**The Impact of Conflict Classification on Strategic Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention:
A Comparative Historical Analysis of the Rwandan Genocide and the Troubles in
Northern Ireland**

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Abstract

The haunting promise of "never again" following the Holocaust was a powerful echo through the latter half of the 20th century, which led the international community to create frameworks designed to prevent future atrocities and promote global peace. However, the failure to effectively prevent events of mass atrocities and proficiently sustain peace across the globe is often rooted in severe flaws and limitations within these frameworks. A critical yet under-examined aspect of these shortcomings is the role of conflict classification in shaping peacebuilding strategies as well as conflict prevention. This paper founds the interconnected nature of conflict classification, conflict prevention, and post-conflict peacebuilding and further proves not merely the lack of conceptualization within the international framework for conflict classification but also the selective nature of international involvement in major conflicts in the post-World War II era. This paper conducts a comparative historical analysis of the Rwandan Genocide and the Troubles in Northern Ireland in order to explore how varying approaches to conflict classification, within international parameters as well as scholarly typologies, inform peacebuilding strategies. The study examines significant gaps in existing international frameworks and the ubiquitous representation of conflict typologies in literature and advocates for re-evaluating classification methods to better support effective and sustainable peacebuilding. By addressing these foundational issues, the research aims to contribute to more resilient and contextually appropriate international response.

Keywords: Peacebuilding, conflict typologies, classification, prevention, genocide, the Troubles, Northern Ireland, Rwanda

Introduction

Nelson Mandela stated, "No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion." Yet, the horrors of the Rwandan Genocide and the Troubles tell a different story. In roughly 100 days, an estimated 800,000 people, mainly Tutsi populations, were brutally killed in Rwanda. This act of violence is officially recognized as one of the most horrific acts of genocide in history. From across the globe, the Troubles claimed the lives of 3500 people in Northern Ireland, a small nation of just 1.8 million.

In both cases, there was a desperate need to implement peacebuilding strategies in their respective post-conflict societies. It is evident, however, that the peacebuilding approaches exercised on Rwandan and Northern Irish soil were far from similar. Rwanda set its focus on transitional justice, through both international and national courts, as a first step towards reconciliation as well as promoting national unity, state-building, and reconstructing the country's economy. While in Northern Ireland, there was an emphasis on decommissioning, all-party peace talks, power-sharing, and social and economic development.

While both fields of peace and conflict studies have tremendously advanced, the literature as well as the international framework still lag significantly behind in understanding the diverse ways in which the typology of conflict impacts the effectiveness of conflict prevention measures as well as peacebuilding approaches implemented within a post-conflict society. This leads me to my research question: How has the classification of the Rwandan Genocide and the Troubles in Northern Ireland shaped the development and implementation of conflict prevention mechanisms and strategic peacebuilding in their post-conflict societies?

The paper addresses this lacuna in the literature on peace and conflict emerging from the ashes of post-World War II conflicts by conducting a comparative historical analysis of the selected cases. The choice of Rwanda and Northern Ireland as case studies stems from both similarities and differences. Both conflicts came to an end in the 1990s, suggesting that the initial peacebuilding strategies for each were developed and implemented during this overlapping period. The Rwandan Genocide has been firmly established as a non-international armed conflict (NIAC) under the Fourth Geneva Convention (International Committee of the Red Cross, 1949). This classification is widely accepted and has been affirmed through international legal proceedings, including those of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). As a matter of interpretation, the Troubles in Northern Ireland could meet the criteria for a non-international armed conflict (NIAC) under the Fourth Geneva Convention as well due to the level of organization and intensity of violence. In this lies a controlled variable, allowing for contrasting insights from the divergent natures of conflict and approaches to peacebuilding. The Rwandan Genocide and the Troubles offer rich framework settings for the test of how the typology of conflict shapes approaches to peacebuilding.

Given the pre-existing literature on the themes of peacebuilding and conflict typology, this paper will undertake a critical examination of the classification of each conflict based on pre-existing conflict typology theories, the approaches to peacebuilding in selected countries, and the progress achieved in each case. The paper will then argue how the techniques employed relate to the specific nature of each conflict and will provide a comprehensive approach to strategic peacebuilding in a world where the dynamics and currents are ever-changing.

Literature Review

Overview of Conflict Typology Literature

Within conflict typology, there are as many types as analysts; social conflicts, intercommunity conflicts, caste conflicts, group conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, intellectual conflicts, economic conflicts, cultural conflicts, religious conflicts, racial or ethnic conflicts, ideological conflicts, hot and cold conflict, north and south conflict, regional conflicts, international or intra-national conflicts and so on; these are some of the types and levels of conflicts designed by the ubiquitous number of scholars who have addressed the matter. Some make distinctions based on conflict parties, some on conflict topics, while the majority use hybrid lists that appear to mix up several categories. Some categories embrace two types, whilst others include up to 20 types and levels of conflict.

According to Dennis Sandole, a founding member of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR), a typology of conflict assists in conflict analysis as well as conflict resolution. This study is mainly concerned with the latter. The wide range of conflict typologies stems from the complex nature of conflict; Dennis Sandole pieced together a three-pillar approach to conflict analysis which is particularly important in understanding conflict typologies as it has synthesized the main criteria scholars use to classify conflict. Sandole's three-pillar approach locates any particular conflict on account of its characteristics under Pillar 1, the causes and conditions of the conflict under Pillar 2, and conflict intervention and implementation under Pillar 3. This framework also introduces three types of conflict; latent conflicts (pre-MCPs), Manifest Conflict Processes (MCPs), and Aggressive Manifest Conflict Processes (AMCPs) (Sandole, 1998).

In most cases, however, scholars limited themselves to one or two of Sandole's columns. To navigate this ubiquity, this study will explore several prominent conflict typologies, including those based on International Humanitarian Law, broad conflict categories, internal conflicts, and interstate conflicts. This structured approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of how different criteria result in different typologies.

The first category deals with the legal classification of conflicts under IHL. Following World War II, intrastate conflicts became viewed as an international threat, prompting the international community to become increasingly involved in internal armed conflicts, regardless of intensity. As a result, IHL proposed a broad classification of conflicts as either an International Armed Conflict (IAC) or a Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC). According to the Common Article 2 of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, IAC is defined as "all cases of declared war or of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them." This definition expanded our conceptual understanding of international armed conflicts because it heavily relies on the realities on the ground in its assessment and doesn't require proof of a formal declaration of war.

As for NIACs, the definition remains vague. Article 3 Common to the Fourth Geneva Convention refers to NIACs as conflicts "not of an international character" further stating that "Persons taking no active part in the hostilities, including members of armed forces who have laid down their arms and those placed 'hors de combat' by sickness, wounds, detention, or any other cause, shall in all circumstances be treated humanely, without any adverse distinction founded on race, colour, religion or faith, sex, birth or wealth, or any other similar criteria."

Amidst the legal turmoil, conflict studies scholars went hammer and tongs at illustrating a comprehensive conflict typology that resonates with the currents of the world. Qunicy Wright, a foundational figure in the field of conflicts and war, conceptualized his own conflict typology, not based on the parties involved but on the causes and motivations behind the onset of the conflict.

Wright distinguishes between physical conflict, where multiple groups compete for the same territory, and political conflict, where one group tries to force its policies on another. He further distinguishes between two sorts of conflict: ideological conflicts, where systems of thinking or values are at odds, and legal disputes, where controversies over claims or demands are resolved through established procedures (Wright, 1990). Prior to the establishment of this conflict typology, Wright had also identified war as a distinct type of conflict characterized by the union of all four types of conflicts (Wright, 1942).

In another attempt to develop a comprehensive typology, Peter Wallensteen, the founder and director of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), outlines three types of organized violence within the UCDP framework. The first type is armed conflict, defined as a political disagreement between a state actor and a non-state actor, with a minimum threshold of 25 fatalities occurring in a year. The next category is inter-communal violence, which refers to conflicts between non-state actors. The final type is one-sided violence, characterized by violence directed at specific populations that are generally unorganized. This paradigm accounts for developments in post-Cold War conflicts and presents a nuanced framework that incorporates a casualty threshold. However, it remains possible that some unique cases may not fit into any of these categories.

Scholars have been compelled to refine conflict typologies in the wake of the horrific internal conflicts that struck the world in the post-World War II era, such as those in Rwanda and Bosnia. They have realized that internal conflict is significantly more intricate than other types of conflicts and needs a more nuanced lens through which to analyze it. Mary Kaldor synthesizes the evolution of warfare in the post-Cold War era and draws the line between Old Wars and New Wars. The former is characterized by clear battle lines between state armies, large-scale violence aimed at the combatants, and the taxation of the public to centralize and fund these wars. These wars were often politically or ideologically motivated and the battle remained the decisive element, usually through territorial conquest. New Wars are a type of warfare involving state forces and/or non-state actors, are decentralized, and are funded in part by the state and other illicit means, including foreign assistance. New Wars are fought in the name of identity politics and are aimed at "creating unfavorable conditions for all parties it cannot control" through different means, often leaving behind significant civilian casualties (Kaldor, 1999). According to Kaldor, identity politics results from globalization, increased interstate communication, as well as interstate migration.

Kaldor's distinction is particularly significant as it provides a nuanced explanation of the evolution of warfare as well as the dynamics between warring factors and beyond (Kaldor, 1999). This typology is of use in understanding the complexities of contemporary conflicts, where war, crime, and human rights abuses intersect. However, the binary nature of this distinction remains unconstructive when studying the divergent realities of intrastate conflicts.

Other scholars have examined internal conflicts in greater depth; Stathis N. Kalyvas, Gladstone Professor of Government at the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, developed his own conflict typology. Although focused exclusively on internal conflict, Kalyvas' approach constitutes "ideal-typical analytical categories rather than universal definitions" (Kalyvas, 2006). He distinguishes four types of civil violence. The first is State Terror, which refers to the unilateral use of terror by the state to enforce compliance. The second is Genocide and (Ethnic) Cleansing, defined as violence intentionally employed to physically exterminate an entire group rather than subject them to political authority. The third is

Reciprocal Extermination, which begins when the previous category becomes bilateral or reciprocal. Finally, the fourth is Civil War, involving multiple actors with shifting control and a targeted audience capable of changing loyalties, thereby impacting the conflict's outcome (Kalyvas, 2006).

Jan Angstrom also develops a quadratic typology of internal armed conflicts. He bases his analysis on two dimensions: idea-individual and whether or not the state itself is contested (Angstrom, 2001). The state is commonly defined as compromising a territory, a population, and a government in control thereof. If, the territory is contested, perhaps on the basis of a territorial dispute, or if the the population is contested, perhaps on the basis of a sectarian conflict, we shall consider the state to be contested. Simultaneously, we have to discuss on what account the government is contested, if applicable. An ideological civil war is underway if the rule is being opposed on ideological grounds although the state's population or territory is not under dispute (box 1). On the other hand, a conflict pertaining to "leadership" can be identified if there is controversy over the state's ruler but not the state itself (box 2). On the other hand, "resource conflicts" emerge when the state itself is disputed on the basis of ideology (box 3). Similarly, we derive ethnic conflict when the state is disputed based on who the state belongs to (box 4) (Angstrom, 2001).

It was not until 1996 that K. J. Holsti, a significant figure in the literature on interstate conflicts, shifted his focus to non-interstate conflicts. He formulated a typology of internal conflicts based on the types of warring factions and the motivations behind their emergence. Holsti delineated four distinct categories of conflicts. The first includes standard state-versus-state wars and armed interventions that entail considerable loss of life. The second refers to decolonizing wars of national liberation, where groups seek independence from colonial powers. The third focuses on internal wars driven by ideological goals. Finally, the fourth encompasses state-nation wars, which involve armed resistance by ethnic, linguistic, and/or religious groups, often with the intent of secession or separation from the state (Holsti, 1996).

As internal conflict typologies reveal fractures within a nation, interstate conflicts highlight greater tensions between nations, with scholars establishing various typologies to capture the distinctive dynamics when states become direct enemies. In an earlier attempt to design an elaborate typology of interstate conflicts, K.J. Holsti classifies these conflicts into twenty-four issues composed into five sets; conflict over territory, economics, nation-state creation, ideology, and human sympathy (i.e. ethnicity/ religion) (Holsti, 1991).

Overview of Peacebuilding Literature

From early history onwards, all societies have sought to create mechanisms and institutions to build and sustain peace. This was demonstrated through councils of elders, religious leaders, and/or other organized forums. The term "peacebuilding" was only coined in 1969 by Johan Galtung, often referred to as "the father of peace studies." In his work, Galtung distinguished between three approaches to peace; peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding. Although widely used, this distinction did not fall short of criticism.

It wasn't until the late 19th century that peacebuilding became an institutionalized concept in international law. Following the inauguration of the League of Nations and The Hague Peace Conference in 1898, this process concluded with the United Nations' establishment at the end of World War II, with its primary goal being to monitor and support international peace through state-to-state mediation, facilitation, good offices, and arbitration. The usage of the term

has widely spread after its resurgence in the 1992 UN Secretary General's Report, An Agenda for Peace. The latter was proposed in the post-Cold War era in light of the rise of UN-led peacekeeping missions across the globe.

Vis-à-vis the definition, three strains of peacebuilding literature will be examined and one of these three strains will serve as the lens through which the study discusses the approaches to peacebuilding. The first strain of peacebuilding literature was elaborated in Boutros Boutros Ghali's An Agenda for Peace in which peacebuilding was originally defined as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict." It is "sustained, cooperative work to deal with the underlying economic, social, cultural and humanitarian problems [that contribute to conflict]" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). This definition, first and foremost, distinguished postconflict peacebuilding from peacekeeping and peacemaking, and emphasized social and political reconstruction as a means of avoiding a "relapse into conflict." The latter term places the assumption of a linear progression from conflict to peace and overemphasizes stability rather than conflict transformation. Additionally, scholars like Charles T. Call argue that the proposed definition is overly state-centric, excluding important levels of the affected population from the peacebuilding process.

Although this definition originated in the post-Cold War era and was purposefully created to address the varying conditions, levels, and types of conflict-affected countries, it remains Western-centric (Call & Cook, 203). It arguably reinforces Western norms and values while diminishing the complex nature of the local political landscape, making this framework ineffective with regard to the reality on the ground.

Exploring Johan Galtung's foundational contributions to the field is essential to grasp the next set of peacebuilding literature. Galtung's pioneering concept of Positive Peace, as distinguished from Negative Peace, represents a significant shift in our perception of post-conflict peacebuilding efforts. According to Galtung, Negative Peace is defined as the absence of direct violence and it was further developed to refer to the absence of organized, collective violence between large groups of people such as nations, and even between classes, races, and ethnic groups. Therefore, Positive Peace entails not only the absence of direct violence but also the establishment of societal conditions that promote justice, reconciliation, and institutional equality across all levels of the affected population (Galtung, 1969). It addresses the systemic forms of structural violence but excludes cultural violence despite their classification as two forms of invisible violence according to Galtung's violent triangle model (Galtung, 1990).

Building on Galtung's theory of peace, the second subset of peacebuilding literature suggests that conflict prevention and conflict resolution are foundational to achieving peace. It sought to include all levels of the affected population and illustrate social, psychological, religious, and other dimensions of peacebuilding operating at the state level and beyond. Although commonly recognized, this definition has been challenged for the operational issues it could impose, particularly due to the distinction between Negative and Positive Peace. The latter ignores not only the complexities and frequently overlapping forms of violence, but also the difficulties of achieving positive peace in nations with low resources or a weak state.

In contrast to the first two sets of peacebuilding literature, the third strain of peacebuilding literature embraces peacebuilding as military, security, political, social, economic, and development interventions aimed at addressing the causes of conflict. This definition doesn't separate peacebuilding from matters of peacemaking and peacekeeping. Therefore, this definition implies that efforts of peacebuilding may take place or commence when conflict is still

ongoing or before war ends. Many scholars, including Elizabeth Jean Wood, reject the idea that peacebuilding strategies implemented in post-conflict societies differ systematically from conflict prevention and war termination in any other society (Wood, 2003). It is, therefore, hard to distinguish between this definition of peacebuilding and the broader literature on peacekeeping and peacemaking.

Methodology

Case studies' selection: Rwanda and Northern Ireland

As previously outlined, the choice of Northern Ireland and Rwanda as case studies stems from both divergent and common characteristics. This comparative historical analysis considered the overlapping period during which preliminary strategies were implemented in Rwanda and Northern Ireland and the non-international nature of both conflicts as controlled variables due to the ubiquity of conflict typologies within the literature and the international framework, highlighting the need for niche analysis of IACs and NIACs separately in order to pave the way for an unchallenged classification. This approach subsequently allowed for insight from two key criteria: (1) the categories under which each conflict is classified, and (2) the expansive assessment of their post-conflict societies.

Data Collection

I utilized a wide variety of primary and secondary data. Primary data included references to and/or analysis of official reports and resolutions published by international organizations (e.g. the UN and the World Bank), references to and/or analysis of official reports published by governments and governmental institutions (e.g. Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Rwanda, National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and the Office for National Statistics), rulings released by national and international courts (e.g. Gacaca Courts, the ICTR), along with relevant peace agreements (e.g. the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration, Belfast Agreement, and the Arusha Peace Accords). Additionally, I turned to secondary sources including books, journal articles, and reports that analyzed the classification of these conflicts, the preliminary peacebuilding efforts, and beyond.

Data Analysis

First, I identified the typology that best aligns with the dynamics of the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the Rwandan Genocide. I then determined the specific category under which each case fell, based on internationally recognized criteria for the distinction between IACs and NIACs as well as scholarly interpretations each elaborating on their own criteria within divergent scopes of study while I explored how this classification affected the design and implementation of the peacebuilding approaches in Rwanda and Northern Ireland. Throughout the research, I conducted a comparative historical analysis of the Negative and Positive Peacebuilding processes in selected countries, through a review of peace accords, state-building procedures, transitional justice mechanisms, and third-party interventions and beyond.

Lastly, the paper sought to assess the effectiveness of the implemented strategies through the lens of four main axes that I have identified; (1) Post-Conflict Stability, grounded on the cessation of violence, security, and the sustainability of peace; (2) Reconciliation and Social Cohesion, involving an analysis of dialogue programs, reintegration efforts, and healing initiatives, using metrics like public attitudes, commission outcomes, and community effectiveness; (3) Economic Recovery and Development, based on economic stability, infrastructure development, and poverty rates, utilizing indicators like GDP growth, employment

rates, and foreign and local investment levels; and (4) Transitional Justice, particularly trials, truth commissions, and reparations, their legitimacy, and their effectiveness in bringing victims justice and preventing crimes in the foreseeable future.

Empirical Findings

To reiterate the primary research question, this paper seeks to investigate the impact of conflict classification, both by the international community and within conflict literature, on the approach to peacebuilding in post-conflict societies. By responding to this question, I aim to establish the importance of conflict classification in strategic peacebuilding and identify relevant lacunas revolving around the matter.

Conflict Classification in Selected Countries

Given the non-international nature of both the Troubles in Northern Ireland and the Rwandan Genocide and the ubiquity of conflict typologies within the literature on peace and conflict, the first step towards pinpointing a typology that encompasses both cases is to consider typologies focused on internal armed conflicts. Additionally, it is crucial to acknowledge the disproportionate scales of violence in these cases and the internationally recognized genocidal intent on the Hutu's end in Rwanda.

Stathis N. Kalyvas' typology besetting Genocide and (Ethnic) Cleansing perfectly aligns with the characteristics of the Rwandan case, while his framework also includes Civil War, characterized by multiple actors with shifting control and a targeted audience whose loyalties can change, affecting the conflict's outcome. Although the Troubles in Northern Ireland were never formally classified as a specific type of conflict, either internationally or regionally, it still fits well within Kalyvas' definition of Civil War violence according to whom Civil War involves prolonged armed conflict between organized groups (like the Irish Republican Army) and state forces (like the British Armed Forces) over territorial control and governance. This conflict blurred the lines between combatants and civilians, aligning with Kalyvas' broader understanding of Civil War dynamics (Kalyvas, 2006).

Assessment of Peacebuilding Approaches in Selected Countries

Johan Galtung's distinction between Negative Peacebuilding, defined as the absence of direct violence, and Positive Peacebuilding, defined as the absence of direct and structural violence, offers a great framework for analyzing peacebuilding approaches in selected countries.

Negative Peacebuilding. The civil war between the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and the Rwandan government was sparked in 1990, and the Arusha Peace Accords (1993) marked the first major peace treaty. These talks were intended to end the civil war and reach a power-sharing arrangement before the foreseen escalation. Meanwhile, the UN SeCo established the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR), primarily designed to monitor and assist in implementing the Arusha Peace Accords (United Nations Security Council Resolution 872, 1993). Although these efforts succeeded at bringing a formal end to civil violence, these accords were ultimately ineffective in preventing the genocide that erupted in 1994, a separate episode of violence marked by mass killings and horrifying crimes against humanity rather than traditional warfare (Reyntjens, 1996).

As the genocide unfolded, the international community kept silent. The United Nations withdrew approximately 90% of its UNAMIR troops, while Member States deliberately restrained their troops (United Nations Security Council Resolution 912 1994). The Rwandan genocide was not resolved through a series of peace talks, nor did the signing of agreements and treaties denote it. Instead, the international indifference to the horrors meant that the battle alone would

determine the fate of roughly 7 million people. In July 1994, the RPF successfully halted the 100-day genocide against the Tutsi and moderate Hutu after ceasing Kigali and subsequently all of Rwanda's territory.

For many years after the end of the genocide, continuous war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) had significant effects on post-conflict stability in Rwanda as some of the armed groups complicit in the genocide, such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda, continued to threaten the borders and internal security of Rwanda. Such categorization of violence as genocide has ensured a nationally oriented security response to address the atrocities and their aftermath. It is not the label per se, but the scale and brutality of the committed atrocities, which have compelled the authorities to implement strict governance and maintain a heavy military presence. Such measures have been decently successful in preventing the re-eruption of mass violence and ensuring stability in the country.

The international community failed to classify the Rwandan Genocide in time and intervened only after the atrocities had ended despite clear signs of escalation as the world watched on their devices as the genocide unfolded (Reyntjens, 1996). It also failed to effectively prevent the genocide or address the conflict in the DRC, which threatened the sovereignty and stability of neighboring countries. This leads me to establish the first gap in conflict classification vis-à-vis peacebuilding. If the international framework established after World War II still fails to timely classify impending conflicts, particularly Genocide and (Ethnic) Cleansing, then the UN is rendered ineffective in its core purpose of preventing atrocities. This failure highlights the critical need to redefine the UN's structure and develop a more robust framework for conflict prevention that goes beyond the limitations of the liberal peace debate.

In contrast to the Rwandan experience, Northern Ireland's 30-year civil war was marked by several all-party peace talks and the signing of numerous peace treaties, some of which were successful, while others failed (Ryan, 2010). Although no classification of the Troubles had been established beyond scholarly interpretations of sectarianism and civil violence to date, the international response to the conflict was arguably more significant and more fruitful despite its limited scope.

The international response to the Troubles in Northern Ireland was marked by both Anglo-Irish relations as well as active US involvement in peace negotiations. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was actively engaged in the conflict from the very start. The Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985) and the Downing Street Declaration (1993) were key milestones as they laid important foundations for peace in Northern Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement granted the Irish government a consultative role in Northern Irish affairs, acknowledging the nationalist community's concerns while affirming Northern Ireland's status within the UK (Cochrane, 1999). The Downing Street Declaration further advanced the peace process by affirming the principle of self-determination for the people of Northern Ireland, paving the way for inclusive negotiations that ultimately led to the Good Friday Agreement (Cox, 1996). However, it was the transition from the elitist, top-down strategy to a more inclusive, all-party peace talks that enabled Northern Ireland to move beyond violence as a form of resistance.

A turning point came with the engagement of U.S. Senator George Mitchell. U.S. President Bill Clinton had nominated Senator Mitchell in December 1995 to chair an international body tasked with overseeing the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Senator Mitchell's insight, coupled with the inclusive nature of the all-party peace talks he facilitated, was critical in bringing Northern Ireland out of the cycle of violence. His efforts brought about the signing of the Belfast Agreement of 1998, which formally ended the violence

in Northern Ireland and set the groundwork for a consociational model of democracy (Curran & Sebenius, 2003).

However, Northern Ireland's stability has constantly been tested, both internally and externally. The continued activity of dissident republican groups in the post-Good Friday Agreement era underlines the continued threats to peace. In 2022 alone, there were 25 reported security-related incidents, demonstrating the relentlessness of paramilitary activity on the ground. However, the region largely maintained stability through the functionality of the Northern Ireland Executive despite occasional suspensions due to political tensions (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2023).

The challenges posed by active paramilitary efforts to disengage from the mechanisms established by the Belfast Agreement reveal the agreement's failure to address the root causes of the 30-year-long violence: sectarianism. This situation reflects the international community's lack of interaction with a more comprehensive approach to Negative Peacebuilding that does not overlook the intricacies behind a society torn apart by sectarian warfare. It also underscores the necessity for a more legally-binding approach to conflicts that pose an international threat, within the boundaries of sovereignty and self-determination.

Furthermore, the failure to classify the Rwandan Genocide in due time contributed to the rise of one-party dominance, which had significant implications for Rwanda's preliminary Positive Peacebuilding efforts (Ingelaere, 2014). Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the absence of a precise classification of the conflict may have prolonged the violence, yet it ultimately allowed for an inclusive peace process that led to the Good Friday Agreement. This agreement, while contributing to peace, also had limitations in achieving an all-encompassing Positive Peacebuilding process.

Positive Peacebuilding. Throughout the first stages of Positive Peacebuilding in Rwanda, the emphasis was put on eliminating systematic oppression and discrimination against particular groups through designing a governmental structure rooted in the principles of good governance, decentralization, and transparency. The *National Decentralization Policy*, first adopted in 2001 and subsequently revised in 2006, 2012, and 2021 was a testament to the Rwandan Government's understanding of the root causes of violence (Ministry of Local Government 2001; 2006; 2012; 2021). The measures put into place were intended to address historical injustices and establish more equitable dynamics and opportunities between Tutsi and Hutu populations, which had previously been distorted by those in power or those holding the capital (Newbury, 1998). The decentralization efforts were fortified by a transitional justice process incorporating the ICTR (United Nations Security Council Resolution 955, 1994), the pre-existing national court system, and the community-based Gacaca (pronounced *ga-cha-cha*) Courts formally re-established in 2004 (Republic of Rwanda, 2004). In total, Gacaca courts processed approximately 1.9 million cases. The key aspect of this judicial process lies in its nature; Gacaca courts were of the people, by the people, for the people. Most survivors and perpetrators participated in one or more reconciliation initiatives, programs, or projects (National Service of Gacaca Courts, 2012).

Throughout this process, the predominant narrative had been that only Tutsi communities were massacred, that all Hutu were complicit in the genocide, and that the burden of apology fell solely on the Hutu people. As a response, Kagame's government founded the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC) meant to "de-ethnicize" Rwanda and promote national unity and reconciliation. The latter promoted the idea of embracing oneself as Rwandan; not Tutsi, not Hutu, and not Twa (Republic of Rwanda, 1999).

Over and beyond that, efforts to promote national unity and reconciliation expanded beyond citizens to include paramilitary groups and ex-combatants through *Ingando* and *Itorero ry'lgihugu;* two consecutive Rwandan post-genocide programs that included solidarity camps where participants, including ex-combatants and returning Hutu refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), engaged in peace education. Both of these programs were aimed at creating national unity, encouraging patriotism, and countering genocide ideology by emphasizing a shared Rwandan identity (Purdeková, 2011). This strategy of national unity and "de-ethnicization" was significant in fostering strong cultural, social, and political tapestries.

However, it remains important to pinpoint that this approach, fueled by fear of a prospective bloody conflict, relatively aggravated the matter, not just through stripping nationals of their identity, but also by promoting a singular one-sided narrative of Rwanda's past, present, and future. This prevented open discussion of the core motives of the genocide and the ongoing challenges of peacebuilding.

In parallel, Rwanda's 2012 revision of the *National Decentralization Policy* foreshadowed a strategic shift in government. The emphasis shifted from strictly encouraging national unity to prioritizing fast-track economic development as a way out of poverty and highlighted administrative decentralization, particularly through the district system, over political decentralization. This strategy was particularly yielding to economic recovery and development in post-genocide Rwanda. Between 2007 and 2017, real GDP rose from RWF 3.26 trillion to RWF 6.69 trillion, or by an average of 7.45% per year. The government managed to reduce poverty from 56.7% in 2006 down to 38.2% in 2017 (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2018).

This shift in policy demonstrates a mature understanding within the RPF-led government that, while the genocide label is important, it must not overwhelm the need to establish a viable and prosperous post-genocide society. The emphasis on economic advancement and practical governing institutions reveals a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding that considers historical context as well as future development goals. Despite such progress, Rwanda remains significantly dependent on foreign aid, which accounted for 14.8 of its GDP in 2019 and brings us to question the extent of autonomy of its growth model (Diao, 2017).

Unlike Rwanda, where the absence of timely classification and subsequent labeling as genocide resulted in a more reactive and transformative approach to both Negative and Positive Peacebuilding, Northern Ireland's Positive Peacebuilding process was built on a pre-established structure laid during the Negative Peacebuilding phase. The Belfast Agreement (1998), in particular, established a consociational governance framework between Unionists and Nationalists, weaponry decommissioning, and police reforms. This existing system guaranteed that when Northern Ireland transitioned to Positive Peacebuilding, there would already be a strong mechanism in place to support further efforts.

The Widgery Tribunal was formed as a response by the British government to the Bloody Sunday event that occurred on January 30, 1972, where 14 unarmed Catholic civilians died in Derry because of the shootings (Widgery, 1972). It was headed by Lord Widgery, and its scope was very limited, presenting a so-called biased approach against the British army. Many of the families of victims were not satisfied with the results, as well as the public at large (McKittrick, 2002). The campaign for a wider investigation led to the establishment of the Saville Inquiry in 1998, headed by Lord Saville of Newdigate. This second inquiry, ordered by Prime Minister Tony Blair, launched a more comprehensive and fairer inquiry into the events. After a while, the Saville Inquiry concluded that the killings were "unjustified and also unlawful" (Saville, 2010).

Yet, despite this milestone toward justice, transitional justice challenges continued well into the post-Belfast Agreement era. The Historical Enquiries Team was set up; it was tasked with investigating the unsolved cases of the Troubles, including Bloody Sunday (Lundy, 2009). The HET did bring limited success in finding the missing pieces of unsolved crimes, but it was axed in 2014, leaving many victims' families still in their desire for resolution and justice. It is evident that the ad hoc initiatives taken by both official entities and independent organizations still lag behind in piecing together a centralized strategy, policy, or plan (Lundy, 2009).

Moreover, an ongoing issue is reflected in various aspects of Northern Irish day-to-day life. Up to now, the process of reconciliation and social cohesion has been laborious and more complicated than ever. One thing that is relevant to note is the existence of peace walls[1] which still stand as a testament to the moral as well as physical divisions between Protestant and Catholic communities. In 2022/23, an estimated 92% of students in Northern Ireland attended schools that were segregated based on ethnopolitical identity, with students attending either a Protestant or a Catholic institution. The latter category constitutes 95% of schools in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2023).

The reluctance to recognize and address sectarianism-driven segregation in Northern Ireland has contributed to the perceived lack of urgency in implementing comprehensive strategies for integration and social cohesion in the post-conflict society. This inaction has left significant gaps in the peacebuilding process, as essential issues such as deep-seated divisions and inequality remain unaddressed.

This highlights another significant gap in the peacebuilding process. International and national hesitation to confront the core issues of certain conflicts often stems from the absence of a clear framework for recognizing and categorizing them. Without such a framework, the urgency to address these issues diminishes, resulting in critical shortcomings that undermine the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts and stand in the way of sustainable peace.

Beyond the efforts to reassemble the social fabric in Northern Ireland, significant strategies toward economic recovery and development were put into practice. The Belfast Agreement only constituted the political foundation of the intended competitive forward-looking approach. The Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (2002) focused on infrastructure development and urban renovation, laying the groundwork for economic growth. Building on this, the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy (2012) aimed to create a competitive economy by prioritizing vital industries such as technology and tourism. In addition to these centralized initiatives, the EU PEACE Programmes (PEACE I–IV) played an important role in encouraging social inclusion and economic regeneration in conflict-affected communities. To achieve these goals, the Northern Ireland Investment Strategy (2008-2018) invested heavily in public services and infrastructure, laying the groundwork for long-term growth, rather than stability. While Northern Ireland's GDP was increasing at a relatively steady pace, regional economies and income inequality continue to pose a challenge to this day (Office for National Statistics, 2024).

This analysis shows that the Rwandan experience differs significantly from the Northern Irish nature of Positive Peacebuilding. This inconsistent response from the international community is also a key issue that warrants further exploration. Critics argue that the

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[1] The peace walls in Northern Ireland are physical barriers that separate predominantly Catholic (nationalist) and Protestant (unionist) communities, primarily in cities like Belfast and Derry.

international community's involvement, mainly through economic aid and diplomatic ties, is part of a "prefabricated IKEA liberal democratization package" that alters local environments to imitate modern Western democracies (Hoffman, 2007). These models often center on white, Christian, heterosexual, and cisgender voices, excluding marginalized individuals across post-conflict societies.

It is consequently important to pinpoint the selective involvement of the international community in post-conflict countries which can result in uneven peacebuilding outcomes that favor the interests of dominant global powers above the demands of marginalized groups. This highlights the necessity of an expansive, well-established, and legally solid framework that is universally recognized and unchallenged for a wide range of cases. Such frameworks would ensure that peacebuilding efforts are consistent and effective, addressing the root causes of conflict while fostering long-term stability and justice.

Discussion and Conclusion

To sum up, this study of the Rwandan genocide and the Troubles examined the labels attributed to each case, the peacebuilding strategies implemented with consideration of their respective labels, as well as their effectiveness. This expansive analysis of the postconflict societies in Rwanda and Northern Ireland allowed me to discuss the importance of conflict classification and conflict typology, address existing lacunas within the international parameters of conflict classification, and identify effective strategies for peacebuilding. Another noteworthy polarity lies within the selected countries' demographics and geographical settings. However, this paper did not explore the implications of these factors on the strategic peacebuilding efforts in the selected cases.

Primarily, this comparative historical analysis sought to explore strategic peacebuilding through the lens of conflict classification, establishing their inherently interconnected nature. By examining this relationship, I analyzed how various conflict classifications can inform and shape tailored peacebuilding strategies and extended the discussion to highlight how these classifications not only guide peacebuilding but also play a crucial role in conflict prevention, underscoring their broader significance in fostering sustainable peace. The findings of this paper can be organized into five distinct stages of analysis, each leading to a key takeaway.

The first stage of analysis focused on Negative Peacebuilding efforts in post-genocide Rwanda, where the international community failed to properly recognize, classify, and intervene preceding the Rwandan genocide as well as the DRC war. The assessment of the latter exposed the intersection between conflict classification and conflict prevention and demonstrated the inefficiencies in current international procedures.This lacuna extends beyond the Great Lakes region and is also evident in other instances of genocide including those in Cambodia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Darfur, among others. This institutes the urgent need to amend the UN, although proven to be nearly impossible, and to establish a more encompassing framework for conflict classification as well as conflict prevention that goes beyond the limitations of the liberal peace debate.

The second stage of analysis focused on Negative Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland. The latter was characterized by an intense peace process that eventually led to the signing of a decisive agreement, the Belfast Agreement or the Good Friday Agreement. Throughout this process, the underlying issues of sectarian violence were largely overlooked which subsequently prevented Northern Ireland from sustaining peace on its soil. This points to the larger issue which is the international community's failure to create a proficient framework that serves the complexities inherent to each unique case.

As for the third stage of analysis which examined the Positive Peacebuilding process in Rwanda, I demonstrated Kagame's government's ambitious vision of an economically thriving and socially compact post-genocide Rwanda through development, good governance, and economic recovery. Thus, what is required is support and recognition for these nations' capacity to engage in sustainable and forward-looking peacebuilding, rather than putting pre-existing labels and external assumptions at the front end of the peacebuilding process. Instead of overwhelming such nations with aid or merely acting as watchdogs, the international community needs to work towards empowering local leadership and fostering internal resilience. This is not only a means of promoting real interstate partnership but also a counterbalancing strategy against the effects of globalization and imperialism, which tend to bring external agendas at the expense of local autonomy.

Furthermore, the analysis of Positive Peacebuilding in Northern Ireland found that deep-rooted ethnopolitical disparities continue to stand as a testament to the unwillingness, both internationally and domestically, to tackle these concerns, demonstrating the need for a more thorough and binding approach to conflict classification and peacebuilding initiatives well prior to the onset of the Positive Peacebuilding process. This aspect could be directly tied back to the second set of findings promoting a proficient framework for conflict classification

Now, from a comparative standpoint, it is important to pinpoint the selective involvement of the international community within conflicts which often results in uneven peacebuilding outcomes that favor the interests of dominant global powers above the demands of developing nations. This highlights the necessity of an expansive, internationally unchallenged, and legally binding framework for conflict classification, conflict prevention, and the three components of peace; peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding given their interconnected nature as to ensure a consistent and effective international response to conflicts infringing upon the principles elaborated upon within pre-existing treaties and declarations.

Recommendations for practitioners and policymakers

This set of findings is further supported by a number of key proposals aimed at improving the global framework for conflict and peace. In an attempt to emphasize the importance of an ongoing debate, a permanent seat for Africa on the UN SeCo will provide critical, context-specific expertise, resulting in more efficient conflict classification and intervention based on an in-depth knowledge of regional dynamics and political scenes. It is important to note that a permanent seat for Africa does not inherently equate to fair representation. Therefore, it is crucial to advocate for broader reforms to the UN's structure and charter all while ensuring that such amendments are legitimate, meaningful, and transparent leading to a more equitable international system.

Second, investments in the capacity building of local institutions, although of a limited nature, have proven to be efficient in a variety of ways, including enabling governance structures for self-sustaining involvement in conflict-essential causes and managing peacebuilding processes with reduced reliance on external players. Throughout this process, it is important to emphasize the role of an international mediator in promoting honest and earnest engagement and ensuring that multilateral efforts are fair rather than oriented towards global powers' interests via selected bilateral partnerships.

Finally and most importantly, the establishment of a legally binding international treaty on conflict classification is critical. Such a treaty would standardize conflict definitions and set clear timelines for intervention, allowing for proactive rather than reactive responses to impending

conflicts. This would prevent the escalation of violence to a point where global outrage or mass casualties become the only catalysts for international engagement.

This paper, particularly the history of Rwanda and Northern Ireland grappling with their own struggles toward peace, demonstrates the inadequacy of international procedures in responding to emerging conflicts, which have claimed thousands, if not millions, of lives. It is not merely an assessment or justification of inaction, but also a condemnation of the propagated narrative spread by the international community, the UN, and other military and non-military alliances, which hammer at persuading the world of utopian currents that are far from reality. This paper constitutes a harsh demand for global action against the systemic failure to adhere to the principles of justice, equality, and peace that these organizations claim to uphold.

This historical analysis examined an important gap in existing conflict and peacebuilding scholarship: the multifaceted intersection between conflict classification and peacebuilding processes. Should this relationship be established, three main lines of inquiry for future research arise; (1) What criteria are appropriate for the development of an international framework advising conflict classification?, (2) In what ways can we ensure that such a framework enhances the efficacy and timeliness of conflict prevention?, and (3) How can the international community be held accountable through legally binding, internationally unchallenged, and inclusive mechanisms that ensure compliance, while operating within the boundaries of state sovereignty and national security?

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