

Nevin Aiken is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia working under the supervision of Dr. Richard Price (Associate Professor of Political Science and Associate Director of the Centre of International Relations at the Liu Institute for Global Issues). Nevin also currently holds an appointment as a Visiting Research Fellow with the Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of California, Irvine where he specializes in research at the intersection of transitional justice, post-conflict peacebuilding, political psychology, and theories of intergroup reconciliation. Additional areas of research interest include constructivist theory in international politics, theories of ethnicity/nationalism, ethnic conflict, genocide, and studies in the normative construction of community. Nevin holds a BA (Honours) in International Relations and Politics and an MA in Political Science from the University of Western Ontario.

Nevin's dissertation work investigates the relationship between processes of post-conflict justice and societal reconciliation in severely divided societies. The last two decades have witnessed a sudden increase in the number of transitional justice institutions – those legal, quasi-legal, or community-based institutions set up to provide accountability for past conflict. This increase is based partly on the assumption that such mechanisms help societies to come to terms with their violent pasts and are therefore a crucial component of post-conflict peacebuilding. However, the ways in which institutions of transitional justice are causally linked to increased reconciliation remain unspecified and under-theorized in current scholarship, as do related understandings of which 'best practices' from existing strategies might be adapted to guide policy in future transitional societies. Nevin's dissertation research seeks to address these gaps.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary synthesis of scholarship from political science, conflict resolution, and social psychology, Nevin's project investigates how institutions of transitional justice can contribute to processes of intergroup reconciliation by acting as sites of critical 'social learning' in the post-conflict environment. In essence, these institutions may provide a crucial social forum in which former enemies are brought together in to condemn past violence and to challenge and potentially transform the entrenched myths, prejudices, and divisions that could otherwise threaten to incite future cycles of violence. More specifically, his work hypothesizes that those institutions most successful in promoting this kind of positive social learning are those which actively facilitate positive intergroup contact and communication, fostering empathy and encouraging more inclusive conceptions of collective identity and moral equality. These factors have all been identified in existing scholarship as necessary, though not sufficient, conditions for intergroup reconciliation and sustainable peace.

With assistance from his Human Security Fellowship, Nevin's research will explore these hypotheses through a comparative examination of the transitional processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa, two deeply divided societies in which relatively 'successful' transitional justice strategies have been used to address past legacies of violence. In addition to archival research, Nevin will be conducting a series of expert interviews in these countries with select academics, government officials, civil society representatives, and non-governmental community leaders to provide a qualitative measure of the contributions that South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Northern Ireland's uniquely 'piecemeal' transitional justice strategy have made to processes of reconciliation among divided communal groups. Combining theoretical innovation with empirical field research, Nevin's research seeks to map the causal

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processes by which these two very different institutional approaches have contributed to reconciliation, and explores what successful components of these strategies might be exported to inform future peacebuilding strategies.

In addition to his 2007–2008 Human Security Fellowship Award, Nevin currently holds a Canada Graduate Scholarship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. More recently, his research was recognized at the University of California, Irvine by a Center for Global Peace and Conflict Studies Graduate Award and a Kugelman Citizen Peacebuilding Fellowship from the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding.