**AINFV: Analysis of Isolation (memory/packet) in Network Function Virtualization**

***Abstract:***

***Introduction:***

The starting days of networks, it was used to designed to send packets between two nodes. As the size of network increased, technology evolved and many network services were introduced from time to time i.e. routing, forwarding, security etc. Traditionally these network services were deployed using hardware middleboxes i.e. firewall, routers etc. These traditional hardware middleboxes are in the market for very long time and still serving their purposes. But there are disadvantages of using this approach, such as mentioned in [**Noval approach**] (a)inflexibility: unable to modify the network services, proprietary issue; (b) Non-Scalability: one needs to buy the new middlebox if the load of the network increases for certain period of time and the load stabilizes after some time, then the new middlebox is useless; and (c) Cost: expensive in terms of upgrading the network components by replacing old middleboxes with latest middleboxes to get the maximum throughput. These disadvantages encouraged the ETSI[**ref**] (European Telecommunication Standards Institute) in 2012 and the idea of NFV (Network Function Virtualization) was proposed. The idea was to replace the hardware middleboxes with software defined network services and deploy these network services as VM (Virtual Machine) on commodity servers. ETSI proposed that NFV will help the service providers as (a) swift deployment of network services; (b) comparatively cheap, by using the commodity servers; (c) more flexibility, upgrading of network service is in software. As mentioned in [**panda thesis**]NFV provide the blueprint of developing the network’s dataplane, that allows the developer to program every packet forwarding in the network. Same in SDN (Software Defined Networking), that provides the blueprint of managing the controlplane, i.e. allows developer to define the custom routing, managing network failures etc. NFV framework provides the following features[**panda thesis**]:

**-Multiplexing:** NFV framework should ensure that the NF (Network Functions) should be hardware independent, this helps in scaling of NF without changing the hardware.

**-Isolation:** NF deployed in virtualized share the under the underlying hardware, NFV framework should ensure the memory and packet isolation without affecting the performance

**-High Performance:** NF connected in series working as NF chains should have maximum throughput or equal to as of hardware middleboxes. NFV framework should ensure this throughput, as there is a major overhead of copying packets from one NF to other.

**-Efficiency:** Framework should ensure the minimal hardware utilization as the aim of NFV is to utilize the commodity servers in effective way.

**-Simplify NF Development:** Framework should ensure the simplicity in development of NF, by separating the tasks into two categories i.e. user defined functionality and preprocessing tasks. All of this should be automated.

**-Rapid Deployment:** Framework should ensure the rapid deployment by production ready NFs (i.e. NF testing and deployment in production environment on the go, to improve the performance) . This safes a lot of time.

***Problem statement***

NFV framework have many advantages but these frameworks are still long way from perfection in terms of development and deployment. For development part as addressed in [**Noval approach**] main issue is the performance trade-off due to low-level programming and optimization issues. Isolation. No standard model is defined, thus every vendor has its own programming model making NF operation complex to work in multi-tanent network environment. For deployment, current idea is to deploy NFs as VMs or Contianers to give isolation as it is main security concern. But at the cost of performance loss. Main idea is to deploy the NFs as a process instead of VMs or Containers.

***Available Solutions***

***Background***

***Requirements***

*As discussed earlier, NFV purposes is to simplify the development and deployment of NFs without changing the functionality and performance offered by traditional middleboxes. As mentioned in [***panda thesis***], there are some requirements that must be fulfiled:*

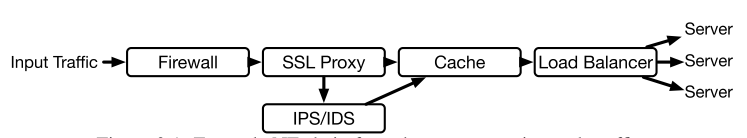
**-Performance:** Framework should not take more than 10 second of microsecond for processing packet. Single NF should be able to process 10-100Gbps of traffic. As the mentioned figures are equivalent to what we get with hardware middleboxes.

**-Efficiency:** Deployment should be done using single machine, because deployment across multiple machine will result in poor resource utilization and performance loss.

**-Chaining:** Framework should be able to combine multiple NF called chaining i.e. *NF1→NF2→....→NFn*. Packet processing starts from *NF1 to Nfn.* ***Fig1*** show the NF chain for processing web traffic.

**Multi-vendor:** NFV framework should support the multi-vendor NF to exists in a network, with security measures i.e. isolation.

**Multi-tenant:** In cloud environment , multiple tenants exists sharing the virtual resource provided by the service provider. NF should be deployed in such a way that the deployment for one tenant should not affect the operation of other tenant.

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***fig1***

Mentioned requirements help in building well structured NFs and deployment ensuring the isolation. To get the further insights of NFV framework, NFV is divided into two parts, one part deals with the development model and second part deals with the execution model.

**Development model:**

Throughput and latency are two major metrics affecting the network performance. Throughput is packet processing in a given time where as latency is time between sending and receiving of packet. These two metrics depend on number of things [**noval approach**]i.e. context switching and copying, network card to cache copying, TLB (Translation Lookaside Buffer) misses and memory allocation. There are many libraries available for fast packet processing namely DPDK[**ref**] and netmap[**ref**] etc. As mentioned in [**panda thesis**] DPDK (Data Plane Development Kit) libraries provide fast packet processing mechanism by: (a) Using PMD (Poll-mode Driver) instead of depending on the CPU interrupts for acknowledgment of received packet; (b) assigning NIC (Network Interface Card) to single process instead of relying on kernel for NIC multiplexing; (c) provides the interface for connecting NIC directly to NF, instead of using intermediate elements (i.e. vSwitch) that required additional computation for packet movement. These libraries helps in improving performance and developers to focus on optimization (i.e. how the packets should be batched). The use of vectorization, as proposed in [**ref],** VPP (Vector Packet Processing) allows the processing on vectors of packets (i.e. up to 256 packets can be read at once.)

As dicussed in [**panda thesis**] The Click modular router [**ref**] based on DPDK libraries, provides the abstraction to develop new NF in such a way by combining multiple packet processing elements. But does not define the how packets flow between different elements. Click provides the limited functionality for customization. Hence for every new NF, developers have to re-write the those elements from scratch, a lot of time is spent on optimizing the elements. Development model should be modular, some module with fixed functionality and common for all NFs, whereas other modules should be user-defined for specific functionality. Developer is responsible for optimizing the user-defined modules only.

**Execution Model:**

Current practice is to deploy NFs in VMs or Containers and for communication vSwitch is used. VMs and Containers ensures the memory isolation (i.e. operation on one NF will not affect the other NF in network). vSwitch allows the NFs to periodically use the NIC for sending and receiving of packets in networks or between NFs. But all this processing of packets is just copying of packets in network and every NF has its own copy of packets that violates the packet isolation(i.e. at any point in time, only one NF should have access to that particular packet) and considerable hard to achieve. Above mentioned technologies have greater influence on performance degradation. As mentioned in [**model paper**], comparing the single process with dedicated NIC, per-core throughput drops by 3x when processing 64B packets using Containers and up to 7x while using VMs. This performance degraded further more when NFs are chained, Containers are 7x slower compared to NF chained in single process and VMs are up to 11x slower. Furthermore, NF chained single process is 6x faster than NF chained Containers or Vms, where each NF having its dedicated core.

***NF Chains***

***Programming VNF***

***Isolation***

Both packet and memory Isolation is the major challenge to achieve, as it directly affects the performance (i.e. latency and throughput). Main reason of this performance gap is that. Firstly during packet processing, packets tends to cross the memory isolation barrier. Secondly the use of context switch that ensures that packet should cross core boundries [**model paper**]. These isolation issues can be catered as mentioned in [**model paper**]:for memory isolation, instead of using VMs and Containers. Checks can be introduced both compile-time and run-time. For packet isolation, “ZCSI (Zero-Copy Software Isolation)” is proposed by author in [**model paper**] that ensures the “safe 0-copy” packet I/O between network functions. This is implemented using unique types[**ref**].

In order to address the issues of development and execution model, author in [**model paper**] proposed a solution called NetBricks. This solution showcased a different way of developing and executing network functions that contradicts with the traditional approach.

***Memory Isolation: Vms/Conatainers***

***Packet Isolation: High performance I/0 libraries for packet processing zero copy Isolation***

***Proposed Framework***

***Overview***

NetBricks, a framework for developing and executing network functions on a single machine. It requires the re-writing of network function compatible with NetBrick’s development model. As mentioned in [**model paper**]- it is not a limitation because of two reasons : (a) not enough development progress has been done for network functions; (b) NetBricks can also co-exists with the traditional network functions, at the cost of performance.

Proposed framework provides both development and execution environment. For development model, it helps developers to work on the high level abstraction of packet processing tasks and allows user defined programmability. Execution model uses safe language and runtimes to ensure memory isolation, whereas current approach uses scheduling for performance isolation [**model paper**]. Another important aspect to consider in execution model is communication between network functions. Message passing [inter-process communication] must not be modified by network function to ensure packet isolation. To achieve this functionality, NetBricks uses the “static checks” to avoid packet copying. Author in [**model paper**] named this functionality as ZCSI (Zero-Copy Software Isolation). ZCSI allows to achieve the memory and packet isolation as compared to VMs and Containers with no performance degradation.

***Main Components***

***Framework***

As discussed above, NetBricks is a complete package. In the section below, development architecture is explained in detailed, later section describes the execution model to deploy the network functions developed using development model

***Development Model***

As described in [**model paper**], NetBricks allow the developer to focus on the high-level programmability of network function. Network function programmability is divided into five sections: packet processing, bytestream processing, control flow, state management and event scheduling.

***Packet Processing***

In NetBricks, packets structure consist of (a) stack of header; (b) the payload; (c) reference to any per-packet metadata [**model paper**]. Header contains structure that defines the length of a packet based on the functional computation of its contents. Payload is the actual data carried by the packet. Metadata defines the internal communication within network function and it is customizable by the developer using user-defined functions. These user-defined functions are passed along with header structure and are able to access last deciphered header along with payload and related metadata. At the start, header stack contains a “null” value, occupying zero byte space. Author provided the four packet operations as follow [**model paper**] : ***Parse:*** This operation takes the header type and structure as an input. Later analyzes the payload accordingly by using header type and update the header stack. At the end header bytes are removed from the payload;  ***Deparse:*** This operation is applied on header stack, it remove the bottom header from the stack and returns it to the payload; ***Transform:***  This operation implement the user-defined functions on header and payload, allows developer to modify the packet size (i.e. by adding or removing bytes to payload as mentioned in “parse”). It also allows to add and modify the metadata of the packet; ***Filter:*** This operation is used to remove packets to be dropped at a specific node. It is a boolean operation return either True or False. Filter operation is based on user-defined and it drops all the packets at the specific node when the user-defined function returns the false value.

***Bytestream Processing***

Main function of bytestream processing is to convert the bytes arrays into packets. User-defined functions are applied on the bytes arrays, In [**model paper**], author provides the two bytestream operations as follow: ***Window:*** This operation takes four parameters as input i.e. window size, sliding increment, timeout and a stream user-defined function. This operation is responsible for receiving and re-arranging the cached packets and create a stream. User-defined function is called whenever there is enough data received to form a window of appropriate size or connection is closed or the timeout expires. Window operation can also forward all received packets without modifying them or it can drop all the packets and generate the modified byte array using *packetize node;* ***Packetize:*** This operation allows the conversion of byte arrays into packets. Providing the byte arrays and header stack, packtize converts and the data into packets and assign the relevant header. For Implementation of above mentioned operations author use the TCP (i.e. TCP sequence number for re-arranging, FIN packets to check connection closing and *packtize* operation on header by modifying the relevant header fields) [**model paper**].

***Control flow***

Control flow deals with the branching required in network function chains. Branching is used to define the conditions i.e. re-routing the packets to specific port etc. Other purpose of branching is to move packets across cores for processing. In order to get the maximum performance, there should be minimum caching of data between cores. Control flow provides the developer the abstraction for re-routing the packets as desired i.e. by user-defined functions, port, address etc. As mentioned above, control flow branching is useful while implementing the network function chains, it allows the developer to select which packet should be routed to next network function. Author provides the three operations for control flow [**model paper**] as follow: ***Group By:*** This operations allows the branching with in network function and branching across network function chains. It takes two input: number of groups for packet re-routing and user-defined function returning the packets with ID of group to which it belongs. Author also provided some per-defined grouping functions based on criterion i.e. TCP flow; ***Shuffle:*** This operation add additional functionality to “Group By” operation i.e. branching is done on the basis of cores. At “*Runtime*”, Group ID generated by shuffle is used to decide the which core to be used for packet processing. Shuffle allows both user-defined and per-defined grouping. Main point to consider is group id generated by the shuffle is not known at the “*Compile time*”; ***Merge:*** This operation provides a junction, where all the different branches can be merged together i.e. all packets from different branches entering a junction and exists as a single group.

***State Management***

When data is processed across multiple core, performance degradation can be observed. Due to communication between core i.e. cache coherence etc. Typically Developer program the network function to partition state and avoid cross-core access or allow minimal access when required without using partition state. NetBrick’s state management allows access across multiple cores. Within core accesses are synchronized but for cross-core accesses author proposed following options [**model paper**] : (a) no-external-access i.e. one core for each partition; (b) bounded inconsistency i.e. where one core has write access to partition and other cores only have read access; (c) strict consistency i.e. allows multi-read and multi-write access.

***Event Scheduling***

Event Scheduling allows the developer to create user-defined functions, that can be run repeatedly i.e. in order to monitor the NF and get the performance logs periodically etc.

***Execution Model***

NetBricks provides the execution environment to run the network function. This model ensures the isolation and also deals with network function placement and scheduling [**model paper**].

***Isolation***

***Memory isolation***

Traditionally isolation is obtained by using VMs and Containers, at the cost of performance loss for simple network function. Considering the complex network function, this performance loss dominates the other factors. To tackle these performance degradation, NetBricks used different approach to achieve isolation. It makes use of RUST [**ref**] safe language that ensure the type checks and LLVM [**ref**] as a runtime. This combination of safe language and runtime achieves the memory isolation similar to that is obtained using the hardware MMU (Memory management Unit). As mentioned in [**model paper**], safe language and runtime ensures following: (a) disallow pointer arithmetic; (b) bound checking on array accesses i.e. preventing random memory accesses; (c) disallow accesses to null object i.e. preventing undefined behavior to ensure memory isolation; (d) type casts are safe. These above features can be achieved using high-level programming languages i.e. Java, C# etc, but these languages are not system friendly.

***Packet Isolation***

Traditional mechanism is to send packets in physical network, NFV follows the same foot step. Network function sent packets in network by copying. This copying mechanism results in performance degradation of packet processing. NetBricks uses the unique types [**ref**] instead of using the copying mechanism. As mentioned in [**model paper**], unique types is used to cater the data races i.e. disallowing the simultaneous accesses to same data. This approach is applied while implementing the network functions, when network function sends a packet, sender function losses the accesses to that packet and only relevant network function should have accesses to that packet. This ensure the packet isolation without any copying of packets.

Above mentioned techniques used in NetBricks for isolation are referred to as ZCSI (Zero-Copy Soft Isolation) [**model paper**]. NetBricks runs as a single process, that can be assigned to one or more cores for processing and use one or more NICs for packets I/O. Packets are transferred between network functions using “function calls”, In case of network function chains, queue is maintained at the receiving end.

***Placement and Scheduling***

As mentioned before NetBricks operates as a single process in which many network functions can be run. Consider the network function chains running as a directed graph having access to multiple available NIC interfaces. Beforeio implementing, NetBricks have to decide at which core the network chains should be run. Based on this NetBricks make the scheduling decisions for packet processing. As author mentioned in [**model paper**] currently NetBricks places all the network functions on a single core to get the maximum performance. For more complex placements, NetBricks make use of *shuffle* operation to process packets across multiple cores.

In [**model paper**] author uses the “run-to-completion” scheduling for NetBricks i.e. packets entering network function, it starts processing till it exists. Scheduling is needed when dealing with more than one packet, considering this all packets are added to “*window*” operation i.e. receiving and re-arranging till enough packets has been collected and “*group by*” operation i.e. stack up packets to be processed by branch. NetBricks uses “*round-robin*” scheduling these operations.

***Testing***

In order to test and validate the NetBricks, two network functions were re-programmed [**model paper**]. Firstly. the network function that decrements the IP TTL (Time To Live) and drops the packet with TTL zero. Secondly, google’s Magvel [**ref**]

(load balancer).

For the first example network function is build using NetBricks as shown in fig.2. Network functions are described as public function in RUST module. *Line 1* of fig.2 shows how the new instance of network function is created using “*ttl\_nf*” function. *D*uring the network function processing, at *Line 3* ethernet (MAC) header is parsed from packet and later at *Line 4* IP header is parsed from the packet. “*Transform*” operation is applied on the parsed IP header decrementing the packet’s TTL (*Line 5*). After the computation of packet’s TTL, “*Filter*” operation is performed that drop the packets having TTL zero (*Line9*). In the end “*Compose*” operation at *Line 12* indicate the end of description of network function and also allows the chaining of network function. As shown in fig.2, no *“Shuffle”* operation is applied while defining the network function. By default, NetBricks routes all the packet processing to single core. Fig.3 shows the code that is used to execute the user-defined functions. “*NetbricksContext*” is used to execute the user configuration. As mentioned in [**model paper**], at *Line 4* pipeline is created that : (a)receives packets from input queue; (b) these packets are forwarded to network function i.e. “*ttl\_nf*” for processing; (c) later processed packets are again to the same queue. Placement of pipeline is defined in user configuration.

For the second example, author used load balancer (Magvel) network function and tried to implement it using NetBricks. Magvel is responsible for dividing the user requests among the back-end servers. Magvel ensures that : it can be deployed in replicated cluster for scalability and fault tolerance; splits traffic; and handles failures. Magvel uses hashing algorithm (i.e. based on lookup table) to achieve above mentioned aims [**model paper**]. Fig.4 shows the packet processing and forwarding part of Magvel. First the lookup table is created (*Line 8*) and then a cache for recording the backend (*Line12*) that is used to start the instance of Magvel network function. Starting at *Line 15,* network function is declared. First the “*Shuffle*” operation (*Line 16*) uses the built-in functionality of using single core. *Line 17* ethernet headers are being parsed. Later *“Group by” operation* (*Line18*) is performed, it uses the “*ipv4\_flow\_hash*” built-in function to extract the flow hash i.e. consist of IP header and TCP or UDP header. This hash is used for two purposes: (a) ensuring that the received packet is TCP or UDP ; (b) to find the already assigned backend to flow (*Line 24*) or to assign new backend to flow using lookup table (*Line 25*). In the end, network functions generates the vector of nodes relevant to the backend, specified by the operation.

***Analysis Tool***

***Test-bed***

***Achieved Results***

***Overheads***

***Framework Evaluation***

***Performance analysis of framework based different Nfs***

***Throughput/MPPS***

***Security Analysis***

***NF vs NF Isolation***

***Comparison of Frameworks***

***Based on Packet/memory Isolation***

***Discuss new & old Framework introduced***

***Conclusion drawn***

***Future Work***