THE PEACE BUILDING STORY

This paper analyzes how narratives around strategic planning frameworks for international peace building interventions are framed. It discusses the features of peace building stories and asks who the heroes, their allies and their enemies are in these stories. The paper illustrates that these narratives signal certain political positions, that they are subjective and often framed through the lens of modernist state-building theory. The researcher demonstrates that "peace building stories" are important resources for practitioners because they can be a source of new conflict but also a means for healing and mutual understanding in political dialogue and consensus building.

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A narrative policy analysis of strategic planning frameworks for international post-conflict peace building

Contents

1   Introduction[1]

There are innumerable actors engaging post-conflict contexts at the international, national and local level. Their activities target a broad range of political, economic, social and cultural agendas, spanning long periods of time and enduring particularly unstable conditions. Since the publication of *An Agenda for Peace*,[2] the international community has been driven to amalgamate all such activities into an increasingly broad and multidimensional enterprise labelled *post-conflict peacebuilding*. As time passed, additional elements related to this new concept continued to be identified and duly incorporated into the undertaking, seeing in practice the ever-widening scope and breadth of peacebuilding. In light of this, and after a string of less than successful experiences, practitioners and policy-makers alike recognized the need to tame such complexity and requested a more coherent master plan. In response to this demand strategic planning frameworks for international post-conflict peacebuilding (SFPs)[3] have been produced since the mid-nineties, by the UN, IFIs, governments of donor and conflict-affected countries, regional organizations and NGOs. By 2010 the g7+ group of fragile states had identified "the proliferation of strategic frameworks" as a significant challenge to peacebuilding.[4] Meanwhile, the European Parliament was considering drafting the EU's own SFP.[5]

SFPs are policy planning documents comprising analysis and recommendations. They belong to the genre of technical-administrative texts but, as many plans do, SFPs also make use of narrative devices usually associated with literary works. In trying to produce a coherent prioritization, phasing and sequencing of activities, they construct a plot with a beginning, middle and end. In the process of attempting to identify and coordinate multiple actors, SFPs make distinctions between main and secondary characters, and between heroes, villains, and victims. And in trying to give a common meaning and purpose to the myriad of tasks performed under the label of peacebuilding, these documents portray themes of progress and crisis against the backdrop of dramatic stories about the fight between good and evil.

This paper will try to illustrate how such *narrativity* present in SFPs signals certain political positions. To achieve this it will present an outline of the narrative analysis approach to policy planning. This is followed by a description of how the methodology has been adapted for this study to the requirements of SFPs. The analysis is then divided in two distinct parts. The first discusses some features of the characters in the "peacebuilding story": who are the heroes and their allies, the anti-subjects, the donor, and what does this signify. The second part deals with plot: how SFPs are structured around the triad *Security-Development-Political Reform*, and how this produces a set of recognizable stories. It is considered how the attempt to give coherence to a collection of literally hundreds of episodes, each of them an intricate narrative in itself, reflects the fact that the peacebuilding story may turn out to be a version of another one, namely the modernist statebuilding story. The paper ends with some reflections about how a narrative policy analysis can help us read and construct different discourses on peacebuilding.

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[1] The author wishes to acknowledge the helpful comments, suggestions, and corrections of Jeremy Tomlinson.

[2] UN, *An Agenda for Peace*.* (An asterisk denotes a reference to a SPF listed in the Annex instead of the general bibliography).

[3] "Peacebuilding" will be used as short for "international post-conflict peacebuilding," except for section 5.2.

[4] International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding, *Synthesis Report*, p. 31.

[5] Major and Môlling, *Towards an EU Peacebuilding Strategy?*

2   Narrative as a persuasive device of peacebuilding policy strategies

> "Sometimes reality is too complex for oral communication. But legend embodies it in a form which enables it to spread all over the world."
>
> Alpha 60, in *Alphaville*, J.-L. Godard, 1965.

Narratives and storytelling are important resources for the reflective and deliberative practitioner. First of all they are very much in the substance of peace work. Different narratives can be the source of controversy and conflict (for instance, historical and identity narratives), but also a means for healing (self-histories, truth and memory) and inter-subjective understanding (in political dialogue and consensus-building).

Moreover they can be used as a practical tool. Reflexive "practice stories"[6] help us make sense of the world and tame complexity, factoring in and negotiating experiences and affects. In addition, storytelling is not used only to talk about the past, but also the present and the future. Past experiences feed into plans, and different visions and future scenarios can be confronted, compared and collectively developed.

In sum, storytelling has both a cognitive function (it help us make sense of complex processes), and a communicative function (it allows for deliberation). Narrative policy analysis is mostly used to understand and overcome political controversies. This paper, however, will use the tool in an alternative capacity in order to decipher the institutional consensus around peacebuilding. Master narratives, or "common-sense stories" based on received wisdom, conceal ideas in what seems unproblematic discourse, and have the power to silence and obstruct the visibility of alternative standpoints.[7]

SFPs are mainly technical-administrative documents. They submit policy analyses and recommendations on how to achieve the objectives of those who commissioned them. They are drafted by expert practitioners, policy-makers and scholars, with the ambition of influencing further policy-making and planning by actors at all levels. They are not primarily or overtly concerned with advocacy or debate. In principle they are practical, hands-on, no-nonsense documents, usually accompanied by other technical-administrative texts such as handbooks, guidelines, reports on lessons learned, benchmarking and evaluation standards, time charts, budgets, etc. SFPs are not literary works, nor narratives of the historical kind. Their function is neither giving aesthetic pleasure nor explaining a sequence of past events, but rather to recommend a course of action, to put forward an agenda. In this sense they tell stories about what future events could or should be, but, by and large, they are arid reports in which most of what is commonly understood as *literariness* is totally absent.[8]

In peacebuilding discourse, security, humanitarian, and economic issues are strongly influenced by the managerial ethos. Even political matters such as elections, constitutional and justice system reforms, the rule of law, and institution-building in general are dealt with by experts in a techno-cratic fashion. Mark Duffield related this to the fact that the "new humanitarianism" of the nine-ties retreated to a technical-administrative discourse, precisely at the time that its political impact was fully recognized. From that point onwards a "restatement of technocratic authority in a me-

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[6] For an account of J. Forester's ideas on the "deliberative practitioner" see Throgmorton's "Planning as persuasive storytelling in the context of 'the Network Society'," *Planning Theory*.

[7] Sutton, "The policy process".

[8] For an introduction to the debate on whether and under what premises political discourse can be considered narrative, see Shenhav, "Thin and thick narrative analysis," *Narrative Inquiry*.

chanical universe" was made, where "politics [was] confined to the policy choices of aid agencies" and, hence, "politics [were] conflated with policy."[9] In addition, the end of the Cold War inaugurated a period of liberal consensus in which some political views were largely accepted as common sense and were thus naturalized, remaining concealed under the guise of pragmatic policy.

This approach has a long tradition in development theory and practice. The problem-solving attitude assumes the modernist view of policy planning as a technical, neutral, objective, and rational endeavour, in direct contrast to the messy and ideological field of politics.[10] But purely scientific and technical discourses can only circulate effectively within the boundaries of the community that produces them. As James Throgmorton argued: no matter how hard technical expert-practitioners try to remain in a (supposedly) neutral position, as soon as they want to be understood by policy-makers and lay audiences they are forced to use persuasive rhetoric. In this context it is apparent that the use of narrative in policy planning serves to moralize and persuade.[11] And although experts derive their status from the mastery of neutral and objective knowledge, "planners' stories about the future will necessarily have to begin from a contestable normative position."[12] That is precisely the reason why the use of narrative devices in these documents, their "participation without belonging—a taking part in without being part of" literary genres,[13] is the most relevant. Their restricted but undeniable narrativity conveys much about the moral and ideological driving forces behind what is presented instead as steadfastly technical, neutral and objective. Narrative policy analysis aims to unearth the ideological positions of such ostensibly technical texts.

Figure 1. Unlikely locations for storytelling?

Fig. 1.1. A fragment of the US *Task Framework* (see n. 27)
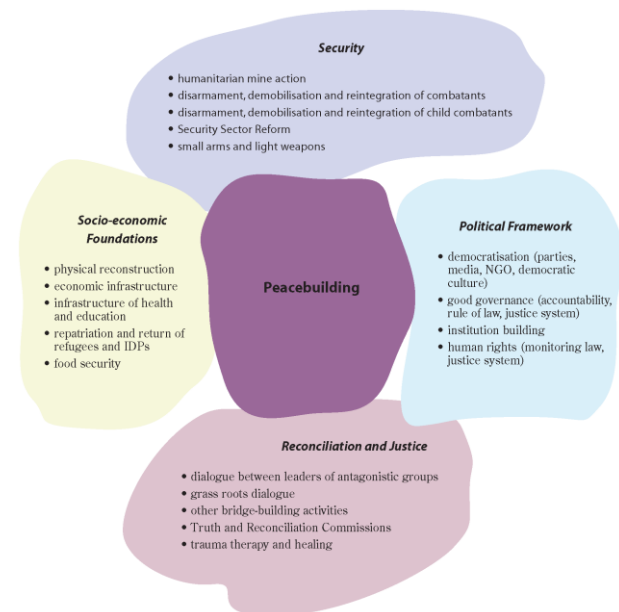
Fig. 1.2. The *Utstein Report*'s palette (see n. 14)

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[9] Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, pp. 75-76.

[10] See Stone, *Policy Paradox* and, in the context of peacebuilding, Richmond, *Peace in International Relations*, and Duffield, *Op.cit*.

[11] In the sense used by H. White in the context of historical narrative. See his "The value of narrativity in the representation of reality," *Critical Inquiry*.

[12] Throgmorton, *Op.cit.*, p. 29.

[13] Derrida, "The law of genre," *Critical Inquiry*, p. 59.

3   Brief outline of a method for the narrative policy analysis of SFPs

This paper considers a broadly defined corpus of SFPs. It relies on the *Utstein Report*'s (normative) definition, which distinguishes between two types of such policy documents: general and intervention strategies. A *general SFP* is one in which a donor government or international organization states—among other things—its own understanding of peacebuilding (including political principles and worldview), and hence the conditions for its potential involvement in a peacebuilding intervention. An *intervention SFP* is drafted by both international and local implementing agencies and they describe the specifics of peacebuilding in a particular country, and incorporate conflict analyses, planning mechanisms, phasing, goals, priorities and activities. General SFPs should inform intervention SFPs, but in many cases they have provided coherence to interventions *ex post facto*.[14]

The corpus analysed in this paper comprises 30 general and 13 intervention SFPs, supporting documents produced by the UN, World Bank, DAC/OECD and other international organizations and donor governments, as well as international compacts agreed between conflict-affected countries and the international community. (The complete list with references is provided as an Annex.)

The analysis of policies using techniques borrowed from literary criticism and theory has its origins in the otherwise unconnected work of Emery Roe and Deborah Stone.[15] Following Roe's use of this lens, narrative policy analysis has most often been used in political controversies with high levels of complexity, uncertainty and polarization–such as those around environmental, public health or regulatory issues. Certainly, peacebuilding is also a field where such conditions hold true.

Moreover SFPs sometimes show a distinct story-like structure. In the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan (KSIP), for instance, it is stated that,

> The KSIP sets out in detail *what* actions are designed to meet the standards ("Action"); *who* is responsible for undertaking that action ("Responsible Actor"); *who* will support the principal actor ("Supported by"), and; *when* the action is planned to take place ("Timeline").[16]

An example of which,

Standard	Action	Responsible Authority	Supported By	Timeline
6. All communities are proportionately represented at all levels of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government, in accordance with applicable legislation.	**6.1** Implementation of established administrative instruments for providing representation to communities.	Ministry of Public Services, Government	UNMIK (Pillar II)	Ongoing, administrative instruments established.
	6.2 Determination of minimum representation standards, based on population criteria, for municipal level offices, taking into account the right and the demand of refugees and IDPs to return.	Ministry of Public Services, Municipalities	UNMIK (Pillar II)	July 2004
	6.3 Development and implementation of plans designed to increase and encourage participation of the communities in the civil service	Ministry of Public Services, UNMIK (Pillar II)	UNMIK (Pillar II)	September 2004 and onwards

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[14] Smith, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding*, pp. 11-13.
[15] Roe, *Narrative Policy Analysis*; Stone, *Op.cit.*
[16] UN, *Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan** (emphasis in the original).

This is then, in essence, a script. And while not all SFPs conform to this pattern, it is still possible to apply a similar elementary structure to their contents based on actions, actors and time sequences.

There is a long tradition of narrative formalization that started in the 1920s with the seminal work of Vladimir Propp on Russian folk-tales. It attempts to find the minimal elements of texts and their relationships—i.e. the structure, or "grammar"—in order to compare stories, and detect patterns and deviations. Although in the last decades this field has been expanded by the consolidation of Narratology as a discipline, the attempts at summarization of natural language by researchers in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and the Cognitive Sciences, and the general "narrative turn" in all disciplines of knowledge, there is no generally agreed method to formalize and compare narratives.

The methodological approach of this paper draws from several sources. To begin with it is based in the SAO (subject-action-object) structure, or semantic triplet, by which the basic narrative unit— the *event*—joins an *agent* (subject) with its *goal* (object) through an *action*, and thus represents a change of state. In this context actions can always be synthesized as the aspiration towards a particular goal, and are marked by verbs such as *want, must, is, do, know, can* and their combinations and opposites.[17] Below the teleological relationship between subject and object is represented as two points ("nodes") connected by a link ("edge"):

event

peacebuilding "activity," "task" or "initiative"
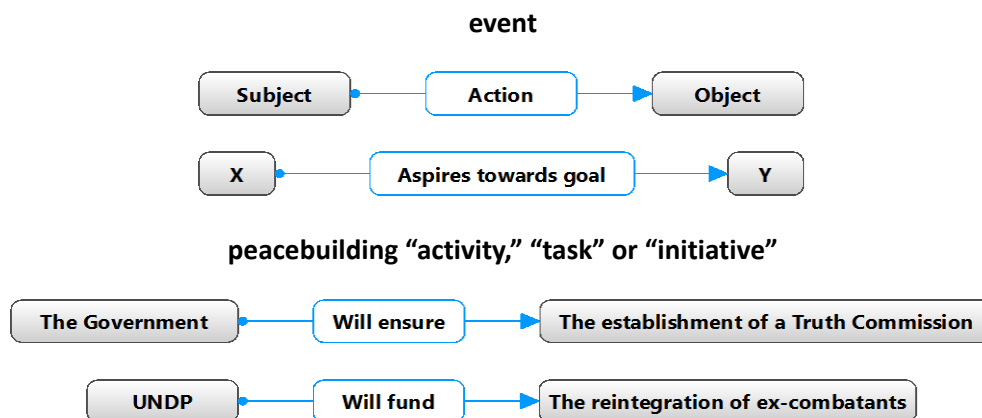
Actions are also connected among themselves when causing, enabling, or being sub-goals of each other. Actors are connected by membership to larger groups:

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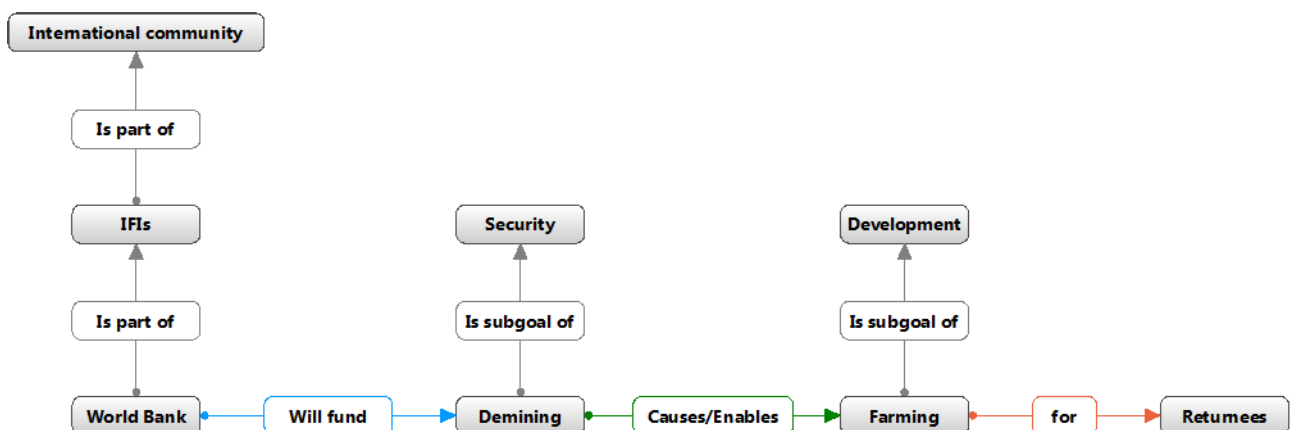
[17] Bal, *Narratology*, p. 205.

This basic schema is expanded by an actantial model, i.e. the identification of further types of actors or teleological functions that complement the subject/object pair: helper, opponent, donor, receiver, and anti-subject (see section 4 below for definitions and discussion on actants). This is convenient for our field of research since identification and assignment of roles for different actors is one of the main concerns of SFPs and peacebuilding in general.
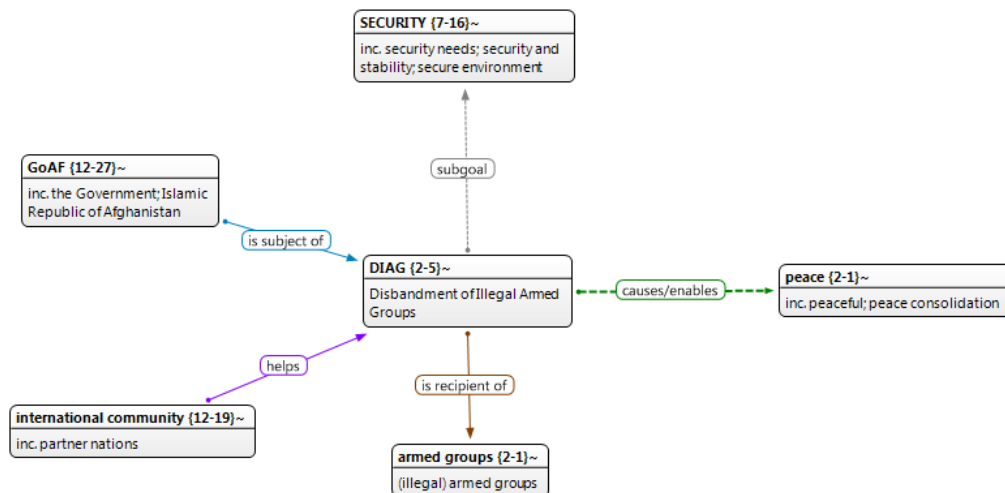
Formalization for the comparison and aggregation of different narratives also requires a rigorous method for the indexation of concepts. Concepts which are synonyms need to be integrated and homonyms segregated, within and across texts. The same applies to relations between concepts.[18] A related decision involves the level of analysis of events, and therefore the general level of integration of concepts.

Partial, redundant, and complex, the story in a SFP cannot be represented in a tidy flowchart; instead at the aggregate level it requires a network narrative analysis (see Fig. 2, next page).

Lastly, note that narrative analysis is never able to determine what the *correct* or *true* meaning of the text is—it simply submits an interpretation of it. Even so, this interpretation is one which is rigorous and therefore discussable.[19]

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[18] See Popping, "Knowledge graphs and network text analysis," *Social Science Information*. Software tools used were Atlas.ti 6.2 for text coding and basic manipulation, and Gephi 0.8.1 and Visone 2.6.3 for graph analysis.

[19] See Bal, *Op.cit*, p. 29.
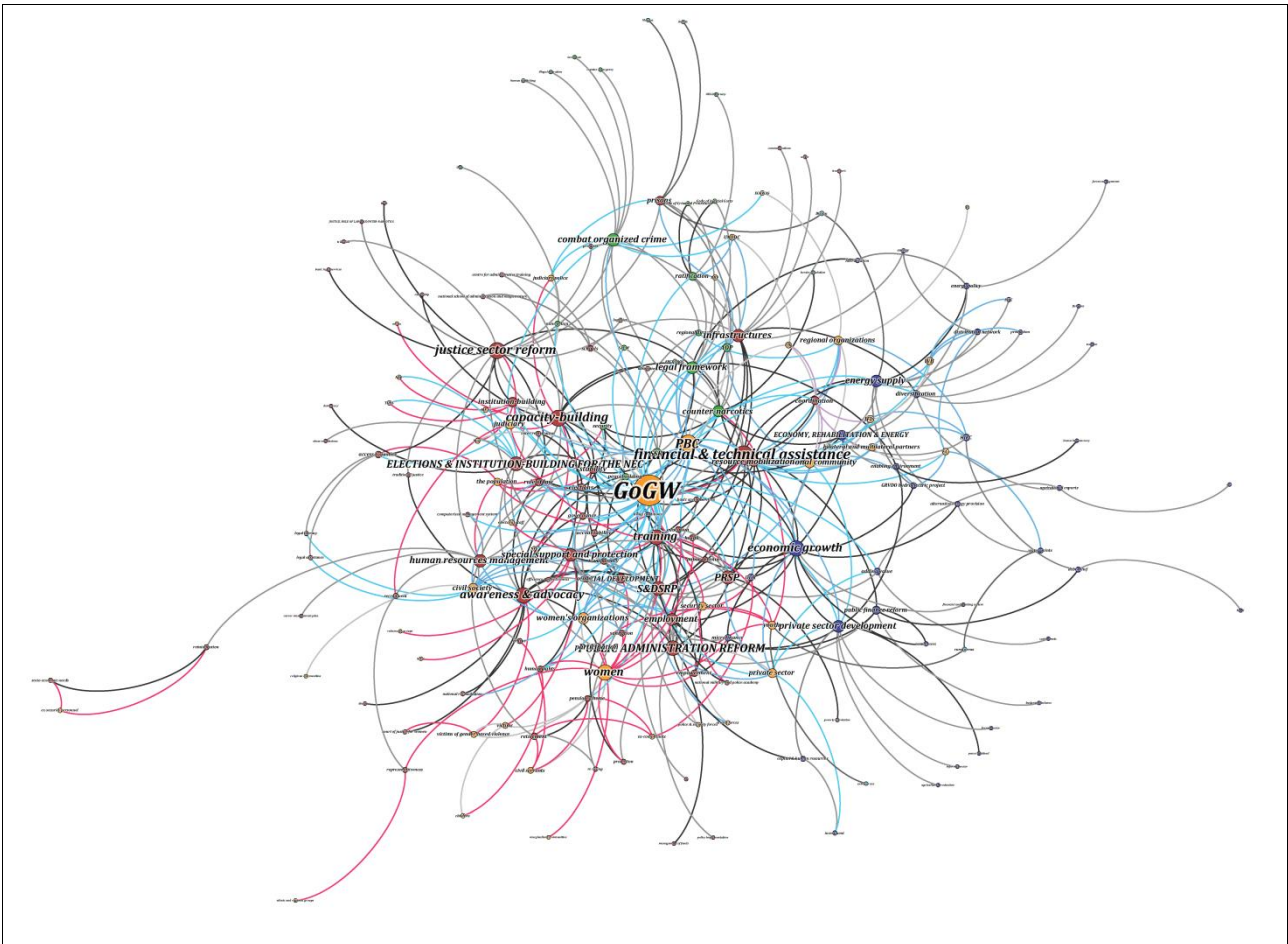
Figure 2. A narrative network of the UN SFP for Guinea-Bissau (see n. 47)
Orange nodes are actors; other, goals and sub-goals. Edge colours represent different types of relations among them.

4   Some familiar characters in the peacebuilding story

> "Thus rode the King into Nottingham Town on that bright afternoon in the early fall season; and none rejoiced more than Robin Hood and his merry men to see him come so royally unto his own."
>
> H. Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood,* 1883.

4.1   Who are the heroes and who their allies?

The following is a simplified classification of *actants* in general SFPs. Actants are actors or groups of actors that share the same relationship with the goal.[20] Categories are self-explanatory:

Subject or hero ....*"Peacebuilders," i.e., international practitioners or the international community*

Object or goal ....*Durable peace*

Receiver or victim ....*"Beneficiaries," the population of conflict-affected countries, or a subset of it (e.g. "vulnerable groups")*

Opponent or villain.........................*"Spoilers"*

Helpers or allies ....*"Partners": donor countries, IFIs, INGOs, the states and civil societies of conflict-affected countries*

Almost everyone involved in peace work would take issue with this classification of international peacebuilders as heroes, while national authorities and civil society organizations are their allies and the conflict-affected populations are labelled "beneficiaries." It seems also to run counter the spirit of general SFPs themselves, which more often than not explicitly honour, at least on paper, the principle of national ownership and affirm the primacy of local stakeholders in peacebuilding activities. From this perspective, the proper role of the international community is to facilitate and support such efforts (the helper), while national or local agents take the lead (the subject/hero). However narrative reasoning does not lend itself to this interpretation and this is precisely why it is an instrumental methodological approach.

To solve the apparent contradiction the analyst should begin with a different, simpler classification of actors—that between *main* and *secondary* (or *supporting*) characters. Main characters are easily recognized because they appear more often in the story and they perform more important actions. There have been fairly successful attempts to automatize the detection of main characters in novels by measuring the frequency in which their names are mentioned. The following is a computer-generated representation of the "distribution of narrative attention" for the over one hundred characters in Charles Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*:[21]

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[20] Bal., *Op.cit*.
[21] Sack, "Simulating plot," p. 158.

Figure 1: Distribution of Narrative Attention (Frequency of Name Mentions by Character) – *The Pickwick Papers*

Total = 109 Characters

$y = 4489.5x^{-1.368}$
$R^2 = 0.97179$

Primary Characters
(>100 Name Mentions)
15% of Characters

Secondary Characters
(10 to 100 Name Mentions)
59% of Characters

Tertiary Characters
(5 to 10 Name Mentions)
26% of Characters
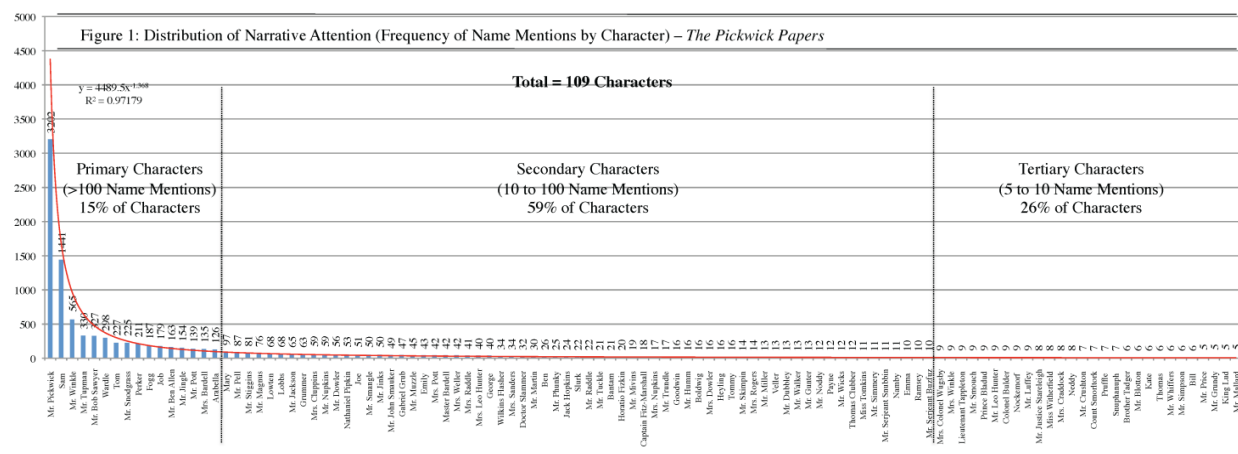
It is possible to apply the same method to SFPs. Figure 3, below, provides a clear picture of who the main character is in the African Union's *PCRD framework*: the AU itself.[22] But if, according to the same text, "national *leadership* applies to all aspects of PCRD" and the only duty of implementing international organizations is "to *support*,"[23] why is it that the former character enjoys less attention than the latter?
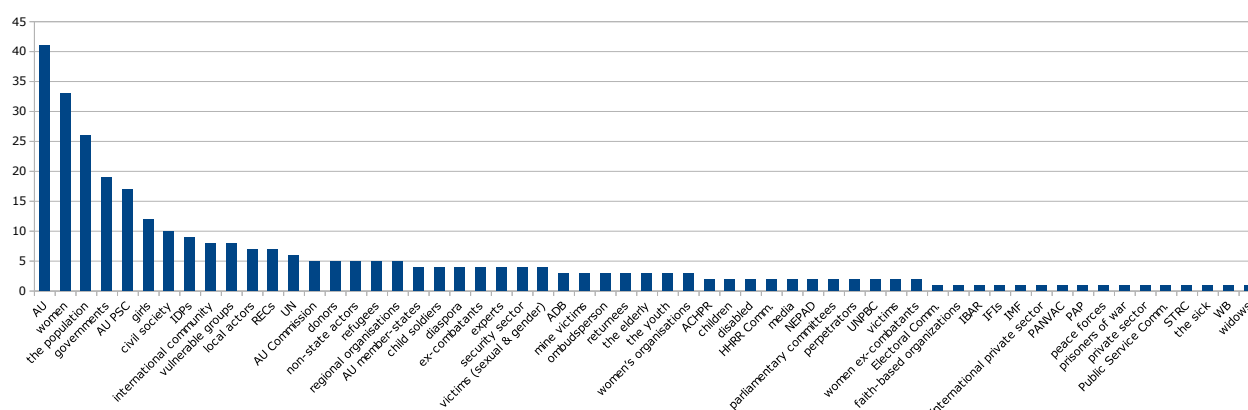
Figure 3. Distribution of narrative attention for AU's PCRD framework (see n. 22)

The fact is that in general SFPs international practitioners are main characters; irrespective their primary actions are to *provide*, *implement*, *ensure, establish* a particular objective which propagates peace ("*to do* actions"), or to *assist*, *promote* and *support* such objectives ("*to help* actions"). A suitable literary analogy is *Robin Hood*. His overall goal is to help the King return to England, which is achieved at the end of the tale. Robin Hood is thus a mere supporter while the King is the real leader, the truly important figure. Even so, in this context one would never think of the King as the main character or the hero of the story; but rather of Robin, whose pursuit of a goal (to help the King and others) is the focus of the narrative. Likewise general SFPs tell us a story about international practitioners who pursue peace by helping others (the national actors), in turn helping others (the conflict-affected population).

Why is it relevant to know who the narrative main character is (as opposed to the real main actor)? Earlier it was shown that the main character can be identified using the rough indicator of counting

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[22] AU, *Draft Policy Framework for Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD)*.*
[23] *Ibid.*, $8 and $81 (emphasis added).

the frequency of their appearance. Important to note is that because of this fact (numerous appearances), the reader comes to know more about the main character(s) than others in the narrative. For example more details are exposed of the main characters' backgrounds, physical and psychological features, mind states, motivations, and relations with other characters. Authors of fictional or historical narratives accomplish this by applying *concretizing* devices, whereby they *dissect* and *contextualize* the main characters in great depth–they might describe these figures' outer and inner selves, families, jobs, financial situation, or even childhood. During the course of the narrative the reader should also expect to see some transformation in the characters as a result of confronting challenges or dilemmas (often introduced using "their own" voice). Overall, works of literature have proven time and time again that main characters must be rounded, while secondary characters are often flat and superficial.

Likewise, in the *PCRD Framework* many constitutive parts of the AU are mentioned, as well as related institutions and a list of allies, each with their own function. Among other trivial details the reader is even introduced to the AU's previous identity, the OAU. In contrast it is disclosed that civil society is composed by faith-based groups, the media, and women's groups, "among others." In terms of the distribution of narrative attention civil society does not fare too bad, but their *concretization* is not at all impressive.

4.2 Who are the victims?

SFPs avoid referring to *beneficiaries* and instead prefer to use the term *stakeholders*. A narrative analysis reveals that this behaviour still falls short of ensuring the proper attention is given to some agents. Looking at the peacebuilding story objectively, recipients or beneficiaries should be considered main characters. Even if fundamentally passive, these actors show a great deal of diversity (e.g. different "specific needs" and expectations) and behavioural complexity (compare refugees, ex-combatants and women). Every SFP which has been analysed tends towards including at the very least women, children, ex-combatants, refugees and internally displaced persons among the recipient population. Other commonly identified beneficiary groups are victims, girls, widows, the rural poor, ethnic and religious minorities, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, etc.

Yet even within this classification of character type (victims), there are nuances. A sharp contrast can be seen between how civil society and women are illustrated. Women, despite being receivers rather than subjects in the text, still make for a compelling main character. The *PCRD Framework* will inform the reader that women are a group of the population who have special needs, and frame them as possible returnees, ex-combatants, widows, girls, and victims of gender-based and sexual abuse. They are also said to be an organized part of civil society and thus are not portrayed simply as victim-recipients, but as active agents in peacebuilding. It is also mentioned that their relationship with perpetrators of abuses and ex-combatants can be troublesome, this latter group being one to which they can simultaneously belong. As such—and despite the scattered, telegraphic references—the technical reports are still able to paint a relatively elaborate portrait of women, with multiple facets and even some ambiguities.

In contrast, civil society (but also the private sector and, in some cases, national authorities) is treated as a bland, under-defined character. Unlike in the discussion of women, the reader is not introduced in depth to their internal composition, motivations, problems, contradictions, dynamic changes, etc. Civil society is instead treated as a single, homogeneous entity of flat character, and implied to be a constant whose every component is well-disposed to the hero's quest. While this assumption should be seen as problematic, the reader is predisposed to accepting such ungrounded assumptions as valid because of repeated exposure to generalized conceptions of

characters and their identities across texts. In a work of fiction, a character in black leather with a scar on his face is quickly accepted as the villain and is expected to be plotting or perpetrating wrongdoing—this type of character is therefore termed 'stock', in that certain attributes and are treated as given. In line with this logic, the "vibrant civil society" described in SFPs is also akin to a stock character. The assumed qualities of the character in this instance are that the group craves participatory politics, liberal democracy, reconciliation, is inclined to help all in their community and are active users of social networking tools. By accepting this conception, the reader automatically comes to view those civil society groups who do not conform to these standards simply as "communities" or "minority groups," part of the passive population and net recipients of sensitization, dialogue and reconciliation activities.

A narrative analysis help us see behind some of the rhetorical assertions of SFPs. Simply put, being an agent, even a "key" agent, does not automatically make an actor a main character. A cursory statement about the general relevance of a given actor can amount to not much in terms of action and description, like the King in Robin Hood's tale. What one should expect and aim to achieve in our own narratives, is that key agents are *also* treated as main characters. In narrative fiction *knowing more* about the characters results in more verisimilitude; in policy narratives it may translate to closer attention to real people. This is an imperative step in refining the ability of SFPs to actually target and reach those in need, and—most importantly—to do so without constructing the relations of actors on the hero-victim premise.

Usually subjects are also recipients of the object they aspire to. In love stories the protagonist wants his or her object of desire (the other person), for him or herself. In contrast, in detective stories the hero wants to solve a crime for the victim, or society, and the recipient of the object (the truth, or retribution) is someone else. The peacebuilding story is undeniably of the latter kind, and not just the general narrative, but every single fragment of it. Actions are performed by someone (usually the international community or national authorities), for someone else (usually the population). On occasion these characters can be both subjects and recipients, but this is not very common. For the most part a specific set of actors plays the role of subjects while a different one that of recipients—these are called *net subjects* and *net recipients*. Looking towards the *Afghanistan Compact* the typical distribution of these roles in an intervention SFP can be seen (observe Fig. 5 for cumulative distribution and Fig. 4 for disaggregated distribution, next page): the state and the international community are main characters (hero and helper, respectively), and the population is the recipient, with civil society only playing a small part. State institutions are also recipients who receive as a result of their own actions or the international community's.

This is then, from the perspective of the Afghan government and the international community, a story about selflessness, altruism and helping others. However imagine what the peacebuilding story would look like if instead of these subject/heroes doing good things for others (the victims), the victims would do them for themselves. Would that not be the right form for a story about true bottom-up, locally-owned and empowering peacebuilding? In narrative terms, selfless heroes make passive recipients, and no matter how often SFPs declare the rightness of people-centred, participative, bottom-up peacebuilding, a close narrative and grammatical analysis shows that the story most often runs contrary to this sentiment. In the final analysis, states and the international community are betrayed by their epics.
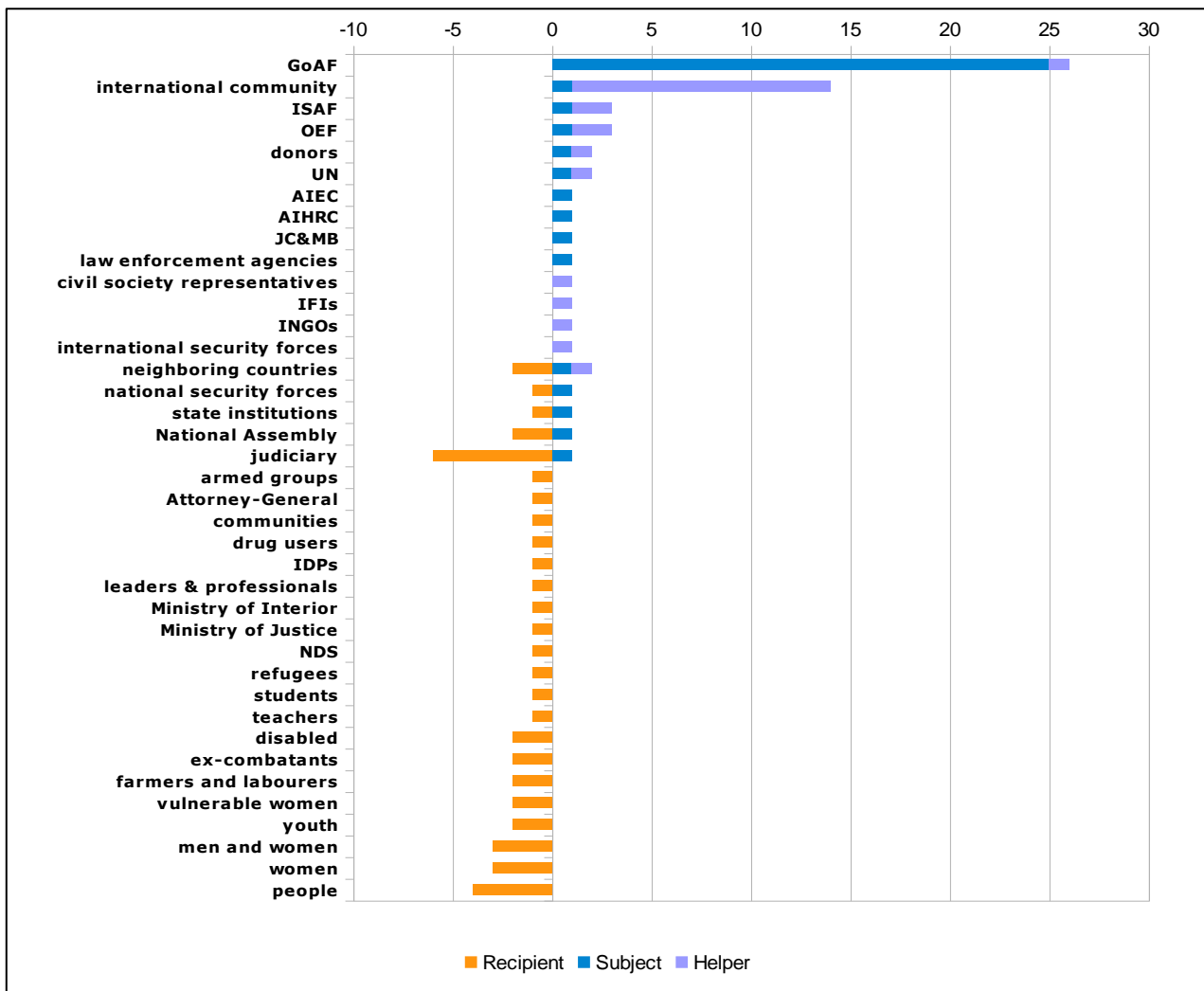
Figure 4. Afghanistan Compact (2006), main actant roles (I)

Amount of events (activities) that have a given actor as their recipient, subject or helper. Many actions have no clearly stated recipient. While it may be assumed that the population at large ("people") is the implied actor in these cases, they have nonetheless been excluded because of their ambiguity.

Abbreviations: GoAF: Government of Afghanistan; ISAF, International Security Assistance Force; OEF, Operation Enduring Freedom; UN, United Nations; AIEC, Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission; AIHRC, Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission; JC&MB, Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board; IFIs, international financial institutions; INGOs, international non-governmental organizations; IDPs, internally displaced persons; NDS, National Directorate of Security.
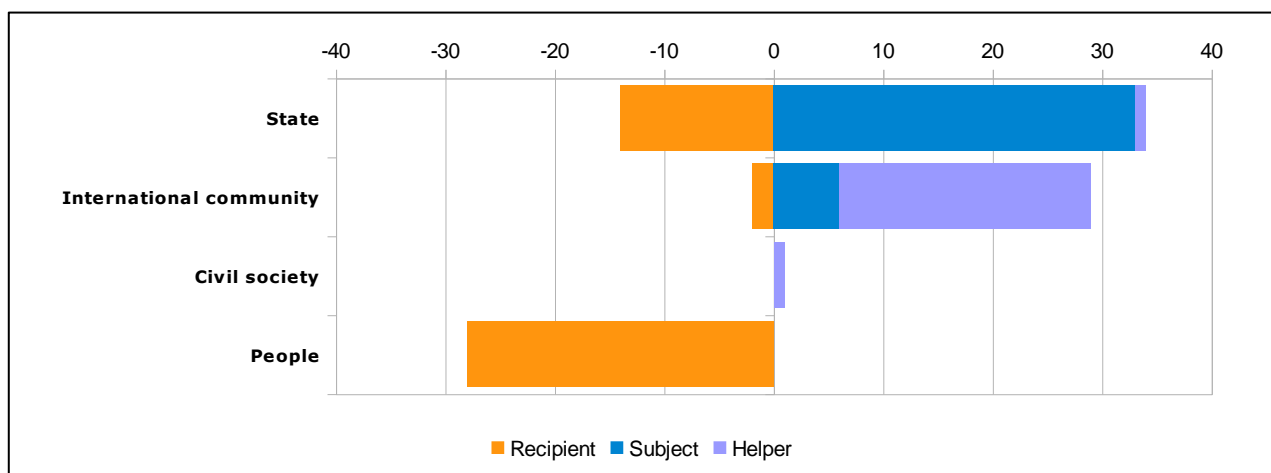
Figure 5. Afghanistan Compact (2006), main actant roles (II)

Apart from the obvious integration of concepts, International community includes neighbouring countries (hence the recipient values), State includes the JC&MB.

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4.3   Partners: allies or anti-subjects?

The *anti-subject* is an autonomous character with an altogether different goal to the one the hero wants to attain, the villain seeks to frustrate, and the victims expect to benefit from. As they follow their parallel course of action anti-subjects can willing or unwillingly help or hinder the hero's quest. In the peacebuilding story the paradigmatic anti-subject is the private sector. The autonomy of their goals is widely assumed, as it is a fact that during the pursuit of their business they can worsen conflict or be a benefactor for peace.

Similarly it is common to consider humanitarian and development workers as anti-subjects. Tools such as the Do No Harm framework are specifically designed to deal with this situation: they help avoid inadvertent damage caused by the pursuit of different goals and, hopefully, turn the resulting actions into ones which work to the advantage of peacebuilders. As this transformation of characters certainly makes for good storytelling, the peacebuilding story often includes accounts of how the anti-subjects can be turned into loyal allies. But as long as autonomous goals are assumed, (at least in narrative terms) these partners will never be true allies—rather they will remain anti-subjects.

4.4   Who is the donor? The *framework-as-power artefact*

Most interesting in the analysis of narratives is the figure of the *donor* (also called *sender, dispatcher* or *power*).[24] The donor is someone or something that provides the hero with, or is in itself, the means (the power) to attain the object.

The differences between helper and donor are considerable. A hero may have many allies (or helpers), but usually just one donor. The help of the allies is needed and welcomed but never sufficient by itself, while the donor's support is crucial. Importantly, the donor does not have to be a person (for instance, detective Sherlock Holmes' donor/power comes from his wits). In addition, similarly to allies not being a significant help relative to the role of the donor figure, villains (or opponents) are never up to the task of challenging the plans in the same manner as the mirror image of the donor—the *anti-donor*—. The anti-donor is often represented as a *lack* of something, or a need.

Who or what is the donor/power in SFPs? What are the means that the heroes need to possess so they can act? Contrary to what one may first think this role is not fulfilled by donor governments, nor military forces or local power brokers. Central as these and other actors' access to particular resources are, as it is always their help that is summoned, this is never done in a way which implies that the whole enterprise depends on them. Instead every SFP states that, despite the best efforts of everyone involved, what is lacking in peacebuilding is coordination and coherence.[25] That is, in SFPs *the strategic framework itself* is presented as the donor/power. Like in folk-tales, where the donor supplies the hero with some sort of magical device, a similar ritual is often performed by SFPs—the experts who have drafted the policy provide the practitioners with a necessary tool or a guideline to pursue their goal.[26] This ritual is referred to in the few times that the international

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[24] We remain within the actantial model proposed by Bal, *Op.cit.*, based on Greimas'. There are slight differences on how the donor/sender is defined by other authors. Cf. Chandler, *Semiotics*, and Martin and Ringham, *Dictionary of Semiotics*.

[25] See Paris, "Understanding the 'coordination problem' in postwar statebuilding".

[26] It has even been argued that in the modernist policy narrative "planning is the hero, 'slaying the dragons of greed and irrationality and if not always triumphing, at least always noble, on the side of angels." Leonie Sandercock quoted in Throgmorton, *Op.cit.*, p. 22.

community appears as a recipient, which is in relation to capacity-building activities fostering coordination and strategic planning, i.e. obtaining the magic tool of SFPs.

Potential spoilers such as combatants not yet demobilized, perpetrators of abuses, political entrepreneurs, and others are featured within the embedded plots of each activity (if at all). In this position they may become candidates to derail the activity, however never appearing to present any grave danger to the peacebuilding effort as a whole. In fact opponents of any sort are strikingly absent in most SFPs. As key political documents, this can be laudable. Instead of name-naming, finger-pointing, and bestowing a too important role to opponents and obstructionists, SFPs are written with a positive, affirmative tone. But from a narrative point of view it does not quite make sense, as in any narrative there *must* be an anti-donor (or at least a respectable "enemy"). Indeed upon closer examination it is not hard to discover one in the peacebuilding story; localized, individualized problems and challenges are put together into a bigger, compound monster—complexity. Complexity, and especially *political* complexity, is the main foe of policy-making, and the way to deal with it and avoid failure is the policy strategic framework.

Using this lens of analysis, there appears to be complete agreement on the role of complexity as the anti-donor in the texts reviewed. If this interpretation is indeed a valid one, the narrative of SFPs is therefore compelling—if somewhat clumsy—for their audience regarding to the need to understand and combat this threat. The solution of the experts, who double as narrators in these documents, is to present their own policy framework as the donor/power and the narratées (the audience) as the heroes. In addition the SFP makes use of predictive storytelling in order to further persuade and legitimize itself, making claims along the lines of: "without me, the whole enterprise which you are embarking upon will fail."

Thus, the final cast in the peacebuilding story is as follows:

Table 1. The final cast of SFPs		
	General SFPs	**Intervention SFPs**
Subject or hero	*International peacebuilders: international practitioners or the International Community*	*Governments*
Object or goal	*Durable peace*	
Opponents or villains	*"Spoilers"*	
Helpers or allies (in order of relevance)	*"Partners": National authorities Civil society*	*"Partners": International partners Civil society*
Donor/power	*The experts/their strategic framework*	
Anti-donor	*Complexity and the lack of a strategic framework*	
Receivers or victims	*"Beneficiaries" or "stakeholders": the population of conflict-affected countries, or a subset of it, e.g. "vulnerable groups"*	
Anti-subject	*Private sector, humanitarian and development workers*	

To sum up this section, SFPs depict stories of subjects doing things not for themselves but for others, which inevitably creates passive recipients. General SFPs commonly assign the role of subject/hero to international peacebuilders, while intervention SFPs tend to portray national governments as the hero and the international community as their ally (although this varies across and within texts). There is less variation in terms of recipients, as this role consistently falls upon the population and/or vulnerable groups and, to a lesser degree, national governments. These

three actors (the international community, national government, and the population) are the main characters of the story, while other agents such as civil society, the private sector, or the donor countries (as distinct to the institutional bodies and agencies of the international community) play nothing but ancillary roles. Women constitute an occasional exception, being granted both the status of a main character and some amount of agency. In addition, on the whole the policy story in SFPs tends to contradict their frequent and explicitly stated disposition towards bottom-up, locally-owned, and participative development and peacebuilding. Finally, SFPs make use of the *framework-as-power artefact*, by presenting themselves as the necessary power to overcome political complexity.

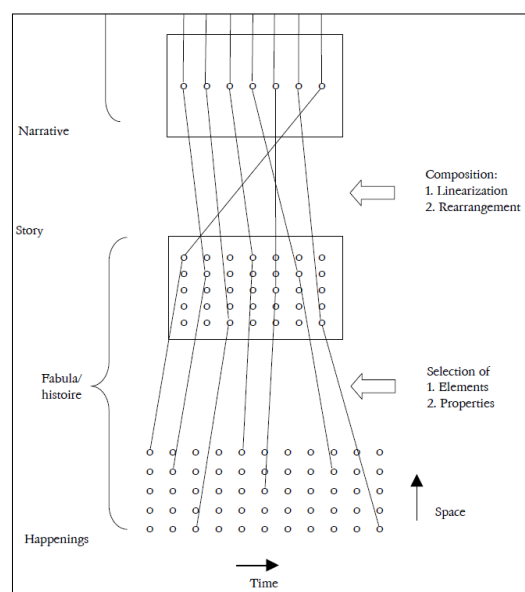# 5   The emplotment of complexity: peacebuilding as modernization

"The plot thickens"

Sherlock Holmes, in *A Study in Scarlet*, A. Conan Doyle, 1887.

The number of activities or, rather, the general types of activities (e.g. "de-mining," "strengthening of the media," "repatriation of refugees"...) in SFPs is huge. The most detailed among the SFPs reviewed, such as the UN *Inventory* and the US *Task Framework*,[27] list over one thousand different activities. While not all of these are meant to be implemented in every context, implementation of any single activity would all the same involve an array of instances. More commonly, elaborated intervention SFPs such as the Kosovo SIP list hundreds of particular tasks. Indeed most SFPs settle on somewhere in the range of 100-200 activities.

Implementation of these plans cannot be easy, and thinly disguised frustration at the sheer complexity of the task is a staple of SFPs. Even so the complexity of their conceptualization should be considered too. What does planning for hundreds of different initiatives that aim to transform whole societies entail? Policy planning abhors complexity and narrative is one way to counter it, by dealing with chaos through simplification and turning complicated and uncertain choices into persuasive and convincing policies. But how exactly do SFPs accomplish this?

Historical narrative is useful to ponder the relationship between complexity and planning. Historians confront a continuous reality from which they select a given set of events to be told (see Fig. 6). Events are then *emploted* by the historian, that is, through personal prioritization, organization and linearization, they are turned into meaningful plots with recognizable characters with goals and motivations, a thread giving it overall unity, and a moral for the story.[28] In a classical example, the "the king died" and "the queen died" are two events (*happenings*) resulting from and causing an infinite

Figure 6. Ideal narrative constitution
The "ideal narrative constitution" goes from bottom to top. Most *happenings* of the real (or imaginary) world are left out when selected for the *story*. Events are then rearranged in order to tell a linear *narrative*. Fragment of the figure in Schmid, *Narratology*, p. 193.

chain of events. The historian selects these two events as significant, and arranges (connects or selects a connection between) them logically or chronologically into a *story* "the King died, then the Queen died of grief." Events are thus emploted and given sense and meaning (*story*). Finally, the historian can rearrange the whole narrative for different purposes, "the Queen died of grief after the King died" (*narrative text*).[29]

The type of planning and scenario-making which SFPs undertake is similar to this.[30] The main difference is that the world from which events are being selected does not yet exist (but it is not an

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[27] UN, *An Inventory of Post-Conflict Peace-Building Activities*; CSIS/AUSA, *Post-Conflict Reconstruction. Task Framework*.*

[28] See White, *Op.cit.*

[29] The example, although not the same exact analysis, is E.M. Forster's, *Aspects of the Novel*.

[30] See the "planning framework narrative" in the US Government's *Draft Planning Framework for Reconstruction, Stabilization, and Conflict Transformation*,* Appendix D, an 11-pages plan for the reconstruction of imaginary

imaginary one either as in narrative fiction, it is a realizable world). SFPs, and policy planning in general, use as their level of reference the "realm of the possible." For example, the UN Terminological Database defines *scenario* as,

> a plausible and often simplified description of how the future may develop, based on a coherent and internally consistent set of assumptions about key driving forces (e.g., rate of technology change, prices) and relationships. Scenarios are neither predictions nor projections and sometimes may be based on a narrative storyline.[31]

In traditional storytelling even the most complex narratives must be represented in a linear way (a *storyline*), if anything, because oral and written literature have to utter one sentence after another. That is, the contents of the story may not be linear, but texts have clear beginnings and ends. On the contrary, SFPs make ample use of tables, charts, and diagrams to consciously defy linearity, and hence shunning "narrativity" in its traditional, narrowest sense.[32] Consider, for instance, the "peacebuilding palette" of the *Utstein Report* (Fig. 1.2 on p. 4, above), in which the arrangement and even selection of events is left to the discretion of the reader. However this paper will try to show that despite explicitly discouraging linear interpretations, SFPs nevertheless present a recognizable plot based on patterned causal, temporal and symbolic (re)arrangements. Their *theme*—progress and development—is time-bounded by its very nature. Plans also present *narrative unity* (beginning, middle, and end/closure) through phasing, and a non-trivial degree of *causality* exists nonetheless, which is complemented by semantic relations such as *explanation* and *resemblance* (achieved by mirroring events). These factors produce a circular or, rather, spring-like narrative structure. It will be argued that this structure is common to many historical and political master narratives, of which the peacebuilding story is in itself one instance and a constitutive part. The following sections will elaborate on each of these elements and how they build upon each other.

5.1   Collective narratives and the triadic SAO pattern

Earlier, the event composed by a subject-action-object (SAO) triad was presented as the smallest narrative unit (see section 3, above)—there is an initial state of affairs, an action upon it, and a resulting end state. Even the smallest of events present a tiny narrative, through the change represented by its inherent beginning, middle and end. Single events are embedded into larger activities and processes, and in turn these are folded into episodes and sub-plots, each one of them repeating the same triadic structural pattern. Every action, big or small, achieves something—a step towards a superior goal and, ultimately, the final objective. This creates a structure of "tales within tales within tales."[33]

Finding the "top-level tale" in literary or film works is straightforward, since one narrative corresponds to a single work (a book, a movie) or a well-defined set of them (as in a trilogy). Political narratives, however, are more difficult to delimit. Speeches, reports, policy plans, etc., are usually fragmentary and incomplete. Often it is said that a given speech or document *belongs* to such and such narrative, that is, it reflects and contributes to an existing, dynamic collective narrative. Likewise, SFPs build on previous reports, adding some contribution to the planning

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country Erewan.

[31] DGACM, *United Nations Multilingual Terminology Database*.

[32] Modern narrative has put to the test the boundaries of this limitation, for instance, in audiovisual narratives through the use of split screens (narrating events simultaneously), or, in literature, using hypertext (freeing the reader from a fixed order of reading and even from pre-established start and end points).

[33] An expression of Propp. See Alker, "Fairy tales, tragedies and world histories ," *Behaviormetrika*; Franzosi, "From words to numbers," *Sociological Methodology*.

literature but assuming the main tenets of cited and uncited texts. A single document is not enough and we need to analyze, therefore, collections of documents to find about their narrative.

5.2   Progress and decay: curves and crises in getting to Denmark

The international post-conflict peacebuilding story[34] is a component of the larger peacebuilding story and its symmetric mirror image (the "curve" or "arc of conflict," seen below in Fig. 7). Post-conflict peacebuilding was born into international intervention literature as a postscript to the scheme in three "acts," Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking, and Peacekeeping.[35] However as the concept gained ground, peacekeeping lost some of its relevance and the framework reverted to a pre-, during, and post-conflict model.
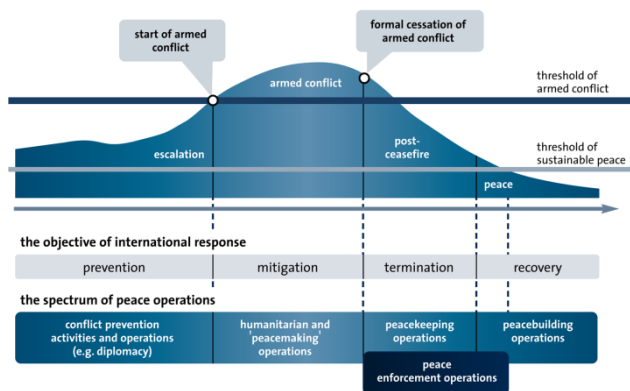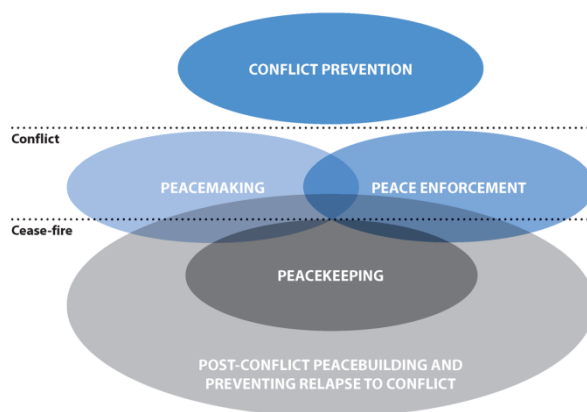

Fig. 7. Conflict and the spectrum of peace operations[36]
The post-conflict phase expanded and further dissected

Fig. 8. Spectrum of peace and security activities[37]
Back to a three-stage model

By many accounts, as the diagram from the *Capstone Doctrine* shows (Fig. 8), prevention should reappear at the end of the process, and in doing so confers the peacebuilding narrative some circularity. (This issue will be further examined in section 5.5). Nonetheless, what is certain is that, as a segment of the arc of conflict, post-conflict peacebuilding is obviously a story about recovery which cannot be understood without the preceding parts of the narrative (war, chaos, under-development, and so on).

This notion of crisis and renewal has been criticized as simplistic, and more nuanced accounts of political and economic processes during conflict have been put forward.[38] But the idea of a blank slate revealed after armed conflict has been crucial in the construction of the international post-conflict peacebuilding story, which fits into what Stone calls "stories of change."[39] There are two basic types: decline and rising. Peacebuilding is mainly told as a story of rising; that is, a propitious tale about opportunity, progress, and development. Stories of decline rely on the prediction that a crisis, breakdown, or collapse is imminent and a given path must be taken if such fate is to be averted. Surely, peacebuilding can take this form too, exploiting the ever-present threats of a return to conflict, state failure, and so on. In rapidly-changing environments the norm is that both

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[34] We temporarily switch to usage of the full term.

[35] As presented in UN's 1992 *Agenda for Peace*.* The concept, needless to say, has its own history before that in the peace research literature.

[36] Gleichmann, Odenwald, Steenken and Wilkinson, *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration*, p. 18.

[37] DPKO, *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*,* p. 19.

[38] See, for instance, Cramer, *Violence in Developing Countries*; Duffield, "Social reconstruction and the radicalization of development," *Development and Change*.

[39] Stone, *Op.cit.*, p. 160.

themes coexist, even fuse together. The "stymied progress story" variation, for instance, runs like this: "In the beginning, things were terrible. Then things got better, thanks to a certain someone. But now somebody or something is interfering with our hero, so things are going to get terrible again."[40] These are universal themes in policy planning, not exclusive to peacebuilding. Familiar stories about economic development, democratization and the arc of conflict easily combine to comprise the modernist developmental narrative.[41]

Ultimately, the plots of SFPs are different adaptations, improvements and additions to the story about "getting to Denmark." The phrase coined by Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock attempts to narrativize development through the image of a journey, alluding to the undertaking of an up-and-coming under-developed country who aspires to a Denmark-like polity: peaceful, prosperous and free.[42] As Francis Fukuyama noted, an exemplary story about how Denmark got to be Denmark may be persuasive but misleading, as it conceals the conflicts, difficulties, arbitrariness, and role of chance in the history of the European country.[43] Even so the myth imposes itself and precludes less appealing stories to become widely accepted narratives.

5.3 Phasing peacebuilding

SFPs use two devices in order to internally structure their policy story: phasing and clustering. Consider the following fragment of the US *Task Framework*:[44]

JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

→ → → → → →

	INITIAL RESPONSE	TRANSFORMATION	FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY
	Goal: Develop mechanisms for addressing past and ongoing grievances	**Goal: Build legal system and process for reconciliation**	**Goal: Functioning legal system based on international norms**
Justice			
Transitional Justice	Deploy transitional justice package, including: international police, police monitors, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, corrections capacity, court administrators, codes and procedures	Dispense justice in central or sensitive jurisdictions	Transfer responsibilities to permanent justice institutions
Law Enforcement			
International Police	Establish international civilian police authority; Disseminate rules, purpose, and objectives of the international force	Conduct co-patrols with indigenous police; Provide police monitors	Phase-out international police and reduce monitoring presence; Retain minimal international oversight of policing
Indigenous Police	Vet and reconfigure existing police forces; Recruit law enforcement and administrative personnel; Establish police academies; Train, educate, and equip/resource existing indigenous police in international policing standards; deploy police monitors	Develop investigative capability and institutionalize procedures for national police; Secure funding to maintain police academies and administrative support to law enforcement; Establish transparent entry, promotion, and retirement systems for national police	Provide ongoing technical support and training; Encourage relationships with relevant national and international law enforcement associations

(Left margin: **VIOLENT CONFLICT**; Right margin: **NORMALIZATION**)

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[40] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[41] Pugh, "Peacebuilding as developmentalism," *Contemporary Security Policy*; "Modernist discourse and the crisis of development theory," *Studies in Comparative International Development*.

[42] Pritchett and Woolcock, "Solutions When the Solution is the Problem," *CGD Working Papers*.

[43] Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*.

[44] CSIS/AUSA, *Op.cit.*, p. 8.

There are three phases in the transformation of VIOLENT CONFLICT into NORMALIZATION, each of them introducing one sub-goal of the overall strategy. At the same time they belong to a JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION cluster, sector JUSTICE, and to the categories of TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE and LAW ENFORCEMENT (the full framework has four clusters and 40 categories).

There are many ways to phase peacebuilding, both in its planning and/or implementation levels. While ternary examples will be provided to emphasize the multi-level embeddedness of tales within tales, the structures themselves can be (at least on the surface) more elaborate. The most recognizable phasing for the implementation of peacebuilding is:[45]

- Phase 1 or emergency/short-term activities (1 to 2 years)

- Phase 2 or transition/medium-term activities (2 to 5 years)

- Phase 3 or development/long-term activities (5 to 10 years)

Note that this can hold true for both whole peacebuilding operations and particular activities within them. The latter in any case will be structured around another three-phased programme (e.g. planning, execution, results). Documents describing the general process of policy-making itself, in which implementation is embedded, present a structure such as:

- Analysis, or background/historical context: origins and dynamics of conflict, in the past.

- Problem definition and policy formulation: the current setting.

- Implementation of the proposed policy: the resolution, in the future.

Therefore SFPs have a story-like beginning, middle and end structure, often with several of them embedded. As opposed to agendas without temporal structure this kind of sequencing confers narrative coherence, i.e., unity or wholeness. Narrative unity lends moral necessity to the resolution (closure) of the story. Without an arc representing a starting point, a motivation and struggle to reach some goal and a final, desired end-state, the many happenings in post-conflict contexts would fail to make sense as a totality. If a given path towards durable peace makes narrative sense, it becomes legitimized in a way that cannot be achieved by analysis leading towards discrete, uncertain, arbitrary, and open-ended actions. A "non-integrated" strategy would not be compelling enough and, as said earlier, policy strategies need to not only put forward plans but also persuade an audience. On the other hand, this narrative structure is very unspecific. It is a general expression of linear progress towards peace and development, and upon closer examination, in the lower level of activities, the narrativity seems to weaken.

SFPs resort to the enumeration of itemized activities and particular objectives to be accomplished. There is no clear storyline holding them together, no thread directly relating to the whole. There seems to be no detailed plot and, in fact, some SFPs explicitly warn us against emploting activity inventories. Thus the other structural device of SFPs must be explored, that of clustering, in order to understand how causality and a narrative thread are delineated in these texts.

5.4 Clustering peacebuilding

SFPs tend to follow a "sectoral approach," where activities or tasks get grouped under clusters, pillars, or similar categories. Three-, four-, or six-cluster classifications are most common, but it is possible to find models with as little as two and as many as a dozen clusters. If the reader examines the co-occurrence of concepts in cluster headings (how often clusters are given title

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[45] See Timilsina, *Getting the Policies Right*.

names such as SECURITY or GOVERNANCE, and how often these labels are combined together in new formulations) it can be concluded that there are three fundamental blocks: SECURITY, SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, and POLITICAL REFORM (see Fig. 9).
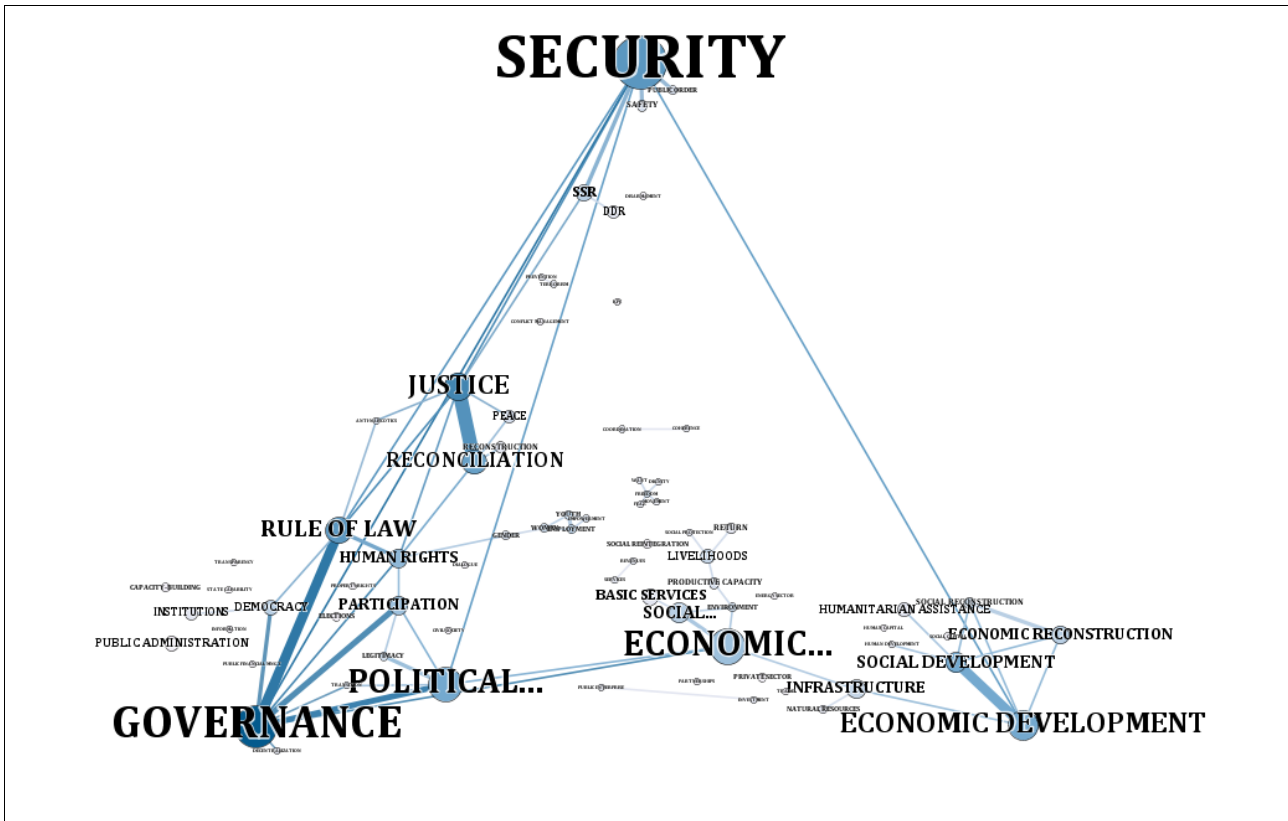

Figure 9. The clusters, pillars, or priorities of peacebuilding[46]

SFPs' activities or tasks are grouped in clusters under the headings plotted in the graph. Node/text size represents the frequency in which a concept appears as a cluster heading in SFPs. As an indication *Security* accounts for 50% of the total mentions, *Reconciliation* only 20%.

Links connect concepts that appear together as single headings of clusters, with link width representing frequency (e.g., "*Justice* and *Reconciliation*," "*Governance* and the *Rule of Law*," and "*Social* [*Development*] and *Economic Development*" are common pairs).

Justice, *Reconciliation*, and *Human Rights* often constitute autonomous clusters, either together or by themselves. However equally often these concepts are related to political ones such as *Rule of Law* and *Governance*, and sometimes to security concepts. Thus we consider three the main clusters: Security, Socio-Economic Development, and Political Reform.

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[46] Notes on abbreviations and integrations (merged concepts):

Economic..., *Political...*, and *Social...* stand for economic/political/social issues, contexts, areas, processes, and other general terms.

Economic/Social Reconstruction includes economic/social foundations and revitalization.

Economic/Social Development includes economic/social well-being and stability.

Economic Development includes sustainable development.

Livelihoods includes income-generating activities.

Humanitarian Assistance includes humanitarian/emergency assistance/aid/well-being/relief.

Women includes the role of women.

Institutions includes institution-building and institutional development.

Basic services includes (basic) social services.

Private sector includes business.

Safety includes civilian protection.

Confirmation of the common tendency to refer to these three clusters in SFPs can be found by probing the *modularity* of concepts, that is, the existence of logical and semantic relations among activities, regardless their explicit classification by clusters (Fig. 11). This classification is very often disrupted in two ways. First, some activities form a part of more than one cluster, some even acting as "cross-cutting" elements. For instance in the UN SFP for Guinea-Bissau,[47] the rehabilitation of prisons and detention facilities falls both under the PHYSICAL RECONSTRUCTION and the JUSTICE REFORM headings. (Incidentally formalization of SFPs makes apparent that instead of gender or anti-corruption, the genuinely cross-cutting issues are capacity-building, training, institution-building and legal frameworks). The second disruption is a caused because causal relationships do happen to be expressed, mostly in the form of preconditions or enabling initiatives.
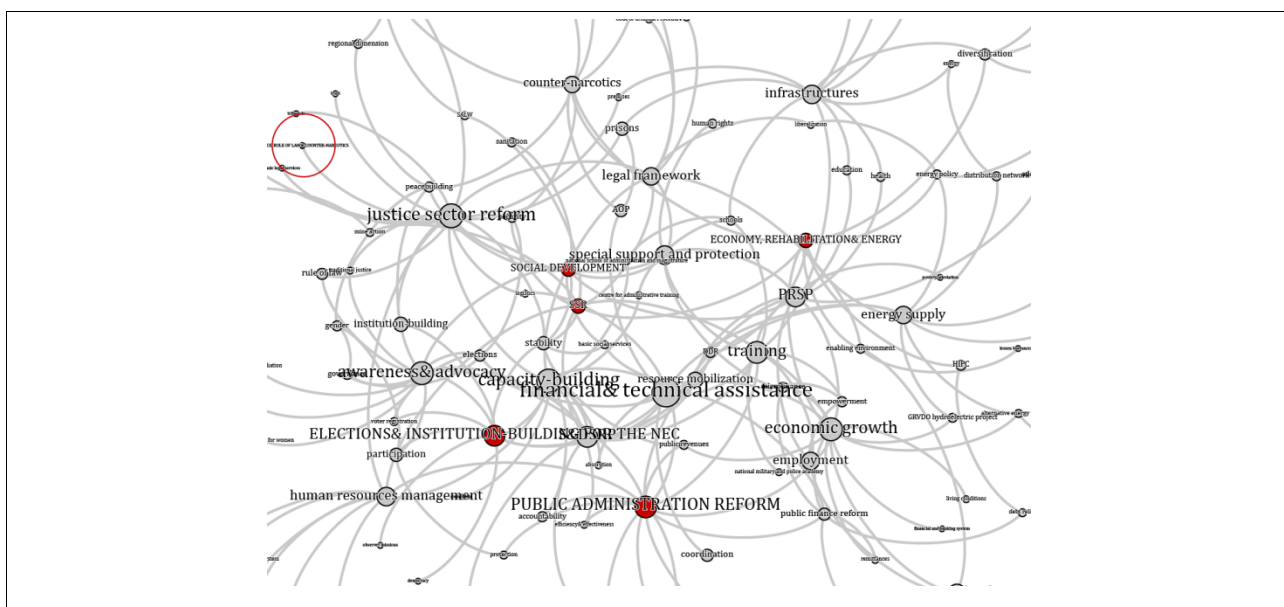
Figure 10. Priorities in the UN Peacebuilding Strategic Framework for Guinea-Bissau (I)
This fragment zooms into the narrative graph of the SFP. Its six pillars appear in red: *SSR*, *Elections & Institution-building for the NEC*, *Economy, Rehabilitation & Energy*, *Public Administration Reform*, *Social Development*, and *Justice, Rule of Law, & Counter-narcotics* (top-left, circled also in red). Actants not represented.

Observing the relationships between all the activities in SFPs, it is seen that 60% of these are taxonomical—that is, relations involving activities which belong to broader categories. This is contentious as even though SFPs try to avoid causality among their activities, it is unavoidable that the relation between goal and sub-goal implies some sort of precondition. While some activities logically should be considered sub-goals (e.g. capacity-building a sub-goal of justice sector reform, or reintegration a sub-goal of DDR) this, nonetheless, seems to present a dilemma to the spirit of SFPs. In the example of DDR it can certainly be argued that reintegration is a sub-goal by definition, and that DDR would not be completed if the reintegration (R) fails. But in the case of capacity-building and justice sector reform, this is not so straightforward because it can be construed either as a precondition or an on-going necessity.

Turning to the larger picture, over a third of the relationships are unambiguous causal sequences, preconditions and enabling actions. However the question remains: is this enough to constitute a coherent, overall narrative? While the answer to this question is debatable, what is certain is that

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[47] UN Peacebuilding Commission, *Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in Guinea-Bissau*.*

phasing and clustering render a number of parallel storylines or subplots, and ensure that not all events are directly and causally connected to each other. The overall narrative therefore, while not necessarily losing coherence, becomes undoubtedly more complex.
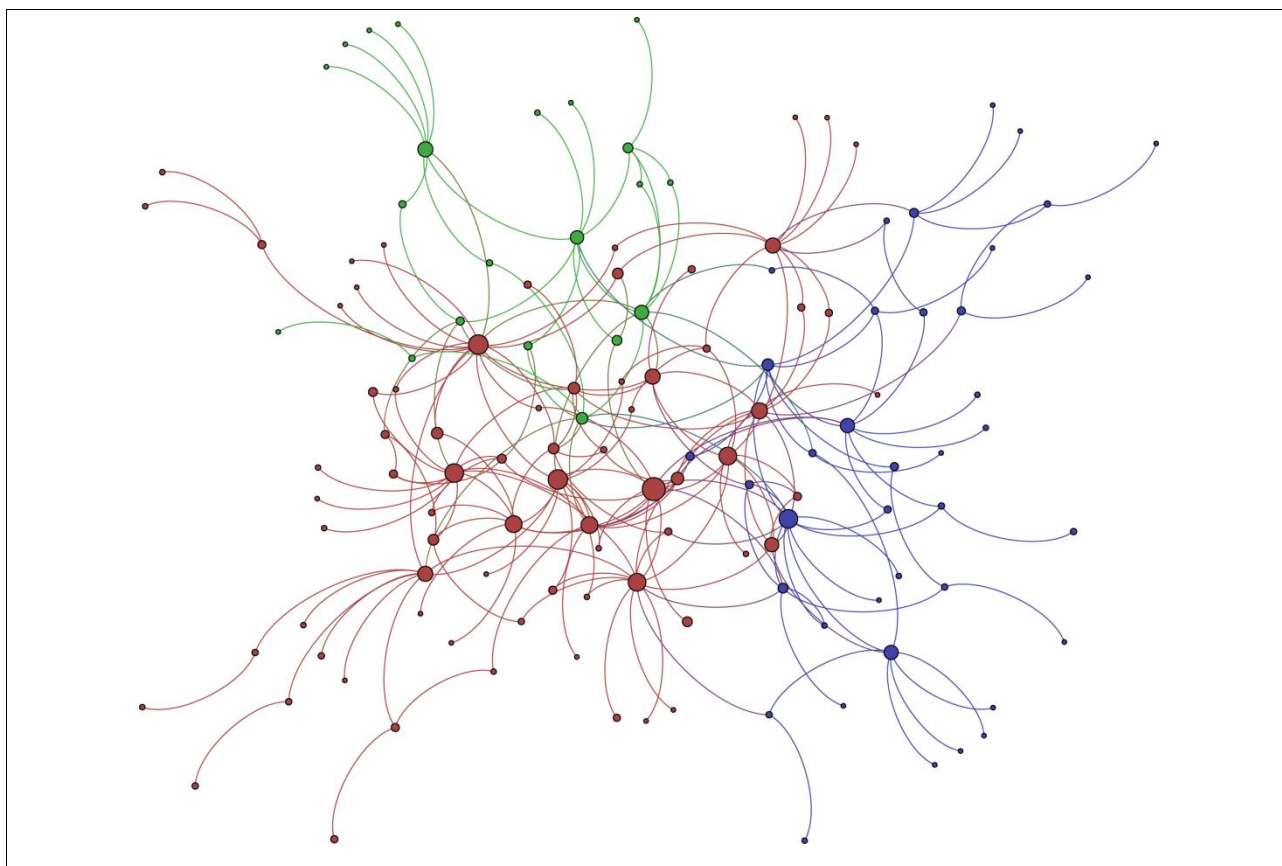
Figure 11. Priorities in the UN Peacebuilding Strategic Framework for Guinea-Bissau (II)
With a community detection algorithm set to a relatively high 2.5 resolution (i.e. forcing a very simplified map of relationships), three distinct groups of closely connected activities, or partitions, come up. The blue partition contains initiatives related to economic growth and private sector development. The green partition comprises security aspects, but also the counter-narcotics and crime area of the *Justice, Rule of Law & Counter-narcotics* block of priorities. That is, although counter-narcotics is classified in the SFP as a "justice issue" the text itself tends to treat it as a "security issue." As expected, the red partition puts together "political" and "judicial" elements whatever their original block of priorities: elections, public administration reform, justice sector reform and the rule of law. It also includes social development, and takes infrastructures and employment away from the *Economy, Rehabilitation & Energy* block. The fact that, against convention, social development (health, education) and reconstruction are not primarily related to the economic cluster may reflect a concern about equitable access to basic services.

5.5 The virtuous circle

The level of difficulty in providing a clear, straightforward sequence is a direct consequence of the ambitiousness of the story attempting to be told. The path towards Denmark involves the complete overhauling of a polity, and there is no simple way to trace it. Peacebuilding revived the developmental modernization project that enjoyed its heyday in the mid-20th Century. The "high modernist" vision assumes that "all good things of modernity [tend] to go together;"[48] in other words, that economic growth, democratization and social change come in a "package," which also means that the process is unavoidably rapid. Modernization theory is also a profoundly normative proposal for liberal nation/statebuilding, which rests on shaky empirical grounds, mostly limited to a stylized account of Western development.[49]

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[48] *Ibid.*, p. 459.

[49] Suhrke, "Reconstruction as Modernisation," *Third World Quarterly*. See also Manzo, *Op.cit.*, and Schellahaas and Seegers, "Peacebuilding: Imperialism's new disguise?," *African Security Review*. For a critique of the "pre-packaged"

Practitioners and scholars have proposed alternatives to the liberal peacebuilding programme which evolved from this model, and mirrored the debates and positions which surrounded modernization theory some 50 years earlier. As its predecessor, peacebuilding has assumed endogenous dynamics and has served to moderate the most optimistic views of an inevitable peace dividend for development. Still, the notion of the all-inclusive package puts SFPs firmly in the high modernist tradition. Political freedoms do not establish themselves prior to economic development as, for example, there cannot be social development without the rule of law. Rather, a spark (be it a revolution, reformation, or reconstruction) makes liberty, participation, prosperity and security unfold together. One of the clearest formulations of the idea appears in Kofi Annan's 2005 report, *In Larger Freedom*:

> We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without development, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights. Unless all these causes are advanced, none will succeed.[50]

But how can this be translated from inspiring rhetoric into an operative agenda, or even a credible storyline? Every introduction to inventories of peacebuilding activities submits the same caveat: no direct causal link and no linear sequencing should be inferred from the way tasks are arranged in these frameworks, let alone between the clusters. Then again, SFPs are dotted by explanations and examples that do assign the status of preconditions or enablers to some activities in respect to others. The following is a selection of typical sequences:

1. *De-mining is a precondition for agricultural production, and food security permits the active political engagement of conflict-affected populations.*

2. *Demilitarization allows for conversion, freeing resources for productive activities. The provision of basic needs is the foundation of political legitimacy.*

3. *The disarmament of ex-combatants is a precondition for the celebration of free and fair elections. The resulting, legitimate government has the authority and mandate to put in place development policies.*

4. *Public order facilitates the strengthening of administrative institutions, which are needed for economic reforms.*

5. *Security allows for the rule of law, which establishes the conditions for long-term private investment.*

A crucial feature of these and other familiar sequences is that they always involve one activity/sub-goal from each of the three primary clusters. Thus, the first of the previous examples could be represented as $S \rightarrow D \rightarrow P$ where S stands for SECURITY, D for SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT and P for POLITICAL REFORM. Example #2 also conforms to the same sequence, while examples #3 to 5 can be translated into $S \rightarrow P \rightarrow D$.

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modernization project (from a stageist modernizing perspective), including its use of the virtuous circle and sequencing of "dimensions of development," see Fukuyama, *Op.cit.*, ch. 30.

[50] UN, *In Larger Freedom,** §17. In a second formulation of the idea in the same document (annex, §2) he says, "human rights and the rule of law".

Clusters, therefore, are markers of some kind of episodic pattern which overlap with phases. It provides a semantic and symbolic relationship between events resulting in a circular narrative structure, which can be extended in explanations like:

6. *Disarmament enables elections, which enable the fair distribution of economic resources, which enables a less conflictive environment, which enables reconciliation, which enables cooperation and further socio-economic gains, etc.*

The $S \rightarrow P \rightarrow D \rightarrow S \rightarrow P \rightarrow D...$ structure is that of a virtuous circle, causality circulating through the clusters and consolidating peace in each round. The simultaneous necessity of all dimensions requires the notion of mutual reinforcement, which is provided by "short-range sequencing": causality appears in short sequences between activities of different clusters that, overall, produce a circular linearity. These fragments fail to create a comprehensive and continuous (i.e. unbroken) chain of events. Instead each short sequence is a mirror image and "indication to the reader"[51] of the overall scheme. It is thus through embedded stories and episodes which resemble and explain the complete narrative arc that the storyline is constructed.

When all these elements—the theme of rising, the three-stage phasing, the clustering, the triadic embedding—are put together, the result is a spiral- or spring-like structure. That is, a narrative which is simultaneously circular and also moves in a particular direction.

This feature of SFPs can be explained as the result of the natural tension between a technical-administrative discourse overwhelmed by the complexity of the task at hand, and the political necessity to simplify, popularize and communicate. In any case, the fact is that this particular pattern is not merely a result of chance. Not only it is a schema constantly replicated in peacebuilding texts, but it also conforms to worn, well-known stories about socio-political development.

Finally, it should be assumed that both patterns, $S \rightarrow P \rightarrow D...$ and $S \rightarrow D \rightarrow P...$, are open-ended (ad infinitum). In addition, that both of these cycles begin with security is revealing of the "statist condition" of peacebuilding and its indebtedness to the modern statebuilding project (predominantly because security is seen as a primordial condition for positive peace).[52]

Time

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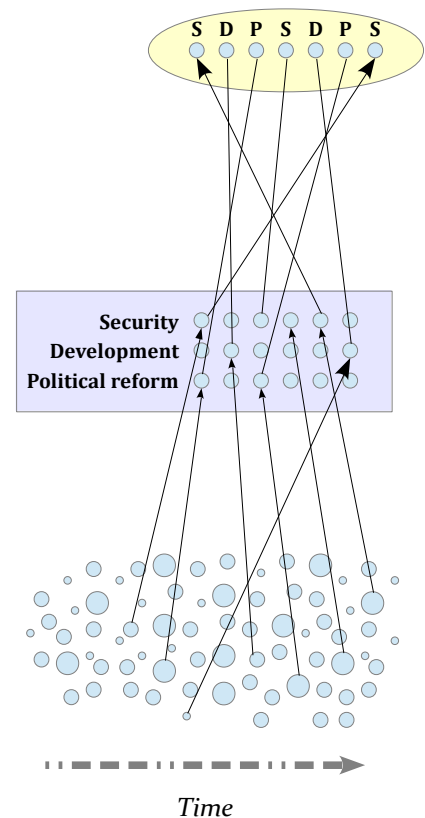
[51] Bal, *Op.cit.*, p. 75.
[52] See Bartelson, *The Critique of the State*; and Paris, "International peacebuilding and the 'mission civilisatrice'," *Review of International Studies*.

6   Final remarks: Implications for emancipatory peacebuilding

The narrative policy analysis of the peacebuilding story presented here is a partial one. Relevant narrative elements missing in this study are: the roles of narrators and narratées, only hinted at in the discussion of actants; the relation between the narrative and non-narrative dimensions of the text; and further characterization of actors, places and times. This paper has also only offered a single understanding amongst many possibilities, since narrative analysis is largely based on subjective interpretations. Regardless, it is hoped that the content of this text has demonstrated how narrative policy analysis can be useful in "reading" and "writing" about peacebuilding. (In other words, that this methodology has both critical and practical applications.)

As seen in the discussion of characters, the standard terminology of beneficiaries, stakeholders, actors, etc., can be misleading. Even with the best of intentions, a particular narrative can make certain actors much less visible when they are not treated as "rounded characters." At the very least, if a peacebuilding initiative of any size strives to be compelling (let alone achievable) it must exhibit some degree of verisimilitude in this respect.

It has also been shown that the themes in various versions of the peacebuilding story tend to be similar. This signifies that meaningful communication about peace is possible between people on different sides of a conflict, and among people in different contexts and from different cultures. As within legends, novels and films, some plans, objectives, and hopes have universal qualities. However, there is also the danger that peacebuilding strategies do not only participate in common themes but belong to a single, overarching narrative. If so, does this imply that alternative visions of peacebuilding strategy are not being expressed? Perhaps there are paths which have not been considered, which can achieve economic development without the rule of law, or participation without social development? What if any of these common goals could be achieved without creating a centralized monopoly of violence?

This paper should also serve as a warning of extremely ambitious plans concealed in simple narratives. Could it be that the heroes' desire to achieve everything at the same time is a central reason the entire initiative may fail? Or perhaps, is the problem more deeply rooted in how the experts authoring SFPs try to rationalize the complex issue which is the recovery and reconstruction of a whole polity? As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman said, "problems are created by problem-solving, [and] new areas of chaos are generated by ordering activity."[53] There is some credence to applying this statement to SFPs; the more one tries to produce a strategic plan that accounts for all dimensions, impacts, actors, etc., the more complex we make our reality (or relation to it).

The final question which is relevant to raise is: do peacebuilders really need to embark in such an enterprise? The developmentalist, modernist statebuilding project was over-ambitious, whatever one may think of its intentions and motivations. Perhaps peace practitioners should instead leave the grand plans of social engineering for the creation of modern nation states to statebuilders.[54] While there exists an unremitting and sensible emphasis in collecting lessons learned from the implementation of specific peacebuilding activities and programmes, there should also be a comparable effort in extracting lessons from past experiences of integrated, multidimensional, holistic, society-wide planning (since this was in no way inaugurated by SFPs).

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[53] Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, p. 14.
[54] See some reflections in this respect in the *Utstein Report*, p. 15.*

Narrative policy analysis is also meant to solve controversies. It aims to reach a consensus through a structured but flexible analysis and comparison of opposing stories, which discuss at length what the problems and solutions are. In this sense the methodology presented in this paper can be useful in the practice of participatory planning. Although probably unaware of the narrative content already present in SFPs, one joint report by the UN and the World Bank called for the active conceptualization of "strategic peacebuilding storylines."[55] If this is accepted as a worthy endeavour, the possibility for broad engagement through "emancipatory storytelling"[56] should be added to it, in order to make storytelling something more than a merely persuasive tool. Most importantly, it should be understood that planning is as much a technical endeavour as an ethical and political one. Thus it is also the duty of the reflective and deliberative practitioner to both listen to and put forward powerful new stories.

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[55] UNDG and World Bank, *Joint Guidance Note*.*
[56] Citton, "Populism and the empowering circulation of myths," *Open*.

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