

Silence is Golden

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of
Billionaires and Economic Inequality
in the Swedish News Media

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Esse non videri

To be, but not to be seen

(The motto of the Wallenberg Family, with an estimated fortune of 2000 billion Swedish krona)

Abstract

Economic inequality is growing rapidly worldwide. Despite research showing that higher inequality within a society corresponds with a higher rate of public health and social problems, there exist little organized resistance against the neo-liberal economic policies that allow the super-rich to pull away from the rest of the population. Even though the causes of poverty cannot be separated from the causes of wealth, poverty has increasingly come to be viewed as a problem that can be solved without worrying about the rich.

This thesis embarks from the standpoint that the representations in the news media play a significant role in legitimizing, challenging or in other ways affecting the extent to which the super-rich are regarded as morally deserving their wealth. With the aim of enhancing our understanding of economic inequality and the mediation of the gap between rich and poor, the present thesis investigates how a selection of billionaires was discursively represented in Sweden's four largest newspapers during 2017.

By using tools from critical discourse analysis, the thesis shows how the news media to a great extent do not problematize the increasing wealth of the super-rich within the context of growing economic inequality. The super-rich are represented as a secret community that rarely talks to the press, and while media silence and absence has usually been linked to powerlessness, this thesis instead considers this "struggle for invisibility" as a powerful strategy for maintaining the inequality gap. The analysis further shows how the philanthropy of the super-rich is represented as acts of admirable charity, rather than expressions of absurd inequality. The thesis links these representations to ongoing trends where neo-liberal discourses – centered on individualization and de-politization – have come to enjoy an increasingly hegemonic position, affecting both the production and content of journalism.

The mediation of economic inequality has remained an under-researched topic within the field. The conclusions of this study – that the news media are more interested in gazing at the spectacle of the super-rich than critically examining them – suggest that more critical research is needed if the news media's role as watchdogs for democracy is to prevail.

Key words: *“Economic inequality”*; *“The super-rich”*; *Billionaires*; *Wealth*; *“Critical discourse analysis”*; *“News media”*; *Neo-liberalism*; *“Undeserving rich”*; *“Visibility management”*; *Silence*; *Sweden*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Pushing the super-rich into focus

In January 2015, I was interviewing the Swedish cartoonist Liv Strömquist at a busy Thai restaurant in Malmö. She had recently been awarded *Dagens Nyheter's* prestigious culture award, and our conversation centered on the political power of the so-called 'cultural elite'. Strömquist had thought a lot about this topic, and in between bites of chicken she argued that the high media visibility that cultural actors receive should not be equated with a platform for exercising power. On the contrary:

What characterizes really powerful people is that no one knows who they are. That is how they want it [...] If one is really powerful, then there is no need to manifest this power in the newspapers. Expressing one's opinions in public is only for losers.
(Vikström, 2015)

While it would be misleading to claim that all powerful people are silent in the news media, Strömquist's hypothesis springs to mind when turning the attention to a particular segment within the population: the super-rich billionaires¹. Granted, some billionaires are famous worldwide (e.g. the likes of Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos), but the vast majority of them could hardly be considered to hold the same celebrity status as top politicians or pop culture stars. However, regardless of their level of visibility – what the super-rich have in common is that they are growing wealthier. According to Oxfam (2018: 8), 82 percent of the growth in global wealth in 2017 went to the richest one percent, whereas the bottom 50 percent saw no increase at all. Another report suggests that if the current trend were to continue, the richest percent will hold on to two-thirds of the world's wealth by the year 2030 (Savage 2018).

The fact that economic inequality is accelerating worldwide is a serious matter. Research shows that higher economic inequality within a society corresponds with a higher rate of health and social problems, such as child mortality, adult life expectancy and drug abuse (Wilkinson & Pickett 2009; Payne 2017), while the opportunities for social mobility weakens (Lansley 2006: 203; Preston 2016). Considering that lobbying and influencing politicians requires "deep pockets" (Davies 2011: 2), the concentration of wealth to a small group of

¹ The definition of how wealthy one has to be in order to be deemed "super-rich" varies between different researchers (see Haeseler 2000: 2; Lansley 2006: 6; Oxfam 2017). This thesis project uses the term in reference to those with a net worth of at least 1 billion SEK (= around 120 million USD). It should be stressed that the term is not used in reference to any objective "wealth line", but more as a way of highlighting that these billionaires are radically wealthier than other "wealthy" groups in society (e.g. doctors, lawyers and celebrities).

super-rich individuals further suggests that democracy is the main victim of excessive inequality (Bauman 2013: 2). Policy changes in favor of an increasingly globalized economy – which have ensured that capital is now free to move wherever the potential for making profit is the most beneficial – have raised concerns that the super-rich are dragging the nation-states into a taxation race to the bottom by forcing governments to compete over their assets (Bauman 1998). These voices suggest that the gap between rich and poor should in itself be seen as a social problem (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 438).

Considering that the dangers of economic inequality have become well known, it raises the question why there is relatively little resistance against the political and economic mechanisms that allow the super-rich to pull away from the rest of the population. History shows that people have only infrequently contested inequality, arguably “because they were led to believe that their inferior status in terms of income, wealth, and privilege was just [...] or that it was necessary for their future well-being” (Wisman & Smith 2011: 974). The existence of inequality in democratic societies thus presupposes an ideological system that legitimizes the status quo. While there is a political debate about the responsibilities of the poor (e.g. they should be more responsible with their money, work harder and make themselves more employable, see Linkon 2015), not much is spoken about the super-rich. Whereas the post-war years were characterized by taxation policies aimed at limiting the wealth of the super-rich in many western countries (Harvey 2005), the decades since the 1980’s have seen a reversed trend where poverty increasingly has come to be viewed as an individual problem that can be solved without worrying about the rich (Lansley 2006: 201; Mau 2015). Despite the fact that the inequality gap has continued to grow – suggesting that “the causes of poverty cannot be separated from the causes of wealth” (Scott 1994: 18) – the belief that the wealth at the top will “trickle-down” to benefit the rest has maintained a strong foothold, despite no evidence of this actually happening (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 449). These trends suggest “a fundamental shift in our cultural and political attitudes towards the very rich” (Lansley 2006: 29).

As “the full range of economic inequality is not assessable through everyday life experiences”, the media serves an important role in shaping the public discourse on the issue (Grisold & Theine 2017: 4266). This is especially the case regarding the public discourse on the super-rich. Considering that the wealth of the super-rich allows them to live isolated lives, the public is left with little choice but to turn to the media for information about them

(Kendall 2011: 22, 49). The stories that the news media choose to tell about the super-rich are – explicitly or implicitly – stories about inequality. Thus, the representations in the news media undoubtedly plays a role in legitimizing, challenging or in other ways affecting the extent to which the super-rich are regarded as morally deserving their wealth in times of growing economic inequality.

It is therefore noteworthy that the question of how economic inequality is mediated to the public rarely features within media and communication studies (Grisold & Theine 2017). As the inequality gap keeps growing, it is consequently all the more important for the field to lose its innocence and stop treating inequality as some kind of taboo topic (Preston 2016: 53). While there exists a small body of research scrutinizing how “the rich” are represented in the news media (Hartley & Melrose 1999; McCall 2013; Kjærsgård 2015), little is known about how *the actual super-rich individuals* that make up “the rich” are represented. Using Sweden – the OECD country where income inequality is currently growing fastest (OECD 2017) – as a case study, this thesis project sets out to investigate how the economic elite and its relation to growing economic inequality are discursively represented in the news media.

1.2 Aims and research questions

The aim of the present thesis is to investigate how the super-rich and their relation to economic inequality are represented in the news media. This is done through analyzing how a selection of Swedish billionaires was discursively represented in the country’s four largest newspapers during the year of 2017. By shifting focus from the poor to the richest in society, the project wishes to supply contextual knowledge that enriches our understanding of how economic inequality is mediated to the public, which further can serve to enhance our knowledge about the growing gap between rich and poor. Using tools from critical discourse analysis in order to approach the issue critically, the further aim is to analyze the dialectical relationship between media texts and the social context of growing economic inequality. Particular attention will be devoted to scrutinizing how – and subsequently why – the super-rich are represented as deserving or undeserving their wealth, and how the super-rich’s efforts to manage their media visibility shape these representations. This boils down to the following research questions:

1. How are the super-rich discursively represented in the Swedish news media?
 - a. How are the super-rich represented as deserving or undeserving their wealth?
 - b. How does the visibility management of the super-rich shape the representations?
2. How can the societal context explain why certain representations are occurring?

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The first step in discussing the issue of how the super-rich are represented in the news media is to position the thesis against the existing body of literature on the subject. Even though the literature review and the subsequent theoretical chapter are kept separately, these two should be viewed as an entity that together forms the theoretical argument, which is that investigating processes of neo-liberalization could enhance our understanding of why the news media represent the super-rich in certain ways. After outlining how the study methodologically performs critical discourse analysis, a chapter on economic inequality in Sweden will serve to contextualize the Swedish billionaires prior to entering the analysis (which, in turn, is divided into three interrelated thematic fields: *The struggle for invisibility*, *Crumbs from the rich man's table* and *The VIP club*). The conclusion will summarize the main findings and suggest how these could be used in further research on the topic.

2. Literature review

This literature review is divided into two blocks: *the news media and economic inequality* and *the news media and the wealthy*. Even though some research within the field deals with both aspects, this division is motivated considering that several studies that investigate the mediation of economic inequality pay no attention to representations of the wealthy. The chapter will conclude with the positioning of this thesis project in relation to the existing body of research.

2.1 The news media and economic inequality

As mentioned, the mediation of economic inequality has not been a prominent feature within the field of communication studies (Preston 2016). In a recent literature review of journal articles in German and English conducted by Grisold and Theine, the authors lament that the issue of how “economic inequality is being mediated to the public is not discussed in economics at all, hardly mentioned in communication studies” (2017: 4265). Seeing as the authors’ overall impression from the literature review is that the news media generally do not provide the public with the information required to understand the structures behind growing economic inequality, the lack of research on the subject can be said to be quite startling (ibid.: 4275). This blank spot is considered a vital motivation for this thesis project.

Within the small body of research that does exist, a significant amount are long-term studies that focus on whether or not the growing gap between the rich and the poor during the last decades has resulted in increasing news media coverage on issues regarding economic inequality. Noteworthy, the studies do not provide any coherent results. Two studies of long-term inequality in the German news media shows an increased coverage of inequality over time, but since both studies use quantitative methods, the results say little about the nature of the mediation (Schröder & Vietze 2015; Petring 2016). Champlin and Knoedler’s (2008) study of six major American newspapers also finds an increase in coverage of inequality. In fact, their second timeframe (2002–2007) featured twice as many articles on the subject as the first one (1997–2002). However, based on the qualitative analysis of the coverage, the researchers concluded that “the emphasis in most cases is limited to a simple reporting of the existence of growing economic inequality and middle class decline” (ibid.: 136). Even though the news media reported the inequalities, they rarely explored or discussed possible solutions to fixing the problem. Regardless of whether one sees problem solving as part of the news

media's democratic purpose, these representations runs the risk of constructing economic inequality as an issue that exists outside the control of policymakers (ibid.).

Other studies showcase different trends. Gandy's (2007) analysis of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* shows an increase in coverage on health disparities and racial inequalities over time, whereas the coverage of economic inequality actually decreased. McCall (2013) finds a non-linear trend in her study of the top three American newsweeklies coverage of the topic between 1980 and 2010, but observes that coverage on *rising* inequality was more prominent in the 1990's than in the early 2000's.² However, in contrast to the other qualitative studies in the sample, McCall argues that the news articles often managed to problematize the income gap and that it was not "uncommon for journalists to spin a remarkably coherent narrative of inequality that is at odds with American-dream ideology" (ibid.: 57).

Another focus has been the coverage of wealth taxes. Limbert and Bullock (2009) and Bell and Entman (2011) both analyze the same case, the 2003 American tax cut on dividend income. Even though they used different methods (critical discourse analysis and framing analysis) and different news sources as material, both studies conclude that an inequality perspective is largely absent in the reporting. Instead of highlighting that the tax cut would primarily benefit the wealthy, the reporting was framed in collectivistic ways, implying that "all Americans would receive tax cuts or eventually benefit from reduced tax burdens" (Bell & Entman 2011: 556). This was done through the use of "neutral language" that diverted attention "from the relationship between tax policies and structural inequality" (Limbert & Bullock 2009: 73).

So why do the news media adapt these perspectives when reporting on economic inequality? Previous research points towards a few different explanations. Some argue that the media itself is a part of the wealthy elite and that upper-middle-class journalists have become distanced from the economic realities of the lower classes (FAIR 1990; Henriques 2000). This distance has also been problematized in Sweden, where Wiik (2010) argues that the heavy concentration of journalists to certain districts and social groups detaches them from the living conditions of the working classes. Some discuss a political economy perspective, often

² McCall (2013) offers two factors to explain this: a lack of academic studies on rising income inequality for the news media to pick up and, secondly, that coverage only seems to take off in times when the inequalities start having an impact on the middle-class.

referring to Herman and Chomsky's (1988) theory of how news media manufactures consent among the population that serves the interests of the wealthy media owners and the elite in general (see McChesney 2008; Schiffrin 2015; Grisold & Theine 2017). Others suggest that the mainstream news media considers the more time-consuming reporting on the complex structures around economic inequality as being too costly to cover (Champlin & Knoedler 2008), or that economy journalists mostly interview economists employed by banks or other institutions who "are more likely to offer business versions rather than labor economist or academic ones" (Gans 2003: 66). Duval (2005: 150) argues from a field-theory perspective that French media outlets have become strongly subordinated to the economic field, concluding that this has led to a homogenization of the coverage that "serves to legitimate the existing economic order".

Within the Swedish context, studies on the mediation of economic inequality are scarce. While research shows that there has been an increase in economic reporting within the Swedish mainstream press (Grafström 2004, 2006), the issue of inequality is evidently yet to draw the attention of media researchers. With the exception of Andreas Pihl Kjærsgård's 2015 study (discussed below), an extensive library search conducted for this thesis failed to find any relevant studies.³ Thus, the thesis will mostly rely on research and theories conducted within an Anglo-American context. Even though there are significant historical differences between these contexts, Jacobsson (2016) argues that the liberal North American model for conducting journalism is increasingly becoming more dominant in Sweden as well. This arguably makes "theories originally tied to an American context valid also when discussing the context of Swedish journalism" (ibid.: 53).

2.2 The news media and the wealthy

Within the literature that explores public attitudes towards the wealthy, a few scholars have acknowledged the importance of bringing the news media into the analysis. However, the media part of the analysis is often limited to a complementary perspective. An exception is Diane Kendall's *Framing Class* (2011), which puts significant emphasis on analyzing long-term representations of the American upper classes in the *New York Times*. Kendall identifies both positive (e.g., "the consensus frame"; "the admiration frame"; "the price-tag frame") and negative (e.g., "the wealthy are unhappy"; "the wealthy are scoundrels") frames. Her

³ Even contacting researchers that have been working with similar topics did little to help.

conclusion is that even though the audience receives mixed messages about the wealthy, most media stories about the upper classes are positive. Even when the rich are accused of wrongdoing, this wrongdoing is usually framed as an “individual aberration” from the system of responsible capitalism. Hence, this framing “serves to legitimate, rather than challenge, existing systems of social inequality” (ibid.: 55). Hartley and Melrose (1999) and McCall (2013), on the other hand, argue that the news media in their respective analyses are certainly capable of being both critical and negative towards the wealthy. This negative coverage is usually aimed at greedy CEO’s or the financial elite at Wall Street. Thus, the image that emerges is an ambivalent one: while we enjoy seeing the rich and mighty fall, we simultaneously continue to be fascinated by the spectacle surrounding their consumption and lifestyles.

Regarding the Swedish context, Andreas Pihl Kjærsgård’s (2015) recent study of Scandinavians’ attitudes towards economic inequality provides an interesting bulk work to embark from. Kjærsgård explicitly emphasizes that researchers need to “put the rich back into focus” by considering them to be a group of “others” separated from “us” (ibid.: 18). This is a refreshing use of the concept “the other”, seeing as it in communication studies tends to primarily refer to stigmatized groups. The study includes both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis of the Swedish news media using the search term “de rika” (eng. “the rich”), which offers two intriguing conclusions: 1) The number of articles about the rich declines dramatically over time; 2) The proportion of articles presenting the rich in a positive light increases significantly. When comparing the Swedish results to the Danish ones, he further remarks that the Swedish media referred much more frequently to rich *individuals* (ibid.: 260). However, Kjærsgård does not investigate this last issue further, which leaves a perfect room for this thesis project.

From the perspective of the wealthy, Lennart Bernhardtson’s (2013) interview study with Swedish business owners about their visibility management in the media offers valuable insights. The study shows how the owners to great extent choose to hide away from the media limelight by regularly refusing to speak to the press about their personal wealth. Some respondents only choose to talk to a selected few journalists whose intentions they can be sure of. On the one hand media exposure is regarded as a threat to their personal safety (e.g. enhancing the risk of kidnapping), on the other there also exists a discourse where the owners who do talk to the media about their private lives are described as “vain”. Some respondents

saw no reason or responsibility what so ever for appearing in the public sphere. Bernhardtson makes an intriguing remark when arguing that this silence can be seen as a way of discursively trying to remove the issue of wealth from the public discussion. Thus, silence should not only be seen as a sign of powerlessness and stigma – it can also be seen as the strategies of the powerful, and especially of the ones holding economic power (ibid.: 285–286). Considering that the super-rich in Sweden mostly are business owners, the anonymous interviewees in Bernhardtson’s study can be said to belong to the same social sphere as the ones being investigated in this research project. Thus, there is a good foundation for this thesis to operate dialectically with the findings from Bernhardtson’s study.

2.3 Positioning of the thesis

Besides supplying contextual knowledge from outside the Anglo-American context, the main contribution of this project to the existing body of research is in its methodological choice to utilize individual billionaires as cases. This approach is based on three criteria. Firstly, previous research on the mediation of economic inequality has highlighted the methodological problems with finding the right search terms to use when gathering the material (McCall 2013; Kjærsgård 2015). Using the names of the billionaires as search terms thus works well from a pragmatic perspective. Secondly, by focusing solely on the richest billionaires, the thesis wishes to highlight that there is a significant difference between the wealth of the super-rich and other “wealthy” groups in society (e.g. celebrities, lawyers, doctors). Thirdly, and most important, instead of discussing abstractly about “the rich”, this approach strives to demystify the actual people who – individually or as part of an economic elite – are capable of exercising a considerable amount of power.

As for the theoretical approach, the present thesis organizes the different discourses on economic inequality that previous researchers have brought up under the umbrella of neo-liberalization. Considering that neo-liberalization has been used by numerous researchers to describe the economic development during the last decades, it seems odd that studies on the mediation of economic inequality have neglected to utilize the concept. Furthermore, embarking from neo-liberalism allows the project to adapt a vast span of valuable theoretical perspectives. These will be presented in the following chapter.

3. Theoretical framework

The analysis of the Swedish news media's representations of the super-rich will rest on a three-part theoretical framework. First, the larger social context of growing economic inequalities and the legitimization of wealth concentration in Western societies will be scrutinized in the light of the ongoing processes of neo-liberalization. As shall be argued, these processes have a significant impact in shaping both the democratic role of the news media and the discourses about the super-rich that – actively or implicitly – are produced and reproduced within media texts. The second part takes this argument further by scrutinizing three distinct arguments – reward, incentive and character – that will be utilized when analyzing whether the news media are representing the super-rich as deserving or undeserving their wealth. Finally, the section wraps up with a discussion on the visibility management of the super-rich with an emphasis on how an ideological perspective on silence can function as a theoretical tool for analyzing the construction of a neo-liberal hegemony. But prior to this, I wish to briefly define the relation between discourse and hegemony, as these two concepts will be recurring throughout the analysis.

3.1 Discourse and hegemony

3.1.1 A social theory of discourse

This study draws on what Norman Fairclough (1992) refers to as a social theory of discourse, which argues for a conceptualization of discourse that subsumes elements from both the tradition within language studies and the social-constructionist tradition, heavily influenced by Michel Foucault (Fairclough 1995: 18). Fairclough uses discourse in reference to the use of language as a form of social practice, which implies that discourse is both a mode of action as well as a mode of representation (Fairclough 1992: 63). Language can thus be viewed as “a medium of power that can be used to sediment inequalities of power and legitimate iniquitous social relations” (Richardson 2007: 14). Fairclough (1992: 64) distinguishes three aspects of the constructive effects of discourses: as constructing social identities and subject positions (e.g. the identity of the super-rich); as constructing social relationships between people (e.g. the networks of the super-rich) and as constructing systems of knowledge and belief (e.g. neo-liberalism). Defining discourse as a form of social practice further implies a dialectic relationship between language and the social context where language is viewed as both *shaping* and *being shaped by* the social context where it appears (Fairclough 1995: 54–55). Hence, even though the Swedish news media's representations of the super-rich are firmly

rooted in the social and material structures of contemporary Sweden, journalists – sometimes actively but often unknowingly – can also contribute to challenging the current order of discourse. Through its power to shape opinions and reinforce beliefs, the language of the news media thus plays a significant role in the social construction of reality (Richardson 2007: 13).

3.1.2 Hegemony

Hegemony originally derives from Antonio Gramsci's theory of how a dominant group or class achieves and maintains its power not primarily through coercion and physical violence, but through constructing consent amongst the dominated masses. Gramsci defines hegemony as:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (Gramsci 1971: 12)

Even though there are elements in Gramsci's conceptualization that do not work in a non-fascist context, e.g. the claim that there is *one* dominant group that controls society (for a critique, see Clair 1998), hegemony still serves as an adequate tool for analyzing how certain discourses come to dominate society to the extent that they become naturalized. Hegemony provides discourses with a matrix – “a way of analyzing the social practice within which the discourse belongs in terms of power relations” (Fairclough 1992: 95). If one wishes to explain why the growing wealth of the super-rich generally is not met with much protest, one could argue that it is because discourses that are legitimating economic inequality have the upper hand in the *hegemonic struggle* (ibid.) versus discourses that are advocating for more redistribution of wealth. According to this theory, people do not oppose the economic mechanisms that operate to their disadvantage because there exists an overarching ideology that discursively has naturalized these mechanisms as taken-for-granted. Thus, in order to contextualize the Swedish news media's representations of the super-rich, the discussion now turns to the perhaps most dominating ideology in contemporary Western societies: neo-liberalism.

3.2 The neo-liberalization of society

3.2.1 Neo-liberalism as theory and practice

Similar to hegemony, neo-liberalism is a concept that has come to encompass a vast array of multifaceted meanings. To fully account for the complexity and the historical origins of the concept is beyond the scope of this thesis (for more extensive accounts, see Harvey 2005; Crouch 2011), but in its very essence, neo-liberalism can be summarized as:

A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (Harvey 2005: 2)

In short, the market is hailed as superior to the state as a means of effectively resolving problems. Thus, the role of the state should be limited to upholding a structural framework that allows the competition of the free market to work its wonders (ibid.; Crouch 2011: 7).

The fact that economic inequality has increased in countries that have adopted neo-liberal policies during the last decades cannot be brushed aside as a mere coincidence (Mau 2015). This is where the influential Marxist geographer David Harvey's possibly most important contribution to the study of neo-liberalism comes into play: The distinction between neo-liberalism as *theory* (presented above) and the actual *practices* of neo-liberalization. Even though neo-liberal theory does not officially proclaim that society should grow more unequal, Harvey (2005: 16) argues that the increasing social inequalities "have in fact been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project". According to him, inequalities are growing because the *utopian* project of neo-liberalization always has been subordinated to its *political* project, which is "to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites" (ibid.: 19). This does not mean that this practice always occurs consciously, nor that the economic power necessarily is restored to members of the old upper class (the growing number of tech-billionaires being one example of this). Regardless of whether the disparate group of super-rich individuals that make up the increasingly transnational economic elite conspire as a class or not, they "nevertheless possess a certain accordance of interests that generally recognizes the advantages [...] to be derived from neoliberalization" (ibid.: 36). What the super-rich have in common is that they continuously capitalize on the neo-liberal promise of a coming utopia that justifies whatever actions needed to be done in order to achieve this goal.

One could have expected that the financial crisis of 2008 – which hit the ordinary shareholders and taxpayers significantly harder than the super-rich – would have resulted in a restructuring of the economic system similar to the reforms that were put in place after the Great Depression of the early 1930’s. Even if protest voices do spring up (e.g. the Occupy Wall Street-movement, see DiSalvo 2015), neo-liberal discourses “continue to exert a huge influence across the globe” (Freedman 2012: 42). This is where the concept of hegemony can offer a helpful explanation. Following this logic, neo-liberalism has become “hegemonic as a mode of discourse” because a sufficient share of the population accepts and legitimizes the current economic order – even though it does not work to their advantage (Harvey 2005: 3). This consent has been manufactured through the selective use of certain discourses while disguising other realities. Talking openly about “restoring power to an economic elite” would hardly gain much public support, but proclaiming to advance “the cause of individual freedom” from state interference is more likely to appeal to a wider audience (ibid.: 40). Steffen Mau argues that discourses advocating for individualization have played a particularly important role in naturalizing neo-liberalism and legitimating economic inequalities. Even though people find the growing inequalities problematic, they are not met with collective resistance because poverty has come to be viewed as an individual problem caused by personal failure. Thus, the neo-liberalization of society signifies a breakdown of solidarity as the structures restraining people from social advancement are being masked by discourses claiming that one should just work harder to achieve ones goals (Mau 2015).

In order for an ideology to achieve hegemony to the point where it becomes “common sense”, there needs to be a diverse number of influential institutions that channels some discourses at the expense of others (Harvey 2005: 40). This creates a need to look into the discourses occurring within think tanks, political parties, universities and – not least – the news media.

3.2.2 Neo-liberalization and the news media

Sean Phelan (2014) identifies two perspectives on the relationship between neo-liberalism and the media within the existing body of research: a political economy and a cultural studies perspective. In a slightly simplified manner, one could summarize that “political economy studies focus on *structure*, [i.e.] the capitalist system, while cultural studies focus on *agency*: as the language of the system” (Jacobsson 2016: 2). However, Phelan (2014: 19–20) underscores that researchers within the two traditions, despite using different conceptual vocabularies, often draw on similar ideas about how neo-liberalism operates as the dominant

ideology. Even though this thesis embarks from a cultural studies perspective by studying media discourse, it seems fruitful to link it with a political economy perspective in order to highlight how neo-liberal structural changes within news media production could be affecting the representations of the super-rich. This way, both “the materiality of the economic base and the way this creates certain conditions, opportunities and limits for journalism” and the “possibility for journalistic negotiations and contestations of neoliberal logic” are taken into account (Jacobsson 2016: 33).

Within the political economy tradition, Phelan (2014: 17) identifies three themes that reoccur in the discussion on neo-liberalism: *media ownership*, *media production* and *media representations*. While this project will be predominantly occupied with media representations, the first two perspectives cannot be omitted from the analysis if one wishes to fully investigate the ways that neo-liberalization is altering the news media’s role in enhancing the quality of democracy (Herman & McChesney 1997: 4). Several studies on media ownership – similar to Harvey’s distinction between neo-liberal theory and practice – argue that “the gap between official neoliberal doctrine and the actuality of neoliberal media regimes” is evident in that the policies written to ensure competition and diversity in reality have created oligopolistic media markets dominated by a few actors (Phelan 2014: 18). Researchers such as Robert McChesney (2001: 13) have expressed concerns that when wealthy owners – who themselves benefit from the existing inequalities – come to dominate the journalism market, the news media are less likely to challenge the economic elite.

The second strand explores how a neo-liberal emphasis on maximizing profits has altered the production of news content. Even though tensions between democratic and profit-oriented objectives within the news media cannot be said to be a new phenomenon, the economic concern has become more important in the neo-liberal era, which in turn has led to a reconfiguration of what public interest entails (Phelan 2014: 18). According to Fenton (2011: 65), the increasing “marketization of the news and the ruthless logic of the economic system that demands ever-increasing profit margins” is changing the nature of the journalistic work, with editors being increasingly concerned with audience ratings instead of living up to the news media’s democratic objectives.

Third and finally, the effects of neo-liberalism on media representations have been discussed in terms of increasing *tabloidization*, which is an umbrella term referring to the “refinement

of commercialized journalism which prioritizes the desires of advertisers to reach large audiences above all other concerns” (Conboy 2006: 207). These processes are usually synonymous with the replacement of “hard” news (i.e. covering political issues that are relevant to public’s ability to participate in the public sphere) with “soft” news (e.g. celebrity stories, human interests and scandals) (Gans 2003: 28). Even though there are good reasons to problematize this dichotomy – and whether gossip in the news media should be seen as a recent phenomenon (see Hartley 1996) – research showcasing increasing space being allocated to “infotainment” at the expense of more time-demanding reporting on complex political and economic issues raise the question of whether the news media’s role as watchdogs for democracy is becoming less prevailing. McChesney (2001: 14) argues that it is precisely in the current “de-politization” of the masses that shows why the commercial media system is so important to the neo-liberal project, since “it [the news media] is singularly brilliant at generating the precise sort of bogus political culture that permits business domination to proceed without using a police state or facing effective popular resistance”.

Critiques have been raised against using neo-liberalism as a theoretical approach. Granted, there is a danger that neo-liberalism becomes “the singular, grand narrative which provides an explanatory framework for the world’s problems” (Freedman 2012: 40), which can lead to researchers neglecting “the more complex and precise accounts of the agents, arguments and mechanisms” operating within every-day life activities (ibid. 2008: 37). Even though referring to neo-liberalism (similar to globalization, digitalization or any of the contemporary meta-narratives) runs the risk of simplifying the issue, it arguably remains a significant explanatory tool. Thus, in order to acknowledge the different, complex and sometimes contradicting discourses that inhabit the ideology, this project will henceforth instead refer to different neo-liberal discourses, or “neo-liberal logics” (Phelan 2014: 32), instead of using neo-liberalism as a singular mode of discourse. Thus, this thesis adopts the concept as a way of analyzing which discourses and logics are (re)produced in the Swedish news media’s representations of the super-rich, and to what extent these discourses serve to legitimize or challenge an increasing neo-liberal hegemony. Some of the most relevant logics that have been used in legitimizing economic inequality and the wealth of the super-rich will be presented in the upcoming chapter.

3.3 The (un)deserving rich

Just as “rich” and “poor” essentially can be defined as moral categories (Hartley & Melrose 1999: 1), the question whether people should be seen as deserving or undeserving their wealth or poverty boils down to a question of morality. Wealth is not only a question of what one is legally entitled to possess, it is also a question of how much one can be said to morally deserve (McQuaig & Brooks 2013). The idea of the “undeserving rich” derives from the concept of the undeserving poor, which has been used to describe “public antipathy toward the poor under particular conditions and the resulting implications for redistributive policy preferences (i.e., if the poor are not hardworking or belong to a subordinate minority group, they are undeserving of welfare)” (McCall 2013: 12–13). But this logic, heavily used in anti-poverty policies, has only partially been applied to the super-rich. Connor and Rowlingson (2011: 446) argue that while “the alleged excesses of ‘the poor’ have been and continue to be subject to far greater disciplinary practices”, the lavish spending of the super-rich on yachts, planes and holidays are not subject to a similar disciplinary regime. The poor are continuously being reminded of their responsibilities, while “no such pressures apply to the wealthiest” (Lansley 2006: xvi, 201–203).

Using the concept of the (un)deserving rich not only allows the researcher to identify the actors who – within the news media discourse – are perceived as part of the problem of inequality, but also the ones who ought to be a part of the solution (McCall 2013: 52). Connor and Rowlingson (2011) suggest that there are three broad criteria by which the rich might be judged deserving or undeserving: 1) *rewards* for hard work; 2) *incentives* to create wealth; 3) the *character* of the rich. The following subsections will scrutinize the arguments individually before explaining how they will be used in the analysis.

3.3.1 Rewarding merit/hard work

The first set of arguments justifies inequality on the basis of individual effort. According to this logic, the rich may be seen as deserving their wealth if their fortune is created through hard and responsible work (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 440). The language of merit and ability operate as a double-edged sword: while these rhetorics legitimize privileges as the reward of effort, they simultaneously pave the way for a discourse where poverty is legitimized as resulting from a *lack* of personal effort and hard work (Scott 1994: 157). Thus, inequality is justified on the basis that “competence, effort and achievement should be

rewarded with riches, while incompetence, sloth and failure should be punished with poverty” (Hartley & Melrose 1999: 2). This train of thought arguably operates as part of the ongoing neoliberal processes of individualization, where inequality has come to be considered to be an individual problem instead of being interpreted in the context of social groups (Mau 2015: 19).

When using these arguments in the current socioeconomic context, at least two questions arise. First, who gets to define and measure what constitutes as “hard work”? If, as a recent study suggests, Swedish CEO’s earn 55 times the salary of an industrial worker (LO 2018) – is it fair to claim that the CEO is working 55 times harder or doing work that is 55 times more important than the ones on the factory floor? The question one should be asking is not whether differential reward is deserved, but “*who* deserves it” and “*how much more* they deserve” (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 439). Second, much of the wealth of today’s rich is still due to inheritance or other forms of wealth that has more to do with social background than personal effort. According to Oxfam (2017), as much as one-third of the world’s billionaire wealth is derived from inherited wealth. Even though the ranks of the super-rich may contain a higher proportion of those from modest backgrounds compared to the 19th century, the super-rich of today still come from a relatively closed circle (Lansley 2006: 208). As Johnson and Reed (1996) laconically concluded over twenty years ago, the best way to become rich seems to be to choose your parents wisely.

3.3.2 Incentives to create wealth that trickles-down

The second set of arguments suggest that people need economic incentives to work hard, which in turn will create wealth that trickles-down to benefit the rest of society (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 444–445). However, as has already been pointed out, most research suggests that the tax reductions that have followed in the footsteps of neo-liberalization have resulted in wealth trickling-up rather than down (Bauman 1998; Lansley 2006; Orton & Rowlingson 2007; Kainz Rognerud 2017). In 2015 even the International Monetary Fund, one of the institutions that most eagerly have encouraged neoliberal economic reforms (Harvey 2005), released a report stating that trickle-down economics do not work in times when the income share of the top 20 percent increases (IMF 2015).

Connor and Rowlingson (2011: 444) claim that even though monetary rewards “certainly play a part in motivating people”, it seems unlikely that money is the only reason why people go to

work (e.g. social reasons, the feeling of contributing). Lansley (2006: 207) questions whether the entrepreneurs of the post-war era, when tax rates were significantly higher, really were so demotivated compared to the super-rich of today by asking whether senior Goldman Sachs staff would quite their jobs if their bonuses were a little lower?

3.3.3 A benign character – philanthrocapitalism

Finally, the third line of arguments centers on the individual character of the rich. This draws on the perception that the wealthy may be considered more deserving if they “behave more responsibly and generously” by giving something back to the community through philanthropy or charitable work (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 446). The philanthropic activities of the super-rich is a recurring feature in the news media, and has turned Bill Gates into a poster boy for billionaires (McQuaig & Brookes 2013: 262). However, even though the charity foundations set up by the super-rich undoubtedly have played a role in the fight against poverty, it should also be underscored that this manner of giving is ideologically charged. The concept of “philanthrocapitalism”, originally coined with a positive connotation (Bishop & Greene 2008), has developed into a term for explaining how the philanthropy of the super-rich serves as a tool for promoting neo-liberal capitalism. Historian Mikkel Thorup offers a comprehensive definition of the concept, which deserves to be quoted at length:

The term “philanthrocapitalism” expresses the idea that *capitalism is or can be charitable in and of itself*. The claim is that capitalist mechanisms are superior to all others (especially the state) when it comes to not only creating economic but also human progress; that the market and market actors are or should be made the prime creators of the good society; that capitalism is not the cause but the solution to all the major problems in the world; that the best thing to do is to extend the market to hitherto personal or state processes; and, finally, that there is no conflict between the rich and the poor but rather that the rich are the poor’s best and possibly only friend. (Thorup 2013: 556, italics in original)

Thorup further argues that philanthrocapitalism should not be regarded as an expression of extreme charity, but rather of absurd inequality. The increasing philanthropic ventures of the billionaires does not suggest that the super-rich are becoming more generous – it is the growing gap between the rich and the poor that are forcing the super-rich to legitimize the current economic order by engaging in charitable giving. Merit is simply no longer a sufficient argument to justify the gap (ibid.: 568). Grounded in neo-liberalism, the gospel of philanthrocapitalism simultaneously proclaims that the methods drawn from business are superior and more efficient compared to the redistributive methods exercised by governments (Edwards 2008; Thompson 2018). By celebrating the benign character of the

super-rich, one runs the risk of neglecting the de-politization of welfare policies that is taking place when individual billionaires increasingly wants to decide who is worthy of financial support at the expense of elected politicians (Callahan 2017).

In the upcoming analysis of the news media, the three arguments scrutinized in this section will serve as theoretical tools for examining whether the billionaires are represented as deserving or undeserving their wealth. Given, there is also the chance that the arguments will be absent from the discourse all together. Kjærsgård (2015: 134) speculates that this hypothetical absence could signify that, within the given context, there is an image that there exist no excessively rich people, or that income and class difference are solved problems. However, within the context of contemporary Sweden, a news media silence regarding issues of deservingness could arguably be equated with an acceptance of the current order – thus implicitly legitimizing the super-rich as deserving. This way of interpreting silence in relation to hegemony is further explored in the upcoming chapter.

3.4 Visibility management and silence

3.4.1 Reversing Thompson: The struggle for invisibility

One of the central arguments in John B. Thompson's influential *Media and Modernity* (1995) is that the media has changed the relationship between visibility and power, and in the process blurred the boundaries between the public and the private. Thompson describes visibility management as "an ancient political art", but simultaneously argues that the development of communication media has left the powerful "with little choice but to submit to the law of compulsory visibility" (ibid.: 135, 137). This change of scenery is described as a double-edged sword: on the one hand this new society of self-disclosure enables the powerful to appear before the people on a never-before experienced scale, but on the other hand it has created new risks as the inability to fully control visibility in the media more easily can lead to scandals (Thompson 2005: 42).

As with most research on powerful groups, Thompson is primarily concerned with the visibility management of the political elite. However, his thesis can fruitfully be applied to the economic elite as well. In a study of business content in the Swedish media conducted back in the early 1990s, Hvitfelt and Malmström (1990: 48, quoted in Grafström 2006: 4) argued that corporate leaders have "stepped into the limelight, alternatively been brought out by journalism". Still, the visibility of the super-rich in the media has remained rather restricted. As mentioned, Bernhardtson (2013) has shown how the Swedish business elite to great extent chooses to hide away from the media limelight by regularly refusing to speak to the press about their wealth. This does not refute Thompson's thesis (2005) that the "struggle for visibility" has come to be of great significance if one is to advance one's cause, take for instance the high visibility on social media pursued by contemporary terrorist groups (Mortensen 2018). However, I argue that the visibility management of the super-rich does challenge the often taken-for-granted notion that invisibility in the media necessarily confines one to obscurity. Unlike elected politicians, the super-rich are not as depending on the support of the public opinion to maintain their power and, as such, they do not need to constantly remind the public about their agendas in order to attract voters. The visibility management of the super-rich could, in my own wording, better be described as a *struggle for invisibility* where the ambition is to shed away from the dangers of public sphere as much as possible. This struggle could arguably be regarded as a strategic part of the self-chosen social

disengagement from society that is characteristic amongst many of today's super-rich (Lansley 2006: 203).

Gans (2004: 116) describes the relationship between sources and journalists as a dance, claiming that “although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading”. But even if that is the case, the fact that the rich refuse to speak to the media about their wealth does not necessarily prevent the media from writing about it (Bernhardtson 2013: 250). Exploring how successful the visibility management of the super-rich effectively is in obfuscating the moral question of wealth – to what extent the super-rich or the journalists are leading the tango – thus becomes a question of great concern for this research project.

3.4.2 The power of silence

In its most condensed definition, silence can be perceived as the absence of speech (Schröter 2013: 16), but this strict literal interpretation of silence does not even begin to grasp the complexity and the different contextual meanings that the concept entails. In many ways, silence is “a rhetorical art that can be as powerful as the spoken or written word” (Glenn 2004: 9). History has shown that the *silencing* of certain topics or groups of people has been one of the most effective strategies for the wielding of power (Jaworski 1993; Clair 1998). Achino-Loeb argues that the broad consensus that is needed in order to establish hegemony is largely based on silence:

the road to overt ideological domination rests on a bedrock of silence running through different layers of suppression that [...] rest on the groove of various self-interests ranging from linguistic continuity to economic and political hegemony. (Achino-Loeb 2006: 13–14)

Previous research has explored a vast array of ways to identify and interpret the meanings of different forms of silences expressed by the powerful. Silence can be *manipulative* when one deliberately conceals relevant information from someone (Huckin 2002), it can be *strategic* when a public figure refuses to communicate verbally when that refusal violates public expectations (Brummett 1980), or one can speak of a *conspiracy of silence* when two communicating parties mutually and actively refuse to acknowledge “the presence of things that actually beg for attention” (Zerubavel 2006: 9). All these forms of silences are difficult to validate for the researcher, seeing as they all presuppose a degree of intentionality that often limits the analysis to speculations regarding the motives of the speaker and/or listener.

Further, even though the choice to stay silent involves some degree of intentionality, the speaker may not be aware of the political dimension of the silence because the way it is being expressed has become naturalized within the societal context. Hence, even the silence of powerful agents – such as the super-rich – could be the result of “constellations of self-interests” that “are pursued ‘naturally’ and not with the conscious aim of producing a discourse that is shaped in a certain way” (Taylor & Schröter 2018: 7).

This research project draws on a definition of silence derived from Taylor and Schröter, where silence is “ascribed to individual speakers when they make a more conscious and intentional choice about what (not) to say – when they choose to say nothing, but instead could have said something” (ibid.). Silence is not only limited to the absence of speech; it can also manifest itself when a person avoids talking about a sensitive topic by instead talking about something else (Schröter 2013: 18). And just as invisibility in the media should not be solely seen as a symptom of powerlessness, a silent individual or group should not be equated with powerlessness. As stressed by Baker (2006: 19), “hegemonic discourse can be at its most powerful when it does not have to be invoked, because it is just taken for granted”. Adopting this ideological perspective on silence (Clair 1998: 6) as a theoretical tool thus complements the analysis of how the news media responds to the visibility management of the super-rich.

4. Methodology and methods

This chapter will outline the methodology and method architecture for the case study of the Swedish news media's representation of the super-rich. The methodological framework rests on a combination of thematic coding and critical discourse analysis, with particular emphasis on detecting absences and silences in the material.

4.1 Social constructionism

The theoretical chapter argues that while the material consequences of economic inequality are very real, the moral attitudes towards these inequalities are socially constructed within the historical context where the inequalities arise. Even though neo-liberal logics and economic inequality may be perceived as taken-for-granted parts of our lived experience, a social constructionist approach questions these types of naturalized assumptions by arguing that the status quo could have been different under other historical circumstances (Hacking 1999: 6). Following Burr's (2003: 2–5) methodological model for conducting social constructionist research, the present thesis thus sets out to challenge taken-for-granted knowledge about economic inequality by analyzing this knowledge as being historically constructed within the context of ongoing processes of neo-liberalization. Considering that mediated communication plays a vital role in the construction of the social world, analyzing these mediatized constructions (Couldry & Hepp 2016: 15) is imperative if we are to understand why economic inequality keeps growing.

4.2 Data gathering and sampling

The sample was chosen according to what Flyvbjerg (2001: 79) describes as an information-oriented selection, where the researcher aims to “maximize the utility of information” from the sample by selecting cases “on the basis of expectations about their informational content”. In order to achieve this maximization, the ten billionaires who topped the business magazine *Veckans Affärer*'s (2017) list of the wealthiest Swedes in 2017 were initially selected as cases. By figuring at the top of this well-known annual ranking, these billionaires could be expected to draw the attention of the news media (Bernhardtson 2013: 139).

After noticing that four of the billionaires in the original sample came from the same family (the Rausing-family), three of them were replaced by three of the tech-billionaires that make

up the latest trend of super-rich Swedes.⁴ This selection was made in order to end up with a sample that included billionaires who have made their fortunes in a variety of ways (e.g. through inheritance, retail trade, tech start-ups). Furthermore, as it soon became obvious that quite a few other billionaires from *Veckans Affärer*'s list appeared in the same articles along with the original cast members of the study, a decision was made to also include these in the analysis.⁵

Choosing to focus on the wealthiest billionaires in an analysis of economic inequality makes this a rather extreme case study, which is “well suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 78). Given, choosing ten other billionaires – with other backgrounds, professions or reputations – would hypothetically have provided the analysis with rather different inputs. Nonetheless, by focusing on a mixed array of billionaires, the case study strives to contribute with “the power of the good example” (ibid.: 66) by supplying self-referential knowledge that the readers can use to challenge deep-seated beliefs about their culture (Baert 2005: 142). The ten billionaires who form the core of the sample are presented in Appendix A.

The empirical material for the present thesis consists of 152 articles from 2017 published in Sweden's four largest daily newspapers⁶: *Dagens Nyheter (DN)*, *Aftonbladet (AB)*, *Expressen (EX)* and *Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)*.⁷ The choice to focus solely on 2017 is motivated by the fact that the number of billionaires in Sweden reached a historical high point during that year (*Veckans Affärer* 2017). Considering that the number of people living in relative poverty has continued to grow in Sweden (Eurostat 2017) one could expect this time frame to supply a decent amount of media coverage on economic inequality.

Focusing on the largest newspapers is a choice made in order to maximize the discursive impact of the material (Kjærsgård 2015: 240). The selection further allows for a variety of

⁴ The three tech-billionaires that were included all appeared close to the top of the list, located on place 18 (Markus Persson), 23 (Daniel Ek) and 30 (Niklas Zennström).

⁵ However, the analysis of these “non-original” billionaires was restricted to the articles that showed up when a member of the original 10-person sample was used as the search term in the media archive. No further search was conducted using the names of the non-original billionaires.

⁶ Free newspapers (such as Metro) were excluded on the basis of them not being as opinion-building.

⁷ Henceforth, “the news media” in the present thesis refers to these four outlets. It should, however, be acknowledged that left-leaning outlets within Swedish news media (e.g. smaller outlets such as *Dagens ETC*) are known for their critical approach towards the super-rich.

journalistic and political profiles. Using the classification scheme from Larsen & Dejgaard (2013: 290), *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* are labeled as “newsstand tabloid press” while *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* are labeled as “semi-serious broadsheets”. Considering the political orientation, *Aftonbladet* is independent social democratic, *Svenska Dagbladet* conservative, while *Expressen* and *Dagens Nyheter* are independent liberal. These differences suggest that different logics could be affecting how the super-rich are (if at all) represented in the different newspapers, which should provide the analysis with material representing “a broader journalistic logic” (Jacobsson 2016: 71).⁸

The sample was gathered by using the ten billionaire’s names as search terms in the Swedish media archive Retriever. This resulted in a sample of 379 articles. The articles were sorted manually, excluding doublets and articles that on other basis were deemed to be irrelevant for the purpose of the study, such as articles that exclusively focused on a business owned by one of the billionaires.⁹ This narrowed the sample down to the final 152 articles, consisting of any journalistically produced material (i.e. opinion pieces, news articles, feature articles, items and lists). Even though these different genres involve different discursive practices (Fairclough 1995: 65) and serve different purposes within the newspaper (e.g. opinion forming, informational, entertainment), this thesis argues that the different genres together form the newspapers’ representations and should, thus, all be included.

4.3 Critical discourse analysis and thematic fields

As the objective of the present thesis is to deconstruct often taken-for-granted understandings of economic inequality, it is necessary to embark from a methodological approach that is concerned with highlighting social problems. Thus, critical discourse analysis (CDA) supplies a fruitful framework, considering that the approach is particularly concerned with deconstructing power relations through “addressing social wrongs in their descriptive aspects and possible ways of righting and mitigating them” (Fairclough 2010: 11). As presented in the

⁸ Jacobsson (2016: 72) further highlights that it is important to argue why any study in this day and age should pay attention to “old media”, considering that other digitalized platforms are said to have become increasingly influential. However, considering that the four newspapers in the sample in 2017 together reached over 2 million readers per day (Orvesto 2018), their content arguably still plays an important role for setting the agenda on political and moral issues (e.g. economic inequality).

⁹ However, it should be pointed out that articles about the billionaires’ businesses could be deemed as relevant in order to fully investigate the discursive representation of the billionaires (for instance, news items reporting how many stocks Stefan Persson has bought in H&M). However, given the limited scope of the present thesis, many of these were deemed less relevant and were thusly excluded.

theoretical section, this approach defines discourse as a form of social practice with the aim of analyzing the dialectical relationship between news media language and the social context. CDA supplies the researcher with an extensive analytical toolbox for conducting a linguistic analysis that allows the researcher to critically investigate *how* and *why* the text is designed in a certain way, i.e. what wider sociocultural processes the text is a part of (Fairclough 1995: 202).

Fairclough's (1992, 1995) approach to CDA embarks from a three-dimensional conceptualization of discourse, whose aim is to scrutinize the dialectical relationship between the *text* (linguistic analysis, including visual content such as photos), the *discursive practice* (the production and consumption of texts) and the wider *social practice* (the sociocultural context where the text appears). This framework can be used with different emphasis depending on the purpose of the analysis (Fairclough 1995: 62). As a full-on study of the discursive practice would have to involve systematic production or audience research, the focus of the present thesis will be on the dialectical relationship between texts and the social practice. However, considering that studying the visibility management of the super-rich involves highlighting elements of the news production process, the discursive practice will not be completely omitted in the analysis (see section 6.1.2).

The project makes use of a selection of analytical tools that have been chosen based on their ability to help analyzing the ideological function of language in the news media's representations of the super-rich. Particular emphasis has been put on analyzing the choice of *wording* and *vocabulary* (Fairclough 1992: 190; Richardson 2007: 47) that is used to describe the super-rich, considering that these representations could reveal to what extent the super-rich are being deemed as deserving or undeserving their wealth. This process also involves analyzing the *functionalization* and *identification* of the super-rich in the material, i.e. what activities the super-rich are associated with and how they are identified in relation to others (van Leeuwen 2008: 42). The concept of *modalities* (Fairclough 1992: 158) is used in order to highlight the degree of affinity that accompanies the news media's statements about the super-rich, while *metaphors* (ibid.: 194) are used as a way of further scrutinizing how processes of economic inequality is discursively represented in the news media. Together, these tools serve to analyze to what extent the *communicative event* (a news article) serves to challenge or reproduce the *order of discourse* by identifying whether any hegemonic struggles are taking place between different discourses in the material (Fairclough 1995: 56).

While CDA to some extent has been concerned with absences, e.g. by looking at which elements are foregrounded or backgrounded in an article (Fairclough 1995: 106), there has been little attention to systematically identify these absences more broadly (Taylor & Schröter 2018: 1). This is understandable, considering that “there is no way which we can linguistically investigate discourses that are absent” (Blommaert 2005: 35). Nevertheless, since what *is not* being said might say more about the values of a society than what *is* said (Huckin 2002: 348), identifying meaningful absences should be an important part of CDA.

In order to do this, I use two analytical tools drawn from Patricia von Münchow (2018: 224): *comparisons* and *looking for “instabilities” within the data set*. The former is utilized to see if some news outlets choose to include certain elements that are absent in others, while the latter tries to locate words or utterances that conflicts with the dominating representations in the material. For instance, if X (e.g. a certain representation of the super-rich) is only mentioned in article A, one might ask why it is not present in article B, C, and so forth. In order to argue for which social presentations that could have been present in the material, but for some reasons are left out, the researcher naturally has to be familiar with the social context for the study (ibid.). In the case of Sweden, a non-mentioning of the growing economic inequality in the representations of the super-rich could arguably be seen as a meaningful absence.

The coding of the material was conducted along the lines of a three-phase thematic content analysis (Rivas 2012: 367). The first phase consisted of reading the 152 articles while underlining words and sentences that involved descriptions of the billionaires (e.g. persona, lifestyles and wealth). With the aid of the analytical tools from CDA, certain categories started to emerge from these individual codes as the reading proceeded. The second phase involved gathering the codes into a new set of documents, where each document represented a certain category. For the final phase, the analysis followed Dahlgren’s (1987: 48; 2000: 94–95) procedure of rereading the articles and codes in order to identify *thematic fields* – elements that explicitly or implicitly seemed to reappear throughout the different categories. After an extensive process, three themes that together seemed to cover most of the relevant findings emerged. Even though there was the option of including more themes (e.g. “The super-rich behave like us”), I chose to limit the number of topics in order to perform a deeper analysis of the ones included. The three themes – *The struggle for invisibility*; *Crumbs from the rich man’s table*; and *The VIP-club* – form the structure of the upcoming analysis.

5. Context: The neo-liberalization of Sweden

Using Sweden as a case study on economic inequality might – at first glance – be perceived as an unexpected choice. After all, is Sweden not known worldwide for its strong welfare state legacy, rooted in social democratic ideals about redistributive socialism accompanied by a remarkable “passion for equality” (Kjærsgård 2015: 1)? It is striking how researchers regularly refer to the Swedish taxation model as a shining example of successfully reducing economic inequality (Rosanvallon 2013: 3; Stiglitz 2012: 127). However, the trend within the Swedish economic and political landscape during the last decades suggests that these praises do not tell the whole story, and that there might be good reasons for us to update our views of Sweden (Theborn 2017: 275).

As observed in the introduction, income inequality is currently growing faster in Sweden than in any other OECD country. In 1999, 50 persons made it onto the list of Swedish billionaires that *Veckans Affärer* composes annually. Their aggregated wealth amounted to a fifth of the Swedish GDP. In 2017 there were 184 individuals on the list, whose aggregated wealth amounted to around half of the Swedish GDP (*Veckans Affärer* 2017).¹⁰ In fact, in 2015 Sweden actually hosted more billionaires per capita than any other country in the EU (Brinded 2015). The main factor behind the growing gap has been escalating capital incomes (Roine 2014: 31). This is indisputably a consequence of political decisions such as the removal of the inheritance tax (2004), the removal of the wealth tax (2007) and a significant lowering of the company taxation (today at 22 per cent). Even though Sweden remains one of the most equal OECD countries, these measures have resulted in claims that Sweden has been turned into a tax haven for the rich (Henrekson 2015: 173).

This of course begs the question: how has this radical change of scenery been possible? To fully account for the transformation of the Swedish model is beyond the scope of this thesis¹¹, but there is little doubt that the increasing influence of neoliberal economics has played an important part in the process (Theborn 2017). As a result of successful lobbying from liberal think tanks, the ideological content of the Swedish public debate became increasingly influenced by neo-liberal ideas (e.g., more talk of “freedom” instead of “equality”) during the

¹⁰ According to a recent report from the left institute Katalys (Allelin et. al, 2018), the 15 most wealthy business families in Sweden controlled companies with an amounting value of 4 935 billion SEK in 2017. That is more than the Swedish GDP for the entire year (4 604 billion SEK).

¹¹ For more extensive accounts, see Blyth 2001; Sandberg 2017.

1980's (Boréus 1997). According to Mark Blyth (2001), the changes within Swedish academic economics towards a "neoliberal ideational shift" that occurred in 1980's resulted in the origins of the Swedish banking rescue 1990–1994 being blamed on the inefficiencies of the welfare state. The result of this ideational shift within politics, the academy and segments of the news media was a "cognitive locking" where any procedure that deviated from the neo-liberal orthodoxy was deemed as unthinkable (ibid.: 23). The effects of this cognitive locking are arguably one of the main reasons why the acceptance of wealth has "fundamentally changed" in Sweden (Henrekson 2015: 170).

Neo-liberal market logics have also contributed to reshaping the organization of the Swedish news media. In 2015, four media conglomerates together owned 70 percent of the daily newspapers (Holmberg 2015).¹² Several social-democratic newspapers are today owned by conglomerates advocating for liberal values (Ohlsson 2010). Even though the political economy perspective mostly functions as a background for the present thesis – as stressed in the theoretical chapter – it is imperative to bear in mind that these structural changes within the Swedish news media have the potential of shaping the extent to which it is concerned with fulfilling its democratic duties (Jacobsson 2016: 54).

Considering that CDA is particularly useful for studying ideological change (Fairclough 1992: 90), the path from a strong welfare state towards a more neo-liberal state that Sweden is currently walking along makes the country's billionaires an intriguing case to investigate. That Sweden has remained an almost taken-for-granted role model of economic equality also makes the country a suitable study object from a social constructionist perspective.

¹² As far as this research has observed, there seem to be no direct ownership connections between the billionaires and the four newspapers investigated in this thesis project.

6. Analysis

The analysis of how the super-rich are represented in the Swedish news media will be structured around three interrelated thematic fields: *The struggle for invisibility*; *Crumbs from the rich man's table*; and *The VIP-club*. Prior to entering the analysis, it should be acknowledged that one of the four newspapers in the sample quantitatively stands out: 50 percent of the articles that were deemed relevant for the study were published in *Expressen*, placing the tabloid way ahead of *Svenska Dagbladet* (21 percent), *Aftonbladet* (16 percent) and *Dagens Nyheter* (13 percent). Considering that the Swedish press investigation from 1994 states that one of the mass media's three primary tasks is to "investigate the influential people in society" (SOU 1995:37: 156), one could certainly question why the other three news outlets are not deeming the increasingly wealthy (hence, influential) super-rich to be particularly newsworthy. Even though *Expressen's* accounts of the super-rich – as will become evident – seldom are characterized by a critical aura, the fact that they make the super-rich visible at least lays the foundation for further discussion in the public sphere on the moral issue of economic inequality. The defenders of the tabloid press would claim these quantitative results as an example of how these newspapers are "every bit as preoccupied with social differences [...] as serious journalists" (Connell 1992: 82), and that these accounts can serve as "discursive gateways" (Dahlgren 2000: 314) for bridging the question of economic inequality to a broad audience.

6.1 The struggle for invisibility

On October 4th, *Expressen* runs a story headlined “Stefan Persson’s *unknown life* as English pub owner”.¹³ The article tells the reader that owner of H&M *in silence* has built a business empire in Ramsbury, a rural town outside London where his family owns a manor. It is further stressed that *not much is known* about Persson’s *unknown* business empire, and that *few outsiders* seem to be aware that the local pub is owned by one of the richest persons in the world. An *anonymous* source is quoted saying “This is completely Stefan’s *private* business. You could call it a hobby” (*EX* 2017-10-04b).

The article is rather representative for how the news media – not just *Expressen* – sell stories about the super-rich to the public. When scanning the vocabulary of the material, one encounters an abundance of words that serves to discursively construct the super-rich as a secret community that prefers to stay silently away from the media limelight. Below follows a brief extract of recurring words and phrases:

Hidden; Mythical; In silence; Chosen to remain anonymous; Hardly gives any interviews; The unknown heiress; Sliding into [something] in silence; Behind the scenery; Known for keeping a low profile; Lives discretely; In the dark; Secret party; Hugger-mugger; Sneaked in the back door; Stays in the background; Very low-key; Chooses not to display.

These words and phrases frequently occur in the headlines, which further underlines the element of secrecy as a major selling point for the news media due to its prominent foregrounding (Fairclough 1992: 83). This is hardly a surprising finding, considering that revealing details from the private lives of celebrities has long been a feature in the news media – especially in the tabloids (Turner 2004: 71–86). However, several researchers have argued that the supply of sensationalist stories has accelerated as part of an ongoing tabloidization of the news media (Gripsrud 2000; Conboy 2006: 208). As presented in the theoretical section, this development has been linked to the commercialization of the news that has increased as neo-liberal discourses have become increasingly hegemonic.

This chapter will henceforth not be concerned with debating tabloidization. Instead, its focus will be on analyzing the super-rich struggle for invisibility and the news media’s discursive representation of this visibility management in relation to neo-liberalization. Nonetheless, since there generally is a correspondence between the complexity of a news story and the

¹³ All quotes have been translated by the author. Italics (used for emphasizing key words and phrases) are added by the author unless explicitly specified otherwise.

likelihood of that story being made (Strömbäck 2009: 149), it is of value to question to what extent the news media are keen to fully de-mystify the super-rich. Within the logics of an increasingly profit-driven media market, the newsworthiness of the super-rich could depend on them remaining mythical characters that the media can re-use as a selling point to attract readers. Since the super-rich arguably are not like other celebrities, this mystification could run the risk of obscuring their impact on democracy.

6.1.1 “It is a no winner” – The silence of the super-rich

The main reason that the news media are able to continuously utilize the secrecy of the super-rich as a selling point is simple: the super-rich rarely talk to the media. Even though the sample for this study consisted of 152 articles, only seven of these contained an actual interview with a billionaire. Thus, a majority of the billionaires that appeared in the sample did not give a single interview to the examined newspapers throughout the entire year.

How can we interpret this absence of speech? Lennart Bernhardtson’s (2013) interview study with Swedish business owners offers valuable insights that deserve to be taken into account. The wealthy interviewees generally conceived the public sphere as a threatening place that they prefer to stay out of. Hence, the relationship with media publicity is described as a problem. The owners explained their reluctance to answer questions about their wealth and personal lives by arguing that talking about these issues is dangerous as it increases the risk of kidnapping. They also claimed that the general public does not have an understanding for the wealthy, and thus it is better to remain silent. Bernhardtson critiques this self-victimization by arguing that the owners’ choice to only talk about their wealth in terms of “outside threats” discursively shifts the conversation away from the wealth itself:

When an owner talks about the dangers and risks associated with the owning, it is simultaneously a story about money. If the narrator were not wealthy, there would hardly be any threat of kidnapping. If the owner were not wealthy, publicities regarding the owner’s economy would hardly be a problem, at least not regarding kidnapping.
(Bernhardtson 2013: 262)

The super-rich’s fear of the public sphere is highlighted in a four-page story in *Aftonbladet* (2017-11-05) under the banner “The lives of the rich”. The article argues that growing economic inequality has made the rich all the more scared of their surroundings. The reporter interviews the founder of a security company, who says that they provide up to 50 instructions to their wealthy costumers for how to minimize the danger of being robbed or

kidnapped. These include removing personal information from the Internet, driving a regular car, shredding documents and not posing with expensive objects in magazines. The article suggests that the super-rich would feel mentally better if economic inequality were to decrease, an argument that also has been put forward by researchers (Doring 2010; Payne 2017). However, this account stands out and mostly serves to highlight the absence of problematization that characterizes the sample as a whole.

In one of the rare first-hand interviews in the sample, count and financier Gustaf Douglas talks to *Expressen* about his life. When the reporter steers the conversation onto Douglas' two sons (both whom are also billionaires), Douglas attempts to explain why the sons refuse to talk to the news media:

– Carl and Erik absolutely do not want to meet, says Gustaf Douglas.

Why is that?

– Because they do not see... *It is a no winner* [eng. in original]. I could also have said that, but one should not throw a rotten fish in someone's face before you have spoken to them, he says. (EX 2017-07-23a).

So the explanation is that “It is a no winner” – neither the billionaire, the news media nor the public would benefit from more media visibility of the super-rich. Douglas' statement could surely be problematized with a follow-up question, as comments like this obstacle any further discussion on the silence of the super-rich. First of all, being able to choose whether to remain silent or invisible in the news media is a sign of privilege, seeing as there are many who have no control whatsoever over their visibility (Bernhardtson 2013: 264). This privilege further entails the power of maintaining silence over certain topics, which serves as an effective way of preserving the status quo (Jaworski 1993: 110). In other words, silence operates as a strategic tool in the struggle for maintaining certain discourses in hegemony. Considering that an “explicit assertion always leaves the door open for disagreement” (von Münchow 2018: 227), remaining silent signifies that one does not fear that one's status (e.g. as deservedly rich) is threatened to the level where it needs to be to constantly reasserted.

The silence of the super-rich can thus be interpreted as an attempt to discursively shift the conversation away from the moral question of wealth possession. When the super-rich refuse to take part in the public sphere, they are contributing to the de-politization of economic inequality that Harvey (2005) identifies as one of the main characteristics of neo-liberalization. When the journalist settles for vague explanations such as “it is a no winner”, it

brings the moral discussion of wealth to what Bernhardtson (2013: 228) calls “a discursive end” (sv. “diskursivt avslut”). This would not be the case if the reporter responded by questioning whether it is true that there really are “no winners” (or no losers) in this struggle for invisibility.

Another example of this de-politization is *Expressen*’s interview with Ikea-founder Ingvar Kamprad’s personal advisor Göran Grosskopf. Ingvar Kamprad’s three sons have hardly given any interviews to the press, a decision that Grosskopf explains the following way:

He does not think that they [the sons] will ever be public figures – not even after Ingvar Kamprad has passed away.
– They have *chosen* to be *shy* and *anonymous* in order to be able to live *a normal life* like *you and me*, and to *avoid getting recognized* in the street. It is their *choice*, he says.
(EX 2017-10-04a)

Here the privilege of *choosing* ones visibility is once again prevalent. Moreover, Grosskopf’s reference to silence as a way of allowing for a *normal* life seems worthy of problematization. According to *Veckans Affärer*’s (2017) latest numbers, the three brothers are estimated to be worth 9 billion SEK each. The question that begs to be asked is whether any person this wealthy could be said to live a normal life. When the reporter does not problematize this argument, it serves to further de-politicize the reality of economic inequality according to neo-liberal logics. Furthermore, talking in such generalizing terms as *you and me* obfuscates the profoundly different economic realities that people live under.

6.1.2 “We kindly refrain from answering” – Searching for the super-rich

According to Strömbäck (2009: 147), content analyses of the news media can never account for what has occurred beyond the publicized story, i.e. which sources have remained anonymous and which sources the journalists have talked to without including them in the final product. However, parts of the production process can still be traced in the material. In fact, *Expressen*’s articles about the super-rich turned out to include several detailed accounts of how the journalists try to get in contact with the super-rich. This is where one needs to highlight the discursive practice of media production (Fairclough 1995).

An article about Biltema’s founder Sten-Åke Lindholm raises the question whether the complex ownership structure of the company is part of an attempt to decrease taxation. The piece concludes with the following statement:

Expressen has attempted to reach Sten-Åke Lindholm for an interview and has even, on appeal from Biltema's press officer Henrik Jarl, sent questions via e-mail.

The questions have, among other things, concerned the ownership structure, taxation advantages and the grandchild who will be taking over the power.

But, six days after the e-mail has been sent, Biltema chooses not to answer any of the questions. In his answer, Henrik Jarl writes: "We kindly refrain from answering the questions".

(EX 2017-09-12)

In the run-up to Stefan Persson's 70th birthday, *Expressen* runs a story that – while mostly written in a positive tone – brings up accusations regarding child labor that have been aimed towards H&M. The reporter has tried to contact Stefan Persson for a comment on these accusations, but according to H&M's press office, Persson is "out travelling and is therefore sadly not able to answer your questions" (EX 2017-10-03b). Later in the same article, the reporter further describes the problems with finding sources for the article:

No one wants to say anything "needlessly" about the richest man in Sweden and his family. When we call a person who for a long time has collaborated with H&M and the Perssons and ask whether the person wants to say anything for Stefan Persson's 70th birthday, the question is rejected.

The person, who otherwise is known for talking openly to the media, says "they are so secret" and ends the conversation.

(ibid.)

The silence of the super-rich is not always invisible and the news media does – at least occasionally – try to get in contact with them. However, these attempts never seem to be followed up. If *Expressen* thought that the question of Biltema's ownership structure or the child labor accusations against H&M were truly relevant, one could assume that they would keep writing articles questioning this silence until the super-rich felt pressured enough to defend themselves in the media. Timothy Cook (2005: 102) argues that a negotiation of newsworthiness is always taking place between the sources and the news media, where the two parties often have different opinions regarding what counts as newsworthy. Since the super-rich regard their wealth and personal consumption as private matters, they logically do not see any reason to talk about these matters in the media. Nevertheless, the news media has the final word in deciding which elements will be included in the story (ibid.: 105; Strömbäck 2009: 152). What the present study shows is that even though the silence of the super-rich occasionally is highlighted, it is seldom problematized or followed up in any way. Thus, the super-rich's struggle for invisibility through silence seems to be working efficiently in halting the moral debate about wealth possession.

On June 22nd, *Aftonbladet* publishes a rewrite based on an article in the left-magazine *ETC* that highlights “how much, or rather how little” some of the richest Swedes pay in taxes as a proportion of their wealth. The article lists a number of billionaires but pays particular attention to Antonia Ax:son Johnson, who despite making 5.4 million SEK per month only pays 18 percent in taxes. *ETC* has interviewed a cashier at Willys – a supermarket chain that Ax:son Johnson’s family owns – who says that the fact that she pays a higher percentage than the billionaire-owner “pisses her off”. The article concludes with stating that *ETC* has unsuccessfully tried to reach Antonia Ax:son Johnson for a comment (*AB* 2017-06-22).

Even though *Aftonbladet* recalls the story of Ax:son Johnson’s taxation on a few occasions during the upcoming weeks (2017-06-23; 2017-06-26; 2017-07-03), the newspaper makes no attempt at forcing her to break her silence.¹⁴ If the issue of her taxation really was perceived as a vital matter, surely the news media would not stop until the billionaire felt the need to go out and defend herself. Now, all she has to do is remain silent and wait until the story fades out. The next time Ax:son Johnson personally appears in the empirical material, it is in the form of a flattering portrait that emphasizes her charitable giving (*SvD* 2017-07-11). One can make an intriguing comparison with the silence of politicians, who are “picked apart” (Jaworski 1993: 106) when refusing to talk to the press, because this refusal almost always creates an aura of *uncertainty*, *passivity* and *relinquishment* (Brummett 1980: 289). Similar expectations on the super-rich in the present thesis seemingly do not exist.

Rather than publishing articles criticizing the super-rich for their refusal to talk, the response of the news media is usually either to talk to (often anonymous) sources that know the billionaire or to simply use quotes and photos from old interviews. Some of these quotes can be several years old, which further underlines how rarely the super-rich talk to the press (see *EX* 2017-05-14a; *EX* 2017-07-25). This serves to further construct the super-rich as mythical beings that seldom graces us with their presence. So when they do choose to make a physical appearance, news media makes the most of the event. *Expressen*’s interview with the Norwegian hotel mogul Petter Stordalen is the most extreme example of this, seeing as it even contains an entire fact box entitled “This is how the meeting was”:

¹⁴ *Aftonbladet* is the only news media in the sample that chooses to highlight the story (at least in printed form). Considering that *Aftonbladet* is the only social democratic newspaper in the sample, this could be regarded as an expected finding.

Petter is incredibly charismatic, but not shallow. On the opposite, he takes the questions seriously and seems genuinely interested in both his co-workers and us from Expressen. He generously stretches the duration of the interview to twice the length that was promised. (EX 2017-05-19).

This flattering description resembles Thompson's (1995: 124) depiction of how powerful elites – before the emergence of the mass media – used to limit their physical appearance to a few staged events where the masses were allowed to gaze upon them. In between, they successfully hide away from the limelight. The fact that the super-rich often choose to remain silent even when critique is posed against them arguably goes to show how little they worry that the silence will have negative consequences for them. So to recall Gans' (2004) metaphor: The news media may have the last word in their tango with the super-rich – but it seems rather obvious that their partner is leading the dance.

6.1.3 Summary

Has not it always been like this; you standing in the background and not in front of the cameras?

– Yes, I am glad if I do not have to do that.

It reminds a bit of how your dad and brother acts. Is it even a conscious family strategy?

– No. It is possibly... *an orientation*.

(EX 2017-05-28, interview with Stefan Persson's daughter Charlotte Söderström)

One of the central processes that turn an ideology into hegemonic as a mode of discourse is the highlighting of certain topics while avoiding talking about others. In the case of neo-liberalization, the increasing economic inequality seemingly belongs to the second category (Harvey 2005; Mau 2015). This section has argued that the super-rich's struggle for invisibility serves to de-politicize economic inequality by halting the critical discussion on the topic. While the news media does occasionally highlight this silence, they do little to problematize it and instead settle for vague explanations such as "it is a no winner" or "it is an orientation". I argue that this lack of problematization contributes to the increasing acceptance of economic inequality that marks a distinctive part of the ongoing neo-liberalization of Sweden. In other words, neo-liberal discourses on economic inequality – manifested through silence – are ostensibly enjoying a rather unchallenged hegemonic position. The section has further argued that an increasingly profit-driven news media might actually benefit from the silence of the super-rich, since this allows them to continuously use the element of secrecy as a selling point. This could help explain why the mainstream news media are not overtly eager to fully de-mystify the super-rich.

6.2 Crumbs from the rich man's table

Ljungby is a rural town of 15 000 people, located in the southwestern part of Småland, a 45 minute drive from Ingvar Kamprad's estate in Älmhult. The town's emergency hospital is one of the smallest in the area: whereas most emergency hospitals operate with two CT-scanners (used in emergencies when a person has had a stroke), Ljungby only has one. When the hospital requests a second scanner from the county council, the request is turned down. Chief physician Anders Ebbesen chooses to contact Ingvar Kamprad, who "more or less offhand" agrees to personally donate the 4.5 millions needed to purchase the scanner. On December 8th, *Expressen* headlines: "The hospital is saved by Kamprad". Fredrik Larsson, operations manager for functional medicine at the county, explains to the journalist how "the device saves lives". Towards the end of the article, Larsson adds: "State and county do not have endless resources. When we ask for help and reach out our hand, it is amazing that Ingvar Kamprad is kind enough to grab it with a promise of the money that is needed" (EX 2017-12-08).

At first glance, this appears to be nothing but a sunshine story. When the authorities' resources were insufficient, a local billionaire benignly stepped in with the money needed to purchase a device that potentially will save many lives. Why should the news media not unanimously celebrate Kamprad for his generous donation? This chapter will problematize that question by arguing that the mainstream news media's reporting on the philanthropic character of the super-rich runs the risk of legitimizing economic inequality and a neo-liberal individualization of welfare redistribution. The chapter will be divided into two blocks: one focusing on charitable giving and the other focusing on sponsorship. The former puts particular emphasis on analyzing the representations in the light of philanthrocapitalism, while the latter returns to the visibility management of the super-rich.

6.2.1 "With the money I can spare" – The super-rich as philanthropists

Thorup (2013: 567) describes billionaire philanthropy as "one of the most high-profile and mediatized expressions of philanthrocapitalism". Indeed, the philanthropic ventures of the super-rich turned out to be a quite often-recurring element in the Swedish mainstream news media as well. A total of 29 articles that mentions some form of charitable giving (including sponsorships) were found in the sample, *Expressen* once again dominating the content with almost two-thirds of the articles. Hans K. Rausing (including other family members) and

Ingvar Kamprad are the two billionaires who most frequently are associated with donating money. In the case of Hans K. Rausing, philanthropy is clearly represented as a sign of his rehabilitation after years of drug-abuse: “Free from drugs and with a new wife by his side, the Tetra Pak-billionaire has devoted his new life to philanthropy” (EX 2017-06-25). Throughout the year, *Expressen* writes a series of articles where this mantra is repeated:

A large share of the philanthropist Hans Rausing’s money has gone to charity.
(EX 2017-01-09)

Hans Rausing *is said* to donate *millions* of pounds to charity every year.
(EX 2017-06-25)

British Daily Mail has previously written that he is ‘*extremely generous*’
(EX 2017-08-12)

It is not uncommon that they run their own charities that donate *large sums* to selected purposes.
(EX 2017-08-20)

As emphasized in the italics, the degree of affinity (Fairclough 1992: 158) that accompanies *Expressen*’s statements leaves the audience with some gaps to fill in. First of all, what is to be regarded as “a large sum” of money? *Expressen* does not supply the readers with any substantial amount of how much money Hans K. Rausing actually has donated, nor how regularly these donations occur. The closest we get is an article referring to the *Daily Mail*, which claims to have revealed that Rausing’s charity has donated “some ten millions” to a charity run by Prince William and Prince Harry (EX 2017-06-25). This absence of information is imperative to highlight, because it exemplifies the lack of perspective that is typical in the reporting on the super-rich’s donations. “Some ten millions” of course comes off as a huge amount of money, but one has to consider that Hans K. Rausing is estimated to be worth approximately 2.6 billion SEK (*Veckans Affärer* 2017). Previous studies have shown that the rich actually pay less to charity, as a proportion of their income, compared to those on lower incomes (Breeze 2006; Gose 2012). When the news just report on “large sums” or refer to the super-rich as “extremely generous”, it may arguably serve to legitimize the super-rich as deserving their wealth due to their presumed charitable character (Connor & Rowlingson 2011). Even though the “sacrifice” they are making with their contribution might proportionally be rather insignificant.

It is also striking how the articles referring to the Rausing family as philanthropists also describe their luxurious residences. Sigrid Rausing’s house, which she bought for 200 million SEK, is described as “something as rare as a mansion in the center of London” (EX 2017-08-

20). One of the articles about Hans K. Rausing's is headlined "Here Rausing is building his new life in luxury", and describes how Rausing has bought a new place in London for 380 million SEK (paid in cash) after previously having resided in a mansion that included a cinema auditorium, a ballroom, a garage for six cars and a library (*EX* 2017-01-09). Since this luxurious consumption is not problematized in the articles, one can argue that the mentioning of philanthropy serves to legitimize the huge amount of money that the super-rich are spending on themselves. Thorup refers back to Thorstein Veblen's (1899) writings on the "conspicuous consumption" of the leisure class, but advocates that the growing economic inequality has made it harder for the wealthy to morally defend their consumption of luxury items. Thus, "the 'conspicuous consumption' must now be supplemented by conspicuous non-consumption in the form of charity in order for the consumption to be both legitimate and enjoyable" (Thorup 2013: 568). As long as they occasionally give something back to the community – and attract the news media's attention – the super-rich are free to continue their lavish spending without being questioned. Thus, the Swedish mainstream news media's way of discursively representing the super-rich as "pursuing the public good" (Edwards 2008: 82) may implicitly serve to legitimize the dominating neo-liberal economic policies that allow the billionaires to grow ever richer.

While being interviewed by the comedian Felix Herngren, Ingvar Kamprad explains his philanthropic awakening in a way similar to Rausing. Kamprad describes how he as a young man spent his money to attract women, but later in life decided that he would "try to help troubled people with the money I can spare" (*EX* 2017-04-30). The articles about Ingvar Kamprad's philanthropy provide more specific accounts regarding the size of his donations – but the discursive representation of the IKEA-billionaire is even more glorifying compared to the Rausing family. This could be because Kamprad's donations mostly go to the elderly. A project centered on creating activities for senior citizens results in the headlines "Kamprad gives 5 millions – wants to reduce loneliness" (*EX* 2017-02-07) and "Kamprad gives millions to elderly" (*AB* 2017-02-08). The former article displays a picture of Kamprad standing among senior citizens in a retirement home, spreading his arms in an almost Jesus-like manner (Figure 1).¹⁵ The image can showcase an ongoing trend where it is no longer enough

¹⁵ Considering that images constitute an important part of media text (Fairclough 1995), the present thesis did take them into consideration in the coding of the material (even though the time frame did not allow for a deeper systematic image analysis). Even though the images offered valuable insights to the analysis, the image of Kamprad (image A) is the only one that is brought up in the analysis.



Figure 1. Ingvar Kamprad visiting a retirement home in Älmhult (Screenshot from Expressen 2017-02-07, photo: Henrik Palmberg/Älmhults kommun).

to just give lavishly – the super-rich need to get “personally involved in the charitable acts” and “go out [and] feel a moral obligation and an emotional attachment to the ones getting the charity” (Thorup 2013: 567). The news media’s representation of Kamprad as a billionaire who “feel[s], engage[s] and participate[s]” (ibid.) is a recurring theme throughout the articles:

– Ingvar is *very active* and *passionate* about this.
(EX 2017-02-07)

– Ingvar is an amazing person and when he heard our proposal, I looked at him and saw that this was something he wanted to do. There really was a *flash of lightning in his eyes*.
(EX 2017-05-11)

The commitment in Silviabo is *highly personal* for him.

– He thinks that care for the elderly and life quality for the elderly is important, she says.
(AB 2017-05-14)

Minor linguistic details serve to further highlight the extent of Kamprad’s philanthropy. Sentences like “Kamprad *continues* to give away his money” (EX 2017-02-07) and “it [Kamprad’s philanthropy] is an activity that *only seems to increase*” (AB 2017-08-06) suggest both that the charitable giving has been going on for some time and that Kamprad is becoming all the more generous. The news media’s representation of Kamprad’s giving seemingly fits within Kendall’s “admiration frame”, where the media serves as “a public relations outlet for the wealthy, helping to smooth the rough edges of their business dealings

and (sometimes) unscrupulous acts by letting others know about their good deeds” (Kendall 2011: 34). The functionalization (van Leeuwen 2008: 42) of the super-rich in the articles raises the question why this representation (philanthropist) has been chosen over other available ones (e.g. capitalist). This choice could signify how the media text implicitly is working ideologically (Fairclough 1995: 14–15), in this case reproducing a neo-liberal logic.

To fully scrutinize the media discursive representations of Kamprad’s giving, one has to turn to the larger social context and ask what is absent in the articles. For one, there is no mentioning of the tax-cuts that has made the super-rich increasingly wealthy. When the media choose to admire Kamprad for his charitable giving without contextualizing it within the neo-liberal economic policies that have resulted in increasing economic inequality, the nature of philanthropy as an expression of “absurd inequality” (Thorup 2013: 568) becomes sidelined. This is especially important to acknowledge since the super-rich often have supported these reforms, for instance in 1997 when a number of Swedish billionaires led by H&M’s Stefan Persson threatened to leave the country if the government did not abolish the wealth tax (Sandberg 2017).

One could conceive this form of neo-liberalization as a three-step process. First, the super-rich demands tax-cuts from the government. Second, this leads to a weakening of the welfare state. Third, when the government no longer can supply enough welfare, the now increasingly wealthy super-rich step in to “save the poor” (e.g., by purchasing a new CT-scanner). Callahan proposes that:

It’s hardly far-fetched to think we’ve witnessed a brilliant power grab: First, the wealthy helped knock out government. Now, they’re taking more direct charge of society themselves, using philanthropy as a tool. (Callahan 2017: 285)

Horvath and Powell (2016: 121) argue that many private philanthropic actions contain “an implicit critique of the state, either with a disdain for its bureaucracy or a larger sense that government has become too cumbersome or slow to come up with new solutions”. When *Expressen* emotionally describes the hospital in Ljungby as a “smaller hospital that struggles in the shadow of the larger care units” and portrays how the county council has failed to grant their request for a new scanner, it is arguably an implicit critique of the local government. Other times, the critique is rather explicit. This is not least the case when *Svenska Dagbladet* interviews Antonia Ax:son Johnson after the billionaire has promised to donate 50 million

SEK to Stockholm School of Economics. Ax:son Johnson says that the decreasing respect for facts, knowledge and the media worries her. According to her, the solution to these problems is to be derived from the world of business:

She is convinced that neither politicians nor international organizations will solve the planet's big questions. This conviction has been strengthened after Donald Trump was elected President and chose to withdraw the USA from the Paris Agreement against climate change.
– It is definitely the corporations that can be the greatest driving force for change.
(SvD 2017-07-11)

This is where one starts to arrive at the core of how philanthrocapitalist discourses operates as part of the neo-liberalization of society. The super-rich do not necessarily oppose giving something back to the community – but many of them want to *individually* decide where their money is going. The state is dismissed as being unable to live up to the challenges and thus it is up to the corporations to save the planet through efficient and “anti-political problem-solving” (Thorup 2013: 568). There is something inherently ironic in that Ax:son Johnson uses Donald Trump to exemplify the shortcomings of the political system, considering that Trump is a businessman who has spent his entire life within the corporate sector. By claiming to represent the good in the battle for a brighter future, the moral question of economic inequality is once again being obfuscated.

The news media's representation of philanthrocapitalism could ideally serve as a gateway to criticizing the economic inequalities that exists in contemporary Sweden. Instead, the news media regularly chooses to paint flattering portraits of benign individuals. The only text where something that resembles a critique of philanthrocapitalism occurs in an opinion piece, in which the billionaire Bengt Ågerup's motives for avoiding taxation is criticized:

Bengt Ågerup namely wants to decide for himself where his money goes and in which country he should be taxed. This is the heart of the problem [...] Sweden, unlike the USA, has had a clear idea that the state should redistribute money through taxation. Politicians – not billionaires – decide how much money should go to health, schools, care, defense, police, railroads. (DN 2017-01-23)

This instability in the empirical material serves to highlight the absence of problematization that characterizes the news media's reporting on billionaire philanthropy. Philanthropy existed long before neo-liberal discourses were becoming increasingly hegemonic, but the news media's reporting on the phenomenon in its current form arguably obscures the underlying inequalities and implicitly justifies the super-rich as deserving their wealth. It should not be seen as a coincidence that billionaire philanthropy historically has been more

common in the USA (Lansley 2006: 166) where neo-liberal discourses have had their perhaps strongest foothold. Regardless of whether the philanthropy of the super-rich is driven by actual benevolence, guilt or a desire to avoid taxes – the mainstream media’s discursive representations are likely to manufacture consent for an increasingly individualized neo-liberal society. Edwards argues that we need to ask ourselves whether the existing inequalities are better fought by increasing philanthropy or by changing the current economic system. According to him, “equality is the foundation of all healthy and democratic relationships, and the key to a civil society in which everyone can participate”. We can either opt for more “meaningful redistribution” or hope for “larger crumbs from the rich man’s table” (Edwards 2008: 59).

6.2.2 “An act of love” – The super-rich as benevolent sponsors

As argued in the previous chapter, the super-rich regularly refuses to speak to the news media when the topic is not to their liking. This leads to a given follow-up question: under what conditions do they agree to give interviews? The above quoted interviews with Ingvar Kamprad and Antonia Ax:son Johnson (the only extensive ones that appeared in the sample) both centered on charitable giving. This would suggest that the super-rich are mostly keen to speak to the media when they get to talk about their own generosity. This thesis is confirmed when analyzing the articles in the sample that centers on sports sponsorship.

In a four-page feature simply headlined “The billionaires”, *Expressen* (2017-05-28) interviews four billionaires about their engagement in Swedish elite sports. The quartet consists of Rune Andersson (business leader), Charlotte Söderström (daughter of H&M’s Stefan Persson), Jakob Porsér (co-founder of Mojang) and Hans Wallenstam (owner of the property company Wallenstam). Considering that most billionaires in the sample did not speak directly to the news media during 2017, suddenly having four voices in the same article is a massive change of scenery. The banner kicks off the article by stating that many Swedish billionaires “are injecting huge amounts that are absolutely crucial to the survival of clubs and the careers of athletes”. The money is usually “paid in secrecy”, but now “four of the country’s richest persons choose to break the silence”. This breaking of silence appears logical from the perspective of Thompson’s (2005: 38) “society of self-disclosure”, where the elite can use the media to approach citizens by “selectively disclosing aspects of their lives and their character in a conversational or even confessional mode”. Contemplating that many ordinary people can relate to supporting a local sports team, displaying yourself as a patron

that brings joy to the people arguably has the potential of making you look favorable in the eyes of others. Apart from bringing good PR to your business, this selective disclosure can simultaneously help smooth over other morally questionable business dealings that one might be doing (Kendall 2011: 34).

It would be wrong to claim that the article is entirely uncritical of the billionaires' investments in the Swedish sporting landscape. The reporter has also interviewed a representative of the Swedish Sports Confederation who warns that rich people's engagement risks causing damage to sport clubs that outweighs the financial gains. However, the actual interviews with the billionaires mostly centers on their emotional investment. Rune Andersson, who sponsors the football team Trelleborgs FF with five millions, says that his engagement is "emotional", adding that "one has to realize that money is not everything in the world" (*EX* 2017-05-28). Jakob Porsér repeatedly stresses that his support for Lulea Hockey is entirely unconditional and that he only wants to "pay back" to the team that is "closest to his heart".

Two other articles, featuring interviews with top equestrians, praise the sponsorship of the super-rich. One equestrian refers to H&M's sponsorship as "an enormous security" (*EX* 2017-07-09) while another proclaims that "I am living my dream thanks to Antonia [Ax:son Johnson]" (*DN* 2017-07-12). The emphasis on the emotional engagement of the super-rich is also prevalent in a *Dagens Nyheter*-column, where the author applauds Antonia Ax:son Johnson, Astrid Ohlin and Charlotte Söderström's "unique" engagement in equestrian sport. The columnist exclaims that Swedish equestrian sport has "won the jackpot" by having the trio as financiers, and celebrates how their engagement is not part of a business strategy to make millions by selling the horses. The column also quotes an old interview with Ax:son Johnson, where the billionaire says: "Training and competing is actually the least profitable one can devote oneself to. In many ways you can call this [sponsorship] an 'act of love'" (*DN* 2017-12-26). Calling it "an act of love" suggests that Ax:son Johnson does not see any actual responsibility to engage in something that is not profitable to herself, but that she nonetheless benevolently chooses to do so. The phrasing neatly sums up the core of philanthrocapitalism: showing that one is emotionally attached to one's charitable giving (Thorup 2013). This does not imply that the super-rich are faking their support for the club or athlete receiving their money. But when the news media mostly produce articles celebrating the emotional engagement of the super-rich, existing economic inequalities once again run the risk of being obfuscated.

6.2.3 Summary

This section has analyzed how the news media represents the philanthropic character of the super-rich. With a few exceptions, the articles are unanimously positive and do not attempt to problematize the charitable acts. The celebration of benign philanthropists who step in where the state has failed is arguably part of the neo-liberalization of Swedish society, especially as the role of the super-rich in the dismantling of the welfare state is absent in the articles. As long as the super-rich act responsibly by giving something back to the community, their lavish consumption and economic superiority ostensibly become easier to accept. That is why it is hardly surprising that the super-rich to a great extent only choose to appear in the news media when they get to talk about their charitable giving. In conclusion, the news media's tendency to emphasize the charitable character of the super-rich may "serve to divert attention from structural accounts of society and change" (Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 446).

6.3 The VIP club

The red thread running through the final thematic field is the argument that while the news media do represent the super-rich as a privileged group, the overarching lack of explanatory perspectives and critique against these privileges contributes to naturalizing the current spectra of economic inequality. This argument will be developed throughout four sections: *comparison*, *socializing*, *inheritance* and *price tagging*.

6.3.1 Two billion hot dogs – Comparison

One of the most featured genres in the material is the top list. These lists work from a few different perspectives: The wealthiest Swedes (*AB* 2017-08-11a); the wealthiest aristocrats (*EX* 2017-07-25); the Swedes with the highest incomes (*DN* 2017-01-01) and the women with the highest incomes (*EX* 2017-12-17). Other articles in the sample refer more loosely to top lists without actually publishing the full ranking. This is not least the case in articles presenting which Swedes have made it onto global rankings of the wealthiest people on the planet. Here, the super-rich are explicitly referred to as *Swedish*, e.g. in terms of “Sweden’s foremost representative on the list” (*SvD* 2017-04-24) or “Two Swedes amongst the world’s 50 richest” (*SvD* 2017-02-12). This identification turns the super-rich into representatives for Sweden in a similar way as, for instance, Swedes figuring on the world ranking in tennis.

Speaking of tennis – it is striking how frequently the news media adopts metaphors from the world of sports when presenting the lists. *Dagens Nyheter* (2017-01-01) describes how Ane Uggla has “knocked out” the Swedish big shots on the stock exchange, and how she is “sailing high above the competition” in the “league of income”. *Expressen* (2017-03-28) describes how 31 Swedes have “qualified for” Forbes world ranking, and that Ingvar Kamprad has been “dropped” from the list that is currently “topped” by Bill Gates. These metaphors serve to construct wealth creation as a game played between the super-rich. For the most part, the wealth of the super-rich is just being compared internally – not with other social groups. This way of playfully referring to extreme wealth as a competition amongst the super-rich serves to obscure the full spectre of growing economic inequality, considering that “the causes of poverty cannot be separated from the causes of wealth” (Scott 1994: 18).

Hartley and Melrose (1999: 11–12) argue that a main reason as to why economic inequality persists is that people only have limited awareness regarding the magnitude of inequality.

Today, the gap has grown so vast that it is hard for anyone to grab it (Payne 2017). When the news media report on the wealth of the super-rich, the numbers are usually just reported in a neutral way without any comparative perspectives. On the few occasions when the news media do attempt to put the wealth of the super-rich into perspective, it is partly done in a somewhat humorous way:

Sten-Åke Lindholm is today worth 11 billion [Swedish] krona. For 11 billion krona you can buy 2.2 billion Billema-hotdogs. If you put the hotdogs in a row, they would be able to reach 11 laps around the globe.
(EX 2017-09-12)

This is what he [Ingvar Kamprad] can afford to buy:
– 59,5 Hallandsås Tunnels¹⁶
– 436 666 Tesla Model S
– 62 380 952 381 liters of milk
– 8 175 500 000 7,3 Big Mac-menus
(AB 2017-08-11a)

Even though these examples do highlight the absurdity of the billionaires' wealth, using hotdogs and Big Macs as examples hardly makes the inequality gap more tangible. More comprehensive comparisons do occur in the material as well, for instance accounts that the amounted wealth of the 178 Swedish billionaires is “more than twice the size of the Swedish state budget in 2017” (AB 2017-08-11a) or that the amounted wealth of the thirteen richest aristocrats amounts to “slightly more than half the size of the annual cost for Swedish health care” (EX 2017-07-23b). This notwithstanding, the extreme wealth is still not compared to the incomes and assets of, say, an average working-class citizen. The wealth may be depicted as “breathtaking” (ibid.) or “implausible” (DN 2017-01-01), but these descriptions still do not problematize inequality or explicitly question whether the super-rich deserve their wealth.

What the frequent recurrence of top lists also can be said to exemplify is how economic inequality is discursively represented as an individual concern. The top lists functions as a display window for the wealthiest individuals who are primarily compared with other wealthy individuals. This “reinterpretation of economic inequality from a collective experience to an individual” is one of the central changes that occur when a society is in a state of neo-liberalization (Mau 2015: 18). Instead of comparing themselves to the ones who clean their houses, the affluent are comparing themselves to other affluent people (Doring 2010: 125).

¹⁶ The Hallandsås Tunnel is a railway tunnel in southwestern Sweden.

Another example of this individualization is how some top lists are accompanied by articles which revolve around how the reader can become a billionaire (*AB* 2017-08-11a) or how to improve one's personal income (*EX* 2017-12-06b). Even though these accounts are not overtly represented in the material, they could be regarded as part of an ongoing trend where individual economic independence has come to be all the more desired. This trend is showcased by the rising number of books written on the subject in recent years (see Ström 2014; Bladh 2016; Laurintzson 2017) and by how "Financially Independent and Retiring Early" (FI/RE) has become somewhat of a trendy buzzword (Harding 2017). A quantitative search in the Swedish media archive, conducted as part of the present thesis, shows that the number of articles mentioning "economic independence" has more than three folded during the last decade.¹⁷ Even though the desire to achieve economic independence is not the same as the desire to become wealthy, this trend could still be seen as exemplifying how collective mobilizations against economic inequality have become sidelined in favor of individual self-improvement efforts (Mau 2015: 18).

At this point, it is imperative to point out that there do exist articles in the sample that are critical towards the super-rich and growing economic inequality. A review of a new book¹⁸ about the 15 richest families in Sweden is bombastically headlined "Unbridled flannel for the economic upper class" (*SvD* 2017-11-05). The reviewer laments that the book only supplies "indolent Wikipedia-presentations" that glorifies the super-rich while ignoring all instances where they have been subjected to criticism. The review further highlights the need to represent the super-rich in relation to economic inequality:

When writing a book about the richest families in Sweden in 2017, paying no attention whatsoever to the fact that economic inequality has gotten out of hand during the last decades is as hard to defend as writing a book about the world's largest oil corporations without mentioning how they affect the environment.
(*ibid.*)

An article in *Aftonbladet* (2017-11-05) about the increasing inequalities in health care offers a detailed account for the current trend. In a quite insightful manner, the reporter contemplates how "the development within society is often a slow process, imperceptible as we are living in the middle of the change". The article is also the only one in the sample where a sociologist is interviewed about the social effects of inequality. The argument that runs through the

¹⁷ The timeframe 1998–2007 encompassed 1562 articles, while the timeframe 2008–2007 encompassed 5 225.

¹⁸ Ström, A. (2017). *Svenska mäktigaste familjer*. Stockholm: Lind & Co.

article is that there exists a breaking point where a society can no longer stand more inequality. Bypassing this point will result in the collapse of solidarity. A set of articles also criticize the super-rich for dodging taxes, for instance an opinion piece in *Svenska Dagbladet* (2017-11-25) where it is described how Ingvar Kamprad, dubbed the “The master of tax planning”, allowed a “horde of solicitors” to build “a veritable Scrooge McDuck-vault” around his money.

However, despite these critical accounts, the news media do not evaluate any concrete solutions as to how inequality should be reduced – besides encouraging the super-rich to pay their taxes. This once again boils down the question of economic inequality to a neo-liberalized question of *individual* responsibility, not a question of collective action (Mau 2015). The individualization-discourse becomes more rampant when considering that many of the billionaires are described as having extra-ordinary characters. Interviewees describe Ingvar Kamprad as some one who “makes a difference *beyond the ordinary*” (SvD 2017-01-12), Melker Schörling as “something *out of the ordinary*” (DN 2017-10-27), Antonia Ax:son Johnson as someone with “*the courage* to challenge” (EX 2017-10-03a), while a columnist compares Niklas Zennström to Christopher Columbus (AB 2017-05-13). These accounts arguably help to further legitimize the super-rich as deserving their wealth based on their individual characters.

If one holds that the role of news media should not only be to identify problems, but also explore and value solutions to them (Champlin & Knoedler 2008: 136), it is problematic that the Swedish news media rarely moves beyond merely stating the problem of economic inequality. In the hegemonic struggle that is taking place in the material, discourses that either ignore the gap or frame it as an individual problem appear to be enjoying the upper hand against discourses stressing solidarity and redistribution of wealth.

6.3.2 The King and I – Socializing

Even though discourses constructing economic inequality as an individual concern are dominating the hegemonic struggle, this does not mean that the super-rich are exclusively referred to in individualized terms. On several occasions, the news media address them in collective terms such as “the economic overclass”; “the economic elite”; “the financial elite”; “the business elite”; and “a power group”. These findings correspond with the results from Kjærsgård’s (2015) study, which finds that “the rich” in Sweden were to a much greater

extent referred to as a “power elite” by the news media compared to their Danish counterparts. This representation of the super-rich as a group separate from the middle class is to be expected, considering the historical political economy of Sweden as a class society (ibid.: 5).

The articles describing the connection between the super-rich can be divided into three categories.¹⁹ The first one consists of red carpet-articles about weddings and parties where the elite socialize with each other. The second consists of articles describing the friendship between the super-rich. Within this category, it is striking how often the royal family makes an appearance. This is especially the case with the families of Stefan Persson and Melker Schörling, whose friendship with the royal family is continuously mentioned throughout the year. The articles further describe how the children of Persson and Schörling also have become close friends with the princesses, highlighting how “the friendship ties have clearly been inherited” (EX 2017-05-24). Finally, the third category consists of articles that mention how the super-rich function as board members of each other’s companies. Throughout the three categories, the private and professional networks amongst the super-rich are hardly problematized whatsoever.

This absence can be argued to be problematic from two perspectives. First, one could question why there does not exist a critical debate regarding the potential impacts these elite networks have on the workings of democracy. As already mentioned, the more powerful (and wealthy) the elites become, “the greater the danger that they undermine the democratic process” (Lansley 2006: 142). Instead of questioning the political impact of the networks, the news media mostly describes the friendship ties as a harmless and enviable form of socializing. The super-rich might be described as belonging to a powerful elite, but the news media are seemingly more interested in gazing at the spectacle of celebrity friendships instead of calling the existence of the elite into question. In this regard, it is not misleading to claim that the news media contributes to manufacturing consent for the powerful by delivering entertainment that serves to divert the public from the political dimension of inequality (Herman & Chomsky 1988: xi).

¹⁹ The articles within the first two categories are almost exclusively from *Expressen*, while the last category also includes articles from *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*.

Second, the super-rich's choice to socialize amongst each other could be regarded as part of their withdrawal into a "private" world where their participation in the public sphere becomes limited (Scott 1994: 154). While the term "social exclusion" is most often used to describe the effects of poverty (Lansley 2006: 203), several theorists argue that we should also speak of a voluntary self-exclusion where the wealthy choose to socially and physically isolate themselves (Barry 1998; Bauman 1999; Giddens 1998). Daniel Doring argues that the super-rich have become the most segregated group in contemporary society as a result of escapism from the moral dilemma of vast economic inequality. Surrounding themselves with their own peers allows the super-rich to escape into a fantasy world where they are "over-taxed, much aligned and misunderstood" (Doring 2010: 133). Divorced from the experience of "ordinary life", the risk is that the super-rich lose their sense of solidarity with the society that enabled them to build their wealth (Lansley 2006: 214). The exclusive networks of the super-rich could thus be serving a similar purpose as their silence in the press – both contribute to a social disengagement from society as part of what has been described as "the revolt of the elites" (Lasch 1995). Considering that this behavior has the potential of trickling down to the rest of the population, one could question why the news media do not problematize the existence of these social circles.

6.3.3 Passing the torch – Inheritance and succession

Scholars arguing for why many of today's super-rich do not deserve their wealth tend to point out that a large proportion of the super-rich have earned their wealth through inheritance, which hardly can be seen as compatible with the meritocratic (and neo-liberal) rhetorics of hard work, free competition and merit (Lansley 2006: 208; Connor & Rowlingson 2011: 440). Logically, inheritance and succession pose a legitimacy problem for wealthy families wishing to pass the torch on to the next generation. Hence, the ideals of the family business have to be adjusted to the "hegemonic ideals" of the market (Pedroso de Lima 2000: 41).

When discursively representing inheritance and succession, the news media operates with an array of metaphors to describe these processes:

Advancing one's position; Accepting more responsibility; Taking a seat; Taking one step up; Changing of the guard; Handing over; Handing over the baton; Having gained more influence; Taking over; Filling the gap; Taking the lead.

Only on a few occasions do the news media actually use the word “inheritance” to describe how power is passed on from one generation to the next (see *EX* 2017-07-23a). By instead opting to use metaphors, the controversy surrounding the word “inheritance” is bypassed and the change-of-generation becomes naturalized as a positive process. This is further established by phrases expressing a high degree of affinity, such as “*It is not strange* that Märta and Sofia Schörling enters several of the Schörling-sphere’s boards” (*SvD* 2017-07-02) and “Christina Stenbeck was *the natural* heir to the throne” (*AB* 2017-07-24). These metaphors and modal choices made by the Swedish news media’s thus serve to “reduce the complexity” (Fairclough 1992: 196) regarding the issue of inheritance.

The representation of inheritance as a positive process that occurs naturally is also evident in the frequent appearance of the word “long-sightedness”. This wording is particularly used in articles advocating that family businesses, made from “flesh and blood”, are more reliable than other companies due to their “long-sightedness, experience and drive” (*SvD* 2017-08-28).²⁰ “Long-sightedness” also occurred in Bernhardtson’s (2013: 230) interview study with business owners, suggesting that super-rich prefer this wording to be used instead of the more controversially charged “inheritance”. The news media have seemingly adopted the discourse, thus contributing to legitimizing the process of inheriting wealth.

The articles mentioning long-sightedness occurs most frequently in *Svenska Dagbladet*, which should not be surprising considering its conservative profile. Many of these articles further describe the competence of the successors, arguing that they possess the right qualities and experience to take over the company:

Many of the children to these company leaders *have been fed* with this at the dinner table.
(*SvD* 2017-03-30a).

Rune Andersson, Melker Schörling and Fredrik Lundberg *have systematically educated* the new generation.
(*SvD* 2017-03-30b)

She [Louise Lindh] knows the company well, has *a solid experience* and *knowledge*, as well as a high level of energy.
(*EX* 2017-05-14a).

²⁰ A counter-argument is that “long-sightedness” instead could be referring to the fact that some big family companies are not launched on the stock market, which makes them less dependent on delivering positive results on a quarterly-basis. However, considering that long-sightedness is used to describe the succession within companies such as H&M and Melker Schörling – who have been on the stock exchange – the term arguably does not only signify the advantages of being off-exchange.

It is here one finds the intersection between the neo-liberal ideas of market rationality and the super-rich families desire to hang on to their wealth. In order to legitimate the succession, the new generation today needs to fulfill the meritocratic criteria by appearing as the most competent people to lead the company into the future. However, as argued by Antónia Pedroso de Lima (2000), claiming that family members are recruited to the top of company under the principles of equal opportunity is dubiously a fair conclusion. Besides passing on knowledge that is learned inside the family, the significant capital of the wealthy gives them access to the most prestigious schools. Due to the restrained access to these exclusive social and relational capitals, the family “guarantee their member’s access to high managerial positions and, thus, informally, impede the entrance of outsiders” (ibid.: 43). The liberal and conservative news media’s discursive representations of the successors as the most competent ones thus obfuscate the economic and social inequalities that pave the way for acquiring this presumed competence.

The overarching absence of critique is yet again made visible when one searches for silence in “cracks, breaches and faults” in the material (Orlandi 1994/1996: 42, quoted from von Münchow 2018: 224). In a book review in *Dagens Nyheter* that philosophizes on the essence of power, the writer recalls an article from *Svenska Dagbladet* that has reported how three billionaires, with an amounted wealth of 900 billion SEK, “will soon be passing the torch to daughters and sons”:

The little twist “will soon passing the torch” gnaws like a rat in my head. I cannot get rid of the formulation. The cruelty, the given fact and the brutality in the same sentence.
(DN 2017-04-07)

A final point regarding the discursive representation of inheritance should come from a gender perspective. Even though this thesis does not explicitly discuss the super-rich through an intersectional lens, it would be indefensible not to address that the vast majority of the billionaires appearing on *Veckans Affärer*’s list are white men. The wealth of all the women who appeared in the sample is due to inheritance, suggesting that wealth creation in Sweden – like in the UK (Lansley 2006: 140) – has remained an almost exclusive male endeavor under “the fair competition” of neo-liberalism. Thus, this enormous gender asymmetry could pose a legitimacy problem for the neo-liberal economic logics.

One of the more unexpected findings in the material was how the liberal and conservative news media are using the female inheritors as a way of displaying how the top of the corporate ladder is becoming fairer. An article in *Svenska Dagbladet* (2017-07-02) describes how whereas family businesses with only daughters used to recruit men from outside the family to run the company, they have now “seemingly become aware of that it is the year 2017”. In another article, headlined “The financial daughters are taking over”, Suzanne Sandler, CEO of StyrelseAkademien in Stockholm, makes a similar point: “the ones who became chairmen the old way became that because they knew the right people” (EX 2017-05-14a). A portrait of Ane Uggla recycles a quote from an interview in 2013, where Uggla explains how her father during a joint trip to Sweden “discovered his daughter’s sharp brains” and that “girls also can” (EX 2017-07-25).

These depictions arguably represent a neo-liberalized view of gender equality, where the concept becomes equated with counting how many men and women are occupying different positions of power. This individualistic reasoning obfuscates complicated power relations and aggravates feminist perspectives that advocate for political mobilization (Fahlgren et al. 2016: 55–56). It further showcases the flexibility of neo-liberal practices, supporting Harvey’s (2005: 19) claim that “when neoliberal principles clash with the need to restore or sustain elite power, then the principles are either abandoned or become so twisted as to be unrecognizable”. Thus, these discourses in the news media serve to strengthen the construction of a neo-liberal hegemony.

6.3.4 Raising the bar – Price tagging

A final aspect that serves to represent the super-rich as a privileged VIP club is accounts of their conspicuous consumption. These depiction – which predominantly appear in *Expressen*’s articles about the Persson and Rausing families – mainly describe the luxurious residences of the super-rich, often including a price tag informing the reader how much the residence has cost (see EX 2017-09-12; EX 2017-01-09). Kendall (2011: 43) describes price tagging as a very popular storytelling device, because “it both entertains and shocks media audiences with the expensive spending habits of the wealthy”. Simultaneously, price tagging sets the wealthy apart from the rest of the population by excluding them from elite settings.

It would be misguided to claim that luxurious consumption is celebrated in the material. For instance, Ingvar Kamprad’s stinginess is highlighted in positive terms on more than one

occasion (*SvD* 2017-05-29; *EX* 2017-04-30). This notwithstanding, the price tagging-articles mostly report neutrally on the costs of the luxurious residences. Considering the claims that the rich “set the fashion which become the styles sought after by the mass of the population” (Townsend 1979: 367), this absence of critique could be deemed problematic. Instead of trickle-down economics, Joseph Stiglitz advocates that we should be talking about *trickle-down behaviorism* where the ones at the bottom aspires to imitate the ones above them in the economic hierarchy. This, according to him, helps explain why so many Americans are living beyond their economic means (Stiglitz 2012: 104–105). As it has been argued that rising economic inequality leads people to take more risky choices in order to meet the rising standards (Payne 2017: 75), *Expressen*’s choice to uncritically feed the audience with images of the luxurious lifestyles of the super-rich could further widen the inequality gap.

Price tagging the cost of the super-rich’s luxury residences is not a new media phenomenon (Kendall 2011: 48). However, the neo-liberalization of the news media that has made them increasingly reliant on revenues from advertisement could surely contribute to strengthening these discourses, considering that price tagging in the media could be seen as a strategy for encouraging consumption (ibid.: 51). While there in recent years have occurred scandals where members of the Swedish business elite have been heavily criticized in the news media for spending company money on personal extravaganzas (most famously the SCA-scandal of 2014²¹), the super-rich are ostensibly rather free to shop conspicuously as long as they use their own money.

6.3.5 Summary

This chapter has argued that while the news media do describe the super-rich as a privileged group of VIP’s, these privileges are – with a few exceptions – rarely problematized or linked to the mechanisms contributing to increasing economic inequality. While Doring (2010: 190) has argued that it is only through interclass marriage that inequality is maintained over time, I argue that private and professional networks and inheritance also play vital roles in keeping the wealth within a closed circle (Hartley & Melrose 1999: 51). The fact that the super-rich are mostly compared with each other, and that their price tagged luxurious mansions are not deemed as symptoms of a problematic unequal society, further serves to obfuscate the growing economic inequality brought along by the neo-liberalization of Sweden

²¹ The scandal revealed several instances where top executives and board members of SCA (Swedish Cellulose Company) had used the company’s money and corporate planes for personal ventures.

7. Concluding discussion

Last year, the Greens-European Free Alliance revealed how the furniture giant [IKEA], through shoveling money around between different parts of the company, has avoided paying taxes of almost 10 billion SEK during the previous six years. *Nonetheless, the Swedes seem to forgive Ingvar Kamprad for anything.* (DN 2017-11-25)

The main argument running through this thesis has been that the road towards increasing economic inequality is deeply worrying, and that social mobility and democracy will be the prime victims if the current trend is not reversed. While there is much debate about how poverty should be fought and why governments are struggling to supply welfare to its citizens, the mechanisms allowing the super-rich to pull away from the rest are rarely called into question. In order for the debate on economic inequality to be constructive and fair, it is imperative to acknowledge that the super-rich “do not live on a separate planet” from the rest (Lansley 2006: 201). Thus, the discussion regarding the problems of poverty and inequality is incomplete without asking whether we are not simultaneously experiencing “a problem of riches” (Orton & Rowlingson 2007).

The discursive representations of the super-rich in this study suggest that these questions are rarely asked in the Swedish mainstream news media. The super-rich are depicted as a secret community that are reluctant to speak to the media, and prefers to hide inside their luxurious gated mansions away from the gaze of the masses. When they do grace us with their appearance, it is often connected to a charitable event where they get to present themselves as benign philanthropists. The super-rich socialize and network primarily amongst each other, and when reaching old age, they pass on their companies and fortunes to the next generation.

In line with the aim of the project, this thesis’ focus on the super-rich supplies contextual knowledge that contributes to enriching our understanding of economic inequality and how the issue is mediated to the public. I argue that the Swedish news media are implicitly legitimizing the billionaires as mostly deserving their wealth, mainly due to the overall absence of problematization of the super-rich’s astronomical assets. This deservingness is further highlighted in the articles about their charitable acts, where the philanthropic ventures – to rephrase Thorup (2013: 568) – are described as expressions of “extreme charity” rather than “absurd inequality”. Thus, these discursive representations of philanthrocapitalism reproduce neo-liberal discourses by celebrating individuals whom step in when government has failed, ignoring the fact that the increasing wealth of the super-rich and the dismantling of

the welfare state are parts of the same economic processes (Bauman 1998). The donations are not put into perspectives in relation to the super-rich net worth, nor do the news media raise the question of *why* the donations are increasing in times of growing economic inequality. Neo-liberal discourses are also traceable in the articles about succession, where metaphors, modal choices and the choice of vocabulary (“long-sightedness” instead of “inheritance”, “competence” instead of “socioeconomical privilege”) serves to construct the transmission of wealth and power as both rational and taken-for-granted. Acknowledging these predominantly positive or neutral representations of the super-rich in the news media enriches our knowledge of why there exists relatively little resistance against the politics that allow for an increasingly unequal society.

The visibility management of the super-rich could – in my own wording – be described as a “struggle for invisibility”, suggesting that the super-rich do not conceive participating in the public sphere as necessary for the legitimization of their wealth. Even though the news media occasionally highlight their silence, e.g. by explicitly writing out the billionaires’ argument for not giving interviews, they overall settle for questionable arguments (e.g. the super-rich want to live “a normal life”) without further problematizing these statements. Considering that the silencing of uncomfortable topics plays a vital role in hegemonic struggles (Clair 1998: 52), the news media’s acceptance of the super-rich’s reluctance to talk about their wealth discursively shifts the discussion away from the moral aspects of economic inequality. Thus, vital parts of the social practice of neo-liberalization – the increasing social inequalities and the restoring of power to an economic elite (Harvey 2005: 16, 19) – are being obfuscated.

The attentive reader has probably noticed that some billionaires have been more prevalent in the analysis than others (see Appendix A). This is because the news media pay a varying degree of attention to different billionaires. While in some cases the asymmetry might be explained by the limited timeframe of the study²², in the case of one particular billionaire it is simply not. Frederik Paulsen Jr, the owner of Ferring Pharmaceuticals, only appeared twice in

²² The sample provided surprisingly few articles about the three tech billionaires Daniel Ek, Markus Persson and Niklas Zennström. One should, however, not draw too many conclusions regarding their newsworthiness based on their absence in 2017. A brief search in the media archive showed that the previous years supplied several articles about the trio that would have been deemed relevant for a study of economic inequality. Even though their absence is not discussed further, the fact that Persson and Zennström have both sold their companies and moved on to venture capital financing could suggest that newsworthiness drops when the billionaire is no longer active in the business that sparked their financial success.

the sample. In fact, he has only appeared a mere ten times in the four newspapers since 2010, and furthermore, his appearances have been limited to top lists. Paulsen's absence suggests that the super-rich have to meet certain criteria in order to be considered newsworthy, such as: owning a company that the audience can relate to (e.g. IKEA/H&M); residing in Sweden (alternatively, the fashionable parts of London); socializing with the royal family; being a renown philanthropist; getting ready for a change-of-generation; being self-made, or, being an anomaly among billionaires (i.e. a woman). The fact that Paulsen do not meet these criteria apparently makes him uninteresting for the news media. Considering that Paulsen's 60 billion SEK undisputedly provides him with a position for exercising a considerable amount of power, one could certainly question why being super-rich in itself is not enough to be considered newsworthy.

It is striking how a lot of recent work on visibility management has dealt with how sexual minorities or interracial partners disclose their behavior in order to protect themselves from homophobia or racism (see Steinbugler 2012; D'haese et. al: 2016; Twist et. al 2017). In a somewhat bizarre mirror image, the super-rich's struggle for invisibility display a similar strategy where their enormous privilege (their wealth) is perceived as a stigma that threatens their safety (Bernhardtson 2013: 183). While the super-rich's choice to socially exclude themselves from society (e.g. through only socializing with each other, not talking to the media) might explicitly be motivated by the fear of kidnapping, it could also be seen as a way of escaping an increasingly unequal world. If the news media allow the super-rich to socially disengage and remain silent, the discussion about economic inequality could risk being only centered on those who are visible. This could explain why, following Bauman's (1998: 97–98) logic, people more easily become hostile towards the “vagabonds” (e.g. the refugee, the beggar) as these become visible symbols – and subsequently scapegoats – for the economic insecurity that a rising number of people are experiencing in today's society. As economic inequality makes the ones at the losing end become more fearful of each other (Doring 2010: 7), the news media's responsibility for putting the super-rich into focus could play an important role in combatting xenophobia and racism.

When the issue of economic inequality is explicitly mentioned in the Swedish news media, it is represented as bringing along undesirable consequences. However, these accounts are so few that they mostly serve to highlight the absence of problematization and contextualization that characterizes the vast majority of the articles about the super-rich. The content is thus

rather paradoxical: if economic inequality is deemed as problematic, why do the articles about the luxurious mansions and charity not reflect this? This study shows why researchers adopting a CDA-perspective should not only focus on the linguistic elements that are present in the text, but look towards the social context and ask why certain representations are absent (Taylor & Schröter 2018). Furthermore, the study confirms previous findings that news media rarely evaluate or explore any tangible solutions to how economic inequality should be fixed (Champlin & Knoedler 2008), with the exception of a few neo-liberal appeals encouraging the super-rich to take their individual responsibility and pay their taxes. The few cracks that disrupt the overarching representations mostly serve to highlight the absence of a hegemonic struggle. In the Swedish news media, explicit and implicit discourses following neo-liberal logics are clearly on top of the order of discourse. I argue that acknowledging these logics can help explaining why the representations of the super-rich predominantly are rather uncritical.

Considering that neo-liberal logics affect both the *practice* of journalism (e.g. fewer employed journalists, focus on profitable entertainment) and the *content* of journalism (neo-liberal logics affecting the representations), it would be imperative for the news media to find a model that is less occupied with profit-seeking, and more with advancing its relationship with democracy (Fenton 2011: 70). Ideally, articles about the super-rich could serve as a fruitful gateway for a more fair and constructive debate on the morals and mechanisms maintaining a vast unequal society. As it is for now, the Swedish news media are clearly more interested in gazing at the spectacle of the super-rich than critically examining them. If the relative economic equality – in the context of world history – that has characterized the last two generations is not to become “a historical aberration” (Lansley 2006: xvi), the news media need to take its democratic responsibility and reverse these priorities.

Suggestions for further research

In order to fully utilize the CDA-toolbox for studying ideological change, it would be of value to investigate a larger timeframe to see whether the representations of the super-rich alter as neo-liberal discourses become increasingly hegemonic. As previous work on the power of silence has been centered on the political elite, it would also be valuable to scrutinize how the silence of the super-rich during scandals affects the audience’s perception of them. In general, the lack of attention paid towards economic inequality within the field of media and communications is remarkable, and an “economic turn” is needed to broaden our understanding of why economic inequality continues to grow despite its well-known hazards.

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9. Sources

The source corpus is fully accessible online via the Swedish Press Archive Retriever. Not every media text was quoted above, however, they were all analyzed and served as a basis for the analysis.

Outlet	Date	Original title	English translation (by author)
Aftonbladet	2017-01-12	Kvotering på Börsen	Quotas on the stock exchange
Aftonbladet	2017-01-21	Här tar de farväl av vår första yuppie	Here they bid farewell to our first yuppie
Aftonbladet	2017-02-08	Kamprad skänker miljoner till äldre	Kamprad gives millions to the elderly
Aftonbladet	2017-04-10	Här dog Chris, 41	Here Chris, 41, died
Aftonbladet	2017-04-28	Superparet vill köpa miljardvillan	The super-couple wants to buy the billion-house
Aftonbladet	2017-05-13	Nej, Frankrike kommer inte att gå sönder	No, France will not fall apart
Aftonbladet	2017-05-14	”Jag tänkte på min mamma”	“I was thinking about my mother”
Aftonbladet	2017-06-22	Kassörskan skattar mer – än ägaren	The cashier pays higher taxes than the owner
Aftonbladet	2017-06-23	Ska rika betala mindre i skatt?”	Should the rich pay less in taxes
Aftonbladet	2017-06-26	Ett paradiset för de rikaste	A paradise for the richest
Aftonbladet	2017-07-03	V har en gyllene chans	V has a golden chance
Aftonbladet	2017-07-18	Amazons ägare på väg att gå om Bill Gates som världens rikaste person	Amazon’s owner on route to surpassing Bill Gates as the world’s richest person
Aftonbladet	2017-07-24	Här är svenska miljonärers sommarparadis	Here are the Swedish millionaire’s summer paradises
Aftonbladet	2017-08-06	Svårare än du tror att ge bort pengar	Harder than you think to give away money
Aftonbladet	2017-08-11a	De är rikast i riket – äger två biljoner	They are the richest in the realm – owns two trillions
Aftonbladet	2017-08-11b	Hennes pappa vill stoppa svenska miljardärens bok	Her dad wants to stop the Swedish billionaire’s book
Aftonbladet	2017-08-14	I SD:s kulisser	In the wings of SD
Aftonbladet	2017-09-21	Mångmiljonär – behåller allt	Multimillionaire – keeps it all
Aftonbladet	2017-11-03	Upplevelser – när man redan äger allt	Experiences – when you already own everything
Aftonbladet	2017-11-05	43 000 kronor för att få veta om du är frisk	43 000 SEK to find out if you are healthy
Aftonbladet	2017-11-10	Varför låter eliten som skolkande högstadietjejer	Why does the elite sound like senior level boys playing hooky

Aftonbladet	2017-12-01	Ingvar Kamprad felaktigt dödförklarad av SR: Förberedde en runa	Ingvar Kamprad wrongly declared dead by SR: Prepared an obituary
Aftonbladet	2017-12-07	Borde fler göra som Ingvar Kamprad?	Should more be doing like Ingvar Kamprad?
Aftonbladet	2017-12-08	Kamprads gåva till Ljungby Lasarett	Kamprad's gift to Ljungby hospital
Dagens Nyheter	2017-01-01	Hon tjänade mest förra året	She earned the most last year
Dagens Nyheter	2017-01-16	Birgitta Forsberg: "Inte underligt att Marie Ehrling lämnar Nordea"	Birgitta Forsberg: "It is not strange that Marie Ehrling leaves Nordea"
Dagens Nyheter	2017-01-23	Birgitta Forsberg: "Miljardären Ågerup borde klara att skatta i Sverige"	Birgitta Forsberg: "The billionaire Ågerup should be able to tax in Sweden"
Dagens Nyheter	2017-02-01	Långsam omställning för H&M:s näthandel	Slow shift for H&M's online shopping
Dagens Nyheter	2017-04-07	Smart debut. Tajt klassresa i universitetsvärlden	Clever debut. Tight class trip in the university world
Dagens Nyheter	2017-04-11	De föll offer för vansinnesdådet	They fell victims to the mad deed
Dagens Nyheter	2017-05-26	Den hemlige makthavaren: Doldisen Fredrik Olsson är chef över alla H&M:s butiker	The secret powerholder: The anonymous Fredrik Olsson runs all of H&M's stores
Dagens Nyheter	2017-06-07	Birgitta Forsberg: "Tänk efter före, Björn Wahlroos"	Birgitta Forsberg: "Think after before, Björn Wahlroos"
Dagens Nyheter	2017-06-10	Kändistät temavecka på Grand	Celebrity packed theme week at Grand
Dagens Nyheter	2017-07-12	Varje häst är en ny utmaning	Every horse is a new challenge
Dagens Nyheter	2017-08-22	AP Møller-Mærsk dumpar oljan	AP Møller-Mærsk dumps the oil
Dagens Nyheter	2017-09-15	Sveriges 15 rikaste familjer kartlagda	Sweden's 15 richest families mapped
Dagens Nyheter	2017-10-27	Från hyllad börschef till brottsmisstänkt	From celebrated exchange manager to crime suspect
Dagens Nyheter	2017-11-15	Finansdöttrarna vill fortsätta vara doldisar	The finance daughters want to remain hidden
Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-03	Varumärket Zlatan skulle tjäna på att sponsra en kvinnlig ryttare	The Brand Zlatan would benefit from sponsoring a female equestrian
Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-05	Språkpris till Kamprad	Language award to Kamprad

Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-19	Ikea: Vi har följt EU-regler om skatter	Ikea: We have followed EU-laws regarding taxation
Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-22	Frantzén. Sublim verklighetsflykt som störs av städning och skamliga förslag	Frantzén. Sublime escapism bothered by cleaning and shameful suggestions.
Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-23	Modegurun som klär folket	The fashion guru who dresses the people
Dagens Nyheter	2017-12-26	Nu krävs en annan strategi än tre affärskvinnors unika driv	Now another strategy than the unique drive of three businesswomen is needed
Expressen	2017-01-08a	Paren med högst inkomst i landet	The couples with the highest incomes in the country
Expressen	2017-01-08b	Rysk affärsman pressar Kamprad på 18 miljarder	Russian businessman presses Kamprad for 18 billions
Expressen	2017-01-08c	Rausings väg tillbaka in i societeten	Rausing's way back into high society
Expressen	2017-01-09	Här bygger Rausing upp sitt nya liv i lyx	Here Rausing is rebuilding his life in luxury
Expressen	2017-01-10a	Spotify's fräcka invit till Obama	Spotify's cheeky invite to Obama
Expressen	2017-01-10b	Ikeachefen: Jag orkade till slut inte ljuga längre	The Ikea boss: In the end I did not manage to lie anymore
Expressen	2017-01-15	Candy Crush en succé för staten	Candy Crush a success for the state
Expressen	2017-01-21	Kungaparet tog ett känslösamt farväl	The Royal couple bid an emotional farewell
Expressen	2017-02-05	Stefan Perssons lyxgods på landsbygden	Stefan Persson's luxury manor in the countryside
Expressen	2017-02-07	Kamprad skänker 5 miljoner – vill minska ensamheten	Kamprad gives 5 millions – wants to reduce loneliness
Expressen	2017-03-24	Persson på plats 43 på Forbes lista	Persson on place 43 on Forbe's list
Expressen	2017-03-25	Slaget om Hälsingland	The battle for Hälsingland
Expressen	2017-03-28	Victorias tätaste vänner	Victoria's richest friends
Expressen	2017-03-31	Nu bryter Noppes familj traditionen	Noppe's family is now breaking the tradition
Expressen	2017-04-06	Åhléns ägare om attacken: Onskedåd	Åhlén's owner about the attack: A deed of evil
Expressen	2017-04-10	Chris dog i attacken	Chris died in the attack
Expressen	2017-04-12	De andra dösoffren i attacken	The other casualties in the attack
Expressen	2017-04-23	Spotify-grundaren ensam på Times top 100-lista	The founder of Spotify alone on Time's top 100-list
Expressen	2017-04-30	Kamprads tårar för döde vännen	Kamprad's tears for the dead friend
Expressen	2017-05-07	93-årige miljardären vill bli kungen av E6	The 93-year-old billionaire wants to be king of the E6

Expressen	2017-05-11	Kamprads gåva till Silvia efter hemliga mötet	Kamprad's gift to Silvia after the secret meeting
Expressen	2017-05-14a	Finansdöttrarna – Nu tar de över	The finance daughters – Now they are taking over
Expressen	2017-05-14b	Silvia om Mammans sjukdom: ”Hon blev så rädd”	Silvia about her Mom's illness: “She became so frightened”
Expressen	2017-05-17	Supervimmel när Resumé korade super-vinnarna	Super crowded when Resumé elected the super winners
Expressen	2017-05-19	Petter Stordalen om: Maktbalansen med Gunhild. Hyllningen till Ingvar Kamprad	Petter Stordalen on: The power balance with Gunhild. The tribute to Kamprad.
Expressen	2017-05-24	Victorias vän Sofia tog makt i pappas bolag	Victoria's friend Sofia took power in dad's company
Expressen	2017-05-26	”Jag var lite rädd för Kamprad”	“I was a little afraid if Kamprad”
Expressen	2017-05-28	Miljardärerna	The billionaires
Expressen	2017-06-04	Ruths kärlek: 29 år yngre Ulf	Ruth's love: Ulf, 29 years younger
Expressen	2017-06-06	Hagasessans föräldrar drömde om en pojke	The parents of Hagasessan dreamed about a boy
Expressen	2017-06-19	Kamprads matsuccé: 18 miljarder kronor	Kamprad's food success: 18 billion SEK
Expressen	2017-06-25	Rausing gav bort tiotals miljoner till prinsarnas stiftelse	Rausing gave away some ten millions to the princes' foundation
Expressen	2017-07-08	Historierna kring Falsterbo Horse Show	The stories around Falsterbo Horse Show
Expressen	2017-07-09	Veteranen Malin Baryard-Johnsson om	The veteran Malin Baryard-Johnsson on
Expressen	2017-07-13	50 miljoner för att skapa möten	50 millions to create meetings
Expressen	2017-07-19	Minecraft-miljardären tar ut 365 miljoner ur sitt företag	The Minecraft-billionaire withdraws 365 millions from his company
Expressen	2017-07-23a	Bröderna Douglas öden: Stormrik och utblottad	The faith of the Douglas brothers: extremely wealthy and indigent
Expressen	2017-07-23b	Så lever Sveriges adelsfamiljer	This is how Sweden's aristocracy families live
Expressen	2017-07-25	Ane Ugglas tjänade nästan en miljard – på ett år	Ane Ugglas earned almost a billion – in a year
Expressen	2017-07-31	Rausing släpper avslöjande bok om det tragiska familjeödet	Rausing releases revealing book about the tragic fate of the family
Expressen	2017-08-12	Bitter familjefejd i klanen Rausing	Bitter family feud in the Rausing clan

Expressen	2017-08-14	Sigrid Rausing vädjade till Eva: ”Du är mycket sjuk”	Sigrid Rausing pleaded to Eva: “You are very ill”
Expressen	2017-08-15	Hans Rausing's ord till domstolen efter hustrun Evas död	Hans Rausing's word to the court after the death of his wife Eva
Expressen	2017-08-20	Så lever släkten Rausing idag	This is how the Rausing family lives today
Expressen	2017-09-04	Hans Rausing vägrar att läsa systemens bok	Hans Rausing refuses to read his sister's book
Expressen	2017-09-08	Ikea-chefen ska rädda Claes Ohlson	The Ikea-boss shall save Claes Ohlson
Expressen	2017-09-09	Nordens mäktigaste finansman är en mix av Wallenberg och Gyllenhammar	The most powerful financier of the Nordic countries is a mixture of Wallenberg and Gyllenhammar
Expressen	2017-09-12	Louise, 27, är den okända arvingen till Biltema”	Louise, 27, is the unknown heiress to Biltema
Expressen	2017-09-28	H&M-miljardären Stefan Perssons hemliga 70-årsfest	The H&M-billionaire Stefan Persson's secret 70-years-party
Expressen	2017-10-03a	Stefan, Karin och Eva fick pris för mänskligheten	Stefan, Karin and Eva received awards for humanitarianism
Expressen	2017-10-03b	H&M-miljardären Stefan Perssons hemliga husköp: 135 miljarder kronor	The H&M-billionaire Stefan Persson's secret house purchase: 135 billion SEK
Expressen	2017-10-04a	Ikea:s dolda makthavare om Kamprads sorg och oron för framtiden	Ikea's secret powerholder about Kamprad's sorrow and worry for the future
Expressen	2017-10-04b	Stefan Perssons okända liv som engelsk pubägare	Stefan Persson's unknown life as English pub owner
Expressen	2017-10-07a	H&M-sonen gifte sig i hemlighet i privata byn	The H&M-son got married in secret in the private village
Expressen	2017-10-07b	Snart kan du skaffa en IKEA-gran till jul	Soon you can purchase an IKEA-spruce for Christmas
Expressen	2017-10-08	Veckans pubägare	Pub owner of the week
Expressen	2017-10-10a	Fjäskta lagom för Spotify, politiker	Suck up to Spotify best you wish, politicians
Expressen	2017-10-10b	Läs en bok vd:ar	Read a book CEOs
Expressen	2017-10-12	Knut Kuntsson: Lite Kamprad-varning på mig	Knut Kuntsson: A bit of a Kamprad warning on me
Expressen	2017-10-17a	Kamprad nobbade firandet	Kamprad brushed off the celebrations
Expressen	2017-10-17b	H&M:s Stefan Persson firade 70	H&M's Stefan Persson celebrated 70
Expressen	2017-10-18	Nöjd GW på miljardärsfest	Satisfied GW at billionaire's party

Expressen	2017-10-22	Veckans bilder	Images of the week
Expressen	2017-11-12	Ian Wachtmeister var rebell till sin död	Ian Wachtmeister was a rebel until his death
Expressen	2017-11-15	Döttrarnas svåra beslut efter Melker Schörlings sjukdom	The daughters' difficult decision after Melker Schörling's illness
Expressen	2017-11-20	Wallströms ilska mot toppcheferna	Wallström's anger towards the top directors
Expressen	2017-12-01	SR dödförklarade Ingvar Kamprad – av misstag	SR declared Ingvar Kamprad dead – by mistake
Expressen	2017-12-06a	Kamprads julklapp: Alla anställda får 13 000 kronor var	Kamprad's Christmas present: All employees receive 13 000 SEK each
Expressen	2017-12-06b	De tjänar bäst där du bor	They earn the most where you live
Expressen	2017-12-09	Sjukhuset räddas av Kamprad	The hospital is saved by Kamprad
Expressen	2017-12-10a	Veckans snackisar	Talk of the week
Expressen	2017-12-10b	Löneklyftan krymper – sakta	The wage gap is shrinking – slowly
Expressen	2017-12-17	Kvinnorna som tjänar mest	The women who make the most
Expressen	2017-12-19	Ikea undvek skatt på 1 miljard euro	Ikea avoided taxation for 1 billion euros
Expressen	2017-12-30	H&M-arvingen Nils skiljer sig från Clara – efter tre år	The H&M-heir Nils is divorcing Clara – after three years
Expressen	2017-12-31	H&M-Perssons svarta år	H&M-Persson's dark year
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-01-02	Näringslivets mäktigaste 2016	The business sector's most powerful in 2016
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-01-12	Så behåller du stjärnorna på jobbet	This is how you keep the stars at work
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-01-13	Regeringen ger upp kvoteringskrav	The government gives up on quota demands
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-02-07	Nu verkar finansfamiljerna medvetna om att det är 2017	Now the finance families seem aware of that it is 2017
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-02-21	Bye, bye Spotify	Bye, bye Spotify
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-02-22	Melker Schörling fortsätter som ledamot i MSAB:s styrelse	Melker Schörling continues as board member on MSAB's board
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-03-05	Det är i Wellington det händer	It is in Wellington that things are happening
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-03-13	Dags att kora årets affärsbragd	Time to elect the business feat of the year

Svenska Dagbladet	2017-03-30a	Vaktavlösning väntas hos finansfamiljerna	A change of guard awaits for the finance families
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-03-30b	Familjeföretag förvaltar väl	Family businesses manage well
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-03-31	Var inte rädd för misstag	Do not be afraid to make mistakes
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-04-26	Deras förmögenheter växte mest	Their fortunes grew the most
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-04-27	Daniel Ek – En av världens 100 mest inflytelserika	Daniel Ek – one of the world's 100 most influential
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-05-02	Vad vet du om världens rikaste personer?	What do you know about the world's richest people?
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-05-29	Peter Benson: ”Intelligenta fanatiker bygger för framtiden”	Peter Benson: Intelligent fanatics build for the future
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-07-11	Företagen kan vara den största drivkraften	The corporations can be the strongest driving force
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-07-21	10 som jobbar efter 65	10 who work after 65
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-08-17	Svenskarna som äger mest aktier	The Swedes who own the most shares
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-08-28	Det är bland kött och blod du hittar aktierna som stiger mest	It is among flesh and blood you find the shares that rise the most
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-09-08	Birgitta Forsberg: ”Pissmyran hetast bli mentor åt Schörlings döttrar”	Birgitta Forsberg: “The fire ant the hottest contender to become mentor for Schörling's daughters”
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-09-09	All Inns Hoppguld satte fokus på H&M-doldis	All Inn's gold in jumping put the light on H&M's unknown
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-10-06	13 dolda makthavare i Krogstockholm	13 unknown powerholders in Bistro-Stockholm
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-10-20	En hjälte med blandad meritlista kommer hem	A hero with a mixed record is coming home
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-11-05	Ohämmtat fjäsk för den ekonomiska överklassen	Unbridled flannel for the economic upper class
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-11-09	Östling tjänar mest – saknas på skattebetalarnas topplista	Östling makes the most – absent from the tax payers' top list
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-11-15	Oklar framtid för Melker Schörling AB	Uncertain future for Melker Schörling AB
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-11-24	Ministern hotar att skärpa lagen för att komma åt skatteplanerare	The Secretary of State threatens to sharpen the law in order to get at tax dodgers
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-11-25	Birgitta Forsberg: ”Sveriges Gordon Gekkos brottas med fåfängan”	Birgitta Forsberg: “The Gordon Gekkos of Sweden are wrestling with their vanity”

Svenska Dagbladet	2017-12-02	Två svenskar bland världens 50 rikaste	Two Swedes among the world's 50 richest
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-12-08	Kamprad ger bort miljoner	Kamprad donates millions
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-12-20	Ekonomiprofessor lyfter fram H&M:s ägarstruktur	Professor of Economics highlights the owner structure of H&M
Svenska Dagbladet	2017-12-23	Vinnarskallen Karl-Johan Persson ger inte upp så lätt	The winner Karl-Johan Persson does not give up so easy

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample

The names of the following ten billionaires were used as search terms for the thesis project. Bear in mind that the billionaires did not necessarily play a foregrounded role in every single one of the 152 articles that were deemed relevant for the project. This is especially in the case of Ingvar Kamrad. Some of the other billionaires that appear in the analysis (e.g. Lars-Åke Lindholm and Gustaf Douglas) were the focus of articles that only briefly mentioned one or several of the billionaires listed below.

- 1. Ingvar Kamrad²³ (estimated fortune in 2017: 650 billion SEK²⁴)**
Born in 1926. Founder of multinational retail company Ikea.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 48
- 2. Stefan Persson (186 billion SEK)**
Born in 1947. Son of clothing company H&M founder Erling Persson, former CEO and current chairman of the company. Persson's children Karl-Johan Persson and Charlotte Söderström feature frequently in the material.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 30
- 3. Hans Rausing (101 billion SEK)**
Born in 1926. Son of food packing company Tetra Pak founder Ruben Rausing and former CEO of the company. Resides in London. Rausing's son Hans K. Rausing, who has recovered from a drug addiction, is the focus of most of the articles. The media often refers to the son as Hans Rausing without the "K", and Hans Rausing SR himself mostly played a backgrounded role in the articles.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 15
- 4. Frederik Paulsen Jr (60 billion SEK)**
Born in 1950. Son of Ferring Pharmaceuticals founder Frederik Paulsen Sr and former CEO of Ferring AB. Resides in Lausanne, Switzerland.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 2
- 5. Melker Schörling (59 billion SEK)**
Born in 1947. Founder of his investment company Melker Schörling AB. Schörling's daughters Sofia Schörling and Märta Schörling Andreen feature frequently in the material.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 13
- 6. Antonia Ax:son Johnson (57 billion SEK)**
Born in 1943. Heiress to the Johnson-fortune and former chairperson of Axel Johnson AB.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 25

²³ Ingvar Kamrad passed away in early 2018. Considering that the analysis was under way by the time of his passing, a decision was made to include Kamrad based on the fact that his passing occurred outside the timeframe of this study.

²⁴ All amounts are taken from *Veckans Affärers'* (2017) list.

- 7. Ane Mærsk Mc-Kinney Uggla (55 billion SEK)**
Born in 1948. Heiress to the Mærsk-fortune and chairperson of the A.P. Møller Foundation.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 15

- 8. Markus Persson (17 billion SEK)**
Born in 1979. Co-founder of video game developer and publisher Mojang.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 9

- 9. Daniel Ek (16 billion SEK)**
Born in 1983. Co-creator of music streaming service Spotify.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 22

- 10. Niklas Zennström (11 billion SEK)**
Born in 1966. Co-creator of the telecommunication application software Skype.
Number of relevant articles in the sample: 2

Appendix B: Thematic coding examples

The 152 articles in the empirical material where all initially coded the following way:

Expressen 2017-09-12:

”Sjukhuset räddas av Kamprad” (“The hospital is saved by Kamprad”)

- **Section:** General news
- **Size:** Larger than half a page
- **Images:** Middle sized of Kamprad. Small sized of the hospital
- **Tone:** Positive
- **Billionaire:** Foregrounded
- **Number of billionaires:** 1
- **Functionalization/identification:** ”Founder and owner of Ikea ”, ”A genuine Smålänning”
- **Interviewed:** Two employees at region Kronoberg
- **Quotes/codes:**
 - ”Räddar” i bildtexten
 - ”Kliver in med pengarna” / ”Går in med en privat donation”
 - ”Apparaten räddar liv”, säger Fredrik Larsson
 - Lasaretten i Ljungby är *ett mindre sjukhus som kämpar i skuggan av de större vårdenheterna*
 - Och Kamprad, som är *genuin smålänning*, lyssnade och bestämde mer eller mindre på stående fot att säga ja till personalens önskan
 - När vi sträcker ut handen och ber om hjälp är Ingvar Kamprad *snäll nog* att rätta tillbaka den med löfte om de pengar som behövs
 - Gåvan på 4,5 miljoner
- **Notes:**
 - Charity
 - The rich are kind and do not forget their roots
 - The rich step in where the state has failed (individualization of welfare)

Theme I: The struggle for invisibility

Codes/quotes	Category	Thematic field
<p>– De har valt att vara <i>skygga och anonyma</i> för att kunna <i>leva ett normalt liv som du och jag</i> och inte bli igenkända på gatan. Det är deras val, säger han.</p>	Secrecy and Silence	The struggle for invisibility
<p>Men de är <i>filantroper som håller sig i bakgrunden</i>. Sigrid har <i>gett ett fåtal intervjuer</i> med brittiska högprofilerade tidningar, men syskonen Lisbet och Hans <i>uttalar sig i princip aldrig i medierna</i>.</p>		
<p>Men Biltema väljer, sex dagar senare efter att mejlet skickats, att inte svara på någon fråga. Så här skriver Henrik Jarl i sitt svar: <i>”Vi avstår vänligen att svara på frågorna”</i>. Expressen <i>har också, utan framgång, sökt Louise Wennberg</i>.</p>	Searching for the Super-rich	
<p><i>Ingen vill säga något ”i onödan”</i> om Sveriges rikaste man och hans familj. När vi <i>ringer upp</i> en person som samarbetat länge med H&M och Perssons och frågar om vederbörande vill säga något inför Stefan Perssons 70-årsdag, blir svaret avvisande. Personen, som annars är känd för att vara mycket öppen i sina kontakter med medier, <i>säger att ”de är så hemliga av sig” och avslutar samtalet</i>.</p>		

Theme II: Crumbs from the rich man's table

Codes/quotes	Category	Thematic field
När vi sträcker ut handen och ber om hjälp är Ingvar Kamprad <i>snäll nog</i> att räcka tillbaka den med löfte om de pengar som behövs	Generous philanthrocapitalism	Crumbs from the rich man's table
Och nu, 90 år gammal, väljer han att <i>dela med sig till jämngamla smålänningar</i> .		
Brittiska Daily Mail har tidigare skrivit att han är " <i>extremt generös</i> " med sina pengar och skänker stora belopp.		
Gång på gång under samtalet i lokalen på Stureplan återkommer Porser till att <i>hans stöd till Luleå Hockey är helt kravlöst. Att han inte vill ha något ansvar. Bara stödja.</i>	Benevolent sponsoring	
<i>På många sätt kan man snarare kalla den delen för en "act of love",</i> ha Antonia Ax:son Johnsson beskrivit det i en DN-intervju		
<i>Tack vare Antonia lever jag min dröm.</i>		

Theme III: The VIP club

Codes/quotes	Category	Thematic field
<p>Kamprad – Det här kan han köpa: – 59,5 <i>Hallandsåstunlar</i> – 436 666 <i>Tesla Model S</i> – 62 380 952 381 <i>liter mjölk</i> – 8 175 500 000 7,3 <i>Big Mac-menyer</i></p>	Comparison	The VIP club
<p><i>För 11 miljardär kronor kan du köpa 2,2 miljardär Biltemakorvar.</i></p>		
<p>Pappa Melker och hustrun Kerstin är <i>självskrivna gäster</i> på kungens officiella och privata fester och när kungen fyllde 70 stod makarna på gästlistan. <i>Vänskapsbanden har helt klart gått i arv.</i></p>	Socializing	
<p>Han och Melker Schörling har i årtionden <i>suttit i varandras styrelser, familjerna umgås med varandra och har semestrat ihop.</i></p>		
<p>Rune Andersson, med sin industrikoncern Mellby Gård, håller på att <i>lämna över stafettpinnen</i> till yngste sonen Johan Andersson, som sedan några år är vd för koncernen</p>	Inheritance and succession	
<p>– Många av barnen till de här företagsledarna <i>har matats med sådant här runt middagsbordet</i></p>		
<p>Våningen, som hon äger privat, köptes 2015 för <i>13,4 miljoner pund</i> – motsvarade drygt <i>138 miljoner kronor.</i></p>	Price tagging	
<p>Paret började sitt nya liv i ett hus som de köpte för nära <i>380 miljoner kronor</i> av den ryske miljardären Roman Abramovitj i <i>den fashionabla stadsdelen Chelsea</i></p>		