

Is there a global super-bourgeoisie?

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Abstract

In recent decades, accelerating processes of globalization and an increase in economic inequality in most of the world's countries have raised the question of the emergence of a new bourgeoisie integrated at the global level, sometimes described as a global super-bourgeoisie. This group would be distinguished by its unequaled level of wealth and global interconnectedness, its transnational ubiquity and concentration in the planet's major global cities, its specific culture, consumption habits, sites of sociability and shared references, and even by class consciousness and capacity to act collectively. This article successively discusses how the social sciences have examined these various dimensions of the question and begun to provide systematic empirical answers.

KEYWORDS

bourgeoisie, class, economic elites, global elite, inequality, super-rich, transnationalism

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, accelerating processes of globalization and an increase in economic inequality in most of the world's countries have raised the question of the possible emergence of a new bourgeoisie now integrated at the global level (Dahrendorf, 2000) or, as some have called it, of a global "super-bourgeoisie" (Cousin & Chauvin, 2015; Duclos 2002; Wagner 2017). These evolutions are sometimes considered complementary to the simultaneous growth of middle classes all around the world or, on the contrary, sometimes framed as threatening that very process (Ball & Nikita, 2014; Koo, 2016; Therborn 2020). The super-bourgeoisie would be distinguished by its unequaled level of wealth and global interconnectedness, its transnational ubiquity and concentration in the planet's major global cities, its specific culture, sites of sociability and shared references, and even by class consciousness and capacity to act collectively (Robinson & Harris, 2000).

To go beyond mere circumstantial media punditry on the issue, sociology and other social sciences have developed several programs of detailed investigation that have examined these dimensions of the question and

begun providing systematic empirical answers to it. This article, therefore, discusses rising inequality at the top of the socio-economic ladder in most countries, transnational interconnections, international mobility, spatial concentration, cultural internationalization, and the most-debated topic of planned coordination among globalized economic elites.

2 | THE GLOBAL RISE OF THE “SUPER-RICH”

The current rise of a new wealth-based upper class is at the core of the work of Thomas Piketty and his collaborators, who point to its tendency to send current Western societies back a century in terms of capital concentration and resource distribution. The international team around the French economist has analyzed the evolution of income and wealth inequality in several OECD countries as well as in other national contexts. This research brings attention to the main accumulation mechanisms behind the rise of this super-bourgeoisie, “hyper-bourgeoisie,” as it has been called in France, or a new group of “super-rich,” as it is increasingly called in the Anglophone scholarly literature (Beaverstock et al., 2004; Hay, 2013; Hay & Beaverstock, 2016).

Piketty (2014) and his colleagues identify three main forces of economic bifurcation aggravating economic inequality. First, the rise in the total amount of accumulated wealth and its concentration at the top of the social ladder. Second, rates of return on capital higher than rates of growth (the formula $r > g$ was made famous with the publication of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*); this rate difference is even higher for the wealthiest households (see Bach et al., 2020). Third, an unprecedented surge in the labor income of the top brackets (especially in the United States and in the United Kingdom), generating a group of what sociologist Olivier Godechot (2016) has termed “working rich,” benefiting from very favorable conditions of value appropriation and capitalization over their lifetime. Assets are transferred intergenerationally, thanks to advantageous tax legislations although, as Céline Bessière and Sibylle Gollac (2020) recently demonstrated in the case of France, family wealth advisors and entrenched legal practices strongly favor sons, who more frequently inherit large “structuring goods,” while female heirs often obtain monetary compensations through unfavorable deals that hinder accumulation or subsequent capital valorization (see also Herlin-Giret, 2019).

These general trends do not manifest themselves with the same intensity in every country. As a result, each country's contribution to the global numbers of the super-rich depends on a combination of factors. The latter include the country's past and present national income (i.e., how much there is to distribute), its total population (i.e., between how many people it is to be distributed), and the inequalities within the population in terms of income and wealth, which altogether determine the pattern of distribution. For instance, today the number of individuals earning at least several hundred thousand dollars per year is much higher in the United States than in France. This is so primarily because the US population is five times larger than the French one and because the mean per capita income is significantly higher in the United States. But it is also due to the diverging evolution of the gap between the top earners and the average income in the two countries. In 1980, on each side of the Atlantic, the 1% of people with the highest income earned on average eight times the mean income. During the following decades, whereas this ratio increased slowly in France (reaching 10 to 1), it shot up abruptly in the United States, where now the highest income earners make over 20 times the mean. This widening gap, fostered by the decline of labor unions, financialization of the economy, tax cuts, and tax avoidance (Saez & Zucman, 2019; Volscho & Kelly, 2012), allowed larger sections of the US top-earners, overwhelmingly men (Yavorsky et al., 2019), to turn into super-rich (see also Keister, 2014).

If one does observe the re-emergence of a category of super-rich at varying degrees in different countries, does this result in the advent of a global bourgeoisie, or to borrow the concept from British sociologist Leslie Sklair (2001), of a “transnational capitalist class”? In order to address this question, one must investigate other dimensions of the recent evolution of economic elites in the context of globalization (Cousin et al., 2018; Khan, 2012).

3 | TRANSNATIONAL INTERCONNECTIONS AND NATIONAL TIES

Network analysis has investigated international links within “interlocking directorates,” that is, the networks between board members of the largest corporations and the organizations dedicated to the private governance of the global economy. Despite the general trend toward globalization and besides the conjunctural effects of economic crises (Heemskerk et al., 2016; van Veen, 2018), the results of these studies show relative stability in the main structures of connection between boards in the past decades. Although transnational ties can be crucial assets within national economic power dynamics (Mach et al., 2021; Murray, 2017), links are first and foremost national, then regional. The densest interregional connection is between the two shores of the Northern Atlantic (Carroll, 2010; Van der Pijl, 1984), while the other main regions of the world are more highly connected to this Euro-American core of global capitalism than between each other. The most significant recent evolution is not the decline of this core/periphery structure in favor of a more multipolar network—this movement exists yet its scope is still very limited—but the rise in pan-European integration fostered by the European Union (Fligstein & Mérand, 2002). Thus, not a shift outside the Euro-American core but rather within the core itself, resulting in the decrease of the relative weight of transatlantic connections compared with intra-European ties (see also Blanchard et al., 2015).

Pursuing this research program further, political scientist Eelke Heemskerk and his team have conducted a study of unprecedented scope researching interlocking directorates within the planet's 1 million largest companies (Heemskerk & Takes, 2016). Among other important results, they brought to light the very high level of interconnection between East Asian and Southeast Asian economic elites (and in particular between China, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia), which control a share of global production and financial flows whose growth has strongly accelerated since the start of the 1990s. In such a context, the recent decision of part of the British political and economic elites to favor Brexit and “the open sea,” putting at risk their innumerable ties with the European Union (Hartmann, 2017), is a hazardous strategic choice, although it will take a few more years to understand its actual impact on British and British-based actors within the global business network.

The partial but increasing deterritorialization of the circuits of capital accumulation (Robinson, 2012), the transnational connections between economic elites, their general level of “motility” (Kaufmann et al., 2004), and how easily they cross international borders (and sometimes ignore them) are all undeniable. Yet, these factors should not lead us to overestimate the residential mobility of the rich or disregard the importance of intra-national ties in elite recruitment (Hartmann, 2011). In almost all countries, the wide majority of top managers remain native-born citizens; Australia and Switzerland are among the few exceptions (Bühlmann et al., 2012). Many places encourage foreign investment and investor mobility by de facto selling resident status or even citizenship to the wealthiest (Abrahamian, 2015; Džankić, 2019; Surak, 2021; Tanasoca, 2016). Every year, a few thousand binational Americans go as far as renouncing their US citizenship in order to pay fewer taxes. However, the data available debunk the widespread myth of millionaire or billionaire tax flight, demonstrating that changes toward more progressive tax systems do not generally trigger an emigration wave (C. Young, 2017).

Beyond the nationality variable, it remains to be seen how much race and gender inform the composition of the global elite. Kevin Young et al. (2021) conducted a study of the approximately 1600 board members of 96 organizations among the largest corporations, think tanks, transnational policy planning groups, and NGOs. They demonstrate that white men, already a majority of board members within the sample, are the only group to see their representation increase as one moves closer to the inner core of the global elite network. By contrast, all the other racial and gender groups, including white women, see their representation decrease.

4 | THE GROWING INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UPPER-CLASS EDUCATION

Looking for factors potentially leading to the unification of certain fractions of national bourgeoisies into a globalized class, one also needs to examine whether the world's elites share the same cultural and ideological references, stemming from increasingly similar socialization and a common emphasis on international openness. With that purpose, the social sciences have scrutinized the cultural internationalization of elites, especially regarding education, values, and leisure.

French historians of the *Annales* school (Braudel, 1992), followed by the promoters of Global History, which focuses on the interpenetration and relations of interdependence between national societies (Dejung et al., 2019; Fauvelle, 2018; Gruzinski, 2014; Subrahmanyam, 2011), have extensively documented how the cosmopolitanism of aristocrats and scholars from several world regions began to take shape even before the start of the modern period, together with intercontinental trade routes for luxury items and networks between merchant elites. Subsequently, the high European nobility continued to construct numerous matrimonial alliances across borders. The "Grand Tour" across Western Europe gradually imposed itself as a rite of passage for young wealthy aristocrats. Several great families of merchants, investors, and bankers accumulated wealth and influence thanks to their multi-territoriality and their ability to coordinate operations across several states (often on several continents). That was the case, for example, of the House of Medici (in the 15th century), the Fuggers and Welsers (in the 15th and 16th centuries), the Barings (in the 18th and 19th centuries), and the Rothschilds (since the 18th century). Such multi-territoriality was also often linked to participation in the Atlantic slave trade and the expansion of colonial empires (Laux et al., 2009).

From the 19th century onward, acquiring experience during some time abroad became a central piece of the education of numerous heirs of the Western business elite, including within an American bourgeoisie largely composed of economically successful foreign migrants (Beckert, 2001). William Astor (born in 1792), who eventually inherited from his father the largest net worth in the United States, was sent to Germany to attend university. Later, this was the case as well with his countryman John Pierpont Morgan (born in 1837). The latter also began his professional career by working at a London bank, as did David Rockefeller (1915–2017) in the following century. Indeed, these biographical periods of training and socialization abroad gradually became more and more common. With the Industrial Revolution, sons of the new capitalist elites began to travel to get familiar with the most modern techniques of production and work organization. Friedrich Engels himself promoted working-class internationalism all the more ardently as he was particularly aware of the bourgeois cosmopolitan culture and transnationalism of the era. As the polyglot son of a rich textile industrialist, he was sent to Manchester at the age of 22 to get acquainted with the ramifications of the family business and help it prosper (Henderson, 2006).

Cosmopolitanism has thus long characterized a fraction of the ruling classes, for which travel often allowed future heirs to "get a practical feel of the international dimension of family capital" (Wagner, 2007, p. 64). However, its weight in the structuring of inequality has increased in the past decades as globalization has reinforced the importance of knowing foreign languages and foreign countries, and sharing a certain number of "global values," as a factor of social hierarchization, thereby creating new forms of exclusion for those not mastering these skills and moral repertoires (Gerhards et al., 2017; Huguée et al., 2020; Weenink, 2008). Around the world, proficiency in English and going through one or several periods of expatriation have gradually become quasi-unavoidable prerequisites for people wishing to reach top executive positions in large companies, via "high-potential" career tracks (see also Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). Those tracks are heavily gendered (Salamin & Davoine, 2015; Selmer & Leung, 2003) and include an overwhelming majority of families where women follow their husband's career mobility. Expatriate conditions and packages typically incite trailing spouses to interrupt their own careers and assume the identity of full-time housewives, thus basing their upward family mobility on the forced adoption of traditional gender roles even for couples that followed a more egalitarian pattern before migration (Arieli, 2007; Cosquer, 2020; Laurig & Selmer, 2010; Le Renard, 2019; Yeoh & Khoo, 1998).

Corporations also increasingly have a taste for MBA graduates, and have encouraged and backed the development of such curricula (David & Schaufelbuehl, 2015). Given their diverse recruitment in terms of nationality and the common pedagogical model adopted by these programs and more generally by the business schools of many countries, they significantly contribute to the international standardization of managerial practices and ideological references (Amdam et al., 2003; Anteby, 2013; Holmqvist, 2018; see also Lo Porto-Lefébure, 2020 about MPA programs).

Cosmopolitanism-based hierarchization and exclusion are also increasingly institutionalized through inter-governmental and European programs (Cicchelli, 2012), national education systems (Igarashi & Saito, 2014; Subramanian, 2019), private schools (Bertron, 2018; Kenway & Fawey, 2014; Maxwell & Aggleton, 2016), rankings (Wedlin, 2006), and nongovernmental educational organizations such as AACSB International or the International Baccalaureate (Doherty et al., 2012; Tarc, 2009). The global diffusion of the nation-state project from the end of the 19th century onward fostered the widespread and isomorphic development of mass education (Meyer et al. 1992). Subsequently, in recent decades, many countries' education systems have seen their elite programs and schools mutate in order to meet new internationalization objectives and to respond to a demand for increasingly precocious preparation for global-level upper-class interactions (Van Zanten, 2018; Van Zanten & Ball, 2015; Van Zanten & Maxwell, 2015).

For instance, in the French case extensively studied by sociologist Anne-Catherine Wagner (1998, 2020), the curricula of *Grandes Écoles* more and more often include a mandatory year or semester abroad and sometimes the option of following binational curricula leading to a double degree. Five percent of French students overall enroll in the EU-funded Erasmus exchange program at some point during their higher education. A smaller but rising number of French high school and college graduates leave each year to complete a full degree course in another country. Therefore, there is a growing family demand for secondary (and even primary and preschool) curricula preparing students for a transnational education. This is the case of the "European" tracks offered by numerous high schools and junior high schools, which include advanced language classes, as well of those devoted to students wishing to learn how to master an Asian language (generally Chinese). But it is even more true for the few private and public schools reserved to students that are already perfectly Anglophone or bilingual (such as those offering the French Baccalaureate with International Option). These establishments exclusively serve youth who have experienced precocious familiarity with foreign languages and cultures, whether from their family's transnationalism and cosmopolitanism (including through English-speaking nannies and au pairs), from their own geographical mobility, or both. The schools cultivate, valorize, and build on this pre-existing familiarity so that while attending them, students have access to specific resources inside and outside the school, thereby allowing them to acquire marks of excellence which they can either substitute for, or cumulate with, academic competences more readily accessible to good students from all backgrounds attending regular French educational institutions. These elite schools' college placement strategies, largely focused on sending their graduates to universities that outperform the best French ones in global rankings and reputation, are also part of their broader enterprise of valorization through internationalization.

5 | GLOBAL CITIES AND GEOGRAPHIC CONCENTRATION OF THE RICH

Where do these ever-richer and ever-more-similarly educated upper classes live? Could the globalized super-bourgeoisie simply turn out to be the bourgeoisie of global cities? Saskia Sassen (2001) defines those cities as the primary network nodes and main command centers for service and information flows between advanced economies. In the past two decades, these cities have repeatedly been described—and sometimes denounced—as strongholds of the main beneficiaries of capitalist globalization.

Assessing the worldwide urban concentration of "the richest" depends on the more-or-less restrictive way one defines this group at the global level. Serbian-American economist Branko Milanovic (2016) shows that if one

considers the top 1% of individuals in terms of income worldwide (adjusted for purchasing power parity, and after taxes), a population of about 70 million in 2008, half of this group was composed of US residents (including individuals even in the top 12% of US income distribution). Western Europeans, Canadians, and Oceanians made up a little bit more than a third, while the Japanese represented one tenth. The rest of the world thus contributed to less than one tenth of this global 1%.

However, the latest *World Inequality Report* (Alvaredo et al., 2018) indicates that during the last four decades, the incomes of the top 1% at the national level—and even more of the 0.1%, 0.01%, and 0.001%—have been rising at a much faster pace in China, India, or Russia than in the United States and thus also than in Europe. The relative weight of these countries within global economic elites has, therefore, grown year after year. Consequently, in addition to concentrating in the global cities that lay at the heart of the first two decades of intensive globalization at the end of the 20th century (New York, Tokyo, Singapore, London, etc.), the great fortunes and the highest incomes are now numerous in metropolises like Hong Kong-Shenzhen, Beijing, Shanghai, Moscow, Mumbai, Delhi, and Dubai, which compete to emulate the global city model (Aneesh, 2015; Dupont, 2011; Gu et al., 2015). This shift is true even though the authoritarianism of their respective national governments and the unpredictability of their local legal frameworks have driven some wealthy households—at least those who are able to embrace that strategy—to place and often hide or launder part of their assets abroad. By acquiring luxury real estate within European, North American, and Australian major cities (Atkinson, 2020; Fernandez et al., 2016; Portes & Armony, 2018), these families hence participate in the property price inflation fueling wealth inequality and in the “urbanization of capital” around the world (Adkins et al., 2019; Harvey, 2016).

Additionally, in particular in the case of the United States, some of the largest national cities specialize in industries that are heavily internationalized and provide many high-skilled, very well-paying jobs. This is the case, of course, of San Francisco, as the rise of the IT industry has transformed the whole Bay Area in recent decades, especially by gentrifying to the latest stage the central city and Silicon Valley (Storper et al., 2015). Other examples include Dallas, with the presence of numerous owners and executives of the Texan oil-industrial complex, and the movie industry in Los Angeles. In Europe, strong concentrations of high- and very-high-income upper classes, often of foreign origin, can be observed in Switzerland, Luxembourg, Cyprus, and Monaco as well as in cities of other small states that combine fiscal attractiveness with an important financial sector benefiting from it. Meanwhile, in the workplace itself, top earners increasingly share their space only with each other (Godechot et al., 2020).

6 | A NEW URBAN AND LEISURE CLASS

The combination of economic dynamism, bustling cultural life, political liberalism, market-based regulation, and fast-growing real estate valuation characterizing the majority of global cities has led to evolutions of their bourgeoisies and upper(-middle) classes in terms of residential behaviors and class relations. In New York, San Francisco, London, and Paris, as well as in many other postindustrial metropolises, the same set of urban forms and processes shape the socio-spatial mosaic of the city and the identities of their inhabitants. Traditional bourgeois neighborhoods have continued supergentrifying, becoming even more exclusive and more “international” due to the growing influx of economic elites from around the world (Pinçon & Pinçon-Charlot, 1992; Webber & Burrows, 2016). Many former working-class areas close to the city center have been gradually gentrifying, fostering the development of local “hipster” or “bobo” subcultures and aesthetics, which share many references around the globe (Zukin, 2010; see also Rofo, 2003). Other spaces, generally nearby the new business districts, have been totally redeveloped and now concentrate corporate managers and professionals in new-build refounded neighborhoods made of high-end condominiums (Butler, 2007; Cousin, 2014). Meanwhile, during the past decade, in the majority of these various neighborhoods, the continuous development of tourism and the multiplication of secondary residences (Paris, 2010, 2013) and short-term rentals via Airbnb has accelerated the rise of real estate prices.

As a consequence, European and American global cities have all been marked by a long-term process of replacement and marginalization of the working and lower-middle classes, thus depriving them of the opportunities and amenities those cities offer (Le Galès & Pierson, 2019). But these metropolises also have in common dynamics of fractioning of the upper(-middle) classes that redefine the economic and symbolic relations between the latter. They are thus places in which the strong presence of the global super-bourgeoisie contributes—through emulation and/or opposition—to shaping a substantial part of intraclass and interclass relations. Local upper classes increasingly share neighborhoods and urban settings with the richest strata of their foreign counterparts and can thus more readily compare themselves to them. A number of managers and professionals would like to emulate the super-rich and actually feel economically insecure for being unable to do so. Cultural elites more often embrace alternative lifestyles and systems of values, but are de facto subjected to the new consumption tastes and habits of the super-rich (Boltanski & Esquerre, 2020; Wakefield, 2017).

Beyond residential contexts, schools, and business and professional environments (see for instance, Beaverstock, 2002; Dezalay & Garth, 2011; Hannerz, 1990; Harrington & Seabrooke, 2020), several global places of leisure and worldwide institutions of sociability also act as instances of reciprocal acculturation, identity integration, and partial homogenization between the bourgeoisies of various countries. However, on this point as well, one must distinguish between different fractions of the upper classes. Alumni and expat associations (the latter often designed for the spouses of expats, mainly women), as well as online groups and other organizations aimed at developing ties between international managers or transnational professionals have very little to do with the traditional cosmopolitanism of the bourgeoisie, which is generally inherited rather than acquired in adulthood. Indeed, old-money upper classes rely much more often on intra- and interfamily multigenerational transnational networks, social clubs and their reciprocal agreements, philanthropic sociability, and the seasonal events of the global jet set calendar (Cousin & Chauvin, 2014, 2017; Monier, 2018). Through these long-standing ties, organizations, and circuits, the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie has the “capacity to move while staying at home” without losing social status (Wagner, 2010, p. 91). Being typically integrated into the local upper class upon arrival, they can thereby partially avoid the risk of downgrading and uprooting potentially associated with less distinctive forms of international mobility (see also Duyvendak, 2011).

The richest individuals and families of both the cosmopolitan bourgeoisie and the expatriate upper class nevertheless patronize many common places, often rely upon the same elite mobilities industry (Koh & Wissink, 2018) and share practices pertaining to multiresidentiality, consumption, and luxury travel that contribute to uniting the old and new bourgeoisies of the world. Examples of such secondary socialization include first-class and business-class flights (and, for the richest, flying on private jets and cruising on super-yachts, see Budd, 2013 and Spence, 2017), stays in very high-end hotels (Birtchnell & Caletrío, 2013), frequentation of the most exclusive restaurants, nightclubs (Mears, 2020), and sports clubs, as well as vacationing in places such as Saint-Tropez and Ramatuelle (Bruno & Salle, 2018), St. Barts (Cousin & Chauvin, 2013), the Hamptons, Nantucket, Aspen, Gstaad, Portofino, Capri, the Costa Smeralda, or Marrakech. They also include premier cultural, commercial, or fundraising events such as the Cannes Film Festival (Ethis, 2001), the Art Basel exhibitions (Schultheis et al., 2015), the four main fashion weeks, the Met Gala, prestigious auctions, and private sales organized by luxury boutiques. These places and events contribute to the accumulation of social capital and the spreading of a lifestyle, as well as socialization into forms of urbanity and distinction made of specific norms and repertoires of interaction. When these norms are not already fully mastered, they can be implicitly recalled by a class of service personnel trained to monitor, manage and, when necessary, redirect bourgeois and aristocratic habituses of various national backgrounds (Cousin & Chauvin, 2019; Delval & Bühlmann, 2020; Sherman, 2007).

Together, these cities, places, and actors participate in the gradual integration of new entrants into a globalized high bourgeoisie which, until the last decades of the 20th century, had remained essentially European and North American. The latter increasingly finds itself side by side with oligarchs and “New Russians” who became extremely rich through the dismantling of the Soviet Union (Schimpfössl, 2018), businessmen and executives connected with

Chinese state capitalism, India's industrial barons (Naudet et al., 2018; Schoettli & Pohlmann, 2017), so-called "Brazillionaires" from Latin America (Schneickert et al., 2015), and the extended families or entourages of the Arab oil monarchies.

7 | INTERNATIONAL AND GEO-SOCIAL CLASS STRATEGIES

In the previous sections, we have mentioned several trends contributing to the gradual transnational homogenization of a wealth-based elite in terms of culture, lifestyle, accumulation practices, and overall valuation of international ties. We have also addressed the educational institutions, urban settings, and socialization arenas favoring the development of a global class consciousness. However, to provide a comprehensive answer to the question of the emergence of a global *ruling* class at the top, or a super-bourgeoisie, we should also ask whether it acts in a concerted way—in other words, whether it can be seen as "conspiring," to borrow a term by political scientist James H. Meisel (1958). Or, to use the Bourdieusian concept employed by sociologists Michel Pinçon and Monique Pinçon-Charlot (1998), one should investigate whether and to which degree they can be considered a "mobilized class," in other words a class for itself (Murray, 2014).

This last question calls for detailed and nuanced analysis. Numerous works in the social sciences have documented the central role of international business organizations and conferences, binational foundations, networks of think tanks, and organs of more or less confidential discussion between Western and global elites, such as the Bilderberg Meetings (Zieliński, 2017), the Trilateral Commission (Luna & Valasco, 2017), and the World Economic Forum (Davis, 2017; Graz, 2003; Pigman, 2007; Ruppert, 2019). These various organizations played a key role in the governance and transnational coordination of capitalist economies, especially in diagnosing their economic and political "crises," and in promoting and accompanying their neoliberal turn away from post-World War II redistribution policies (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). Moreover, Joshua Murray (2014) showed that firms belonging to the "inner core" of the network of large multinational corporations are more likely to coordinate their political activities than firms belonging to the periphery of the network.

Other studies have detailed how economic bourgeoisies, corrupt government leaders, and the professionals that advise them commonly escape national systems of control through offshore financial centers, free ports, shell companies, trusts, loopholes, political connections, special residency statuses, and intercontinental circuits (Chauvin et al., 2018; Harrington, 2016, 2017; Hoang, 2018; Shaxson, 2016). As leaks and data investigations coordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists have repeatedly demonstrated (Obermayer & Obermaier, 2016), these techniques allow tax avoidance and the embezzlement of public funds, as well as the illegal wealth accumulation that both occasion (see Zucman, 2015). Such (mis)appropriation most often operates with little remorse because, in many countries where neoliberal references have been mainstreamed, high individual wealth is strongly correlated with personal beliefs in one's own deservingness (Hecht et al., 2020) and values that delegitimize fiscal redistribution and more generally solidarity toward the poor (Fisman et al., 2015; Paugam et al., 2017). Moreover, those international circuits and tax havens may be used by wealthy husbands to dissimulate part of their assets from their spouses, whether with the purpose of ensuring the livelihood of a hidden partner, asserting shadow control of inheritable funds, or keeping major chunks of their fortune out of reach and out of view of judges (and of their wife's lawyers) in case of divorce (Bessière & Gollac, 2020).

In addition to these forms of international coordination, often accused of bypassing democratic institutions, and these strategies of tax evasion, recent studies also point out the responsibility of the super-rich and of a large majority of the global elite in the anthropogenic climate crisis. Indeed, the lifestyle they lead (in terms of mobility, residential, and consumption habits), and which they promote among the people that would like to emulate them, presents a particularly high carbon footprint (UN Environment Program, 2020). Furthermore, we now have detailed knowledge on how, in the past decades, several owners and leaders of the world's largest fossil fuel companies (of which the top 25 cause 50% of global human-made greenhouse gas emissions) ordered and massively funded

climate disinformation campaigns orchestrated by think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, the American Enterprise Institute (Mitchell, 2011), the Heartland Institute, and the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

These attitudes, of course, seem even more cynical in view of elites' proactive investments and land acquisitions in territories that will be spared by the most destructive consequences of climate change. Sociologist Bruno Latour (2018) goes as far as hypothesizing the calculated anticipation by the world's richest that, because of their ever-growing means and their mobility, they will be of the minority surviving climate collapse and, therefore, do not really need to care about it. Latour thus invites us to rethink global elites as (fractions of) a *geo*-social class defined by relations and conflicts that are inseparably earthly and social. According to this expanded materialist perspective, those elites not only control the means of production: they also largely control the ongoing process of selective destruction of the biosphere and, thereby, could play a key role in slowing it down (Schultz, 2020a, 2020b). Yet, according to Latour, the latter scenario would only happen if current elite cosmopolitanism based on "global" organizations and values was seriously challenged, beyond mere symbolic strategies of distinction (Farrell, 2020), by a new one based on sustainability and terrestrial belonging.

Finally, the existence of coordinated strategies at the global level (whatever they might be) is not enough to describe the relations within the global bourgeoisie as irenic and nonantagonistic. True, in many countries, international resources are an increasingly important asset for elite actors to impose themselves within the national "field of power" (Bourdieu, 1996; Bühlmann, 2020). But while agreeing on the value of international ties, several elite fractions can also oppose each other within a country by resorting to different and unequal international resources and to distinct forms of cosmopolitanism (Cousin & Chauvin, 2014). Moreover, elite cosmopolitanism and national rooting are by no means contradictory, as the most distinctive international spaces will value the copresence of "authentic" representatives of diverse cultures as enrichment (Wagner, 2010). As it happens, numerous resources deployed within the international field of economic power in fact remain first accumulated at the national level and then valorized internationally based on geopolitical balances between countries (Dezalay, 2004)—balances that these various resources in turn contribute to modifying.

8 | CONCLUSION

Is there a global super-bourgeoisie? This article reviews recent social science research investigating various aspects of the question. These studies show that the increase in intergenerational wealth appropriation at the top was accompanied by a rise in global connections between elites, although national and intracontinental ties remain key power resources. At the cultural level, the world's elites acquire increasingly similar education and tastes. They tend to concentrate in a limited number of global cities, or at least have residences there in the context of multiterritoriality. Their lifestyles also play a disproportionate role in the current environmental crises. Global organs of elite coordination exist but intraclass antagonisms should not be underestimated. Finally, a great deal of the legitimacy deployed in global economic, political, and symbolic struggles is still accumulated within national fields of power.

The Covid-19 pandemic has substantially affected the different dynamics fostering a global super-bourgeoisie. International mobilities, sociability, and educational strategies, as well as the employment of domestic workers, have been limited worldwide in a way unprecedented since World War II. Global cities found themselves at the heart of the health crisis, while the multiple residences of the rich and their widespread ability to work remotely (and sometimes hoard or snatch medical resources and treatments) allowed them to minimize both their exposure to the virus and the inconveniences of staying at home. In the midst of the Covid-induced recession increasing inequality and generating precarity, they have fared better overall than the rest of the economic ladder, even if it is currently difficult to anticipate what the middle- and long-term effects of the crisis might be.

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