

Tuesday 17th April 2012, 16.00 -17.30
Oxford Martin School, Old Indian Institute
34 Broad Street, OX1 3BD

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This lecture is being held by Oxford Martin School and Oxford Martin Programme on Complexity

'Catastrophic dehumanization: the psychological dynamics of severe conflict'

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Thomas Homer-Dixon holds the CIGI Chair of Global Systems at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo, Canada. At the University of Waterloo, he is Director of the Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation and Professor in the School of Environment, Enterprise, and Development in the Faculty of Environment, with a cross-appointment to the Political Science Department in the Faculty of Arts. Born in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, he received his B.A. in political science from Carleton University in 1980 and his Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in international relations, defense and arms control policy, and conflict theory in 1989. He then moved to the University of Toronto to lead several pioneering research projects investigating the links between environmental stress and violence in poor countries. Since joining the University of Waterloo in 2008, his research has focused on threats to global security in the 21st century, including economic instability, climate change, and energy scarcity. He also studies how people, organizations, and societies can better resolve their conflicts and innovate in response to complex problems. His work is highly interdisciplinary, drawing on political science, economics, environmental studies, geography, cognitive science, social psychology, and complex systems theory. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on topics ranging from environmental security to international relations and complexity theory. In 1999 he received the University of Toronto's Northrop Frye Teaching Award for integrating teaching and research. Dr. Homer-Dixon's books include *The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization*, which won Canada's 2006 National Business Book Award, *The Ingenuity Gap*, which won the 2001 Governor General's Non-fiction Award, and *Environment, Scarcity, and Violence*, which won the 2000 Caldwell Prize of the American Political Science Association. His academic writing has appeared in leading journals, including *Ambio*, *International Security*, *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Population and Development Review*. He has written for non-academic audiences in *Foreign Policy*, *Scientific American*, *The New York Times*, and the *Financial Times*. He now writes regularly for the *Toronto Globe and Mail* in Canada. A widely sought speaker, Dr. Homer-Dixon has delivered addresses on his research to academic and general audiences around the world. He has also consulted to senior levels of government in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

ABSTRACT:

Dehumanization is arguably a defining feature of the most brutal acts of human violence, such as saturation bombardment of civilian populations, terrorist attacks on urban centers, intense battlefield combat, and genocide. I propose a psychological explanation of this phenomenon that uses a catastrophe manifold to describe a set of psychological states in an individual's mind and the possible pathways of movement between these states. The manifold exists in a three-dimensional phase space defined by the variables identity, justice, and structural constraint. It specifies five hypotheses about the causes and dynamics of dehumanization. Taken together, these hypotheses represent an overarching theory of the nonlinear collapse of identification at the level of the individual.