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## CHAPTER 1

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# Reframing Public Discourses for Peace and Justice

*Michael Karlberg*

A discourse can be conceptualized as an evolving way that people think and talk about a given aspect of reality, which influences their perceptions and social practices in relation to that aspect of reality. Thus, we can conceive of discourses on governance, on the economy, on human rights, or on the environment, each of which can influence perceptions and practices in their respective domains. Discourses contain structural properties, such as interpretive frames, that partially determine their influence on our perceptions and practices. With this in mind, struggles for peace and justice can be understood, in part, as struggles to reframe significant public discourses. Toward this end, the discussion that follows begins with an overview of contemporary efforts to conceptualize discourse. It then examines the concept of an interpretive frame as a key structural property of discourses. In turn, three overarching ways of framing public discourses, each based on a different understanding of human nature and social reality, are posited. The first two, the *social command frame* and the *social contest frame*, can be understood as hegemonic frames that perpetuate social conflict and injustice. The third frame, the *social body frame*, is offered as a normative alternative that derives from recognition of humanity's increasing global interdependence. The discussion concludes by arguing that, at this critical juncture in human history, struggles for peace and justice should be understood, in part, as struggles to reframe public discourses according to the logic of interdependence expressed by the social body frame.

## Conceptualizing Discourse

Most efforts to conceptualize discourse rest on the underlying premise that language and language use do not merely reflect or represent our social and mental realities, they also play a role in constructing or structuring these realities. This conception of discourse as a structuring agent is now accepted within diverse schools of thought that span the disciplines of anthropology, communication, linguistics, literary studies, political science, social psychology, and sociology, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies. Though people still debate the relative influence of discourse, or the nature of that influence, or how to best study it, discourse theory has established itself as an influential framework for social analysis and activism.

This broad conception of discourse encompasses diverse approaches to inquiry (refer to discussions in McKinlay and McVittie 2008; Phillips and Hardy 2002; Schiffrin, Tannen, and Hamilton 2001). Among these diverse approaches, an approach known as *critical discourse analysis* is especially relevant to struggles for peace and justice. Critical discourse analysis tends to examine discourse in its broad social and historical context; it tends to be change oriented in its focus; and it is concerned with the ways that power dynamics produce and are reproduced by dominant or hegemonic discourses through the construction of meaning, knowledge, and ideology (van Dijk 2001). For example, critical discourse analysis points out that if one is raised in a social environment in which people think and talk about gender in highly patriarchal and oppressive ways, then one is more likely to enact and perpetuate gendered practices that are patriarchal and oppressive. Of course, the direction of influence between discourse and social practice is not one way. Gendered practices also influence the way people think and talk about gender. Thus, the relationship between discourse and social practice is dialectical—each influences or informs the other. However, within this dialectical relationship, discourse can act as an agent that structures, to some degree, our “common sense” views about reality, which in turn shape related social practices, even as those social practices also inform the discourses associated with them. Furthermore, as critical discourse analysis points out, all of this occurs within a field of power relations that can shape the direction these dialectical feedback processes lead over time.

In this regard, critical discourse analysis reminds us that discourses can embody and perpetuate the perspectives, values, and interests of privileged segments of society who, by virtue of their social positions,

exert a disproportionate influence on the articulation of discourses. Such influence need not be consciously exerted. Rather, people often have an unconscious affinity for ideas that align with their own interests (Howe 1978). Therefore, segments of society who have disproportionate access to the means of cultural production tend, to some extent, consciously or unconsciously, to shape dominant discourses according to self-interested ideas and perspectives. Consequently, members of subordinate social groups sometimes internalize, as their own “common sense,” the ideas and perspectives embedded in these dominant discourses, even when such ideas may not align with their own interests. A commonly cited historical example of this is the women’s antisuffrage movement in the United States, in which a large number of women organized to prevent themselves and other women from obtaining the vote. This was done on the “common sense” view, circulating at the time within some prevalent discourses on gender, that suffrage would draw women into the world of politics and would thereby corrupt their moral purity—which would allegedly result in an unraveling of the entire social fabric (Thurner 1993; Cholmeley 1970). As this example illustrates, discourses can help to construct “a social reality that is taken for granted and that advantages some participants at the expense of others” (Phillips and Hardy 2002, 15).

### Conceptualizing Interpretive Frames

In discourse analysis, “discourse is viewed as a phenomenon which has its own properties, properties which have an impact on people and their social interactions” (McKinlay and McVittie 2008, 8). These properties include systems of categorization, metaphors, narratives, frames, and other interpretive devices that can influence cognition, perception, and action within communities of shared discourse. From among these properties, the discussion at hand is concerned primarily with interpretive frames, due to their widely recognized importance in struggles for peace and justice (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Benford and Snow 2000).

The initial concept of an interpretive frame is generally attributed to Bateson (1954), who pointed out that discrete communicative acts are rendered meaningful within larger interpretive frames. For example, an apparently “hostile” communicative act can take on completely different meanings when interpreted through the frame “this is play” or the frame “this is war.” Building on Bateson’s insights, Goffman (1974) conceptualized frames as cognitive schemata or mental frameworks that

shape our perceptions, interpretations, and representations of reality; mentally organize our experience; and provide normative guides for our actions.

Since this initial work by Bateson and Goffman, the concept of *frames* and *framing* has been conceptualized with varying nuances across the social and psychological sciences. What unifies all of these conceptions, however, is the understanding that people necessarily rely on acquired structures of interpretation to sift, sort, and make sense out of the otherwise overwhelming universe of information and experience they encounter in their daily lives (Tannen 1993). Frames are, in effect, a form of “conceptual scaffolding” that we rely on to construct our understanding of the world (Snow and Benford 1988, 213). As Ryan and Gamson explain,

Like a picture frame, an issue frame marks off some part of the world. Like a building frame, it holds things together. It provides coherence to an array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is essential—what consequences and values are at stake. We do not see the frame directly, but infer its presence by its characteristic expressions and language. Each frame gives the advantage to certain ways of talking and thinking, while it places others “out of the picture.” (2006, 14)

Frames, as such, are often acquired unconsciously. They influence not only how we interpret specific phenomena but also which phenomena we notice. They are composed of tacit explanations and expectations regarding “what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin 1980, 6). In this regard, a given “fact” will become more or less salient, or take on different meanings, within different frames (Ryan and Gamson 2006). Indeed, the same words can even take on different meanings within different interpretive frames (Lakoff 2006a), as the discussion later in this chapter illustrates.

Even as frames are a characteristic of human cognition, they can also become embedded in *texts*—broadly defined to include all spoken, written, and mediated forms of communication—where they make some aspects of reality more salient than others, and in the process they “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, 52). In critical discourse analysis, these implicit structures of interpretation, which reside simultaneously in human minds and texts, are understood as widely shared yet fluid and potentially contested structures that are produced and transmitted through discourse within fields of power relations.

With these conceptions of *discourse* and *frame* in mind, one can appreciate why struggles for peace and justice can be understood, in part, as struggles to *reframe* significant public discourses. Thus, the concept of framing has been widely adopted by social movement theorists and activists. Benford and Snow document a proliferation of scholarship on social movement framing in recent decades, and they argue that “framing processes have come to be regarded, alongside resource mobilization and political opportunity processes, as a central dynamic in understanding the character and course of social movements” (2000, 612; see also Johnston and Noakes 2005; McAdam, McCarthy, and Mayer 1996). As Benford and Snow go on to explain,

Social movement scholars interested in framing processes begin by taking as problematic what until the mid-1980s the literature largely ignored: meaning work—the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings. From this perspective, social movements are not viewed merely as carriers of extant ideas and meanings that grow automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Rather, movement actors are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning. (2000, 613)

The scholarship that has emerged in this field has produced many valuable insights. These include insights into the diagnostic, prognostic, and mobilizing functions of social movement frames; insights into frame resonance, credibility, and salience within and across movements and populations; and insights into frame development, generation, elaboration, and diffusion (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Benford and Snow 2000).

Another set of insights, which are particularly relevant to the discussion at hand, pertain to the interpretive scope and influence of social movement frames. In this regard, theorists have identified at least two levels of framing: *collective action frames* and *master frames*. To date, most social movement scholarship has focused on collective action frames. These movement-specific frames are used to identify and interpret discrete social or environmental problems; to attribute responsibility for, or an underlying cause of, the problem; and to motivate and mobilize specific forms of action in response (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson 1992). For instance, framing the 2003 invasion of Iraq as the effort of an oil-addicted country to secure its oil supply suggests an interpretation of the conflict, attributes an underlying cause, and suggests relevant lines of action for those who seek to end the war.

Master frames, in contrast, are more expansive, inclusive, and flexible in their interpretive scope and can be employed across a range of social movements, where they may lend form and structure to more specific collective action frames (Johnston and Noakes 2005; Benford and Snow 2000, 1992; William 1995). Examples include broad “injustice frames” (Carroll and Ratner 1996a, 1996b; Gamson et al. 1982), “human rights frames” (Karagiannis 2009; Valocchi 1996; Williams and Williams 1995), “democracy frames” (Noonan 1995), and “anti-globalization frames” (Karagiannis 2009)—each of which can partially structure interpretations of, and responses to, myriad specific social issues.

One way of understanding the distinction between collective action frames and master frames is in terms of *surface frames* and *deep frames*. As Lakoff explains, “Deep frames structure your moral system or your worldview. Surface frames have a much smaller scope” (2006a, 12). In this sense, master frames operate on a deeper level than collective action frames. And, as Lakoff asserts,

Deep frames are where the action is . . . they characterize moral and political principles that are so deep they are part of your very identity. Deep framing is the conceptual infrastructure of the mind: the foundations, walls, and beams of that edifice. Without the deep frames, there is nothing for the surface message frames to hang on. (2006a, 12)

To be effective, struggles for peace and justice therefore need to operate, at least in part, at the level of deep framing—or deep reframing. With this insight in mind, the remainder of this chapter outlines and discusses three contrasting master frames, or deep frames, that can simultaneously shape and reflect foundational understandings of human nature and social reality. These frames are presented as *ideal-type* concepts (Weber 1904). In other words, they are analytical constructs that, like all analytical constructs, can never correspond perfectly with some presumably “objective” reality. They can, however, serve as heuristic devices for organizing inquiry and guiding praxis within struggles to reframe public discourses for peace and justice.

### ***The Social Command Frame***

The social command frame, as conceptualized below, is a legacy of patriarchal or authoritarian social relations. Within the social command frame, human nature tends to be conceived in terms of dominance and submission, strength and weakness, and independence and dependence.

Society thus tends to be understood in strongly hierarchical terms, in which power is exercised in controlling and coercive ways. In discourse, the social command frame is generally associated with imperative statements that are unidirectional and power imbalanced. As Goldschlager explains in his analysis of authoritarian discourse:

The most obvious grammatical example of this kind of expression is the use of the imperative form . . . Its use establishes a social relationship between the two locutors: one gives orders, the other obeys. Politeness or stylistic devices do not alter the relative position of the two: one has power, the other is annihilated as a thinking creature. In this case, the social link is established by a grammatical form which is unidirectional and accepts no linguistic reciprocity. (1982, 11)

In addition to the imperative and asymmetrical structure of much communication within the social command frame, the frame is also typically characterized by absolutism and the rejection of ambiguity; by impending threats to security and order; by a fear-based morality; by monopolization of the right to speak; by dismissiveness and ridicule of doubters or dissenters; by autoreferential arguments and appeals; by sloganistic, jingoistic, or chauvinistic appeals; and by superficial appeals for unity, harmony, and consensus (Anderson and Cissna 2008; Leung, Koch, and Lin 2002; Perrin 2005; Kozan 1997; Lakoff 1996; Nader 1996, 1991, 1990; Schweitzer 1996; de Jouvenel 1993; Rose 1992; Kent 1992; Wiley-Crofts 1991; Kidder and Hostetler 1990; Chanock 1985; Goldschlager 1982).

Historically, variations on these themes, informed by the same underlying conceptions of human nature and the social order, can be found in the ideological underpinnings of slavery, feudalism, and the caste system. Today, variations on these themes can still be found in autocratic regimes around the world, in some fundamentalist religious doctrines, in strongly patriarchal families, in the diatribes of extreme media personalities, and in other surviving enclaves of authoritarian discourse. What all of these systems of thought and practice tend to share are normative assumptions or assertions that some segments of the population are naturally inclined toward ignorance, moral weakness, or other forms of dependency and are thus incapable of governing themselves effectively. According to this logic, governance and leadership should be the prerogative of individuals or social groups that are in some way superior to others. In general, democratic societies have rejected the social command frame as a hegemonic and oppressive

construct invoked by self-interested ruling classes seeking to buttress their power and privilege in society—although the frame still echoes in some regressive democratic discourses.

### *The Social Contest Frame*

The social contest frame, as conceptualized below, became a widely influential interpretive frame with the ascendancy of Western liberal thought where it arose, in part, in response to the injustice and oppression associated with the social command frame. Within the social contest frame, human nature is conceived primarily in terms of egoistic, self-interested, and competitive instincts. Society is thus understood as a competitive arena in which self-maximizing individuals or groups pursue divergent interests in a world characterized by scarce resources and opportunities.

Variations on these themes echo through the ideological underpinnings of laissez-faire capitalism, the Westphalian system of national sovereignty, partisan democracy, the legal adversary system, and related social constructs. What all of these social constructs tend to share in common are normative assumptions and assertions that the best way to organize society is to harness everyone's self-interested and competitive energy and attempt to channel it toward the maximum social benefit (Karlberg 2004). This is accomplished by organizing social relations and institutions as contests that allegedly reward truth, excellence, innovation, efficiency, and productivity. Such contests inevitably produce winners and losers, but in the long run (surviving) populations are allegedly better off.

In discourse, the social contest frame is well illustrated by Tannen's (1998) analysis of "the argument culture" that has become such a prominent feature of American society. As Tannen explains, "The argument culture urges us to respond to the world—and the people in it—in an adversarial frame of mind. It rests on the assumption that opposition is the best way to get anything done" (3–4). Within such a culture, "thinking of human interactions as battles is a metaphorical frame through which we learn to regard the world" (13). "The war on drugs, the war on cancer, the battle of the sexes, politicians' turf battles—in the argument culture, war metaphors pervade our talk and shape our thinking. Nearly everything is framed as a battle or a game in which winning and losing is the main concern" (4).

In addition to war metaphors, the social contest frame also embodies sports metaphors, fight metaphors, market metaphors, social Darwinist

metaphors, and other oppositional or competitive constructs that are routinely invoked—within the media, in political rhetoric, in classrooms and textbooks, and in everyday speech—to make sense out of virtually every aspect of social reality (Nordum 2010; Steuter and Wills 2009; Karlberg and Buell 2005; Hartman 2002; Karlberg 2002, 1997; Childress 2001; McCorkle 1991; Arno 1984; Lakoff and Johnson 1980). These discursive constructs simultaneously reflect and reinforce a cultural tendency toward *normative adversarialism*—or the assumption that contests are normal and necessary models of social organization (Karlberg 2004; Fellman 1998).

The costs and consequences of the prevailing culture of contest, measured in both social and ecological terms, are becoming increasingly apparent to many critical observers. These costs and consequences include extreme disparities of wealth and poverty, oppressive hierarchies of power and domination, unbridled militarism, the entrenchment of ideological and identity-based conflicts, tensions over the control of natural resources, and the inability to address mounting ecological crises such as climate change (Bunzl 2010; Karlberg 2004; Bakan 2004; Polanyi 2001; Fellman 1998; Galtung 1996; Kohn 1986). Such is the record of the prevailing culture of contest, which is proving increasingly maladaptive under the conditions of growing social and ecological interdependence that humanity is now experiencing.

Despite its maladaptive nature, the social contest frame has become normalized or naturalized in recent centuries as a “common sense” interpretation of social reality. Though we do not see this common-sense frame directly, we can infer its presence by its characteristic expressions and language, such as the war metaphors and other adversarial metaphors discussed above, which promote corresponding perceptions of social reality. These perceptions, in turn, tend to translate into hegemonic institutional constructs. That is, within the logic of the social contest frame, social institutions are routinely structured as contests of power; and within such contests, the most powerful segments of society are systematically advantaged. Thus the social contest frame serves the interests of privileged segments of society who occupy social positions from which they continue to cultivate the frame, whether consciously or not, as an accepted form of “common sense” that supports the prevailing culture of contest (Karlberg 2004).

In response to the social injustices and ecological ruin that the culture of contest leaves in its wake, countless protest movements have sprung up over the past century. However, many of these movements have also understood their own actions within a larger social contest

frame, and they have thus pursued divisive and adversarial strategies of social change that are consistent with that frame (Karagiannis 2009; Chesters and Welsh 2004; Karlberg 2003; Klandermans et al. 1999; Gamson 1995; Hunt, Benford, and Snow 1994). In the process, such movements may inadvertently be reinforcing the hegemony of the culture of contest that is the underlying, but frequently overlooked, source of their frustrations and concerns (Karlberg 2010, 2003).

### *The Social Body Frame*

If the struggle for peace and justice is to advance, it will need to overcome the lingering legacy of the social command frame, as well as the prevailing hegemony of the social contest frame. What is needed is a more just, coherent, and compelling frame that is adapted to the conditions of increasing social and ecological interdependence that humanity is experiencing at this critical juncture in history. No other metaphor can capture the logic of interdependence more effectively, or promote the principle of justice more coherently and compellingly, than the metaphor of the organic social body.<sup>1</sup>

In an interdependent social body, the well-being of every individual or group depends upon the well-being of the entire social body. This collective well-being cannot be achieved through oppressive power hierarchies. Nor can it be achieved by structuring virtually every social institution as a contest of power. Rather, collective well-being can only be achieved by maximizing the possibilities for every individual to realize their creative potential to contribute to the common good within empowering institutional structures that foster and canalize human capacities in this way.

Efforts to reframe public discourses according to this logic begin with a sober reexamination of prevailing assumptions about human nature. As discussed above, within the social contest frame, human nature is conceived primarily in terms of egoistic and competitive instincts. Hence contests are considered normal and necessary models of social organization. Yet the human sciences are now clearly demonstrating that human beings are wired for both competition and cooperation, egoism and altruism, and which of these potentials is more fully realized depends in large part on our cultural environment, our education and training, our opportunities for moral development, and the institutional structures we act within (Bowles and Gintis 2011; Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010; de Waal 2009; Keltner 2009; Tomasello 2008; Henrich and Henrich 2007; Scott and Seglow 2007; Margulis

1998; Sober and Wilson 1998; Fellman 1998; Monroe 1996; Lunati 1992; Lewontin 1991; Kohn 1990; Rose, Lewontin, and Kamin 1987; Seville 1987; Axelrod 1984; Margolis 1982; Leaky and Lewin 1977; Becker 1976).

In light of this emerging understanding of human nature and human potential, one of the most fundamental normative challenges we face, at this time when 7 billion of us need to learn how to live together on an increasingly crowded planet, is learning how to cultivate—more widely, systematically, and effectively—every individual’s latent capacity for cooperation and altruism. Moreover, the success of such efforts will depend, at least in part, on fostering the individual’s consciousness of the oneness of humanity. Consider, in this regard, the groundbreaking work on altruism conducted by Monroe (1996). Like many other social scientists interested in the phenomenon of altruism, Monroe was dissatisfied with prevailing theories, articulated within the social contest frame, that attempt to explain away altruism as self-interest in disguise. By taking a fresh look at the subject, through an extensive empirical investigation, she found that diverse cases of altruism had one clear common denominator. “World views,” she wrote,

constitute extremely powerful influences on altruism, with the critical factor being the altruist’s perception of self in relation to others. But . . . this perception is not framed in terms of group ties . . . Rather, it is a reflection of the perceived relationship between the altruist and all other human beings . . . This view appears to bond them to all humanity in an affective manner that encourages altruistic treatment. (198)

“Altruists,” Monroe continued, “have a particular perspective in which all mankind is connected through a common humanity, in which each individual is linked to all others” (206). “Altruists,” she concluded, “share a view of the world in which all people are one” (198).

To recognize that “all people are one” is to recognize the essential unity and interdependence—or oneness—of the entire social body. This recognition entails a radical reconception of the relationship between the individual and society, the implications of which were alluded to above with the introduction of the social body metaphor: In an interdependent social body, the well-being of every individual or group depends upon the well-being of the entire social body; and this can be achieved only by maximizing the possibilities for every individual to realize their creative potential to contribute to the common good within empowering institutional structures that foster and canalize human capacities in this way.

Achieving this vision will require profound yet simultaneous changes at the level of individual consciousness and at the level of institutional structures. At the level of individual consciousness, a growing body of research into latent human capacities for altruism, empathy, cooperation, and reciprocity is providing new insights into how such change might be cultivated (e.g., Calloway-Thomas 2010; Keltner, Smith, and Marsh 2010; Laszlo 2010, 1989; de Waal 2009; Gibbs 2009; Rifkin 2009; Gordon 2009; Keltner 2009; Levine 2009; O'Connell 2009; Kolm 2008; Ossewaarde 2007; Appiah 2006; Giri 2006; Danesh 2006; Gardner 2006; Karlberg and Farhoumand-Simms 2006; Abizadeh 2005a; Dower and Williams 2002; Carnegie 2002; Jones 2001; Kapur 2000; Wright 2000; Hoffman 2000; Arbab 2000; Fellman 1998; Nussbaum 1997; Elgin and LeDrew 1997; Oliner et al. 1995; Kohn 1990; Boulding 1988). Likewise, at the level of institutional structures, parallel insights are being generated by growing networks of scholars, activists, and nongovernmental organizations who are animated by a recognition of humanity's increasing systemic interdependence (e.g., Daily and Farley 2011; Bummel 2010; Held 2010, 2006, 2005; Brown and Held 2010; Bunzl 2009; Kauppi et al. 2010; Smith and Max-Neef 2010; Restakis 2010; Jackson 2009; Curl 2009; Archibugi 2008; Karlberg 2007; Dahl 2007; McKibben 2007; Homer-Dixon 2006; Rajan 2006; Bell 2006; Strauss 2005; Tetalman and Belitos 2005; Hahnel 2005; Montreal International Forum 2005; Levi, Resci, and Pellegrin-Rescia 2005; Abizadeh 2005b; Stiglitz 2004; Meadows, Randers, and Meadows 2004; Lerche 2004; Fleming et al. 2003; Held and McGrew 2003; Calame 2001; Earth Charter Commission 2000; Henderson 1999; Nathanson 1998; Archibugi and Held 1995; Commission on Global Governance 1995; Walker 1993; Bushrui, Ayman, and Laszlo 1993; Ostrom 1990; Huddleston 1989; Brundtland Commission 1987; Boulding 1985; Mansbridge 1980).

Closely related to these emerging insights regarding individual consciousness and institutional reform, other social theorists and activists are articulating a range of complementary insights that provide further depth and substance to the social body frame. For instance, while the logic of the social command frame leads to coercive and controlling conceptions of power, and the logic of the social contest frame leads to competitive and adversarial conceptions of power, a growing number of feminists, systems theorists, and others are beginning to articulate cooperative and mutualistic conceptions of power that are consistent with the logic of the social body frame (e.g., Emmett 2009; Karlberg 2005; Arbab 2000; Mansbridge 1998; Bahá'í International Community

1995; Boulding 1990; Hartsock 1983, 1974; Miller 1976; Arendt 1969; Follett 1942).

Likewise, while the logic of the social command frame leads to asymmetrical modes of authoritarian communication, and the logic of the social contest frame leads to polarizing modes of argumentative debate, a growing number of communication scholars, political scientists, cosmopolitan philosophers, and others are articulating models of dialogical communication and deliberative or consultative decision making that reflect the logic of the social body frame (e.g., Brown, Harris, and Russell 2010; Morrell 2010; Fishkin 2009; Arnett, Fritz, and Bell 2009; Bone, Griffin, and Scholz 2008; Roberts and Arnett 2008; Rostball 2008; Appiah 2006; Danesh and Danesh 2004; Gutman and Thompson 2004; Rosenberg and Gandhi 2003; Makau and Marty 2001; Isaacs 1999; Elster 1998; Bohman and Rehg 1997; Bohm 1996; Foss and Griffin 1995; Dillon 1994; Habermas 1991, 1984; Cohen 1989).

By bringing these diverse insights and expressions into focus, and juxtaposing them with the logic of the social command and social contest frames, we can see a new interpretive logic emerging in some contemporary discourses. Moreover, as the prevailing culture of contest is increasingly called into question due to its ruinous consequences, growing movements of people are recognizing, and acting on, the logic of social and ecological interdependence (Hawken 2007).

### **Reframing Discourses According to the Logic of the Social Body Frame**

As stated at the outset of this discussion, the three contrasting frames outlined above are presented as ideal-type concepts. Like all analytical constructs, they can never correspond perfectly with some presumably objective reality. Care must be taken, therefore, not to reify these frames or to overextend the metaphors that inform them.<sup>2</sup> These frames can, however, serve as useful heuristic devices for organizing inquiry and guiding praxis within struggles for peace and justice.

It should also be noted that the frames outlined above sometimes coexist in contradictory or fragmented ways. As Lakoff explains, people employ interpretive frames in unconscious ways that are not always consistent or coherent, and that can change over time (2006b). Thus some people may employ the social contest frame in specific social domains (such as governance, law, and the economy) while they employ the social body frame in other domains (such as family life or social affiliations).

In addition, some people may unconsciously shift between these frames even when thinking about the same social domain.

Interpretive frames can therefore be understood as patterned but shifting and sometimes fragmented interpretive tendencies that can nonetheless exert powerful influences on the ways people think, speak, and act in relation to various aspects of reality. These influences include shaping the way people interpret everything from everyday experience to scientific data; shaping normative expectations and roles in different social contexts; shaping the formulation of laws and policies; shaping the construction or reform of social institutions; and even shaping relationships between populations or nation-states. Moreover, all of this occurs within fields of power relations in which more powerful segments of society can exert a disproportionate influence on the way discourses are framed.

For all of these reasons, it is evident that struggles for peace and justice must be attentive to the interpretive frames that dominate public discourses. It is not enough to invoke moral principles, articulate compelling concepts, and marshal scientific data to support reasoned arguments, within discourses that are framed for conflict and injustice. The discourses themselves must be reframed for those principles, concepts, and data to be interpreted in ways that correspond to the goals of peace and justice.

Consider, in this regard, the meaning of *justice* itself. Within the social contest frame, the principle of justice can, in practice, mean little more than a commitment to fair rules and fair play within contests between competing individuals and interest groups. Thus, within the social contest frame, justice is understood primarily in distributional terms, within a schema of relative winners and losers. When the rules of fair competition are violated, justice is also understood in corrective or retribitional terms. It is true, of course, that various philosophers within Western liberal societies and elsewhere have articulated more thoughtful conceptions of justice. In practice, however, the functional expression of justice within a culture of contest can mean little more than efforts to ensure and enforce the fairness of distributional contests. If contests characterized by fair rules and fair play do not yield more inclusive and equitable forms of justice, then such conceptions of justice will ultimately be dismissed as naïve and utopian within the logic of the social contest frame.

In contrast, within the social body frame, justice can be understood as the foundational principle of social organization—the first virtue of a unified and interdependent social body—without which shared

well-being and collective prosperity are impossible to achieve. At the individual level, justice can be conceived as a latent faculty of human consciousness that, when properly developed, enables people to judge in fair-minded or unprejudiced ways. And this faculty can be cultivated through processes of education and moral development. In this sense, the principle of justice becomes an indispensable guide for fair and equitable decision making—at both the individual and collective levels—rooted in a recognition that the interests of the individual and those of society are inseparably linked. In the process, justice can be conceptualized as a primary means by which unified thought and coordinated action can be achieved and sustained within a population. Justice, thus conceived, is an essential quality of the ideal relationship between members of a unified and interdependent social body.

Or consider the concept of *service*. Within the social contest frame, service to others implies a position of inferiority or subjugation. Service functions are what the losers in social contests perform for the benefit of the winners. Service-oriented professions are therefore devalued, and service-oriented individuals never “get ahead” in the contest of life.

In contrast, within the social body frame, service to others can be understood as an essential social ethic—the basis for mutual reciprocity, shared well-being, and collective prosperity. Service to others thus becomes a feature of a meaningful, rewarding, and purposeful life that entails the regulation of purely egoistic and self-interested pursuits, and the transcendence of purely material pleasures and aspirations. In all of these ways, the concept of service to others defines another essential quality of the ideal relationship between members of a unified and interdependent social body.

Or consider divergent interpretations of scientific data, such as the growing body of empirical evidence regarding global warming—an issue that has significant implications for peace and justice. Within the social contest frame, Westphalian concepts of absolute state sovereignty and partisan systems of state governance have been naturalized in a reinforcing manner that makes it all but impossible to achieve a coordinated global response to climate change, as each state pursues its narrow self-interests in a manner that is driven by the short-term imperatives of internal partisan election cycles. Furthermore, according to the logic of the social contest frame, climate change represents little more than a change in the parameters of contests that have, in recent centuries, become global in scope. The most powerful segments of the earth’s population—the winners in the prevailing culture of contest—will undoubtedly be able to shield themselves from the material effects

of global warming by moving, by developing or purchasing adaptive technologies, and so forth. Why, then, should today's power elites be overly concerned about global-warming data—unless they interpret it through the moral imperatives of the social body frame?

Within the social body frame, global warming represents a clear threat to shared well-being and collective prosperity that requires a unified and coordinated global response. And since the most vulnerable segments of the earth's population will suffer the most from global warming, the principle of justice—including intergenerational justice—becomes the imperative principle of a collective response. Justice, in this context, calls for a degree of altruistic self-sacrifice on the part of those individuals, social groups, and states who have benefitted the most from the industrial economy that led to the problem of global warming. But the possibility of such self-sacrifice only becomes meaningful, and only assumes motivational force, within the frame of an interdependent social body—or the frame of oneness. In other words, within the social contest frame, global warming becomes an intractable problem that can only lead to increasing social conflict and injustice. However, within the social body frame, coordinated responses to global warming can be envisioned and enacted. The same holds true for most of the mounting global challenges humanity will face in the twenty-first century.

### A Cautionary Note

For all of the reasons outlined above, struggles for peace and justice can be understood, at least in part, as struggles to reframe relevant public discourses. It is not sufficient to invoke moral principles, articulate compelling concepts, and marshal scientific data to support reasoned arguments within discourses that are framed for conflict and injustice. The discourses themselves must be reframed for those principles, concepts, and data to be interpreted in ways that advance the goals of peace and justice. The social body frame offers this interpretive logic.

However, in seeking to reframe public discourses according to the logic of the social body frame, it is important to be aware of past and present abuses of the social body metaphor. Social body metaphors have an ancient history that traces back to diverse sources, including the Rig-Veda, *Aesop's Fables*, the Torah, the Confucian *Analects*, Plato's *Republic*, the New Testament, and numerous medieval and modern sources (Rollo-Koster 2010; Harvey 2007, 1999). Historically, these metaphors have been employed for a wide variety of purposes, both emancipating and oppressive.

With regard to the latter, earlier in this chapter, it was noted that the social command frame is often associated with superficial appeals for unity, harmony, and consensus (Leung, Koch, and Lin 2002; Kozan 1997; Nader 1996, 1991, 1990; Schweitzer 1996; de Jouvenel 1993; Rose 1992; Kent 1992; Wiley-Crofts 1991; Kidder and Hostetler 1990; Chanock 1985). In this regard, crude body metaphors have sometimes been invoked—in cynical and oppressive ways—in order to legitimize and preserve extreme hierarchies of power, encourage compliance and passivity, stifle protest and dissent, and impose a facade of popular consent (van Ree 1993; Simon 1960).

For instance, in feudal Europe, “body politic” metaphors were often employed to defend the strongly hierarchical relationship between the sovereign and his subjects. In such metaphors, the monarch represented the head of society while the populace represented the body, and the role of the head was to command and direct the wholly subservient body (Rasmussen and Brown 2005; Hale 1971). Likewise, South Asian caste systems have sometimes been rationalized through broadly similar conceptions of society, in which the head comprises the priestly cast; the arms comprise the warrior caste; the torso comprises the farmer, merchant, and artisan castes; and the feet comprise the menial laboring castes (Harvey 2007; Olivelle 2005).

It is also worth noting that, within the social command frame, body metaphors have sometimes been invoked to incite violence, hatred, or rejection of foreign or marginalized groups who are represented as invasive or pathological threats to the body (O’Brien 2010). In such cases, intolerance “takes on an almost immunological form” as threatening groups or ideas are metaphorically represented as parasites, viruses, plagues, or cancers (Noel 1994, 119).

Against this backdrop, efforts to reframe public discourses according to the logic of the social body frame must be informed by an acute awareness of these oppressive and alarmist abuses of social body metaphors. Indeed, efforts to *reframe* public discourses according to the logic of interdependence must simultaneously be understood as efforts to *reclaim* the social body metaphor by rearticulating it according to the logic of social justice. In other words, efforts to reclaim the social body metaphor must be informed by a complex and dynamic understanding of social and ecological interdependence that is explicitly harnessed to the values of justice, equity, and shared prosperity. Such efforts must be clearly distinguished from those crude and oppressive body metaphors that have occasionally been invoked within the logic of the social command frame—because in the absence of commitments to justice, appeals to unity can become an oppressive force.

## Conclusion

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, peace and justice will not be realized by advancing reasoned arguments within discourses that are framed for conflict and injustice. The discourses themselves must be reframed in ways that advance the goals of peace and justice. The social body frame appears to offer this interpretive logic—provided it is defined by a core commitment to social justice.

Skeptics may argue that all conceptions of a social body are inherently oppressive, and that conflict and competition, despite their drawbacks, are the only means by which justice can legitimately be pursued. According to this argument, the social body frame articulated in the preceding discussion is naïve and unrealistic, and the social contest frame reflects a necessary realism.

However, a sober examination of the prevailing culture of contest, and of the social and ecological record it is leaving in its wake, suggests otherwise. This record raises profound questions about the ongoing viability of the culture of contest in an age of ever-increasing social and ecological interdependence. To insist that the prevailing culture of contest is leading us toward a more peaceful and just social order, or that the culture of contest can be sustained indefinitely as our numbers and impact on this planet continue to grow, is arguably the more naïve and unrealistic interpretation. How realistic is it to presume that the prevailing culture of contest—with its valorization of egoistic behaviors and its endemic failures of collective coordination—can be sustained indefinitely?

On the contrary, our reproductive and technological successes as a species have transformed the conditions of our own existence. This new reality requires us to adopt a new realism—one that recognizes our organic interdependence and seeks to translate this recognition into a more peaceful, just, and sustainable social order. At the very least, if we are interested in peace, justice, and ecological integrity, we need to open a space for dialog and inquiry regarding the possibility of moving beyond the prevailing culture of contest. In this discursive space, we would do well to ask ourselves: How can justice be made the organizing principle of a unified, interdependent, and coordinated social body? And how can public discourses be reframed to promote this end?

## Notes

1. It is important to note that the social body metaphor has occasionally been invoked in the past, in cynical and oppressive ways, within the logic of the social command frame. This theme is addressed later in this chapter.

2. For an insightful discussion regarding the problems of reifying and/or overextending the social body metaphor, refer to Levine (1995) or Elwick (2003).

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