

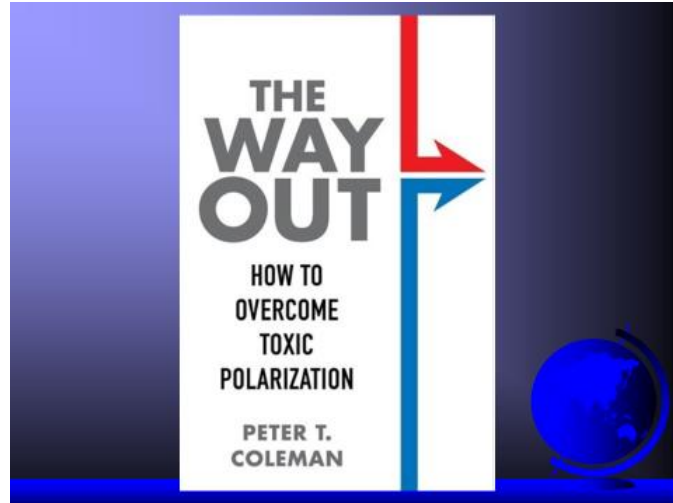
**Peter T. Coleman**

**Honored by the 2020 Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies Commitment Award**

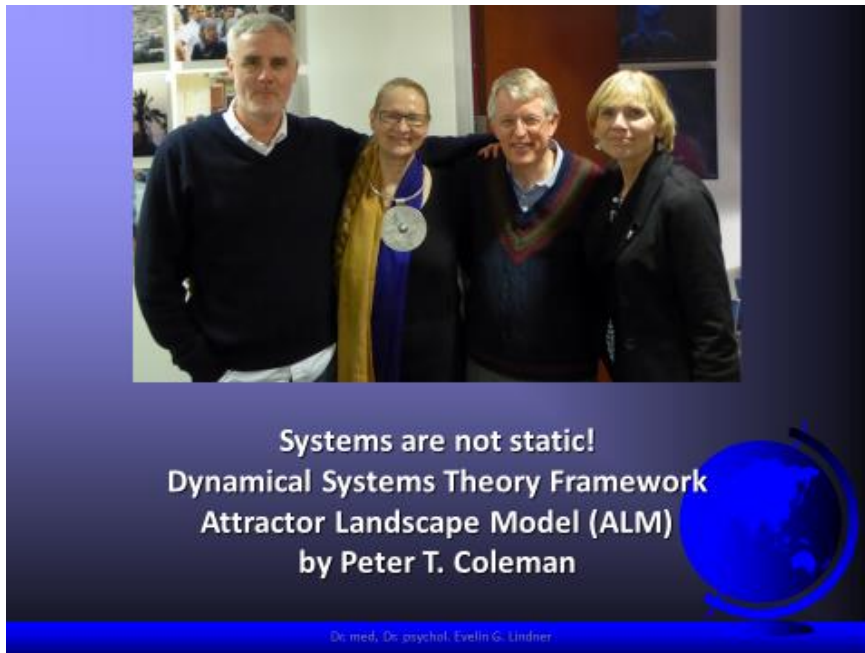
**December 11, 2020**

A tribute to Peter Coleman by Evelin Lindner

Founding President of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship



Peter Coleman’s new book, forthcoming in 2021  
See [www.thewayoutofpolarization.com](http://www.thewayoutofpolarization.com)



December 7, 2016, wonderful End-of-Year Gathering at the Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (MD-ICCCR) at Teachers College, Columbia University, New York City, with Peter Coleman, Linda Hartling, Michael Britton, and Evelin Lindner

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## Peter's Seminal Leadership

My name is Evelin Lindner, and I am the Founding President of the Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) fellowship. It was a great joy for me to meet Peter Coleman for the first time on December 17, 2001, when I was invited to share my research on humiliation at Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City. Peter attended my talk, accompanying Morton Deutsch, the “father” of the academic field of conflict resolution and founder of the Morton Deutsch International Center for Cooperation and Conflict Resolution (MD-ICCCR) at Teachers College. Peter is a Professor of Psychology, with Morton Deutsch as his mentor, and in 1998, Peter succeeded Morton Deutsch as Director of the MD-ICCCR.

In the years following 2001, Morton Deutsch became also my cherished and esteemed mentor and I look back in the deepest of gratitude — we will always honour Mort's spirit, ever since he passed away in 2017 at the age of 97, having worked until the last minute. We miss him! Many of my books and book chapters came into being through the nurturing care of Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman!<sup>1</sup> Thank you!

Two years after 2001, on July 7, 2003, Morton Deutsch took the initiative to convene our first Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict in the conference room of his Center at Teachers College. Peter Coleman attended this meeting together with Janet Gerson, Beth Fisher-Yoshida, Susan Opatow, Michelle Fine, and Andrea Bartoli.

Following this gathering, with great gratitude, our HumanDHS fellowship welcomed Morton Deutsch and Peter Coleman, as well as Janet Gerson, Beth Fisher-Yoshida, Andrea Bartoli, and many of their colleagues, as esteemed members of the first hour into our Global Advisory Board.

On December 11, 2009, our dear Morton Deutsch accepted our first HumanDHS Lifetime Commitment Award, and we are deeply grateful to be able to honor Peter Coleman with our Lifetime Commitment Award eleven years later, this year, 2020!

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the award ceremony had to take place virtually, a limitation that deprived us of the opportunity to honor Peter in the ways we would have liked. We would have loved to do much more to show our appreciation for Peter as a brilliant scholar and independent thinker, as a human being of the highest of integrity and care, and as a generous supporter of our dignity work. Please follow him on Twitter @PeterTColeman1 to always be informed of his most recent work.

Peter's award ceremony was held on Friday, December 11, 2020, on the second day of our 17<sup>th</sup> Annual Workshop on Transforming Humiliation and Violent Conflict, this year titled “From a Virus Pandemic to a Pandemic of Dignity: How Can We Escape Complicity with Institutionalized Humiliation?” The workshop took place on Zoom from December 10 – 12, 2020, as always in loving partnership with the MD-ICCCR of Teachers College, Columbia University. It was wonderful to also have Danielle Coon with us, the Associate Director of the MD-ICCCR! HumanDHS Director Linda Hartling, the workshop Digni-Organizing team, and our entire global community are all deeply thankful to the MD-ICCCR for hosting this workshop series so lovingly every year since 2003!

This year not only brought limitations, it also opened new horizons. The coronavirus pandemic opened new opportunities to welcome participants who could not travel to New York in the past, and 150 dignity friends from all continents registered for this workshop. In Oregon, where Linda is based, it was morning, in New Zealand it was already the next day! See the program at [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/annualmeeting/35.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/annualmeeting/35.php).

Rather than convening single events, all of our HumanDHS gatherings are part of a lifelong dignity project. It is our overall aim to build what we call a “global dignity family,” of which Peter Coleman and his team and colleagues are esteemed and beloved members. We invite all educators and learners who wish to bring more dignity into the world to join our fellowship, and, in particular, to help nurture the educational initiative that we launched in 2011, the World Dignity University initiative.

## Peter's Seminal Research

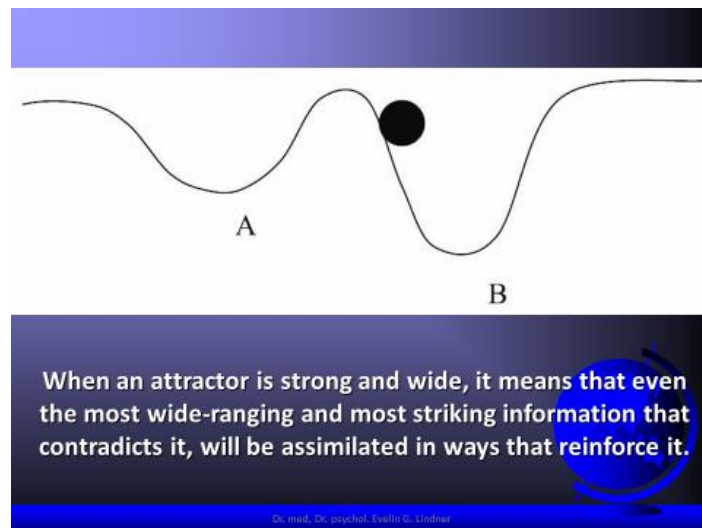
Not just in my role as convener of our global dignity fellowship, also for me personally it is a profound joy to honor Peter Coleman now, seventeen years after we first met in 2001. Since 2001, I have been deeply impressed by Peter's work, by his efforts to shed light on intractable conflicts, to explain how and why seemingly absurd situations often persist. Peter builds on existing research and then surpasses it, transcending the frameworks of previous thinkers by taking into account, not least, that systems are not static — systems change, systems move, systems are dynamic. Dr. Coleman has therefore developed a *dynamical systems approach* to conceptualize the intransigence entailed in intractable conflict,<sup>2</sup> and this is a summary on the MD-ICCCR website:

One cutting-edge theory that guides many research projects at the ICCCR is the Attractor Landscape Model (ALM), a theoretical framework within the Dynamical Systems Theory framework. In contrast to traditional problem-solving models of conflict, ALM places conflicts with a dynamic field of nonlinear dynamic patterns, self-organization, and reinforcing feedback loops. Using ALM allows researchers to see intractable conflicts as “stuck” in destructive interaction patterns, which resist all attempts to reach resolution. Actions taken to disrupt one element of the conflict system are quickly thwarted as other elements of the system act to maintain or reestablish the distractive attractor. From the ALM perspective, disrupting an intractable conflict requires first mapping the dynamic patterns and feedback loops that are currently holding the conflict in its current state while also identifying “actionable hubs” where an intervention could serve to disrupt the attractor. Finally, it is not enough to disrupt the attractor without first identifying latent attractors, which are potential alternative (positive) attractor states. In other words, it is not enough to approach a conflict in terms of reducing the likelihood of war — the involved parties must also act to identify and increase the probabilities for peace.<sup>3</sup>

In my work, I use the Attractor Landscape Model to anchor my conceptualization of the long-term historical path that our species *Homo sapiens* has traversed since we began walking our planet around 300,000 years ago. In my writing, I attempt to bridge academia's siloization by striving to understand the core messages of various fields of academic inquiry, then I try to bring them together on different levels of abstraction, using the *ideal-type* approach of sociologist Max Weber, and finally, I attempt to reconstruct them from the perspective of dignity and humiliation. So far, I have done this with war, genocide, and terrorism (2000, 2017),<sup>4</sup> international conflict (2006 and 2009),<sup>5</sup> gender and security (2010),<sup>6</sup> and economics (2012).<sup>7</sup> Currently, I am working on a book titled *From Humiliation to Dignity: For a Future of Global Solidarity*.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the past millennia, the so-called *dominator model of society* defined the *world-system*<sup>9</sup> — social scientist Riane Eisler contrasts the dominator model with the *partnership model of society* — and I suggest that the dominator model could be regarded as a particularly salient *attractor* in the ALM model, an attractor that is both strong and wide.

An attractor is a “package” of schemata, goals, attitudes, or dispositions of dominant mental and behavioral patterns. In the Figure below, Coleman depicts attractor A as having a weak and wide basin, and attractor B as a strong and narrow basin (Vallacher, et al., 2010, p. 256). The ball represents the current state of a system and the two valleys represent two attractors for the system. A local energy minimum is achieved when the ball rests at the bottom of the valley.



The width of the valley indicates the range of states that an attractor accommodates, and this may even include information and events that seem inconsistent with the attractor. The depth symbolizes the strength of resistance to change. When an attractor is both strong and wide, it means that it is extremely difficult to move “the ball” out of a deep and wide valley into another attractor that might be waiting in latency, it means that even the most wide-ranging and most striking information that contradicts it will be assimilated in ways that reinforce it. To say this more simply, any useful message from an opponent will be re-interpreted as hostile — even if an opponent were to warn of imminent natural disaster soon hitting all, friend and opponent alike, this warning would be disbelieved and responded to with what is called *reactive devaluation*.<sup>10</sup> A protracted malignant conflict betrays that, indeed, a strong attractor with a wide basin of attraction is at work.

We live in an interconnected and finite world now, a world, where human rights ideals have become salient, and in this world, competition for domination over people and nature has become infeasible, practically, psychologically, and ethically. The dominator mindset has overstayed its viability and the only solution is global cooperation. So far, however, it seems the attraction of the dominator mindset is still too strong for a turnaround.

In my work, I summarize humankind’s present situation by saying that we live in times in which *sociocide* and *ecocide* are systemic. The suffix *-cide* means ‘killing’ — words such as genocide, suicide, or pesticide all end on *-cide*, stemming from Latin *-cida* and the verb *caedo, caedes, caedere, caedi, caedum*.<sup>11</sup> Sociocide and ecocide epitomize systemic humiliation.

Peter’s forthcoming book, titled *The Way Out: How to Overcome Toxic Polarization* speaks specifically to the problem of *sociocide*, the killing of our *sociosphere*, the degradation of the cohesion in our human communities, local and global. Indeed, we live in a world now, where hateful polarization poisons our relationships, we have a pandemic of disconnection and loneliness, particularly in the Western world, that will outlast the coronavirus pandemic — for instance, Britain had to appoint a special minister for loneliness in 2018. So far, however, world powers trying to outcompete each other militarily and economically also outcompete attempts to heal and prevent the sociocide and ecocide that this competition causes.

In this situation, Peter’s new book “offers new insights from current research on how seemingly unchangeable problems can and do, in fact, change.” The book’s promise is described on its website [www.thewayoutofpolarization.com](http://www.thewayoutofpolarization.com):

It will suggest what *you* can do — the actions, skills, and competencies that will help you navigate these times most effectively — as well as what to look for in *groups and organizations in your community* that are already at work making America more functional again.

## **Congratulations, dear Peter, with your seminal work and leadership!**

Our dignity work is based on the African *Ubuntu* philosophy “I am because of you!” and your support and your work, dear Peter, are crucial for bringing more dignity into this world! Bertha von Suttner has inspired the will of Alfred Nobel — see her 1889 book, *Die Waffen nieder!* or *Lay Down Your Arms!*<sup>12</sup> — and we feel very close to her spirit. Our nomination for the prize in 2015, 2016, and 2017 has protected many of our network members around the world who put themselves in danger by speaking up for dignity.<sup>13</sup> Congratulations also to you with our Nobel Peace Prize nominations, dear Peter!

### **Dear Peter, we congratulate you with our 2020 HumanDHS Lifetime Commitment Award!**



We have no words to express our gratitude and admiration to you, dear Peter, for your clear-sighted future-oriented courageous and visionary work and leadership together with your colleagues and team!

In deep admiration,  
Evelin Lindner, also on behalf of Linda Hartling and the entire  
Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, among others, Lindner, 2006, 2010a, b, 2011, 2012a, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Coleman, et al., 2007, Coleman, 2011, Coleman, et al., 2008, Vallacher, et al., 2010. See also Coleman, et al., 2009, Goldman and Coleman, 2005a, b.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://icccr.tc.columbia.edu/practice/tools-and-assessments/attractor-landscape-model/>.

<sup>4</sup> *The psychology of humiliation: Somalia, Rwanda / Burundi, and Hitler's Germany* was my doctoral dissertation in social psychology at the Department of Psychology of the University of Oslo, Norway, in

## Notes

2000. *Quality of life: A German-Egyptian comparative study* (in German) was my doctoral dissertation in psychological medicine at the University of Hamburg, Germany, in 1993. *Honor, humiliation, and terror: An explosive mix — and how we can defuse it with dignity*, was my fifth book, and it came out in 2017 in Dignity Press, in its imprint World Dignity University Press, with a foreword by Linda Hartling, director of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies. Please see more chapters and papers in full text on [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin02.php).

<sup>5</sup> *Making enemies: Humiliation and international conflict* was my first book on dignity and humiliation and how we may envision a more dignified world, characterised as a path-breaking book and honoured as ‘Outstanding Academic Title’ for 2007 in the USA by the journal *Choice*. Please see more details on [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/01.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/01.php). *Emotion and conflict: How human rights can dignify emotion and help us wage good conflict* was my second book. See [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/02.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/02.php).

<sup>6</sup> *Gender, humiliation, and global security* was my third book, published by Praeger in 2010. Archbishop Desmond Tutu kindly contributed with a foreword (asked for a prepublication endorsement, he kindly offered to contribute with a foreword). The book was ‘highly recommended’ by *Choice* in July 2010. For more details, see [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/03.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/03.php).

<sup>7</sup> *A dignity economy: Creating an economy that serves human dignity and preserves our planet* was my fourth book, and it is the first publication of Dignity Press, published in 2012 in its imprint World Dignity University Press. See [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/04.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/book/04.php).

<sup>8</sup> Lindner, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See Wallerstein, 1974–1989. See also Harvey, 2005, and Hudson, 2003. See also Lindner, 2012b.

<sup>10</sup> Ross, 1995. It was a privilege to have Lee Ross as my doctoral advisor, and later as esteemed member of the first hour in the global advisory board of our Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies fellowship.

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, *The youth have seen enough*, by Rex Weyler, Greenpeace, 4th January 2019, [www.greenpeace.org/international/story/20260/the-youth-have-seen-enough/](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/story/20260/the-youth-have-seen-enough/).

<sup>12</sup> Suttner, 1889.

<sup>13</sup> See more on [www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/142.php](http://www.humiliationstudies.org/whoweare/evelin/142.php).