

## REMARKS IN HONOR OF FRANCE MOORE LAPPÉ

Outstanding Public Scholar of the International Political Economy Section  
of the International Studies Association  
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By Robin Broad

It is indeed an honor to be here to celebrate an outstanding public scholar.

We honor Frances Moore Lappé as a scholar, as a prolific writer, as someone whose ideas reach broad audiences and as someone who works terrifically hard to make the connections between her research, her writing, and organizations fighting for social change. But we honor her not just as a scholar who makes sure her books get into the hands of activists. We honor her also as someone who is herself an activist, someone who herself works to transform what she writes into action.

Historian Howard Zinn put it well:

A small number of people in every generation are forerunners, in thought, action, spirit, who swerve past the barriers of greed and power to hold a torch high for the rest of us. Lappé is one of those.

Indeed, for nearly four decades, “Frankie” has exemplified the term “public scholar” or “scholar-activist.” She started her research on food, hunger, and globalization in the basement of the UC Berkeley agricultural library in 1969. She had dropped out of graduate school (for social work) to pursue her own research agenda. In her words: “I had one question: Why hunger?” She was 26 years old and possessed (in the way that the most extraordinary public scholars are possessed) with what would become her life mission: Why hunger?

I can’t recall when I first read the book that came out of Frankie’s basement research: her Diet for a Small Planet. Did I read it before or after it became an international best-seller? (For the record, when first published in 1971, it cost \$1.25...or \$3.75 in spiral version. Also, for the record, it has sold over 3 million copies since.) Did I first read it before or after she appeared on the Today Show? Again, I don’t recall.

But I do remember its impact on me and others. Indeed, you say the name Frances Moore Lappé to someone from my generation and among the responses you are likely to get is: “She changed the way I ate.” You are also likely to get another response: “She changed the way I think about food and about hunger.”

Yes, Frankie was among a handful of young female public scholars in the North (along with our 2007 Outstanding Public Scholar Susan George, Theresa Hayter, and Cheryl Payer, to name just three) who changed the discourse about poverty. Frankie was among a handful of young female public scholars who laid out many of the issues that progressive scholars in IPE think are

important today: that is, the interrelationships among hunger, poverty, inequality, power, transnational corporations, bilateral and multilateral institutions, and so on.

Frankie's subsequent book -- Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity coauthored with Joe Collins -- was published in 1977. This book also indicates the staying-power of Frankie's analysis. Indeed, the book reads as true today as when it was published 30 years ago. Want to understand why food prices are high? Want to understand why Thai rice is exported across the globe to Senegal? Want to understand why the root-cause of the current "food crisis" is *not* food shortages, contrary to what a National Public Radio series argued this past summer? In case after case, as Frankie has told us for some four decades now and as she told NPR: it is a myth is that there is not enough food. Rather, as Frankie explains: "lack of food" is "a symptom"; "lack of power" is the "cause."

We on the Outstanding Public Scholar Committee (of the International Political Economy Section of the International Studies Association) made our selection as the so-called food crisis of 2008 hit. And we couldn't think of a more fitting person to be awarded Outstanding Public Scholar at a conference with the theme "Exploring the Past, Anticipating the Future."

And we on the Committee aren't the only ones to note the staying power of her analysis: In June 2008, Diet for a Small Planet and Frankie's most recent book - entitled Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity, and Courage in a World Gone Mad - were designated as must-reads for the next U.S. president in The New York Times Sunday Review of Books (by Barbara Kingsolver and Michael Pollan, respectively).

Yes, Frankie has changed the way generations think about these issues. But Frankie doesn't just write books or op-eds or talk to radio and TV folks to correct conventional misperceptions about the roots of hunger. Frankie acts; she builds institutions and builds individuals who in turn act.

I'm a case in point: Frankie and I were first in touch when I lived in the Philippines in the late 1970s. (In all honesty, I don't recall the means through which we were in touch. It's hard to remember those pre-email, even pre-easy long-distance phone calls, days. Presumably we were in touch via something called a letter upon which one places something called stamps.) In any case, I was living in the Philippines with an indigenous community whose ancestral domain was being stolen by Del Monte to expand its export-oriented pineapple plantations.

And I was on my way to graduate school. But Frankie intervened. She made sure that I returned via a speaking tour in Europe -- where groups Frankie was working with were campaigning against Del Monte. She made sure I acted as well as studied. This is part of what Frankie did and does: Through her actions, she builds other public scholars and activists.

She also builds institutions and structures through which individuals can act, and yet more public scholars and activists are built. She doesn't just write books -- she uses her books as organizing tools, if you will: In 1975, from Food First came the Institute for Food and Development Policy, more commonly called Food First. Part of what is so truly special about Food First is that it is a membership organization. According to its bylaws, memberships have to account for a majority

of funding base. This was key to Frankie because her ideal vision wasn't just of another think-tank; her vision was:

- to build an institution that turned individual members into actors in the cause of a more just world;
- to build a national organization with local chapters;
- to build a collectivity of individuals who acted based on structural analysis;
- to make local-national-global connections (long before it was fashionable to do so) dedicated to transforming so-called democracy into what she calls "living democracy." (Interestingly enough, she and Indian activists came up with this same term "living democracy" separately – as Frankie discovered on a trip to India.)

Even as Frankie uncovered the ravages of the dominant public and private institutions in the world and even as she wrote and fought against them, she has remained an optimist who insists on focusing on positive alternatives. Thus, her 2002 book, written with her daughter Anna Lappé, Hope's Edge: The Next Diet for a Small Planet, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary sequel to Diet for a Small Planet. Hope's Edge chronicles the journey mother and daughter took around the globe -- a journey literally to find hope in grassroots democratic social movements worldwide, a journey to counter the myth that such "living democracy" was a pipe-dream.

It's a wonderful book, a book that once again takes on myriad myths -- myths that human nature makes people greedy, myths that only richer people in richer countries care about the environment or can take action to make the world a better place. It is a book that I have used and continue to use in both undergraduate and graduate classes. Indeed, it is the only book I have ever used as required reading that students have then bought copies of to give to others as gifts.

With this book Frankie once again moved from writing into action. Together, she and her daughter Anna built the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Small Planet Institute, a collaborative network for research and popular education to bring democracy to life. With her daughter, she is also co-founder of the Small Planet Fund, which channels resources to democratic social movements worldwide -- not as charity but as connected actors in this living democracy.

Allow me to recount just one more story about Frankie from the past: It was 1985 in Elmhurst, Illinois – at a public event on the Third World debt crisis. In all honesty, I don't recall all such public speaking events, or probably even most. But there were two things about Frankie's participation that stuck with me:

1. The presence of a huge local chapter of Food First, holding onto Frankie's every word; and
2. Her electricity. She didn't just talk. She spoke as if she were plugged in to an electric socket. And she electrified the audience.

Let me end with two quotes from Frankie. First, from Hope's Edge (in 2002):

Everything I wrote in Diet For a Small Planet was sitting there for any nutritionist or economist to put together well before I did. But because I was untrained, I didn't wear the blinders created by being taught to perceive only within a set framework.

And, recently in the Huffington Post:

Reducing democracy to voting and shopping, it can't tap our deep needs and capacities to be problem solvers ourselves. Essentially, humans aren't couch potatoes and whiners! We are doers who thrive when we know our voices count.

Need I say more except: Thank you, Frankie. Thank you for all you do. Thank you also for modeling a road less traveled in terms of public scholarship. And thank you for your extraordinary public scholarship which continues to inspire today.

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