



## Article

# The Construction of Peacebuilding Narratives in ‘Media Talk’—A Methodological Discussion

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**Abstract:** How are narratives around peace and conflict constructed in radio? This paper offers a detailed discussion of a framework of analysis of media narratives. It examines how perceptions of peacebuilding are constructed and aired in radiophonic debates. It deals with methodological questions and carries out an interpretative analysis of narratives in ‘media talk’, here defined as a broadcast output in the form of ‘talking’. The narrative analysis is composed of four dimensions: thematic, structural, actor and agency levels. What started as an effort to study a political debate in the Central African Republic from a radio station named Ndeke Luka, evolved into an in-depth reflection of how competing, clashing and counter peacebuilding narratives can take form. One particular transcript of a radio programme is hereby used to exemplify and illustrate how this analytical framework is operationalised. It is not intended, though, to offer any generalisation claim as this study is a work in progress. While interrogating the ways peacebuilding narratives in ‘media talk’ can be detected, this paper goes beyond the sharing of a particular case. This model makes it possible to apprehend the nuances of ‘media talk’ as a contesting and disputing space for diverse narratives. As a point of departure, it claims that the ideas of *peacebuildings* (in plural) relate to experiential practices. Research in ‘media talk’ constitutes a relevant arena for mapping emerging narratives of conflict and peace.

**Keywords:** journalism; radio; media talk; narrative analysis; interpretivism; social constructionism; peacebuilding



**Citation:** Ortiz dos Santos, Fabíola. 2023. The Construction of Peacebuilding Narratives in ‘Media Talk’—A Methodological Discussion. *Journalism and Media* 4: 339–363. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia4010023>

Academic Editor:  
Andreu Casero-Ripollés

Received: 13 December 2022  
Revised: 15 February 2023  
Accepted: 3 March 2023  
Published: 8 March 2023



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## 1. Introduction

How are narratives around peace and conflict constructed in radio? In what ways can we detect peacebuilding narratives in ‘media talk?’. Drawing from those questions, this paper aims at offering a detailed methodological discussion of how to analyse the construction of narratives in radio broadcasting. Researching narratives is critical to understand the nuances in relation to peace and public knowledge. The radiophonic sphere can be regarded as an essential space for discussion on peacebuilding processes. Media talk, here defined as a broadcast output in the form of ‘talking’, should not be neglected as an object for research if we are to strive to apprehend the role media play through their narratives in peacebuilding.

Based on a constructionist approach, this article provides an in-depth methods examination of narrative analysis with a thematic and structural coding process, actor analysis and agency levels drawing from the author’s own research data. What started as an effort to study a political debate in the Central African Republic from a radio station named Ndeke Luka evolved into an in-depth reflection of how competing, clashing and counter peacebuilding narratives can take form. One particular transcript of a radio programme is used to exemplify and illustrate how this analytical framework is operationalised. A 50 min episode of the political debate named ‘*Patara*’ from the Central African Radio Ndeke Luka based in the capital Bangui, was chosen as an exemplar for the interpretative scheme. Narrative analysis of radio content regarding peace and conflict is insufficiently conducted. The

narrative framework of inquiry that is hereby discussed in this article form part of larger doctoral research project that gathered interviews, fieldnotes observation and radio programmes. While it is not intended to offer any generalisation or homogenous interpretation, this paper aspires to take a step further in the field by proposing an analytical framework as a way of mapping narratives in radio and how they could be detected considering the social, cultural and contextual nuances where these narratives are built.

This article starts with a review of the literature regarding media and peacebuilding, coupled with a discussion of narratives in 'media talk'. A brief appraisal of social constructionism is featured as the perspective that sets the bases for the interpretative framework. The analytical model composed of four dimensions is further discussed alongside the case report of the Radio Ndeke Luka political debate. 'Patara' is then presented and contextualised followed by the operationalisation of the coding system with a four-step procedure of coding cycles. Finally, a brief discussion and concluding remarks examine the challenges and opportunities for encountering narratives of peacebuilding.

## 2. Media, Narratives and Peacebuilding

Media can play a constructive and proactive role in peacebuilding with the ability to direct public attention towards negotiations and to restore communication among parties and groups of citizens (Galtung 2002, 2003; Galtung et al. 2002; Howard 2004; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005; Shinar 2007). This section reviews the literature regarding the role of media in contexts of conflict and peacebuilding. It also conceptualises narratives and their use in broadcast media.

### 2.1. Media and Peacebuilding

When conflicts emerge, the media, intended or not, often become key actors as they disseminate, withhold and manipulate information in ways that can influence the unfolding of the conflicts. Whether material or symbolic, conflicts are ideological and shaped by historical and prevailing power relations (Mano 2021). They acquire multifaceted characteristics and result from confrontations between actors, communities, organisations, or governments. They imply a serious difference of opinion, aspirations, and arguments between opposing groups or opposing ideas or principles. Conflict is never a static phenomenon and is constantly changed by ongoing human interaction (p'Lajur 2006, pp. 64–65).

It is through the media that every party within a conflict attempts to convey its own narrative. Scholarly debate has frequently supported the media's agency in escalating conflicts but also in contributing to peace by defusing tensions and enhancing the prospects of conflict transformation, particularly through radio with its large outreach even in hard-to-reach places (Santos and Schönbachler 2022; Rodríguez 2011, 2015; Hoffmann and Hawkins 2015; Maweu and Mare 2021; Shinar 2003, 2007; Lynch and McGoldrick 2005, 2012; Ross 2006; Mogeckwu 2011; Suchenwirth and Keeble 2011; Shaw et al. 2012; Tomiak 2018; Mano 2021). As for peace, it does not necessarily mean total absence of conflict but rather the absence of violence in all its forms and the unfolding of conflict in a constructive way (p'Lajur 2006, p. 66).

Peace should not be seen as the "end station of a trajectory at all, but rather be understood as a continuous process" (Orgeret 2021, p. 2). Orgeret (2021) argued for the need to explore cultural, political and technological transformations in journalistic practice and the media's role overall in raising awareness of wars and conflicts. The media can either:

(...) glorify or puncture the images of the parties of a conflict, infuse optimistic or pessimistic impressions about the possibilities of peace, fortify or undermine the public's willingness to compromise, and buttress or render hollow the legitimacy of the protagonists in a conflict including the state (Lugalambi 2006, p. 114).

As a response to direct violence, the media can help society identify and promote direct acts aimed at transforming conflicts and identify the "cultures of peace whereby peace is cherished as a value" (Lugalambi 2006, p. 107). The author assigned media a

cultural role in peacebuilding and in the management of conflict as well as in the prevention of violence, acknowledging that the contribution of media to promoting peace is a subject of debate and should include several actors and institutions (p. 108).

Since peace, and also communication, is a process rather than a fixed condition or a state with permanent positions (Bruck and Roach 1993, pp. 19–20), the media cannot capture the process of peacebuilding ‘episodically’ or only “spotlighting developments as bounded events or series of occurrences with a definite beginning and end” (Lugalambi 2006, p. 113) as such processes are more complex than what is portrayed with a simple finale.

The function of media in peacebuilding and in conflict transformation is decisive, yet difficult to put in practice and to be examined; once the relationship between the media and conflict is seemingly more subtle and dubious than the literature at times implies (Schoemaker and Stremmlau 2014; Maweu and Mare 2021; Budka and Bräuchler 2020; Tayeebwa 2016), as the phases between conflict, post-conflict and peace are often blurred, and the development from war to peace is not inescapably unidirectional (Orgeret 2021). If on the one hand, the media can serve as an agent of change (Betz 2012), on the other hand, social, political and professional structures influence and constrain journalists and the media alike (Santos and Schönbächler 2022). The task of channeling communication between sides, educating the conflicting parties, identifying underlying interests and listening to grievances are some elements of conflict resolution that media may foster (Howard 2004, 2009).

Widely understood, peacebuilding seeks to remedy the implicit and fundamental causes of violent conflict and transform the long-term relationships (Mac Ginty 2013, pp. 132–33). The concept refers to constructive social practices or to practices that represent an attempt to build new foundations for a transformed society (Kappler 2014, p. 38). It is not inherently consensual and harmonious, but rather contested and linked to competing norm systems. One of the primary goals of peacebuilding is to develop the potential for sustainable peace by providing experiences that may lead people to support the transition to peace (Millar 2014, pp. 1–25). When people connect and form trusting relationships, they might be prone to cooperate to constructively address the conflict (Schirch 2004, p. 9).

‘Local media’ can be involved in different categories of peacebuilding activities. They can serve as an informational tool and as an instrument for societal reconciliation (Curtis 2000). Conceptualised as a system of beliefs and practices, the ‘local’ can be extra-territorial encompassing transnational networks and sets of ideas and belonging (Mac Ginty 2015, p. 851). Critical scholarship encouraged a local turn in peace research on ‘the everyday’ role and meaning of locally based actors with a claim that peacebuilding initiatives should foster ‘local ownership’ and be bottom-up planned, owned and carried out (Bräuchler and Naucke 2017, pp. 422–29). This thought was inaugurated by John Paul Lederach (1997) when he coined the idea of ‘peace from below’ as one of the first comprehensive approaches postulating a shift to the ‘local’ (Paffenholz 2015) and focusing on people as drivers of peace (Paffenholz 2015, pp. 868–57).

The media have a ‘social mandate’—the one-off nurturing of the public interest, championing a ‘common vision’ based on core principles around which citizens ought to be encouraged to unite. Cultivating public consensus is about the media helping to focus citizens’ attention on issues of collective concern to produce agreement and persuade people to voice their opinions (Lugalambi 2006). Frère characterised as undeniable the media’s capacity to both increase and decrease tensions within countries undergoing crisis (Frère and Marthoz 2007). Media can ultimately support peacebuilding processes by proactively working against elements of the political culture that enable the institutionalisation of violence (Lugalambi 2006).

## 2.2. Narratives in Media Talk

As defined by Michel de Certeau (1992), a narrative is required in order to present an intelligible and coherent sequence of events (p. 89). Narratives allow the ‘present’ to be ‘situated’ in time and be ‘symbolised’ through a frame (pp. 90–92). The content and its

‘expansion’ refer to an order of succession that can be subject to omissions and inversions producing effects of meaning (p. 93). Additionally, the British historian Alun Munslow (1997) outlined narrative as a story based upon available evidence—it is a discourse that places disparate events in an understandable order (p. 12). It is, in his view, a structure of explanation used to account for the occurrence of events and human actions (p. 201).

For Ricoeur (1984), human action can be narrated so as to represent the human experience in time being ‘symbolically mediated’ (p. 57). Narrative mediates the uncertainty of change and permanence “through a process of emplotment’ that organises the contingencies of existence into a coherent whole” (Crowley 2003, p. 2). Narrative does not try to mirror reality; rather it attempts to replicate lived experience (Park 2005). It is one of the essential ways in which humans construct a sense of who they are in relation to the world in a ‘delineated and contextual frame’ (pp. 38–40). It refers to a “discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity by means of a plot” (Polkinghorne 1995, p. 5).

Media narratives are systems of representation. It is from and within these narratives that people interpret and build their understandings of inhabited spaces (Iqani and Resende 2019). Media construct stories by turning daily events into narratives (Huisman et al. 2005; Calvo Figueras et al. 2022), this being achieved by putting in place a set of strategies and linguistic devices. The ‘way of telling’ plays a role to shape the designs in the minds of people of the relations that they set with each other and with the surrounding world. The journalist–narrator creates a form of presenting reality. Media narratives are constructed with the reported speech based on the source that is truth-claiming (Erdem 2019). Not everyone has a ‘voice’ in the news as some people are represented without being able to speak for themselves—they are mainly ‘talked about’ (Dunn 2005, p. 208). As narrative is ubiquitous in the contemporary world, it confers a performative power to the ways of worldmaking (Nünning 2010, pp. 194–95).

Storytelling is not intrinsically ‘good or peaceful’ (Senehi 2008), as narratives may intensify social cleavages by privileging cultures and silencing others: “when they generate or reproduce prejudicial and enemy images of other groups; and when they mask inequalities and injustice, inflame negative emotions, and misrepresent society (destructive storytelling)” (p. 203). Conversely, they may foster peace when they involve a dialogue and “promote consciousness raising, serve to resist domination, or teach conflict resolution strategies (constructive storytelling)” (ibid.).

Narrative conflicts can be considered as ‘competing stories’ (Garagozov 2015), and people tend to interact from within these competing conflict narratives (Cobb 1993, p. 251) as parties at conflict strive to legitimise their claims by creating and disseminating their own version of ‘what happened in reality’ while at the same time delegitimising their opponents’ allegations. In order to negotiate, reach some common grounds within these competing narratives and achieve ‘narrative transformations’ attaining a ‘common narrative’ would then help parties at conflict create a “shared, internally consistent vision of the past, present and future, which is considered as an important precondition for civil peace” (Garagozov 2015, p. 1).

Radio programmes have an audience-oriented communicative intentionality which is embodied in the organisation of their setting (Scannell 1991; Dunn 2005). The dimension of ‘media talk’ is incorporated in this discussion. There are different forms of ‘talk’ used by broadcasters as their means of communicating with audiences. Amidst the different types of broadcast talk, the one considered in this paper is the radio debates whereby much of the talk that audiences encounter in radio is pre-scripted or with a proportion of ‘unscripted talk’ (Hutchby 2006, p. 1). It unfolds in the real time of the show, “meaning that the participants have to be creative in reacting and responding to one another’s talk in the course of its production” (p. 2). Radiophonic debates contain forms of talk that do not just involve professional broadcasters. They gather speakers from outside the broadcasting profession, such as politicians, representatives of social organisations and institutions, eyewitnesses and ordinary members of the public (ibid.).

In radio debates, much of the talk is pre-scripted or contains a large proportion of ‘unscripted talk’ (Hutchby 2006), and they aim at gathering various points of views, ‘voices’, from selected participants (Dunn 2005). In any media interview, both interviewee and interviewer adopt narrative roles or functions. As Bell and van Leeuwen (1994) pointed out, in most media interviews, the interviewer possesses power and control over the duration and structure of the interview, and the audience is provided with the interviewer’s perspective on the story. The interviews are usually dynamic, involving relations of linguistic control, more generally ideological control. The power of questioning appears as a technique in order to exercise control over meaning (Bell and van Leeuwen 1994).

Media talk has recently begun to be studied as a “phenomenon in its own right” (Hutchby 2006, p. 4). Researching narratives in media talk is crucial to understand the relationship between the media and public knowledge. Narratives in broadcast could be regarded as a relevant space for discussion on peacebuilding processes and activities. They provide the “broadest and most accessible public spaces in which ordinary members of the populace can express their opinions on such issues” (Hutchby 2006, p. 4). Considering that peacebuilding is ‘experiential’ (Millar 2014) and that it can be ‘talked’ in the media and through the media, broadcast talk consists of a valuable object of analytic attention. By proposing a framework for analysis of peacebuilding narratives, I wish to shed light on how these perceptions are constructed and aired in radiophonic debates.

### 3. A Social Constructionist Perspective in Narrative Approach

Social constructionism is the standpoint that frames the interpretative analysis that aims to yield insights from the broadcasters’ production of narratives. Constructionism emphasises how humans actively use symbolic resources to *objectify*, *circulate* and *interpret* the ‘meaningfulness of their existence (Lindlof 2008; Lindlof and Taylor 2019, p. 63, authors’ emphasis). Social constructionist studies seek to go beyond a fixed and universalistic worldview and embrace a more “fluid, particularistic, and socio-historically embedded conceptions” (Weinberg 2008, p. 14). It is a push for a critical position towards taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, challenging the view that conventional knowledge is based upon objective and unbiased observation of the world (Burr 1995, p. 2). This mode of viewing the world dismisses an ‘absolute Truth’ and takes a pluralist position of ‘truths’ (Esin et al. 2014).

Scholars identified with constructionism have focused on how symbols, discourse and media operate in this process. The guiding claim is that communication is an essential “activity by which humans *constitute* their social world as a ‘real’ phenomenon” (Bartesaghi and Castor 2008; Lindlof and Taylor 2019, p. 63, emphasis by the authors). Methods of interpretative practices have been widely employed in communication research exploring how particular narratives frame public understanding (Bartesaghi and Castor 2008, p. 6; Foster and Bochner 2008; Lindlof and Taylor 2019, p. 63). Under the stimulus of social constructionism, communication researchers turned their attention to the “everyday, ordinary, lived experiences of individuals involved in ongoing relationships with one another” (Foster and Bochner 2008, p. 94). Language, exchanged through communicative action, as well as the idea that various social realities do exist, are some assumptions shared by this paradigm. As a framework for inquiry and action, social construction acknowledges the potential that communication holds for transformation and sustainable change (p. 86).

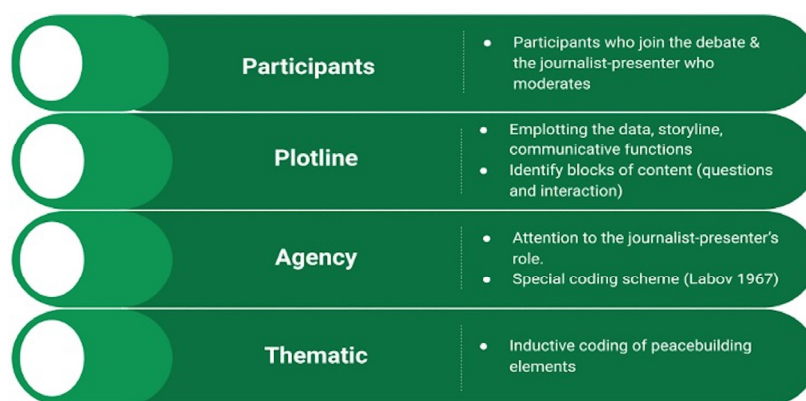
The constructionist inquiry is a multifaceted field of scholarship, having narrative as one of these facets. Narratives are ongoing social practices that people perform and do in relation to others (Sparkes and Smith 2008, p. 299). The narrative constructionist approach is more concerned with stories as social events and as social functions (Esin et al. 2014). I adopt a social constructionist perspective when approaching narrative analysis of media talk and turn my attention to the radio as public narratives. Through interactions generated within the talk in radio, participants are engaged in conversations that operationalise reflection, meaning making, connectedness and agency, which are central to the social constructionist philosophy (Gergen 2001; Burr 2003). This approach to narratives considers



the broader social construction of a story within interpersonal, social and cultural relations examining how a narrative is a repercussion of the several layers of discourses (Esin et al. 2014, pp. 4–7).

#### 4. A Framework for Interpretative Narrative Analysis

This section presents the proposed framework of analysis detailing the four dimensions of the code system: (1) the actors involved in the narratives—the participants of the debates and the journalist who moderates; (2) the plotline or structure—‘emplotting’ the data with events, actions, happenings, to-and-fro oral recursive movement and aspects of textual coherence using communicative functions of talking; (3) the agency dimension that embeds the notion of ‘agency’ as conceptualised by Giddens (1984). Particular attention is paid to examining the journalist-presenter’s role, how the journalist conducts the debate, handles the moderation and, ultimately, how the journalist fosters the shaping of the narrative that is built as the oral interventions unfold. For the scrutiny of the presenter’s role, the coding scheme was inspired by Labov and Waletzky (1967) model. After the identification of the participants, the structure of the plot and levels of agency in the debate, an analysis of (4) the broad themes of the text is carried out by seeking pieces of evidence concerning peacebuilding. These categories represent the etic view and are often referred to as analyst-constructed categories (Rossman et al. 2017, p. 456). Figure 1 displays the framework composed by four dimensions of the analysis.



**Figure 1.** Analytical framework composed by four dimensions.

Within the next segments, a discussion of these dimensions is briefly offered, starting with the actor analysis, followed by the structural layer, the agency and the thematic dimension.

##### 4.1. Actors (Participants) Dimension

This layer concerns the first dimension of the participants/actors. The principle used is similar to the one normally employed in a content analysis (Ericson et al. 1991; Hansen and Machin 2013). The analysis of characters or actors involved in the radio debates is important both from a narrative as well as from a media representation perspective. Realizing how the analysis examines who is portrayed as saying and doing what to whom and with what key attributes is essential to an understanding of media roles in social representation and power relationships in society (Hansen and Machin 2013, p. 100).

##### 4.2. Plotline or Structural Dimension

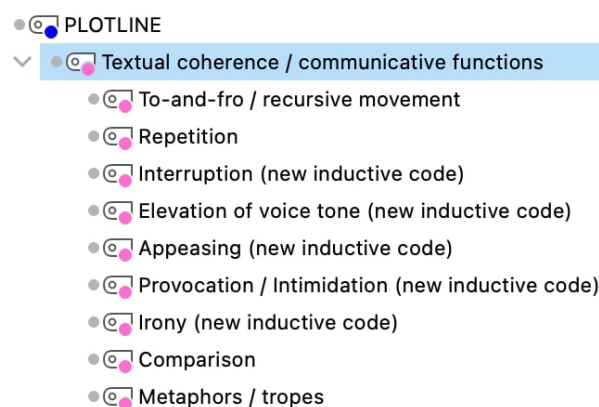
The structural analysis—plotline—is inspired by what Polkinghorne (1995) describes as the ‘narrative mode of analysis’ that serves to characterise the human action that has taken place in a particular setting. The plotline is about “the configuration of the data into a coherent whole” (p. 15). It is a method of ‘emplotting’ in which narrative data consist of actions, events and happenings so as to produce coherent stories. It uses a to-and-fro recursive movement from parts to whole or from whole to parts and associates the range of

disconnected data elements reasoned. The plotline makes the final story congruent with the data while bringing narrative meanings that are not explicit.

Added to the plotline, a particular scrutiny of the presenter's role is undertaken with a coding scheme inspired by Labov and Waletzky (1967). Their system connects with levels of agency and concerns the structural and temporal order of the 'told'. Out of the six components suggested by Labov and Waletzky, the evaluative statement is the most important one because it reveals the "attitude of the narrator towards the narrative by emphasizing the relative importance of some narrative units as compared to others" (p. 37). They give us clues to understand the meaning that the tellers (the participants) give to their experiences. The idea is to unfold the structural organisation of the presenter's narrative into the following (Kim 2015; Labov and Waletzky 1967; Mishler 1986, 1995):

- **Abstract:** a summary of the story and its points.
- **Orientation:** providing a context such as place, time and character to orient.
- **Complicating Action:** skeleton plot, or an event that causes a problem as in 'And then what happened?'.
- **Evaluation:** evaluative comments on events, justification of its telling or the meaning that the teller gives to an event.
- **Result or Resolution:** resolution of the story or the conflict; it follows the evaluation.
- **Coda:** bringing the narrator and listener back to the present; it is a functional device for returning the verbal perspective to the present moment.

The plotline includes aspects of textual coherence in the narrative. A closer attention is paid to ways in which unity and consistency are maintained in the narrative by using communicative functions of talking (Mishler 1995). A set of specific codes aims to address communicative acts, such as to-and-fro recursive movements in the speech, repetition, interruption, elevation of tone of voice, appeasing tone of voice, provocation or intimidation, irony, comparison, metaphors and tropes (a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression). Below Figure 2 shows the coding scheme of the communicative functions:



**Figure 2.** List of codes pertaining to the communicative functions to be detected in the transcript.

#### 4.3. Agency Dimension

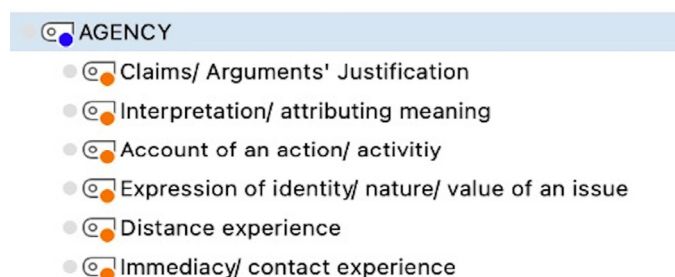
Agency is not a synonym of free will. Practice theorists recognise that actions are always socially, culturally and linguistically constrained (Ahearn 1999, p. 13). Agency refers not only to the intentions people have in doing things, but also to their "capability of doing those things" (Giddens 1984, p. 9). The consequences of what actors do, either intentionally or unintentionally, would not have happened if the actors had acted differently. Agency is enabled by narrative processes when we are able to put our current situation into a larger context (Hardt 2018).

Narrative is often portrayed as having several levels of agency—such as experiencing events, reflecting and relating them in a narrative form (Björninen et al. 2020). Through these interactions, participants are engaged in conversations that operationalise reflection, meaning making, connectedness and agency, which are essential to the social constructionist

philosophy (Burr 1995; Gergen 2001; Abkhezr et al. 2020, p. 5). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) include ‘narrative construction’ as one of the central processes in which agency is oriented towards the future (p. 989).

A control over narrative agents and their ‘narrative position’ enables speakers to represent possible scenarios and projected outcomes of political choices in a way that is favourable to their agendas. ‘Narrative positioning’ refers to either positions ascribed and taken in a story, situations where people participate in social interaction or in relation to identities and normative discourses beyond the storytelling situation (Björninen et al. 2020).

The agency codes were theoretically composed (Björninen et al. 2020; Giddens 1984; Mead and Murphy 1932). They embrace the idea of ‘immediacy/contact experience’ and ‘distance experience’, whereas the latter entails the capacity to use ideation and imagery in remembrance and anticipation (distance experience) in contrast to an immediate contact experience of reality. The expression of identity, nature or value of a matter and the account of an action and activity refer to Giddens’ idea of discursive consciousness—“what agents know about what they do is restricted to what they can say about it” (Giddens 1984, p. xxx). The act of interpretation of attributing meaning and claiming with arguments and justification points to Giddens’ conception of knowledgeable ability—“what agents know about what they do, and why they do” (p. xxiii). The codes and subcodes of agency are outlined below in Figure 3:



**Figure 3.** Subcodes to detect the participants’ agency throughout the radio programme.

#### 4.4. Thematic Dimension

This dimension aims at identifying broad themes regarding peace and conflict. This is what Polkinghorne (1995) calls the ‘paradigmatic mode of analysis’. The idea is to seek pieces of evidence to form general categories of peacebuilding elements. In here, the examination of the data focuses on the discovery of common thematic elements or salient constructs in storied data (Kim 2015, p. 172). A cluster will assemble themes that relate to social and cultural referents of what Mishler (1995) calls narrative functions of contexts and consequences. They correspond to “cultural, social and psychological context and functions of stories” (p. 90). An inductive analysis seeks salient categories within the data that are expressed by the participants of the radio debate.

### 5. Case Report ‘Patara’: Media Talk in Radio

Meaning ‘debate’ in Sango, the language spoken in the Central African Republic (CAR), *Patara* is a 50 min political debate flagship of the nationwide Radio Ndeke Luka (RNL). Based in the capital Bangui, the outlet was launched in 2000, succeeding a former radio sponsored by the United Nations. After the departure of the UN mission at that time MINURCA<sup>1</sup>, the outlet was taken over by the Swiss non-governmental organisation Fondation Hironnelle and transformed into Ndeke Luka (the ‘bird of good luck’ in Sango). A national audience survey showed that it was the top radio station in the country with more than two million listeners (IMMAR 2017). Ndeke Luka has been funded mainly by the European Union Trust Fund ‘Békou’ established in July 2014 in the aftermath of the crisis in the country. The Békou Trust Fund<sup>2</sup> aims to support the country’s exit from the crisis, its reconstruction and development (European Commission n.d.).



The radio broadcasts are live in French and in Sango with radio partners throughout the country. It employs around fifty professionals in Bangui and in the provinces, producing programmes, debates and entertainment. The radio's editorial charter states the objectives of contributing to dialogue between Central Africans by producing and broadcasting factual, impartial and professional information and to allow every listener to understand the challenges of reconstructing the country during the democratisation process and in the post-conflict context ([Radio Ndeke Luka n.d.](#)). Broadcast weekly on Saturdays, *Patara* is one of the station's oldest programmes, becoming a reference for discussing pressing issues. "It exists since, well, at least fifteen years", said a former project manager of Hironde<sup>3</sup>. The idea was to have a debate that was plural and that each and every one could speak "what they really thought about with their arguments", noted a former journalist of the radio who had been a moderator of *Patara*<sup>4</sup>. Due to its high popularity, the programme had to be suspended during the period of the crisis in the CAR<sup>5</sup> during 2013 and 2014, stressed a former editor-in-chief<sup>6</sup>: "we couldn't work under those conditions."

"We debate the subjects concerning the political life in Central Africa, the subjects that marked the week. It is a political debate, but we touch all the sensitive questions in the society. We question the ruling power. The programme is very civic."<sup>7</sup>

The 50 min episode of *Patara* from 19 January 2019 was the one selected to use the four-dimension analytical model of narrative analysis. This broadcast approached the 'Khartoum dialogue' that was about to take place in the capital of Sudan between 24 January and 5 February 2019. The peace talks were brokered by the African Union and the United Nations and culminated in the signature of the *Accords Politique pour la Paix et la Réconciliation en République Centrafricaine*<sup>8</sup> by the government with 14 armed groups on 6 February 2019. This is the most recent peace agreement; seven other deals had been previously signed and eventually collapsed in past years. The main challenges faced by the country included promoting a politics of power sharing and an inclusive government, avoiding another *coup d'état*, effectively disarming the population with an efficient demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration program (DDR) and promoting reconciliation and access to justice and reparations.

The weekly programme *Patara* is considered for the purpose of the analysis, as one analytical unit. The storyline is led by the journalist who presents, moderates, poses the questions and drives the flow of enquiries, topics to be approached and interventions throughout the programme. The journalist placed in the position of the presenter has the role of handling the topics to be discussed, to create climax and to pose pressing questions. This transcript of the debate showcasing divergent positions concerning the peace negotiations was used to exemplify and illustrate how to operationalise the analytical framework. Departing from this particular broadcast that was aired in early 2019 and approached the controversial peace accords, the analysis touches upon a sensitive but crucial point within the social interest and public debate in the Central African society at that moment in time. The signing of a peace accord would unleash a series of processes of peacebuilding, including justice trials that would follow in the years to come.

By focusing in one single transcript, it is neither intended here to offer any generalisation claim nor to render a full account of Radio Ndeke Luka's narratives, let alone be representative of the Central African media landscape. This is a pertinent limitation that ought to be acknowledged. Considering that the topics to be discussed on this weekly broadcast, as well as the participants invited to join, vary, it is expected that the flow of the narratives might likewise incur some variation—depending on the topic to be discussed, on the questions to be posed and on the participants to join. Depending on the topic chosen and the guests, it might have a more inflammatory or confrontational tone than others. However, as the journalist-presenter tended to be the same in moderating and preparing the script, it is expected that patterns can be detected across different transcripts as the structure (with the outline of blocks of questions) of the debate and the levels of the

participants' agency fostered by the presenter might follow some common pattern despite the thematic of the discussion that varies from week to week.

## 6. Operationalising the Coding System

This section presents results deriving from the operationalisation (in four steps) of the analytical model of the weekly Radio Ndeke Luka's political debate *Patara* by using the MAXQDA software. For projects that require multiple types of data, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software becomes a vital and indispensable tool to assemble masses of data in common codes (Saldaña 2013, pp. 25–26; Rossman et al. 2017, p. 462). Coding is a 'cyclical act' (Saldaña 2013, p. 8). It is not simply labelling, but rather a process whereby data is "segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation prior to display" (Grbich 2013, p. 17). In this research, the narrative coding process requires meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience (p. 10). As a matter of specification, the narrative coding to be used in this study applies the conventions of literary elements and analysis to qualitative texts, often in the form of stories. This type of coding is appropriate for exploring intra/inter-personal participant experiences and actions to understand the human condition through narrative (Saldaña 2013, pp. 265–66).

### 6.1. STEP I. Identifying and Locating Participants

The transcript has a general record with descriptive identifiers: type (*Émission* in French), date of transcription, date of the programme, duration, language, title of the issue of the day (announced in the radio's website), the corresponding website's link, how many participants in the debate and the description of who the participants were, as shown in Figure 4.

Émission : PATARA Date de transcription : 1er Avril 2021 Date d'émission : 19 Janvier 2019 Durée : 00:46:02 Langue : Française Titre : Le dialogue de Khartoum dialogue de la dernière chance ou peine perdue Lien: <a href="https://www.radiondeluka.org/debats/patara/33062-le-dialogue-de-khartoum-dialogue-de-la-derniere-chance-ou-peine-perdue.html">https://www.radiondeluka.org/debats/patara/33062-le-dialogue-de-khartoum-dialogue-de-la-derniere-chance-ou-peine-perdue.html</a>  Combien de participantes dans le débat : 5  Qui est/ sont le(s) participante(s):
---

**Figure 4.** The general record of the transcript.

This step concerns the first dimension of the participants. The analysis of actors involved in the debate is important both from a narrative as well as from a media representation perspective. At this stage, the participants were identified and coded, as displayed below in Figure 5:

Code	Segment
Sources / Actors\Civil Society Groups\Comité suivi recommandations - Forum de Bangui	Comité du suivi des recommandations du Forum de Bangui
Sources / Actors\Civil Society Groups\Network NGOs Human Rights	Réseau des ONGs des Droits de l'Homme, Coordonnateur Adjoint de la Coalition de la Cour Pénale Internationale, Ancien Président de l'Action Chrétienne pour l'Abolition de la Torture
Sources / Actors\Individuals\Journalist	Journaliste
Sources / Actors\Non-state Armed Groups\Advisory monitoring committee DDR - Comité Consultatif du DDR	Coordonnateur des Groupes adhérents au processus DDR, Membre du Comité Consultatif du DDR à la Présidence de la République.
Sources / Actors\Non-state Armed Groups	Porte-Parole du Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique le FPRC

..Comité suivi recommandations - Forum de Bangui	9	Qui est/ sont le(s) participante(s):
..Network NGOs Human Rights	10	1. Joseph BINDOUMI Magistrat et Président du Comité du suivi des recommandations du Forum de Bangui
..Journalist	11	2. Maître Hyacinthe DEGBA, Membre du Réseau des ONGs des Droits de l'Homme, Coordonnateur Adjoint de la Coalition de la Cour Pénale Internationale, Ancien Président de l'Action Chrétienne pour l'Abolition de la Torture,
..Advisory monitoring committee DDR - Comité Consultatif du DDR	12	3. Albert MBAYA, Journaliste,
..Non-state Armed Groups	13	4. Larry Nordine MAHALBA, Coordonnateur des Groupes adhérents au processus DDR, Membre du Comité Consultatif du DDR à la Présidence de la République.
	14	5. Aboubakar Sidik Ali, Porte-Parole du Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique le FPRC

**Figure 5.** How the participants were coded in the MAXQDA transcript.

The analysis of actors involved in the debate and the positions they uphold grant a first insight into how the narrative is constructed. In this specific debate aired on 19 January 2019, the main topic was ‘The Khartoum dialogue—a last chance or a lost cause?’. It was the first broadcast aired in the year and had five guests, two of them were members of civil society groups and one was a journalist director of a publication of the daily newspaper *l’Agora* (founded in 2007) who had worked during the period of the crisis in the country (2013–2014). One representative of the civil society held the position of chairman of the monitoring committee of the Bangui Forum (*Comité du suivi des recommandations du Forum de Bangui*). The Bangui National Forum was a national reconciliation conference organised by the transition of the CAR government having taken place in Bangui in May 2015<sup>9</sup>.

The other civil society participant was a member of the Human Rights NGO Network (*Réseau des ONGs des Droits de l’Homme*). This non-profit network of several NGOs aims for the promotion and defence of human rights in the Central African Republic. It has as its mission to improve the respect for human rights in the country, to support democracy through the promotion of the rule of law and to train leaders at the grassroots level coupled with advocacy with decision makers for the ratification of legal instruments relating to human rights. It also works to raise awareness on the culture of peace; to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts; to visit prisons and to offer assistance to victims of human rights violations ([RONGDHRCA n.d.](#))

When it comes to members of armed groups, at first glance it was not evident whether they belonged to warlord factions. Two of the five participants who had affiliations with non-state armed groups were invited to debate over the negotiation process of the peace agreement. One was the advisory monitoring committee responsible for coordinating with the armed group signatories of the accord. This same person served as the spokesperson of the Movement of Central African Liberators for Justice (*Le Mouvement des libérateurs centrafricains pour la justice*—MLCJ) that had in its ranks a majority of Muslims. This politico-military group belonged to the ex-Seleka movement that overthrew President François Bozizé in 2013 and gathered over 1000 fighters ([Mankou and Nzam 2017](#)).

The other participant was the spokesperson of the Popular Front for the Rebirth of the Central African Republic (*Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique*—FPRC). It was formed in 2014 in the northern town of Birao bordering Chad and Sudan that later

controlled most of the northern CAR, moving its base to the town of N'Délé. Operating as an ad hoc parallel state, this group had its own police, prisons and military bases. They collected taxes and profited from gold and diamond mines (UNSC 2020; UN Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council 2018; Vinograd 2017).

In this broadcast, the two armed groups' representatives were confronted by the invited guests of the civil society groups in a heated debate, peppered with pressing questions, interruptions, to-and-fro conversation and elevation of tone of voice.

*[Présentatrice] Selon vous la solution pour ramener la paix définitivement en République centrafricaine passera nécessairement par Khartoum? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 74–75)<sup>10</sup>*

To both participants, the presenter asked whether they could confirm the existing non-negotiable claims for the peace agreement.

*[Présentatrice] Alors, les groupes armés avaient publié des revendications, et parmi ces revendications, il y en a douze qui sont non négociables dont, l'amnistie générale. ( . . . ) Vous confirmez les douze revendications non négociables? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 78–84)<sup>11</sup>*

The journalist offered the floor to the guest of the monitoring committee of the disarmament to react to what other participants had commented addressing a short follow-up question: 'what is the first claim you are making for the Khartoum dialogue?'. The conversation was interrupted by some of these guests who interacted among themselves. There was contention between the journalist and the guest of the monitoring committee of the disarmament with elevation of tone of voice on the part of the interviewee. Throughout the debate, the moderator recalled a case of violence that occurred in a town called Bambari after a certain armed group had agreed to lower its weapons, 'how do you explain what happened?', he questioned. There was stark disagreement among the civil society participant of the Bangui Forum and the guest of the monitoring committee of the disarmament.

## 6.2. STEP II. Identifying the Structure or Plotline of the Program

The step of identifying the structure of the programme consists of three stages: the journalist-presenter, blocks of content, and communicative functions.

### 6.2.1. The Journalist-Presenter

The passages in the transcripts where the journalist-presenter spoke are highlighted in green. The idea was to denote the fragments from the journalist's participation as leader of the flow of the debate. Examples are shown below in Figure 6:

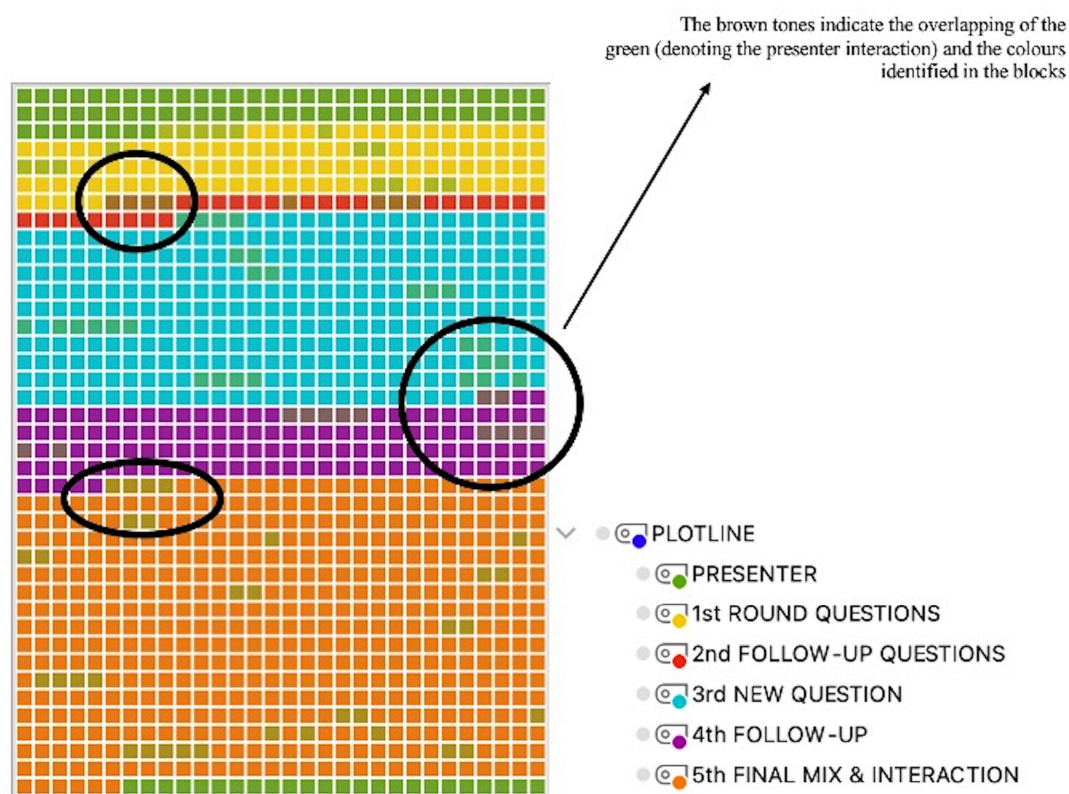
J-PRESEN	32 [0:03:04.0] Présentatrice 33 Nous avons en ligne, Monsieur Aboubakar Sidik Ali, Porte-parole du Front Populaire pour la Renaissance de Centrafrique F.P.R.C. Monsieur Ali, Bonjour,	J-PRESEN	108 [0:19:18.0] Présentatrice 109 (invité) quelle est la toute première revendication que vous portez déjà pour Khartoum ?
J-PRESEN	38 [0:03:31.0] Présentatrice 39 Merci, Khartoum aujourd'hui, un dialogue de dernière chance ? Voilà la toute première question à poser à nos invités. Nous allons faire le tour de la table à commencer par la Magistrat Bindoumi.	J-PRESEN	154 [0:28:35.0] Présentatrice 155 Alors, donc vous pensez que l'idée de partition du pays n'arrivera pas ?
J-PRESEN	55 [0:05:40.0] Présentatrice 56 OK, vous avez donné votre position. Albert Mbaya votre avis sur ce dialogue de Khartoum.	J-PRESEN	164 [0:29:44.0] Présentatrice 165 /La population ne dit pas mais c'est imposé/
J-PRESEN	71 [0:08:26.0] Présentatrice 72 /La société civile maintenant, est-elle ARMEE ?	J-PRESEN	208 [0:42:07.0] Présentatrice 207 /Les armes sont déposées où ?
J-PRESEN	75 [0:08:33.0] Présentatrice 76 (Invité) selon vous la solution pour ramener la paix définitivement en République centrafricaine passera nécessairement par Khartoum ?	J-PRESEN	218 [0:42:51.0] Présentatrice 219 Mais je reviens sur ce que vous avez dit, c'est très important. Les groupes armés ont déjà déposé les armes mais, ce qui s'est passé à Bambari, vous avez dit que c'est pas vous. C'est qui alors ?/

Figure 6. Passages where the journalist-presenter intervened were highlighted.



### 6.2.2. Blocks of Content

After looking at the presenter's interaction, closer attention was paid to recognising blocks of content according to the questions posed and the intervention performed by the participants. In this analysis, five blocks of content were identified. They consisted of the first round of questions posed by the presenter where the same question was asked to all the participants. This first block is indicated in yellow (Figure 7). The preamble at the beginning of the programme was extensive. The presenter announced the topic of the debate, gave context in relation to the numerous peace agreements signed in the past and launched a list of about five pressing questions that would be raised throughout the debate. For each participant announced, there was a to-and-fro greeting interaction before starting the first block with the questions. After the announcement of the theme, the context, the pressing questions and the names of the participants, the presenter led a 'tour de table', a first warming up moment when all the participants were addressed a general question that would guide and unfold throughout the conversation. In this case, the journalist kicked off with the pressing question: 'Is Khartoum today a last chance dialogue?'.



**Figure 7.** Portrayal of blocks of content within the radio transcript of the debate.

The subsequent block (in red) in Figure 7 denotes the second round of immediate follow-up as reaction to participants' comments to the first question. A third block identified in blue points to another round containing a new question opened to all participants. The magenta represents the block with the fourth loop of questions that includes follow-ups for clarification ('what they meant by something they said previously'). The last cycle is marked in orange to indicate the final sequence with an open space for the participants to interact among themselves and react to each other's comments. The presenter here mainly moderated in raising topics that could be further discussed and reflected by asking for the participants' reaction. As observed, this final block echoed a participant's point of view and resonated to the others' opinions.

Below in Figure 7, it is possible to see the distribution of colours of the blocks. The green passages are also included, indicating the interaction with the journalist-presenter.



It is evident that the presenter is more active in the beginning of the audio transcript and at the end. In between, the presenter participated mainly as a moderator and enquirer—these passages are indicated in brown (an example is marked with a black circle) as it overlaps with the other colours of the blocks.

You can see that the first round of questions (yellow) is placed right after the introduction and contextualisation of the debate. The first participant from the civil society representing the Bangui Forum started, followed by a member of an NGO network on human rights, the head of the advisory monitoring committee DDR (coded as part of non-state armed groups with a to-and-fro movement of repeating the question), then a senior journalist who had been invited as a participant, and the last to respond was another member of an armed group who joined by phone. The first block (yellow) lasted for five minutes.

The second round with immediate follow-up questions (red) occupied a very short portion. The presenter launched a second round of follow-up questions and asked the guest from the DDR Committee to react to what had been added by the other participant of the armed group. With a short to-and-fro, the presenter enquired: 'Is civil society also armed?', 'The solution to definitively bring peace to the Central African Republic will necessarily involve Khartoum?'. This second block (red) was the shortest, only one minute long.

The third round (blue) with a new question and the fourth round (magenta) have different proportions of space within the transcript. The third (blue) and fifth (orange) are the longest ones, lasting, respectively, 12 and almost 20 min. On the third round, the presenter gave the floor to the invited journalist to comment on demands requested by the armed groups—'among these demands there are twelve that are non-negotiable, including general amnesty', stressed the moderator. To the participant of the DDR Committee, the presenter asked if he could confirm whether there were twelve non-negotiable demands posing the same question to the representative of the armed group joining by phone. As for the civil society representative of the Bangui Forum, the presenter wondered whether he had been invited to participate in the talks in Khartoum. On a different issue, the guest from the NGO network was asked to offer his opinion about the need to change the constitution.

The moderator then gave the floor once more to the DDR Committee to react to what had been said, with a short follow-up: 'what is the first demand you (armed groups) are making in Khartoum?'. During his speech, the representative of the Bangui Forum interrupted the member of the armed group talking over his voice with criticism. The presenter then rephrased the question about what would be the first demand from the signatories of the peace deal and then directed the same question to the guest of the armed group on the phone.

The fourth block (purple) was rather short, five minutes long, and was a space where the presenter gave the floor to the guest of the human rights NGO to react to what had been said by the armed group leaders. Then, the journalist asked the guest of the Bangui Forum about recommendations the Forum had made. There was again an interruption and to-and-fro movement between him and the DDR Committee.

The last final block (orange) was a mix of open and follow-up questions asking for participants' reaction on top of others' comments. It occupied a large segment of the transcript (almost half of the programme duration), making it possible to infer that half of the debate was dedicated to open follow-ups, a chain reaction of questions building on top of the guests' own comments and points of view. In this final block, the moderator asked the journalist to render an analytical view with a reflexive tone: 'Would the government that controls only Bangui and a few *prefectures* (provinces) continue to be strong in front of those who control most of the country?'. The journalist was briefly interrupted and spoken over by the guest from the Bangui Forum.

Other follow-ups were posed, such as whether the journalist thought that the idea of partition of the country would not happen. His speech was again interrupted, this time by the head of the DDR Committee. Now, turning to the other armed group representative, the moderator asked his opinion about the partition of the country, with some probing

questions: 'Does this mean that the partition will be part of the demands you bring to Khartoum?', 'and what do you say about the events (of violence) that happened?' when referring to some regions of the country that faced an upsurge of violence.

The guest from the human rights NGO network was invited to react to what had been said by the armed leader on the phone, followed by the civil society participant of the Bangui Forum who offered his perspective. The presenter then announced that the debate was reaching an end and gave the floor to the DDR member who had indicated his wish to speak. There was an oral dispute, to-and-fro and interruption between the moderator and the DDR member with an elevation of tone of voice on the part of the interviewee. The presenter recalled the case that a certain armed group that had agreed to lower their weapons was involved in an alleged case of violence in a town called Bambari: 'How do you explain what have happened?' followed by another to-and-fro and interruption between the DDR Committee and the guest of the Bangui Forum as both disagreed. 'So, it was the foreigners who did it?', asked the presenter referring to what had been mentioned about the allegation that foreign soldiers were operating in the country.

For the last considerations, the presenter addressed to the guest from the NGO network, and subsequently announced the end of the debate. The moderator summarised what had been discussed in the programme: 'is it still a last-minute dialogue in Khartoum or a wasted effort?' and repeated the names of the participants without interacting in a farewell closure.

### 6.2.3. Communicative Functions

As the media talk unfolded, the analysis of the communicative functions detected comparisons and metaphors as attempts to depict and explain reality. On one occasion, the moderator compared by saying: 'The country is doing really bad. At risk of paraphrasing the famous Ivorian [artist] Tiken Jah Fakoly [in his song] "My country is doing bad"<sup>12</sup>'. The elevation of tone of voice was detected in several segments, not only in the intervention of the armed groups members, but from the civil society as well, as in this citation: '( . . . ) one day the people will rise. And when the people rise, it will be difficult', emphasised a civil representative with a threatening attitude. 'We can even forbid you to enter in an airplane', he stated pointing to one armed group representative.

Irony was constant from both sides (civil representatives and armed groups), as in this occurrence: 'Is there an armed group that is called civil society? I don't know', stated a warlord by responding to the criticism that the civil society had not been sufficiently included in the Khartoum dialogue that involved the Central African government and the armed groups. Levels of agency were detected in the moderator interventions when, for example, the journalist abruptly interrupted to ask a warlord for clarification: 'And you, what can you say about what happened in Bambari, in Bakouma?' referring to cases of violence in these two northeastern towns. The moderator then continued with a direct question: 'Where were the arms deposited?' pressing the warlord to answer with an increased tone of voice: '[They are] STOCKED already, Minusca [the UN mission] can confirm'.

Expressions of metaphors were used either by the presenters or by the participants. The use of the metaphors facilitated passing the message to the audience or to turn a complex topic into a simpler and graspable idea. They were used as a way of referring to the violent past, to experiences in the present and to hopes and wishes concerning the future. The moderator used repetition to propel further engagement of the participant or to address certain aspects of the overall narrative. Not rarely, the participants engaged in a to-and-fro, speaking over each other and interrupting talk with juxtaposing the arguments in reaction to criticism offered by other participants. Sometimes, these debates reached a peak of contention and controversy.

There were several moments in which the conversation thread seemed to be blocked and truncated, with back and forth and quarrels with indistinguishable voices. A few times, participants interrupted each other, without letting the other finish their thought. The

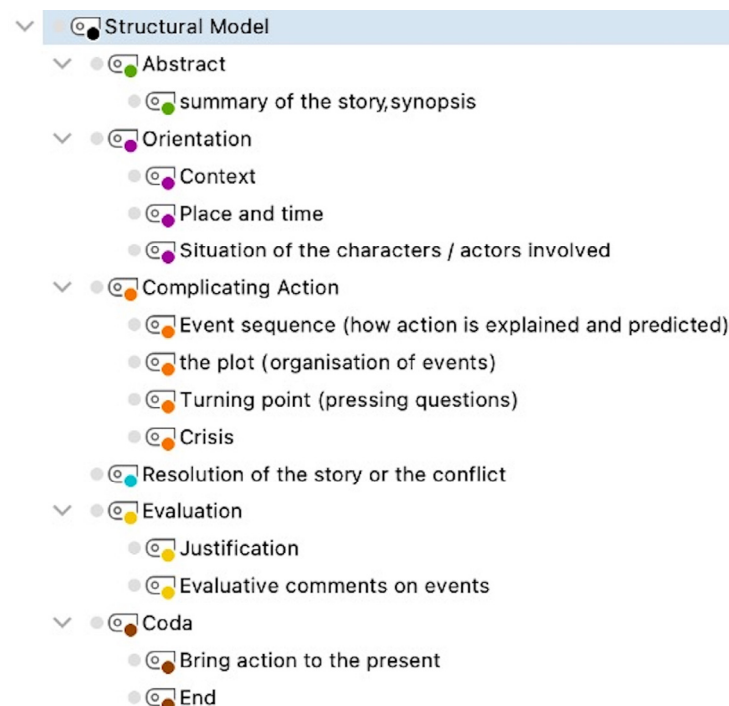
journalist as the moderator tried to play the role of ‘timing controller’ in order to guarantee a balanced time for the participants and also to take charge of commanding and directing the conversation with guiding questions.

### 6.3. STEP III. Identifying Levels of Agency

A theoretically driven coding scheme serves as a guide to detect the actors’ levels of agency. This step consists of two stages: scrutinising the presenter’s role and coding agency.

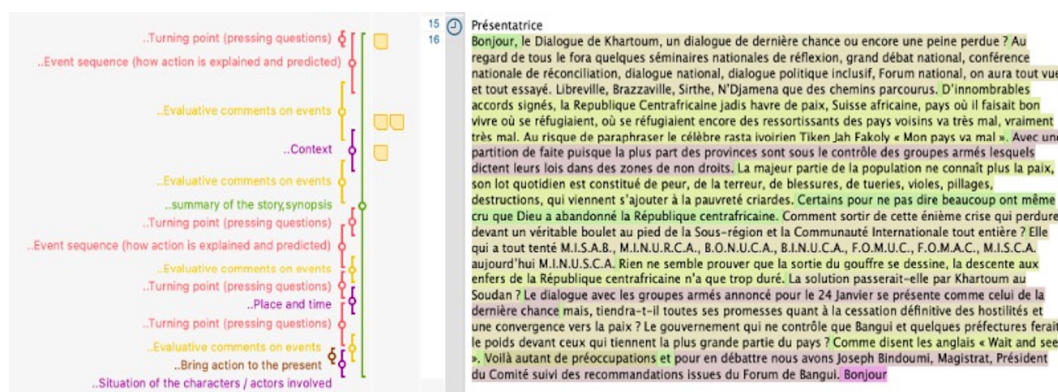
#### 6.3.1. Scrutinising the Presenter’s Role

A careful examination was made of the presenter’s role—how the journalist conducted the debate, handled the moderation and ultimately how the shaping of the narrative was fostered as the oral interventions unfolded. A special coding scheme inspired by the model developed by Labov and Waletzky (1967) was conducted at the first opening paragraph when the presenter announced the debate. The initial introduction of the debate would configure as ‘Abstract’ according to Labov and Waletzky’s model; yet it contained almost all the other components within this first introduction: the aspects of ‘Orientation’ (in which it situated the participating actors involved, who would co-construct the real-time narrative) and the ‘Complicating action’ (when the journalist announced pressing questions indicating what should be the turning point for the conversation during the programme). There was also an indication of an ‘Evaluation’ in which the journalist, for the first and one of the unique times, made evaluative comments. The ‘Coda’ was present too, bringing the conversation to the present—‘*Voilà autant de préoccupations*’ [‘So these are all the concerns’]. The codes and subcodes of the Labov model are indicated below in Figure 8:



**Figure 8.** Codes pertaining to the Labov and Waletzky (1967) model to analyse the presenter’s role.

Figure 9 shows the initial paragraph coding in the MAXQDA.



**Figure 9.** Example of an excerpt (initial paragraph of the transcript) that was coded with the six components of Labov and Waletzky (1967) for the presenter's portion.

The preamble made by the presenter at the beginning of the broadcast was long and detailed so as to give background information before launching the debate. The journalist took the time to situate the thematic to be approached, to cite sources and grant definitions before launching the questions.

Subcodes of Orientation ('context', 'place and time' or 'situation of the characters') overlapped with 'the plot, organisation of events', 'crisis', 'turning point' and subcodes of Complicating Action were present. Segments with 'turning point' (Complicating Action) were also coded as Resolution of the story:

*[Présentatrice] Merci Monsieur, Albert Mbaya, le gouvernement qui ne contrôle que Bangui et quelques préfectures ferait le poids devant ceux qui tiennent la grande partie du pays? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 145–46)<sup>13</sup>*

Evaluative remarks were made in short insertions throughout the conversation as a strategy to redirect the questions, encourage analysis or elicit certain angles or answers. The first part of the programme started with a 'tour de table' with the journalist posing slightly similar questions to each participant and offering a general pressing query that each guest should address and react to as a way of warming up and setting the tone for the debate. As a strategy to move on throughout the debate, the presenter summarised what had been previously said by one participant while addressing a similar question or asking probing questions to another participant to react. The journalist tended from time to time to offer a synthesis and evaluative comments so as to keep the tone and organise the thread of the conversation. Although the presenter was the one responsible to lead, address and moderate the debate, it was not rare that the participants interacted freely among one another. They interrupted and complemented each other and did not wait for the journalist to give them the floor.

### 6.3.2. Agency Codes

The agency codes were detected during the conversation between the presenter and the guests individually. At times, the presenter asked the guests to describe and offer more information about what they did, what their thoughts were on a particular matter or how they reacted to certain topics, critics, or events. In these conversations, the presenter tended to foster the participants' agency regarding their discursive consciousness, what they say they did, how they interpreted what they did and reasons for that and their knowledgeability. By diagnosing these levels, it was possible to observe that the presenter fostered the agency of the actors when the journalist continually asked them to share their understanding and to offer their rationale. Through this method, the participants as actors of the narrative rendered themselves knowledgeable of their actions.

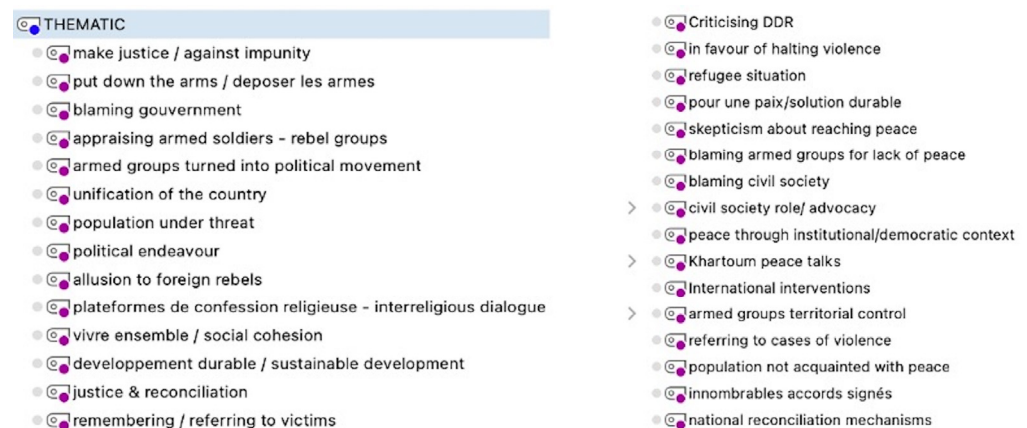
The 'contact experience' pointing to the immediacy of an action emerged as actors drew from their living and embodying experiences to offer accounts and tell their perceptions of

different aspects of reality—either during their involvement in the peace and disarmament negotiations or as a civil society group undertaking civic activities. One illustration is when the presenter directly asked one participant whether they had been invited to join the peace talks in Khartoum.

[Présentatrice]/Oui, je reviens à la société civile, est-ce que cette société civile était l'invitée à Khartoum? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 92–93)<sup>14</sup>

#### 6.4. STEP IV. Identifying Thematic Codes

This step consisted of detecting broad elements of peace and conflict by in vivo thematic coding. These coded elements will be further assembled and will form the basis for a theme. Unlike a code, a theme is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and what it means (Saldaña 2013, p. 267). A theme may be identified at the manifest level—directly observable in the information—or at the latent level—underlying the phenomenon. The goal of this step comprises developing an overarching theme that intertwines various thematic codes together from the data corpus. The inductive set of thematic elements of peacebuilding are highlighted below in Figure 10:



**Figure 10.** Subcodes originated from the in vivo thematic coding regarding peace and conflict of the radio programme.

Figure 11 displays one example of how these codes look in MAXQDA in one speaker intervention:



**Figure 11.** How the thematic coding was displayed in MAXQDA.



When we turn to identifying elements of peace and conflict, careful attention needs to be paid to the content related to the person speaking. For instance, this quote: ‘We who seek to unify the country’ may induce a peaceful consideration of gathering the people and avoiding violence. It is interesting to note that such a phrase has been repeatedly stressed by warlords as an attempt to legitimise their armed action and their reputation. In this broadcast, there was an attempt from the presenter to offer background with historical information while asking the participants for their perspective. Painting a picture and reflecting about the aspects that drove the conjunctural factors is a critical endeavour to offer the citizenry tools and ways of how to read and interpret reality.

## 7. A Brief Discussion

This analytical framework strives to capture the nuances of how media talk reflects narratives of different understandings of peacebuilding(s), in plural. It opens the possibility to observe the existence of diverse narratives in a radio programme identifying competing and clashing accounts. *Patara* assumed the format of a debate with the guests joining in person (except for one) and sharing the physical space of Ndeke Luka’s studio in Bangui. It had a mix of participants from civil society leaders to representatives of armed groups that offered their perspectives concerning one main topic. The sharing of the same space can enrich a discussion as distinct (sometimes contrasting) angles, and reflections are likely to be offered. On the other hand, sharing the same physical space required an effort from the participants to travel to Ndeke Luka’s newsroom in the capital to attend the recording of the debate. This aspect can impede the presence of a variety of actors who are geographically distant from Bangui or who have no means to make a journey to the capital—as the country is disconnected and the existing roads are not entirely safe. On this occasion, the debate was joined by one participant on the phone interacting with the other invited guests in the studio.

The presenter fostered the agency of the actors when the journalist continually asked them to share their understanding of what they did, to explain and to offer their rationale. The participants, as actors of the narrative, rendered themselves knowledgeable of their actions. Evaluative remarks were made in short insertions throughout the conversation as a strategy to readdress the questions, encourage analysis or insert certain angles or answers.

As discussed, conflicts are ideological and shaped by historical and power relations (Mano 2021). They result from confrontations between actors, communities, organisations or governments and imply a serious difference of opinion, aspirations and arguments among groups who have opposing ideas or principles. It was noticeable how the representatives of non-state armed groups were confronted both by the moderator and other participants from the civil society groups. The way the questions were posed, inciting non-state armed groups to make their intentions public, represented an attempt by the radio station to serve as a watchdog and monitor the conduct of para-official actors. The power of questioning appeared both as a technique and as an attempt to exercise control over meaning (Bell and van Leeuwen 1994). It is through the media that parties within a conflict attempt to deliver their narratives and beliefs.

As a way of enhancing the prospects of conflict transformation, the representatives of non-state armed actors had the floor on equal terms to offer their points of view and arguments and to react to the criticisms proffered by the other participants. The probing and inquisitive questions had an overall aim of clarifying the militias’ perspectives of how and why they were conducting the war, their intentions concerning the peace talks or what could compel these groups to respect the accords.

In radio debates with pre-scripted questions, narratives unfold in the real time of the show as the participants react and respond to one another’s intervention through ‘unscripted talk’ (Hutchby 2006). In *Patara*, interviewees and interviewer adopted narrative roles. The interviewer, here the journalist who moderated the debate, tried to play the role of ‘time keeper’ to guarantee balanced time for the participants, to be in charge posing guiding questions and to control the structure of the conversation. Although the presenter

was the one responsible to lead, address and moderate the debate, it was not rare that the participants interacted freely among one another. They interrupted and complemented each other and did not wait for the journalist to give them the floor.

As the media talk unfolded, the analysis of the communicative functions commonly detected comparisons and metaphors as an attempt to depict and explain reality. The use of the metaphors had the power to turn a complex topic into a simpler and graspable one. The resource of repetition was used to reinstate, reiterate, recapitulate, echo or emphasise a certain topic, issue or concern and interrogate the participants about their lived experiences.

The elevation of tone of voice was detected in several segments. This was witnessed in both the armed groups members and the civil society members as well. Irony was constant from both sides. The participants commonly engaged in to-and-fro cross talking and interrupting with juxtaposing arguments in reaction to criticism offered by other participants. Sometimes, this debate reached a peak of contention and controversy. Although at some moments the temper of the debate appeared to elevate, it never escalated out of the expected contentiousness. Despite the existing hostility, insults, offenses, disrespect, rudeness or physical aggression were not detected.

The presenter tended to foster the participants' agency regarding their discursive consciousness, what they could say about what they did, how they interpreted what they did and reasons for that, i.e., their knowledgeability. In this way, the participants as actors of the narrative rendered themselves knowledgeable of their actions. Offering a safe space for dialogue with civilians is an attempt to create spaces for acknowledging interests and differences and rationalising actions towards forging possible roads of transforming disputed realities. In this radio space, participants could openly refer to the violent past, to experiences in the present and to hopes and wishes concerning the future.

The peace accords that were signed did not include active participation of civil society. This was a key aspect raised and criticised by the participants representing social groups. *Patara*, though, opened an opportunity for this layer of society to take part. As discussed, the media should not capture the process of peacebuilding in an episodic way or with a fixed beginning and end event (Lugalambi 2006). It is symbolic that a radio station dedicated a window of its weekly programme to gather contending arguments and bring together sectors that had been prevented from joining the formal official political arena of discussion in the framework of the peace talks in Khartoum (carried out in secrecy and behind closed doors).

As Orgeret (2021) pinpointed, peace should be understood as a continuous process once the development from war to peace is not unidirectional—the phases between conflict, post-conflict and peace are often blurred. The media is imbued with a social mandate nurturing the public interest. It has a cultural role in peacebuilding and in the management of conflict by helping to focus citizens' attention on issues of collective concern, to produce agreement and persuade people to voice their opinions (Lugalambi 2006).

When we turn to identifying elements of peace and conflict, careful attention needs to be paid to the content related to who said what. A distracted look may be inadvertently misleading. Appraising peace was repeatedly stressed by warlords as an attempt of legitimise their armed action and their reputation. Narrative conflicts can be considered as competing stories (Garagozov 2015). It is then important to acknowledge existing tensions that narratives of peacebuilding(s), in plural, are being shaped each day. With the aim of achieving a narrative transformation, parties at conflict may come to collectively create a shared vision of the past, present and future, serving as a precondition for civil peace.

However, within the format of this debate, there was no open intention to reach one final conclusion or resolution of the issue. The overall aim of the debate was to display arguments from different angles about certain specific matters without necessarily having to reach a unanimous agreement among the participants. This is in itself an already pertinent endeavour. Without acknowledging points of tension, potential narratives of peace in everyday life may not be based on genuine and realistic expectations. Recognising the existing tensions does not necessarily mean to provoke a conflict, but to help shape

arguments and transform different aspirations that could be later channelled towards creative ways to reach some common ground.

### 8. Concluding Remarks: Detecting Emerging Narratives

The idea that peacebuilding agency and narratives are not inherently consensual and harmonious, but rather contested and linked to competing norm systems is evident in the analytical process of narratives in media talk. The 50 min episode of the political debate *Patara*, a broadcast programme of Radio Ndeke Luka—an outlet based in the capital of Central African Republic, was used as an exemplar of how the procedures of analysing emerging narratives of peacebuilding could be undertaken. A constructionist interpretative analysis of narratives was conducted embracing a thematic and structural coding process, as well as the layers of actor and agency.

This paper aimed at offering a methodological discussion of how media narratives around peacebuilding may be carved. By proposing a framework for analysis of peacebuilding narratives, I aimed at shedding light on how these perceptions are constructed and aired in radiophonic debates. As evidenced in this radio broadcast drawing from the author's own research data, the ideas of peace and conflict expressed in the 'media talk' relates to social practices as experiential occurrences of *peacebuildings*, in plural.

Narratives allow the present to be situated in time and be symbolised through a frame whereby the narration of human action represents the human experience in time that has been symbolically mediated. The social constructionist perspective was used when approaching narrative analysis of media talk as public narratives. The narrative constructionist approach is more concerned with stories as social events and as social functions once narratives do not mirror reality; they rather replicate lived experience. Media narratives are systems of representation, and the journalist-narrator shapes a form of presenting reality.

The use of media content in academic inquiry for analysing different narratives offers pertinent insights regarding the plurality of accounts around *peacebuildings*, as well as the interaction of points of view among actors amidst armed conflict settings. Research in media talk, and more particularly in broadcast radio, constitutes a relevant space for mapping emerging narratives of conflict and peace. These narratives profit from the mediatic public space offered through the airwaves that allow them to come to light and be expressed. Radio talk should not be disregarded and underestimated as a research object within the efforts of understanding the role media play in peacebuilding spaces. The analysis of narratives arises as an interdisciplinary tool bridging the media and communication scholarly field to one of conflict and peacebuilding.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Data Availability Statement:** The audio broadcasts can be publicly accessed on the website of Radio Ndeke Luka through the link: <https://www.radiondekeluka.org/debats/patara/33062-le-dialogue-de-khartoum-dialogue-de-la-derniere-chance-ou-peine-perdue.html> (Last accessed on 2 March 2023).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic was a 1350-troop peacekeeping mission established by the UN Security Council in March 1998 and lasted until February 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> The Fund was created by France, Germany and the Netherlands and was later joined by Italy and Switzerland. Békou means 'hope' in Sango.
- <sup>3</sup> Interview conducted online on 16 March 2021. The interviews portrayed in this article serve mainly the purpose to offer context and background information about the radio itself and its programme. Following the ethical and informed consent, the names of the interviewees are kept in confidentiality. The interviews were conducted by the researcher in an extensive fieldwork data collection throughout 2021.
- <sup>4</sup> Interview conducted online on 25 May 2021.

- 5 The crisis in CAR was marked by a *coup d'état* (March 2013) perpetrated by a majorly Muslim armed coalition named *Seleka* ('alliance' in Sango) that invaded and conquered many towns from the northern part of the country and marched towards the capital Bangui to overthrow the president, at that time, François Bozizé. A further counterattack in December 2013 by a mainly Christian militia, named anti-Balaka, immersed the country into widespread violence.
- 6 Interview conducted online on 24 February 2021.
- 7 Online interview with Radio Ndeke Luka former editor-in-chief in 24 February 2021.
- 8 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic.
- 9 Following the Brazzaville ceasefire conference of July 2014 and the CAR popular consultations during the first quarter of 2015, the forum resulted in the adoption of a Republican Pact for Peace, National Reconciliation and Reconstruction in the CAR and the signature of a Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Repatriation (DDRR) agreement among 9 of 10 armed groups (UN News 2015). It produced 643 recommendations out of these meetings that were mainly within the framework of good governance, justice, peace, national reconciliation, security and socio-economic development (Ndeke Luka 2020).
- 10 [Presenter] In your opinion, will the solution to definitively bring peace to the Central African Republic necessarily go through Khartoum? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 74–75). Translation into English.
- 11 [Presenter] So the armed groups had published demands, and among these demands, there are twelve that are non-negotiable, including general amnesty. ( . . . ) Do you confirm the twelve non-negotiable demands? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 78–84). Translation into English.
- 12 Original title in French '*Mon pays va mal*'.
- 13 [Presenter] Thank you sir Albert Mbaye, the government that controls only Bangui and a few prefectures would be a match for those who control most of the country? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 145–46). Translation into English.
- 14 [Presenter]/Yes, I come back to the civil society, was the civil society the guest in Khartoum? (PATARA 19 January 2019, Pos. 92–93). Translation into English.

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