

# QUESTIONING the SUPER-RICH

Representations, Structures, Experiences

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**Abstract** The authors outline how multiple dimensions—historical and contemporary; global and local; political, economic, social, and cultural—inform an understanding of the super-rich. Recent super-rich scholarship is reviewed with regard to three themes: discourses and representations; mechanisms and structures; experiences and identities. The empirical and conceptual insights of the contents are then highlighted, with regard to the significance of discourses of legitimacy, namely, those of meritocracy, civility, and luxury; the intersections of race and class that underpin assumptions about and representations of wealth; institutional and political-economic dynamics, in relation to international financial systems and property markets; and experiences and attitudes, examined via elites' professional identities and cultural practices. The authors suggest that questioning the super-rich provides an avenue for the study of power in society, how it is reproduced, and how global hierarchies may be shifting. To that end, the articles attempt to make visible the brute force of the infrastructures (politics and policy, cultural and occupational conventions, financial devices and systems) that are occluded by the tendency to focus on the gloss of super-rich lifestyles; to draw attention to the long-term and newly emerging tensions within and between categories of wealth and of elites, and spheres of political, economic, and cultural activity; and to contribute to an understanding of how the accumulation of wealth is perpetuated and excused through discourses of legitimation, structural dynamics, and lived identities. These are much-needed critical interventions at a time of escalating inequality.

**Keywords** discourse, elite, identity, representation, super-rich

A *Guardian* columnist (Cosslett 2018) recently demanded, “Are we really going to let the super-rich take all the art?” Warning readers about art consultants buying Picassos in bulk and museum collections grinding to a halt as art becomes the best performing asset class of the year, the columnist contemplates a future “in which only the super-rich get to bask in the beauty of humanity’s masterpieces” and notes, “I don’t especially begrudge them their monopoly on vulgar yachts or tacky hotels, but when they start stealing the art, I’m liable to start rocking back and forth while muttering ‘Full communism!’ under my breath.” The piece makes manifest a range of recurrent anxieties and objections that characterize writings on the super-rich, including the division between a mega wealthy elite and everybody else; changes in global markets and structural factors that enable extreme accumulations of wealth; fears around the loss of culture in the face of sheer economic might; and the assumption that the super-rich are robbing “us,” the 99%, of our cultural heritage.

Questioning the super-rich—unpacking the legitimacy of the hyper concentration of wealth, unveiling the financial devices and systems that make it possible, and laying bare its consequences and limitations—could not come at a more timely moment. As in the above example, there is a general sense of the deepening chasm between the very wealthy and “the rest,” expressed and reproduced through their seeming monopolization of the good life (and good art). The super-rich appear increasingly isolated in a foreign land in which different tax regimes and life expectancy outcomes apply. And yet, our capacity to grasp the situation is inhibited, in part by the sheer magnitude of the chasm, by the deeply entrenched “wicked problems” bound up

with those inequalities locally and globally, and by the difficulties in gaining an “inside view” of the machinations and mind-sets, infrastructures, and ideologies at work in the perpetuation of the super-rich. As such, attention tends to shift to the surface: the ostentatiousness of super-rich individuals, their lifestyles, and their accoutrements. In turn, what remains hidden from view are the institutional, ideological, and conventional bases on which rest the reproduction of inequality. With this special issue, we suggest that social science has a particularly crucial role to play in enhancing our capacity to grasp and, more so, to challenge the current situation, by bringing to bear a diverse range of theoretical and methodological tools for understanding the *contingent* accomplishment, reproduction, and legitimation of the power relations that sustain and exacerbate the chasm between the super-rich and “the rest.”

The global economy has been shaped for more than five decades by the rise of multinational corporations and global brands, escalating outsourcing and offshoring, and the increasing withdrawal of the state from the provision of a social safety net. In the past decade, a protracted economic slowdown and austerity measures have been accompanied by accelerating concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. The statistics on global inequality grow increasingly stark, as marked by Oxfam in successive annual reports on global inequality, suitably timed to coincide with the annual World Economic Forum meeting for global political and business leaders in Davos, Switzerland. A growing popular awareness of and dissatisfaction with global and local inequalities have shaped public views on wealth, luxury, and elites, and given rise to highly visible protest movements. And yet, wealth—and

the myth of wealth—continues to work in unintended ways. The cry of “we are the 99%,” as espoused by Occupy and other movements for distributive justice, may fuel commitment to the redistribution of economic resources (Chomsky 2012; Piketty 2014; Dorling 2014; Sayer 2015). However, it also invigorates the reproduction of structural inequalities, through the defensive measures of the 1 percent, and the aspirational strategies of those wishing to join it.

At the same time that the gap between the 1 percent and the 99 percent has widened, new groups are ascending into the elite, from both established and emerging economies. In 2016, 55 percent of the world’s 2,397 billionaires were entirely “self-made”; 20 percent of those billionaires were from China, Russia, India, and Brazil (Wealth-X 2017). The makeup of the super-rich is rapidly changing as the leading economies of the global South increase their share of the market, shaking the foundations of the West’s domination on economic but also cultural terms. This has led to shifting divisions and alliances within and between the upper-middle classes and ascendant ultra-affluent at both local and global scales.

As the mechanisms for the creation and concentration of wealth transform, and global wealth becomes ever more concentrated (Beaverstock, Hubbard, and Short 2004; Di Muzio 2015), the representational politics of status continue to shift (Faiers 2014) between positions of ambivalence. On the one hand, there are demure performances of super-rich status. Following the financial crisis of 2008, newspapers reported on luxury goods shoppers asking for plain shopping bags (Knowledge@Wharton 2009). Similarly, we might look to the consecration of privilege enacted through the discourse of

meritocracy (Littler 2017), as in the case of the current president of the United States, who, despite being born into wealth, presents himself as a self-made man (Serafini 2017). These are poignant examples of the complex structural and representational dynamics of wealth: as the majority make material adjustments in an age of austerity, the super-rich modulate the symbolic language of their wealth. On the other hand, ostentatious performances by the super-rich verge on the carnivalesque: the current president of the United States (again) in his gold-plated elevator (Littler, this issue); a Russian oligarch’s £360 million super yacht (Burford 2017); a Chinese tycoon shopping with an entourage of robot handmaidens (Mullin 2016). Such examples sit within a rich vein of popular accounts of the wealthy and their misbehaviors, from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby* (1925) to Brett Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991) to Kevin Kwan’s *Crazy Rich Asians* (2013).

So too do these examples sit within a long tradition of social scientific scholarship on the mentalities and practices of economic elites, from Thorstein Veblen’s ([1899] 1994) influential account of the nouveaux riches of the 1890s, to more recent work on the new global power elite, conspicuous philanthrocapitalism, and emerging modes of good taste (e.g., Cassidy 2015; Daloz 2010; Hay and Muller 2013; Featherstone 2014; Schimpfössl 2014; Smith Maguire and Lim 2015). The study of contemporary elites has emerged from a range of disciplinary perspectives and in relation to an array of empirical foci; this has produced complementary if not always intersecting bodies of knowledge with regard to the lived experiences, discourses, and institutional infrastructure of the super-rich (e.g., Freeland 2013; Sayer 2015; Hay and Beaverstock 2016; see

recent special issues assembled by Davis and Williams 2017; Armitage 2018; Cousin, Khan, and Mears 2018). All of this work underlines the contemporary significance of the super-rich. To study economic elites is to study power and inequality from above (Khan 2012).

This special issue thus offers critical reflection on the category of the super-rich. Who are the super-rich? How do they produce and reproduce their status? How are the figures of the super-rich differently configured across time and space? From a range of disciplinary perspectives, the collection of articles utilizes the super-rich as a lens to examine political, economic, and cultural shifts with regard to the aesthetic, spatial, and financial dimensions of wealth and power. Questioning the super-rich, we suggest, provides an avenue for the study of power in society, how it is reproduced, and how global hierarchies may be shifting with the decentering of the West. To that end, the articles attempt to make visible the brute force of the infrastructures (politics and policy, cultural and occupational conventions, financial devices and systems) that are occluded by the tendency to focus on the gloss of super-rich lifestyles; this requires attention to the long-term and newly emerging tensions within and between categories of wealth and of elites, and spheres of political, economic, and cultural activity. Furthermore, the authors contribute to an understanding of how the accumulation of wealth is perpetuated and excused through discourses of legitimation, structural dynamics, and lived identities. These are much-needed critical interventions at a time of escalating inequality when the “parallel country” (Frank 2007) of the super-rich has amassed half of the global wealth.

### ***Super-Rich Scholarship***

Studying the super-rich comes with specific challenges, both methodological and disciplinary. Access is often the main barrier in studying the lives of the elites; however, the social science preoccupation with class strictly in terms of disadvantage (e.g., Moore, Gibson, and Lumby 2018) can also pose obstacles, framing the study of elites as a peripheral luxury. However, recent work has compellingly argued that we must not only study the oppressed and the marginalized, but we must also “study up” to fully understand and challenge social and economic inequality (e.g., Di Muzio 2015; Khan 2012). That argument provided the starting point for an event we organized in May 2017 that brought together a range of social science and arts and humanities scholars looking at the super-rich as a serious object of study. Funded by CAMEo, the University of Leicester’s Research Institute for Cultural and Media Economies, the symposium brought together several of the authors featured herein, as well as others such as Jonathan Beaverstock, who recounted experiencing journal editors’ successive dismissals of the research topic when seeking to publish what has become a seminal article in the field (Beaverstock, Hubbard, and Short 2004). While related scholarship has gathered momentum since that time, the super-rich remain under-researched—hence the contributions in this special issue. Three themes in particular emerge from recent scholarship, which help to frame the intent and content of the special issue: the discourses and representations, mechanisms and structures, and lived experiences and identities of the super-rich.

*Discourses and Representations*

Studies of the discursive dimensions of the super-rich have explored the ways in which representations of the wealthy are shaped by both celebratory and critical frames, and circulated as part of the flow of information and imagery about class, power, and privilege (Kendall 2011). Historical comparisons have highlighted the continuity of certain narrative constructions of the wealthy, both approving (“rags to riches” stories) and disapproving (“get rich quick” stories), as well as changes, as the justification of wealth has shifted from religious virtue to individual happiness (Fluck 2003). Representations of the super-rich, their lives and excesses, serve to individualize and naturalize inequality, helping to legitimate the structural processes underpinning extreme concentrations of wealth (Jaworski and Thurlow 2017). Representations of wealth symbolically and ideologically work to obscure structural processes that reproduce the advantages of elites, from the transnational movement of capital to urban planning and the organization of credit that enables excessive consumption. This discursive misdirection allows seeming contradictions to pass unnoticed, as when individuals simultaneously hold prowealth attitudes while directing explicit skepticism and criticism at the rich (Horwitz and Dovidio 2017).

Attention has also been directed at the representational practices of the super-rich. These are also marked by continuities and changes over time. If the conspicuous consumption and performances of affluence identified by Veblen ([1899] 1994) have transformed in an era of informationalization when “even billionaires dress casually” (Fluck 2003: 65), they are nevertheless far from extinct. New forms of inconspicuous conspicuousness (Eckhardt, Belk, and Wilson 2014) and elite cultural

capital (Prieur and Savage 2013) continue to symbolically demarcate elites from their aspirants. At the same time, the cultural imaginaries of wealth and power are spectacularly displayed and deployed through material objects, from iconic architecture to luxury retail spaces (e.g., Armitage and Roberts 2016; Crewe and Martin 2016; Sklair and Struna 2013).

*Mechanisms and Structures*

The mechanisms and structures that enable the hyper concentration of wealth and buttress the reproduction of the super-rich have been the focus of substantial research. These extend from financial instruments to strategies for influencing tax and property policies, which have come to characterize “global” cities like London (Atkinson 2016; Burrows, Webber, and Atkinson 2017). Many such studies emerge from the fields of geography and urban studies, with recurrent themes being the processes and mechanisms that allow for the movement of the super-rich and their capital, and the importance of mobility and the utilization of space.

Special attention has been given to changes in the nature of global capitalism (Haseler 1999), the emergence and intensification of financialization and deregulation, and the ability of the super-rich to better tap into flows of transnational capital so as to increase their own wealth (Irvin 2008; Chesters 2013; Davis and Williams 2017; Volscho and Kelly 2012) through financial products and property (Fernandez, Hofman, and Aalbers 2016). As a result, urban zoning and housing policy are increasingly tailored to the advantage of the super-rich. Certain cities and zones within cities become territories in which the super-rich are embedded spatially and politically, and from which others are excluded. Some of the more structurally

oriented work discusses a hegemonic transnational class (see Murray 2015 for a general perspective on this issue, and Kaup 2013 for a look at how this is locally articulated). This kind of work highlights the links between the transnational, mobile lives of those with privilege and the reproduction of a privileged habitus—intersecting with the final theme, below. Overall, this body of work looks to understand the mobilities of the super-rich within a wider global capitalist system that is premised on flow and mobility for the few.

### *Lived Experiences and Identities*

In addition to the more market-based, economic approaches to understanding the structural foundations for the reproduction of the super-rich, work has also been done on the cultural reproduction of the super-rich via particular identities and dispositions, sowed through education and preparation for work (Forbes and Lingard 2015; Tarc and Tarc 2015). A key theme in this regard has been agency, with scholars noting the exaggerated degree of influence and “hyper” agency ascribed to and mobilized by the super-rich (Maclean, Harvey, and Kling 2017). Whether it be in regard to decisions to close themselves off in gated communities (Pow 2011), to engage in charity work or public service (Power et al. 2016; Schimpfössl, this issue), or to partake in research that may actually be critical of them (Gilding 2010), research underlines the super-rich’s capacity to choose on their own terms. Agency clearly overlaps with mobility (see Butler and Lees 2006 and Webber and Burrows 2016 on the local impacts of mobility) but also with the performance of everyday life, as studies of the consumption and leisure habits of the super-rich suggest (e.g., Marroun, Wilkinson, and Young 2014; Spence 2014).

Reflecting the peculiar challenges of access associated with studying elites, the lived experiences and identities of the super-rich are often approached indirectly (notable exceptions include Frank [2007] and Greenfield [2017], who offer cultural-anthropological “inside” views of the super-rich, their lifestyles, aspirations, and anxieties). On the one hand, research has examined the mentalities of the super-rich via traces left by their activities and practices. For example, a significant body of work has examined the way in which the super-rich “colonize” space through mechanisms of exclusion and visual territorializing, through the building of gated communities and other exclusive and exclusionary zones (Pow 2011; Knowles 2017; Thurlow and Jaworski 2012). On the other hand, the dispositions of the super-rich are accessed through the frontline service class who are engaged directly with them, such as the intermediaries who manage their financial affairs (Davies 2008) and court high net worth individuals to specific locations as a means to inject capital (Pow 2011, 2017; Atkinson 2016).

The three themes discussed above cover an array of perspectives on the super-rich, from the structural and micro-mechanisms that enable the accumulation and management of wealth, to the discourses that frame wealth, and the subjective experiences of elites. Intersections between these themes highlight both the constitution of the super-rich as a socioeconomic phenomenon and significant research contributions from scholars across the social sciences—many of whom are included in this special issue. The spatial dimensions of the super-rich, for instance, run through examinations of the global distribution of wealth and financial management services, the performance of leisure activities and the

symbolic framing of super-rich consumption, and the reverberations of historic East/West divides and Eurocentric perspectives in the contemporary status contests between cadres of elites. Concepts of mobility, agency, legitimacy, inequality, and differentiation have served as critical foci for research and offer potential touchpoints for future cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural insights.

### ***Looking Inside the Super-Rich***

The articles in this special issue question the conceptualization of the super-rich from three overarching perspectives. The first several contributions share a concern with critically unpacking key discourses of legitimacy for wealth—namely, those of meritocracy (Littler), civility (Smith Maguire), and luxury (Roberts)—and with troubling the representational conventions of the super-rich (Ojih Odutola, introduced by Frizzell). The next article examines the political-economic and social dynamics of international property markets (Burrows and Knowles). The final two articles turn attention to the experiences and mind-sets of elites, via a focus on their professional identities (Davis) and cultural practices (Schimpfössl).

Jo Littler investigates the way in which elites draw on discourses of meritocracy to validate their position and actions. Littler takes two images as her starting point for a cultural studies–informed deconstruction of the relationship between politics, corporate power, and the media. First: a photo of current US president Donald Trump and former United Kingdom Independence Party leader Nigel Farage standing in Trump’s gold-plated elevator; second: a group photo of Trump and Farage joined by a number of men who were instrumental in the Leave.EU campaign (namely, Arron

Banks, Gerry Gunster, Andy Wigmore, and Raheem Kassam). The different layers of the images are considered, from the history of the building where the elevator is located to the relationships between the men photographed and the reactions that the images generated online. Littler points to the contradictory relationship between Trump’s flamboyant wealth and his self-positioning as the voice of the masses. She refers to Trump and his ilk as “normcore plutocrats,” Littler’s term for the ultra-wealthy who “attempt to maintain and increase their power and wealth by performing ordinariness.” Littler peels away the mask of ordinariness that these normcore plutocrats put on by means of orchestrated discourse and media texts in their attempts to legitimize their wealth and uphold the myth of meritocracy.

Jennifer Smith Maguire focuses on the nouveau riche faction of the super-rich, arguing that media representations of the nouveaux riches are central in the cultural constitution of the global middle class. She examines the role of a discourse of civility in policing the boundaries of class, often in relation to consumption habits. Smith Maguire identifies three dominant frames in representations of the nouveaux riches aimed at the Western professional middle class: civility, vulgarity, and order (by which groups are positioned and movement between positions is rationalized in relation to both civility and vulgarity). She finds vulgarity to be the most prominent frame, positioning nouveau riche consumption as a crass display of wealth; even if the nouveaux riches know what to buy and where to be seen, they are represented as not knowing how to behave. Nevertheless, some representations in her media sample bestowed the mark of civility, as when nouveau riche behavior and consumption aligned with established Western ideals

of bourgeois “good taste.” Such representations thus serve to reaffirm the Western upper middle classes’ position as gatekeepers of what is and is not civilized. Smith Maguire suggests that the overrepresentation of Asian (particularly Chinese) new rich in the media, and the condescending attitudes toward non-Western rising rich, are manifestations of established upper middle-class anxieties about their place in the global status hierarchy. Connecting representations of the new super-rich to a global socioeconomic climate in flux, Smith Maguire offers a rich account of the way in which the nouveaux riches serve as subjects and symbols of a rapidly changing capitalist system and as anchors for a number of anxieties that result from these transformations.

Joanne Roberts offers a critical examination of the moral position of luxury, painting a picture of imminent crisis both for luxury and for the super-rich in the face of contemporary escalating inequality. Taking a long-term historical perspective, the article provides an overview of the positive and negative conceptualizations and implications of luxury from the classical period to the present. In doing so, Roberts makes clear that the moral position of luxury is both context dependent and bound up with inequality. This sets the foundation for considering the ethical and moral questions that luxury poses to the super-rich, particularly in relation to the tensions between collectivizing redistribution (i.e., taxes) versus individualizing redistribution (i.e., the magnanimity of super-rich philanthropists); between collective luxuries (e.g., high-quality roads, health care, and education) and individual luxuries; and between cultural experiences accessible to the general community versus those reserved for an increasingly removed elite. Roberts

also discusses the relationship between law and morality and references the way in which laws and spaces are increasingly bent to suit the super-rich—from strategies for tax avoidance to the criminalization of rough sleeping—and the dark side to philanthropy, which withholds tax revenue from the state and supplants public expenditure without being democratically accountable.

The special issue then turns to a further account of the super-rich, through the work of artist Toyin Ojih Odutola, insightfully introduced by Deborah Frizzell. Through both images and text, Ojih Odutola constructs a fictional world in which Nigerian noble and mercantile wealth come together. This world is populated with all the expected signifiers of wealth: richly hued and paneled rooms; gilt-framed paintings; red velvet slippers and gold watches; fine fabrics and furs; family estates and equestrian pursuits. At the same time, her works challenge assumptions about wealth through intersections between signifiers of race and class, further complicated by nationality and sexuality—as the marriage that unites the old and new rich Nigerian families is between “the Marquess of UmuEze Amara, TMH Jidefor Emeka, and his husband, Lord Temitope Omodele from the House of Obafemi” (Ojih Odutola 2017). Moreover, as indicated in Frizzell’s commentary, Ojih Odutola challenges what wealth means, questioning the equivalences typically drawn between excellence and wealth, and wealth and freedom. She invites us to consider the “beauty and richness in the world” that is flattened by a narrow focus on the economic spoils of affluence, and to challenge the narrow geographical imaginary and normative visual discourse of the cultural imaginary of the super-rich.



Moving away from discourse and representation, Roger Burrows and Caroline Knowles address the financialization of housing in London over the last decade, approaching the subject from the perspective of economic geography. Distinguishing between the “merely wealthy” (“the haves”) and the über-wealthy (the “have yachts”), the authors trace the sociospatial transformations of a number of London neighborhoods, through the lived experiences of long-term inhabitants. In their analysis, Burrows and Knowles explore the usefulness of the term *gentrification* for understanding changes in already affluent areas. They question the limits of the frames and methodological tools used for understanding urban transformations and expose the internal stratification of the wealthy. Through rich excerpts from a series of interviews with residents in affluent areas of London, Burrows and Knowles provide an account of the recent stages of an increasing financialization of housing and offer a nuanced perspective on the super-rich by presenting perceptions of this group held by the “merely wealthy.”

Aeron Davis explores the structural factors that have shaped the professional identities of contemporary CEOs, whom he regards as primary definers of and influences on contemporary wealth creation. Drawing from interview data, Davis identifies differences in the geographic and social networks, attitudes, and strategies of CEOs, contrasting those located in publicly traded and large, private UK companies. However, he also identifies continuities within this faction, corroborated by data from a demographic audit of CEOs and historical accounts of CEOs going back to the 1970s. These continuities include the professionalization of the CEO occupation, a narrowing of educational

backgrounds and disciplinary expertise and mentalities to the fields of accounting and finance, and a shortening of tenure with an accompanying increased focus on demonstrating performance through short-term profits and share price increases. What emerges is a picture of the “financialized CEO,” operating with a foreshortened time horizon and an emphasis on the spectacle of markets (big deals, large-scale restructuring, short-term share movements in funds) to maintain investor interest. Davis demonstrates how these strategies and mind-sets privilege returns for the super-rich investor over long-term innovation and stability for the company, thereby placing financialization and the financialized CEO at the heart of today’s extreme wealth and inequality.

Elisabeth Schimpfössl also addresses the lived experiences and identities of the super-rich, through the lens of cultural practice. She explores the charitable and philanthropic practices of Russia’s super-rich and discusses the extent to which the frame of philanthrocapitalism is useful for understanding the motivations, dynamics, and relations to the state that lie behind these practices. Through a detailed account of the Russian context and the history of philanthropy in the region, Schimpfössl provides a useful perspective on the cultural practices of the super-rich. More specifically, she provides valuable insights into the identity of Russia’s billionaires and their relation to their Soviet upbringing, particularly their often contradictory views on welfare and the state. She suggests that multimillionaire and billionaire philanthropists have constructed distinct ideas about themselves and the role they play in the betterment of Russian society. These ideas help them legitimize their place in the elite.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

The assembled articles contribute to advancing the literature on the super-rich in the three areas identified earlier. The analyses of discourse and representation allow for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the super-rich attempt to legitimize their status (Littler) and naturalize luxury and inequality (Roberts). Also highlighted are ways in which representations of and narratives about the super-rich reflect other groups' anxieties about their position in a "Great Chain of Being" (Smith Maguire), and the potential for alternative representations (Ojih Odutola) to disrupt assumptions about wealth (such as those associated with race/ethnicity and nationality) and challenge the historical inequalities on which they rest. Discourses on the super-rich also cut across Burrow and Knowles's analysis of urban transformation, which serves as a window for looking at the super-rich through the eyes of the merely wealthy. The two final articles of the issue explore the lived experiences of the super-rich but return as well to discourses and structural factors. The characteristics of the professional identities and attitudes of the world's top CEOs, as described by Davis, are linked to changes in education and the market, and Schimpfössl ties the philanthropic activities of Russia's super-rich to regional discourses on the role of the state and the duty of individuals.

Studying the super-rich is not only about the super-rich as subjects. The special issue authors invite us to formulate questions about structural issues that the spectacularization of wealth obscures. This includes questioning the distribution of wealth more broadly, the relationship between the public and private sectors, and the politics behind the development of

economic and social policy. Studying the super-rich allows us to understand how the accumulation of wealth is perpetuated and excused, but also how middle-class habitus is reproduced, providing an avenue for the study of power in society, and how it is perpetuated. While popular attention has been directed at the new international super-rich and non-Western billionaires becoming more "Westernized," the Western elite are also looking to (some of) the new super-rich, as we see in Mandarin (but not Russian or Arabic) being embedded in (some) elite schools' curricula (Forbes and Lingard 2015). Thus while the middlebrow may resist the super-rich and regard them as vulgar, the old elite seeks to triangulate and benchmark against the distinctive resources of the other, colonizing them to retain the long-standing distance—and thus distinction—that exists between themselves and their newly emerging global competitors.

As a subject, the super-rich are dynamic and constantly evolving, thus inviting further research. While significant research has been done on the mobility, finances, and consumption habits of the super-rich, the representations and representational practices of the super-rich remain under-researched. How do the super-rich make use of different media (e.g., social media, photography, press) to construct their own sense of identity? How are widely distributed images of the super-rich (e.g., Rich Kids of Instagram) referenced by working- and middle-class young people in their own identity-building processes? And how important are images of wealth, luxury, and elite leisure in the building of protest discourse and imaginaries against capitalism and/or the concentration of wealth? Furthermore, while there is extensive work linking the lives of the

super-rich with the economic structures in which they are embedded, there is not enough work on the super-rich and their own understandings of wider structural factors (and how these may have enabled their wealth). Another possible future avenue of research is gender. How are images of the worlds of the super-rich gendered? How are gendered hierarchies played out in the world of the super-rich? How are women excluded or co-opted, and how do these dynamics differ for the “new” and “old” super-rich (when billionaires with inherited wealth are far more likely to be women; *Wealth-X* 2017)? A similar line of inquiry could be followed—as in Ojih Odutola’s work—to explore race, ethnicity, and nationality in this context, in terms of both representation and local and transnational constructions of the elites. Thus the special issue invites—if not demands—scholars to undertake further work to question the representations, structures, and experiences of the super-rich; to generate more encompassing, critical accounts of the intended and unintended characteristics and consequences of the super-rich; to further demystify the mechanisms and assumptions that underpin the intensification of the political, economic, and cultural clout of the super-rich; and to fundamentally challenge the increasing isolationism of the super-rich, underlining that when it comes to this planet and our shared future, “they” as much as “we” are the 100 percent.

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