

# Book Review

## **Are We the 99%? The Occupy Movement, Feminism and Intersectionality**

Heather McKee Hurwitz

*Philadelphia, PA, 2020* , EAN: 978-1-4399-2021-3 (hardback), \$99.50, EAN: 978-1-4399-2022-0 (paperback), \$25.95, 208 pp; index.

The Occupy Movement is ten years old this year, and yet there is still so much that we do not understand about the movement. For those unfamiliar with the topic, Occupy first came to prominence in September of 2011, when New York City activists occupied a public square in the city's financial district. Despite attracting relatively little attention at first, the movement soon grew in the public imagination until it spawned a movement that spread not only across the United States, but the globe. The movement made use of urban occupations as its primary tactic, and tended to adopt 'horizontal' organizing styles, which eschewed formal leaders in favor of mass assemblies 'facilitated' by activists. Its most prominent frame was that of the '99%' – the notion that 99% of a country's population have common interests that diverge from their elite '1%' foes.

By now, there have been numerous trade and scholarly books written about Occupy, but few have engaged with the topic as systematically as *Are We the 99%*. Indeed, this is a book in which scholars will be justified in taking a great deal of interest. Leveraging important insights from feminist sociology, the study of women's movements, and intersectional politics, Hurwitz masterfully demonstrates how these various literatures and perspectives shed light on the movement's more particular dynamics.

But what does *Are We The 99%* hold for the reader? How does the book contribute to our understanding of social movements? Alongside a more general survey of the progression of the Occupy movement, the book offers a great deal of specific insights highly useful to scholars, exploring the dynamics of collective identity, framing, discrimination, and feminist mobilization in the US Occupy movement. These contributions are respectively detailed in each of the book's four

core chapters. Because of the highly specific focus of the book's chapters, its introduction is mandatory reading for those seeking to synthesize its contents. Fortunately, it offers an excellent overview of the context underpinning the Occupy movement and the relevance of an intersectional approach to understanding its dynamics, in keeping with the state of the art in research on intersectional social movements. The introduction also overviews Hurwitz's research methods and her field sites, something further developed in greater depth in the book's methodological appendix.

The book's first chapter tackles the formation and sustenance of collective identities in the Occupy movement from an intersectional perspective, making the case that the 99% identity served to obscure movement diversity and erased the distinct experiences of women of color and other marginalized groups. This – Hurwitz shows compellingly – led to the development of oppositional collective identities within the movement which rejected the 99% umbrella identity in favor of novel bases for contentious political engagement. Scholars have made the observation that the 99% identity failed to be truly inclusive in the past, but this chapter's principal contribution lies in showing the consequences of that failure, and how it affected movement activity.

The second chapter in the book turns to the question of framing and cultural production, analyzing how Occupy crafted a '99% frame' and sustained this through an array of cultural products. Building on the critique developed in Chapter 1, Hurwitz points out that this frame neglected to actively identify marginalized groups as constituting part of the 99%, and shows how – in response – movement participants actively sought to represent these groups by shifting to a more intersectional approach to framing which allowed greater scope for coalition building.

The book's third chapter was perhaps the one I found most interesting. Its central contribution is the notion of 'discriminatory resistance' – a means by which non-leaders in social movements like Occupy can act to sustain social inequalities within those movements, even despite the best efforts of movement leadership. I found this concept to be well explicated, highly useful, and transferable to innumerable other scenarios. The concept was easy to internalize and readily applicable to other social movements. It will certainly be of great benefit to scholars in the future.

The book's fourth chapter turns squarely to the influence of feminist mobilization on the movement, tracing how specifically feminist collective identities, free spaces and bridge-leaders played an important role in the movement. This part of the book was highly interesting, but I occasionally found it difficult to grasp whether Hurwitz was seeking to argue that feminist mobilization was truly distinctly different from the various queer, anti-racist or other forms of marginalized mobilization associated with Occupy, or whether all of this mobilization was being read as 'feminist' in an intersectional sense. Addressing this matter would have strongly complemented the intersectional ethos characterizing the rest of the book.

Despite the instructive content of its chapters, the book's organization also offers a point for criticism: at least half of its core chapters seem to have appeared before in a quite similar form. Chapter 3, for example, bears resemblance to a 2019 article by the author, while Chapter 4 similarly corresponds to another one of the author's past articles. I was unfamiliar with these pieces when reading the book, and so this mattered little to me, but those who are more familiar with the author's scholarship may wish to reflect on whether the book will be of utility to them.

Underpinning Hurwitz' analysis is serious and sophisticated ethnographic research that has endowed the book with a rich trove of data from which to support the author's claims. The book makes use of a wide variety of informative – and often touching – vignettes drawn from interviews. Hurwitz is not afraid to allow interviewees to speak for themselves, publishing extracts more-or-less wholesale, rather than cherry-picking quotes. She pairs these extracts with extensive and reflective engagement with relevant social scientific literature, fusing scholarship with evidence in an impressive fashion.

Spanning the coasts of the United States, with primary field sites in New York and Oakland (supplemented with other sites in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Occupy National Gathering in Philadelphia), Hurwitz's detailed and precise research is of considerable benefit to students and scholars of the Occupy movement. Moreover, the trove of data she and her colleagues have compiled in the form of an online archive (dubbed 'The Occupy Archive') is a profound contribution in its own right.

In sum, there is a lot to like about this book. From the perspective of a scholar interested in the Occupy movement, the author's intersectional feminist approach to the movement constitutes an important contribution. For scholars of social movements more broadly, the book productively uses the Occupy case to develop useful theoretical propositions for the analysis of other movements, such as 'discriminatory resistance'. Finally, there is also a lot of educational utility to the book. In fact, *Are We the 99%* is the kind of book I wish had been available when I started teaching courses on Occupy. It is an extremely nuanced, carefully written discussion of how the Occupy movement's dynamics interacted with its internal contradictions. All in all, I would commend it highly to anyone interested in or teaching about the Occupy movement, the practicalities of intersectional contention, or gender and social movements more generally.