

Foreword: From Kosrae to Kensington: uncovering cartographies of abundance

In 2007 I was fortunate enough to spend six months travelling around the world. And although I had always been intellectually aware of the vast differences in wealth between the planet's rich and poor, the reality of the situation came as something of a shock. The contrast was truly evident as I moved from places like Micronesia (including the island of Kosrae), Central America and Zanzibar, to London and its surrounds, including Sandbanks (near Poole, Dorset) – reputedly one of the most expensive places in the world to buy real estate. Perhaps sensitized by what I had seen so recently elsewhere, I was struck by the vast wealth evident in the south-east of England. From conversations with residents and my own observations, it became apparent for example that there was a good chance the Bentley that rolled by in Kensington was just one of a stable of expensive vehicles belonging to the owner or that there was a possibility that possession of a fine London house was matched by a ‘chocolate box’ home in Hampshire, Devon or Dorset, not to mention others in more exotic parts of the world. When I returned to work in Australia I began to investigate geographical work on the super-rich. After a lengthy search and very much to my surprise, I found just two publications. One, published by Eric Neumayer in *Applied Economics Letters*, asked the deceptively simple question ‘why are there more super-rich people in some countries than in others?’ (2004, p. 793). And in the other, published in *Geoforum*, Beaverstock et al. (2004) exhorted geographers to give attention to contemporary geographies of the super-rich. It is now over eight years since those works were printed and yet library shelves and the pages of journals remain largely devoid of geographical work on the super-rich¹ – a startling lacuna this volume sets out to fill.

So, this volume is really the ‘first cut’ at a book-length project on geographies of the super-rich. As such, it is intended to generate broader academic interest in this work – and perhaps even some lay attention – and to map out some of the territory for any subsequent work that may follow.

The intended audience is largely an academic one – professional scholars – but vitally important too are those student-readers who may find geographies of the super-rich sufficiently exciting to spark future work.

Although the book confines its explicit attentions to matters of geography, the chapters' coverage of specific topics such as art history, private wealth management, property development, city liveability, and tourism signal appeal and relevance to an even more diverse audience of advanced students and scholars in disciplines such as cultural studies, economics, politics, and sociology. The spatial span of the volume from Singapore to St Barts, London to Lexington may be an additional allure or point of connection to a broad range of readers.

ON READERS AND WRITERS; OMISSIONS AND COMMISSIONS

Recruiting authors for a project on an area in which so little has been written was a challenge. In the absence of a large body of published geographical work on the super-rich I arranged sessions at various conferences including those of the Association of American Geographers in Washington, DC (2010) and the joint meetings of the New Zealand Geographical Society and Institute of Australian Geographers held in Christchurch (2010) to expose – and promote – emerging scholarship on the super-rich. Calls for papers associated with those sessions attracted several excellent scholars. Then, having secured a contract with Edward Elgar, I was able to uncover and recruit other authors through an extensive Web-search coupled with 'world-wide' listserve calls for contributions. And finally, one author emerged after I had asked him to referee one of the chapters submitted to this collection! Although there is some international flavour to authorship here, with contributors from Australia, England, France, Germany, New Zealand, Singapore, the United States and Wales, there are some notable absences – particularly for a book on the super-rich. These include, for example, Canada, China, India, Russia, and the various countries of South America, a part of the world with disproportionate numbers of the ultra-wealthy. But having acknowledged these unfortunate absences and being cognizant of publishing deadlines, I am afraid I can do little more at this stage except hope that if there is ever a second edition of this book or a successor of some kind, it will be possible to repair this flaw in coverage – maybe even drawing on new work this volume might stimulate.

Perhaps as a consequence of the author-recruitment method I found myself obliged to adopt, and as is so often characteristic of edited

collections, this volume has chapters of varying ‘densities’ and complexity. For this, I make no apology: it is a fact of life that different ideas and authors require different forms of expression. However, I know that in every case the authors whose work is set out here have worked to present material as clearly as possible. And as an editor with a career interest in effective communication, I have devoted considerable attention in this volume to matters of clarity. One objective of this has been to help ensure that chapters are accessible to as wide a range of prospective student and professional academic readers as possible, as well as to interested lay readers.

Over and above each chapter’s readability another of my critical concerns, not surprisingly, has been credibility in this new area of work. So, for that reason, every chapter in this collection has been reviewed by experts in relevant fields. Referees have been kind with their time and energy and have offered sensible, comprehensive and critical opinion. I owe a great deal of thanks to each of them, listed alphabetically here, together with their institutional affiliation: Neil Argent (New England), Tim Butler (King’s College London), Eric Compas (Wisconsin – Whitewater), David Crouch (Derby), Keith Halfacree (Swansea), Roy Jones (Curtin), Karen Lai (National University of Singapore), Richard Le Heron (Auckland), Ute Lehrer (York), Cheryl Morse (Vermont), Dieter K. Muller (Umeå), Chris Paris (Ulster – Magee), Martin Perry (Massey), Mike Roche (Massey), Matthew Rofe (South Australia), Bruce Ryan (Cincinnati), Regina Scheyvens (Massey), Neelu Seetaram (Bournemouth), Eric Sheppard (Minnesota), Jim Walmsley (New England), Saskia Warren (Sheffield) and Steffen Wetzstein (Western Australia). I also thank Michael Scott (Flinders) and Barney Warf (Kansas) for their comments on earlier drafts of the book’s introductory chapter. And before concluding I would also like to express a special note of thanks to contributors to this volume not only for their patience with my particular style of editing but also for their fine work establishing this exciting field.

Iain Hay

NOTE

1. Notable exceptions include the 2010 work of Ley; 2011 work of Pow; and Beaverstock, Hall and Wainwright’s 2011 paper. Aside from David Ley, each of these scholars has contributed to this volume.

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