money to send the younger children to school.

She does not know the NGOs very well and has not sought them out to ask for help. Apart from ASAPSU she only seems to know UNHCR. She does not use the public institutions, for example the social center. She received a sheet with their phone numbers upon arrival, but she prefers to ask her family or the PC for help.

She considers herself vulnerable, but she does not know the vulnerability criteria. No one has explained it to her.

She complains a lot about her difficult situation, and asks for help. She does not know how to take care of all her children. She does not earn money. Her house is falling apart. She is old and weak. She is angry and desperate.

14. Interview

Duration: 15 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, in her early 20s, two small children, no husband

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to February 2016

Main points: This young woman had listened to the former interview and she did not mind answering my questions. So we stayed and conducted a second interview at the same house. This young woman is not related to the elderly woman.

She was well received in Tabou. She is renting a room in a small house, which is okay, but she would like to get her own house. Before she left Liberia, UNHCR informed them that everyone would get houses, so she does not understand why she has not been allowed to benefit. Her sister has benefitted from the housing project, but it was very difficult to pay for the materials etc.

She sells fruits and earns a bit of money that way, but not enough. It is only enough to get through the day. She wants to expand her business to also sell fabrics and shoes, but she needs more money to start this. She has not been able to make savings, because she needs to take good care of her children.

She has not had a lot of contact with the NGOs and has not participated in any projects. She still has a good image of NGOs in Tabou.

She does not have ID papers. She knows that she needs to go see SAARA, but she has not had time yet.

She does not know if she is vulnerable according to the criteria.

15. Interview

Duration: 20 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, in her 40s, four children, no husband.

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to February 2016

Main points: The interview took place in front of her house and my guide translated both questions and answers.

She wanted to repatriate because peace had returned to the country. She was well received and got food, NFI kit and cash upon arrival. In the beginning she lived with her sister until she got to participate in the shelter project. But she suffered to get the materials. She explains how difficult it was, because she did not have the money to pay someone else, so she had to make the bricks herself. She finds it unfair that NGOs demand so much. But she still likes the NGO staff, who have a good attitude and listen to their problems. She has not been to NGO offices but always goes to the Protection Committee if she has a problem.

She has also participated in Food for Work projects, planting bananas and cassava, but she stopped working in the fields. Now she earns money by buying and cooking cassava, which she sells at the market. It works well, but she wants to expand her business and also sell onions, chili etc. She needs more money before she can do this and she has not been able to make savings. She needs assistance to do this. She has heard about IGAs, but has not tried to get information on how to participate.

She has heard of Ivorians crossing the border and still participating in the repatriation program. According to her it is because they want to wait with repatriation until the cash grant is as high as possible. It is not a good thing to do. All Ivorians should come home now, because the war is over.

She does not have ID papers, but her children have birth certificates. She is not sure where she should go to get new papers. She has not heard about SAARA.

She is not happy that DRC is leaving.

16. Interview

Duration: 15 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, in her yearly 40s, not married, eight children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to April 2016

Main points: We were sitting just outside her house, in sort of a small, enclosed courtyard. A repatriated man, whom I met the day before at the DRC office followed

us to the house and listened to the interview. This seemed to make the woman a little shy.

She explains that everything was a struggle in Liberia. Because of this she wanted to go back to Côte d'Ivoire, where she was well received. Her house had been destroyed, but she has managed to rebuild it together with her brother, who also lives there.

She has not participated in IGAs and does not earn money as it is now. When she needs help she asks her family, who can provide her food. She would like to cook and maybe open a small *maquis*, but she is not actively working towards this goal.

She says that NGO staff are good people. They listen to their problems and understand, but they cannot really help or give more assistance.

She is sick and had to pay a lot of money at the hospital. She has not tried to get medical assistance from any NGO and do not know which ones to contact.

Before leaving Liberia they were promised a lot of assistance, but they have not kept their promises. She has not sought out any explanations to this. Still, in general she thinks that NGOs have a good image and that they help the repatriates as much as they can. But the assistance is insufficient.

Her eight children do not have birth certificates. Last year, she went to the prefecture and then to the court to get a *jugement suppletif* for her children, but they are still waiting to receive the certificates. She has asked for them again but was told to be patient.

17. Interview

Duration: 45 minutes

Interviewee: Man, in his late 40s, DRC staff member

Refugee status: Non

Main points: I had planned to meet with one of my colleagues, with whom I had had an interesting discussion a few days before in the car towards Tabou. I conducted the interview in his living room. My guide and the other repatriated man who had decided to follow us, was also present during the interview, and sometimes they would chip in with comments.

According to him, the Kroumanes lack solidarity in work and collective thinking. They prefer to work individually. But when it comes to helping others in need they have solidarity. Food for Work are good projects, but they do not function with

Kroumane people. They stay motivated only as long as the distribution of food continues. Out of 100, maybe only 15 continue.

He explains that it is a cultural problem, which is made worse by lack of education. The majority in Tabou area are analphabets. This makes it difficult for them to understand the benefits of collective work. Also, they are bad at communicating whenever there is a problem.

Burkinabé, Liberians and other ethnic groups have better work ethics.

Some repatriates still own lands to cultivate. Some have lost everything, but the cash grant helps them. He is convinced that it should be possible for everyone to get a decent life, but some just spend the money in a bad way, e.g. drinking beer.

He thinks that repatriates generally understand that assistance is provided based on vulnerability criteria, and they accept this difference that is created as a result. On the other hand it is more difficult for them to understand the concept of intervention zones. Usually this is not explained to repatriates.

He proposes that radios could be used to inform people about the principles and strategies of NGOs. Information is crucial for avoiding conflict and tension in the communities.

He explains that beneficiaries usually do not ask a lot of questions. They are more like passive receivers.

He finds it very possible that UNHCR Liberia promise more assistance than they will actually get. It is a strategy to motivate and push refugees to return. It is not good to lie. The result is that the repatriation is not truly voluntary.

He has heard of Ivorians who cross the border before official repatriation. They do this to check up on their homes, fields and the security situation. It is intelligent, a way of preparing, but it is also cheating.

15.06.2017

Today DRC was closing one of their sub-offices in Tabou Department, in the town of Grabo. My colleagues invited me along so I could meet other repatriates. They called the PC in Grabo in advance and had them gather some people I could talk to. They did not seem to explain the purpose of the interviews. When we arrived at the DRC office in Grabo, the repatriates were already sitting outside, waiting for us. I took them aside one by one for the interview.

18. Interview

Duration: 20 minutes

Interviewee: Man, in his 30s, member of Protection Committee Grabo

Refugee status: Non

Main points: According to him, DRC staff always acts well with beneficiaries, there are no problems to report. There is a lot of information about who gets what and why, which prevents misunderstandings and tension. The assistance has had a big impact and repatriates are now ready to take care of themselves when DRC leaves. On the other hand, he also explains that repatriates are often sad and worried about their situation. They have a multitude of problems and not just one.

Regarding the housing projects, he finds it normal that participation is demanded. In this area it is not necessary to pay for the plot of land, it is just given by the village chiefs. He acknowledges that sometimes it is hard work for the repatriates to get the materials etc. but it is worth the hard work.

He has heard of several Ivorians who cross the border to Liberia and participate in the repatriation program at the same time. These people see the assistance as a gift. They make sure to benefit as much as possible from the assistance. He thinks that it is cheating. He explains that whenever the Protection Committee encounters these people, they tell them to stop cheating and to stay in Liberia.

He has also heard of another way of cheating the system – a woman 'collects' children from the village with the accord of their parents. The children are then sent to Liberia where they get on the list for family reunification and repatriation. They thus receive a cash grant of 50,000 FCFA upon arrival. The woman keeps most but the children also get a small part. That way everyone earns money. This happens a lot.

Regarding birth certificates, he says that it is due to parents' negligence that many children still do not have this. He finds it very difficult to understand this problem.

The vulnerability criteria are useful and repatriates understand them well.

The PC in Grabo had applied for an IGA, to become sustainable, but it was not accepted by DRC.

19. Interview

Duration: 20 minutes

Interviewee: Woman, in her 40s, four children, no husband

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2016

Main points: She explains that life was hard in the camp in Liberia. She had a small shop there where she sold drinks, but it was not enough at all. Things got worse after her accident (she showed me scars on her stomach and legs) and she is still in physical pain.

She is renting a house for 10,000 FCFA per month and she has a small business selling snails (500-1000 FCFA) and oranges. She is on the list to participate in the shelter project, but she has no idea how to pay for materials and the plot of land. She will have to make the bricks herself, which she is very worried about due to pain. On top of that, she already finds it difficult to pay school and hospital bills.

According to her, HO staff is not very visible or accessible in Grabo. They do not understand how difficult life is. There is no work and no fields to cultivate in Grabo.

She did not receive any food assistance upon arrival

She has not heard of the vulnerability criteria.

She was very well prepared for the 'meeting' and had brought all her refugee papers, bills etc.

20. Interview

Duration: 10 minutes

Interviewee: Man, in his late 20s. Has a wife

Refugee status: Refugee from 2014 to 2016

Main points: His French was not so good, and as I had no one to translate it was a difficult interview.

In the Liberian camp he sold charcoal but life was difficult.

He was well received upon return and is renting a house with his wife.

He has participated in the Food for Work project, which was a good project according to him. But today he is no longer working in the fields because they are too far from his home. He still thinks that the other participants are cultivating the fields.

He is currently learning how to drive trucks to transport cocoa. He would try to participate in other IGA if he gets the opportunity, but he is not sure he would have time beside his job.

If he has a problem he does not ask NGOs or the Protection Committee. He will first see his employer who will most likely be able to help him.
He has lost his ID card and has to pay 15,000 FCFA to get a new. It can be done in Grabo, but he does not have the money yet. It is not a priority.

21. Interview

Duration: 10 minutes

Interviewee: Woman in her 30s, five children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2015

Main points: Before leaving Liberia she was promised 3 months of food, but she never received all. Upon arrival she received the cash grant and only one month of food.
She is alone with 5 children and none of them go to school.
She is currently living with a friend, as she is waiting for her house to be built. She explains that she does not have enough money to provide the materials they ask for, and she does not know how she will succeed. But she has to try, if not someone else will just take her place.
According to her, NGO staff is in general very kind, but they ask for the impossible. They expect too much of the repatriates. She thought that the NGOs would take care of everything when she returned.
She has applied for an IGA through CARITAS and is waiting for a reply. She wants to farm cows and chicken.

22. Interview

Duration: 15 minutes

Interviewee: Man in his 50s, with wife and two children

Refugee status: Refugee from 2013 to 2016

Main points: He explains how life in Liberia was very difficult. The schools were in English, which was a problem for his children. They had many problems with their health and the hospital in the camp was not good.
Now he is working in a cocoa plantation and is also a carpenter. His wife stays at home and takes care of the children.
Right now they are renting a room. He is rather angry and frustrated that their participation in the shelter project was refused. He does not understand why and finds

it very unfair – *'c'est très mechant'*. He has not been given any information about vulnerability criteria or the selection process. He says that maybe they have just drawn lots. He does not at all understand why there is a difference between repatriates and the assistance that they get. It is unfair that the NGOs cannot help everyone.
He considers himself vulnerable.
He and his family have a lot of problems and they cannot handle all of it alone. They ask NGOs for help, but they arrive unannounced in the village so he is always out working and the wife cannot take care of it. He is angry with the process and explains that he cannot just sit at home and wait for the NGOs.
He seems desperate and cannot see any solutions to his problems. He asks for my help.

23. Interview

Duration: 15 minutes
Interviewee: Girl, 17 years old
Refugee status: Refugee from 2011 to 2016
Main points: Their house had been burned down so now she is renting a house, with her mother and younger siblings. They have not benefitted from the shelter project, because her village is in a non-intervention zone. She had not been informed about this before they left Liberia.
The food they received upon arrival did not cover their needs for 3 months as had been promised.
She explains that NGOs must understand that the war has destroyed everything and today they do not even have fields to cultivate. Hence, she does not find the participatory approach good.
She says that her family does not even have enough money for food.
She was working as a seamstress but the small shop closed. Now she is working all day in a *maquis* and earns 500 FCFA per day. She wants to go to school, but was told that she is too old now. She did not attend school in Liberia.
She has lost her ID papers, which gives her problems whenever she has to pass a police control point. She has not yet tried to get new papers.
According to her, NGO staff has a good attitude towards beneficiaries, but they cannot help a lot.

16.06.2017

After a few emails, I succeeded in getting a meeting with a staff member from UNHCR, Tabou office. The interview was conducted in his small office. Occasionally, we were interrupted by some of his colleagues, who needed a signature or advice.

24. Interview

Duration: 46 minutes

Interviewee: Man in his 40s, UNHCR staff member

Refugee status: Non

Main points: He explains that beneficiaries have very high expectations - *'ils s'attandent à tout'*. Therefore they are often disappointed and feel that someone/NGOs are cheating them.

Beneficiaries have big confidence in UNHCR, mainly because UNHCR works through partner organizations, so they think that they can complain if the partner is not doing well and then UNHCR will solve the problem.

According to him, people are too used to getting assistance for free. The result is that they need NGOs to help them with everything, even declaring their children. There have been many information campaigns on the subject, but without results.

He says that UNHCR expects to close down their programs by end 2017 or 18. So do many other NGOs. But people here think that NGOs will always be there, ready to help them. He is of the opinion that it is a bad moment to close down projects in Tabou. Projects have not yet had a sustainable impact.

NGOs have done an enormous job and provided a lot of assistance to Tabou, but the results are not to be seen on the ground, because beneficiaries do not think long-term.

In Tabou Department, they do not trust the government. This is also due to the fact that this area is supportive of Gbagbo. So they prefer the NGOs.

He explains that every Tuesday, UNHCR opens their office and receives complaints from beneficiaries. Usually there are approx. 20 every Tuesday. Some will send several of their family members one by one to the office to ask the same question and thus put pressure on HCR.

He says that there is a cultural aspect in this way of behaving. The Kroumanes in Tabou are lazy. And the laziness is also apparent when looking outside the assistance.

The Kroumanes own land, but they do not cultivate it. His experience is that people in Guiglo work more, and foreigners in Tabou also have more motivation and get rich here. It is very difficult to get beneficiaries to contribute to the projects and they do not have valid excuses.

A young woman that earns 500 FCFA per day at a maquis, is also an example of laziness and dependency, according to him. She ought to be proactive and look for better opportunities.

He has heard people talking about Ivorians, who continuously cross the border and still get repatriated, but he does not have any proof of this. If he gets proof he will inform UNHCR Liberia. He thinks it is because they lack food in the camps.

He explains that there is too little assistance to the number of people in need. They have already received 1004 repatriates in Tabou in 2017, and they will construct only 73 houses. There are not enough schools and water pumps. He stresses that NGOs cannot do everything. They need the support of the Ivorian government.