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Abstract

The Syrian conflict in 2011 has inevitably led to the massive forced migration of asylum seekers and refugees. Most of them fled to neighbouring and several countries in Europe. As a result of the European Union (EU) 's open border policy, their influx into Europe was reckoned a problem for many European countries due to increasing crimes and threats to its members' national security. Some European Union countries chose to be cautious by refusing or only providing financial assistance. Contrastingly, as an EU member state, Sweden received thousands of Syrian refugees until 2013. On October 3, 2013, the Swedish government announced an asylum policy of guaranteed housing provision and the right to bring families to Syrian asylum seekers until they obtain UNHCR refugee status. Such granting asylum policy to Syrian refugees shows differences in the identity of social security construction both in the society and its decision-makers compared to other EU countries. This article exposes the identity influence on the Swedish government's decision to grant asylum to Syrian refugees in 2013. This article employs the "aspirational constructivism" theory by Anne Clunan, arguing that a state's policy is based on a national identity sourced from society's historical reflections and the political elite's future aspirations. This article finds that Swedish society's history experienced cultural homogenization, known as a multicultural country, and the Social-Democracy and *folkhemmet* ("Home for the People") idea of the political elites resulted in the granting of asylum policy to Syrian refugees in October 2013.

Key Words

Aspirational constructivism, national identity, *folkhemmet*, refugees, asylum, history, the political elite.

1. Introduction

National identity is an exciting aspect of European society since it comes from the history and aspirations of its people from time to time. On the other hand, people's migration from other countries to Europe has become significant. The EU's open border policy has further opened up people's migration. Not only that, Europe is also a destination for refugees or asylum seekers due to conflicts that occur on other continents. In 2008, the EU Commission noted that immigrants from non-European regions accounted for 3.8 per cent of the EU's total population. From 2002 to 2013, European Union countries received at least 1.5 to 2 million third-world country immigrants annually (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). The Syrian conflict from

2011 to 2013 resulted in 2.5 million Syrians fleeing to neighbouring countries in the Middle East, such as Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). Meanwhile, 4% of these refugees inhabited European areas such as Germany and Sweden.[1] In this case, most of these Syrian refugees were asylum seekers waiting to be granted refugee status. According to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR), asylum seekers are people who fled their country due to social or political conflicts and still have to receive specific evaluations to get status as "refugees". The review or evaluation of this status depends on the country's asylum system to determine which asylum seekers are entitled to international protection (UNHCR, 2001-2022).

Geographically, Sweden is a Northern European country three thousand kilometres from Syria. As a welfare state - Swedish Model is one of the few Scandinavian countries that have joined the European Union. As an EU member, in 2012, the Swedish Government accepted 7,814 asylum seekers from Syria (Aljazeera, 2013). On September 3 2013, Sweden became the first country in the European Union to issue a policy granting asylum to Syrian refugees (The Local SE, 2013). Some of the protections offered by the Swedish Government were permanent accommodation to opportunities for reunification by bringing Syrian refugee families to Sweden. Annie Hoernbald, the spokeswoman for the Swedish Migration Board, said, "All Syrian asylum seekers who apply for asylum in Sweden will get it. The agency made this decision because it believes the violence in Syria will not end soon."(France 24, 2013). Several international humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, welcomed the Swedish Government's decision. On the other hand, the EU was cautious in issuing asylum policies. The EU actively provided humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees through the European Parliament, amounting to 358 million Euro (Migration Policy Centre, 2013). However, Sweden was the only country that opened up opportunities for asylum and direct protection for Syrian refugees in Europe.

The problem of Syrian refugees is a humanitarian problem of concern today. Until 2013, UN assistance of US$6.5 million was recorded as the most considerable humanitarian aid for a single country (Boston Globe 2013), compared to refugee problems in other countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq. Meanwhile, some EU member states have shown a different attitude. Italy and Greece only accepted Syrian refugees to live in refugee camps, even on roads. Meanwhile, the British government had strict regulations and refused asylum to some residents of Middle Eastern countries, including Syria (Spiegel Internasional, 2013). At the end of October 2013, the German government granted asylum to 106 Syrian refugees in Lebanon to live in several locations in Germany. It was different from the Swedish government's policy which provided asylum and direct protection to all Syrian refugees registered in Sweden. This article argues that such a difference in Sweden's policy response, compared to the EU's response towards Syrian asylum seekers and refugees, was induced by differences in the national identity construction of social security in its decision-makers and society. Following this context, this article aims to analyze the role of national identity in a country's foreign policy by answering, "how does identity affect the Swedish Government's policy to grant asylum to Syrian refugees in October 2013?".

This article employs the "aspirational constructivism" theory by Anne Clunan to answer the question, substantiating that a state's policy is based on a national identity sourced from society's historical reflections and the political elite's future aspirations. With this theory, this article mainly argues that Swedish society history experienced cultural homogenization, known as a multicultural country, and the Social-Democracy and *folkhemmet* ("Home for the People") idea

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[1] "Interview with Helen Flautre, member of European Parliament", dalam http://syrianrefugees.eu/?page_id=311

of the political elites resulted in the granting of asylum policy to Syrian refugees in October 2013. In supporting the main argument, this article will proceed as follows. First, it will discuss the constructivist approach, particularly aspirational constructivism by Anne Clunan, to explore the range of theoretical variables available to discuss the role of identity in Sweden's foreign policy construction. Second, it briefly reviews Swedish history and national identity. Third, it identifies and reviews Sweden's political elite linked to its refugee management policy. Fourth, using Clunan's framework, this article analyzes the effect of Swedish identity on its government's asylum-granting policy for Syrian refugees in 2013.

2. Literature Review & Analytical Framework

Constructivism is a perspective in International Relations theory born as a critique of realism and liberalism. As an approach, constructivism uses an interpretive understanding to analyze the identity and national interests of the state, social structure, and construction of reality so that it tends to be more subjective (Viotti & Kauppi, 2017, pp. 277) In contrast to realism which tends to see national interests based on materialism, such as military power, constructivism understands national interests based on identity, principles, and norms that produce intersubjectivity resulting from different understandings and positions of the society and also political elites (Clunan, 2009, p. 5).

Concerning identity, Anne F. Clunan, in "The Social Reconstruction of Russia's Identity", tries to elaborate on the idea of Alexander Wendt, who is known as a structural-constructivist, with Ted Hopf's analysis which understands identity as a result of cognitive-psychological processes. Clunan uses this framework to examine the changing identity of Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Alexander Wendt, known for "anarchy is what the states make of it", better understands the construction of a state's identity based on its structure within. In this case, identity comes from the understanding and behaviour of actors in the state's structure (other), which turn to the project state's identity (self). Meanwhile, through his research on Russian popular identity, Ted Hopf bases his understanding on his empirical findings seeing the relationship of identity to historical aspects and the periodization of time that shapes it (Clunan, 2009, p. 7). The criticism that became Clunan's argument later is that national identity could not only be understood based on "others" projections of the "self" a la Wendt. On the other hand, Hopf's argument regarding identity change still cannot explain the role of humans as agents who can change identity.

Clunan interprets the national interest as limited by the formation of the national identity itself. Within this framework, the political elite plays a vital role in shaping a country's goals and political status based on the legitimacy of past experiences and ideas that generate future aspirations contributing to interest formation within a foreign policy (Clunan, 2009, p. 3). This idea became known as aspirational constructivism which sees national identity as an ongoing interaction between social structures and humans as agents. Therefore, identity can be interpreted as a social process that produces a positive characteristic or difference that becomes the country's self-esteem[2] and a psychological process that involves identifying social groups based on national history and experiences that can become aspirations. The inseparable aspects of historical tradition and emotional strength of the state in national identity cause aspirational constructivism to see national identity as a subject that continues to change along with perceptions of political elites and material aspects.

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[2] Self-esteem refers to the appreciation and patriotic attitude towards the country.

"[National identity]...instead they are subject to change by political elites, who use reason, not just historical aspirations, to define national identities and national interests." (Clunan, 2009, p. 8)

To explain its relationship to national interests, Clunan defines identity formation as a process that can always change depending on history, culture, and conditions when a policy is formed. In the connection between history and aspirations, Clunan interprets constructivism like John Ruggie that "constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in human life." In this regard, the process of identity formation is a competition of sources of identity chosen by the political elites. In the process, identity formation is based on the national self-image comprising of "political purpose" aggregating the "logic of appropriateness" of state behaviour with its government system and "international status", which is more concerned with the state status in the international relations, observed through its rank on specific issues, their rights, and powers, and their obligations (Clunan, 2009, p. 10). Perceptions from external actors then influence the practical behaviour guidelines of the state. At the same time, history and past experiences are used as aspirations of the political elite in shaping policies if the state has undergone a significant transformation in a certain period.

Clunan describes the flow of identity linkages with national interests through four basic assumptions based on this description. First, the psychological need for self-esteem and value rationality makes political elites build a national self-image through several strategies. These affect the national interest and state behaviour regarding in-group and outgroup identification. This classification of in-group and outgroup is based on the assumptions that society can identify itself through several groups with overlapping identities. When a group has a similar identity to other groups, the community will identify the group as an in-group so that the resulting behaviour tends to be friendly, and vice versa. Furthermore, the political elites "choose" the national self-image as a national interest based on historical aspirations, suitability, and effectiveness with current conditions (Clunan, 2009, p. 16). Furthermore, in every identity formation process that proceeds to the national interest, Clunan revealed that the political elites would use several strategies, encompassing mobility, competition, and creativity, to test the effectiveness of history and past experiences. The theoretical operationalization of "aspirational constructivism" and the analytical model developed based on this literature review elaboration are described in the following chart.
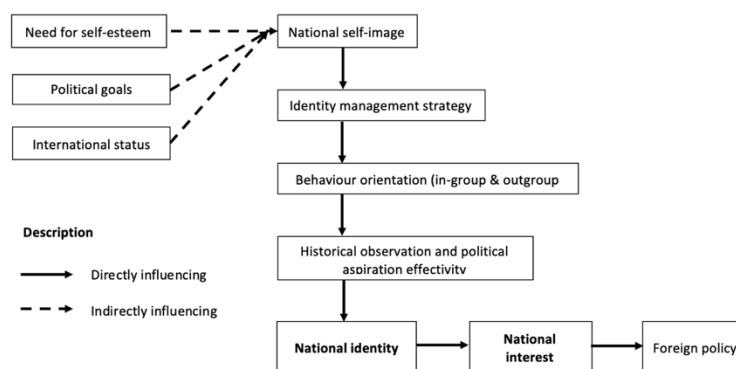

Figure 1. Theoretical Operationalization
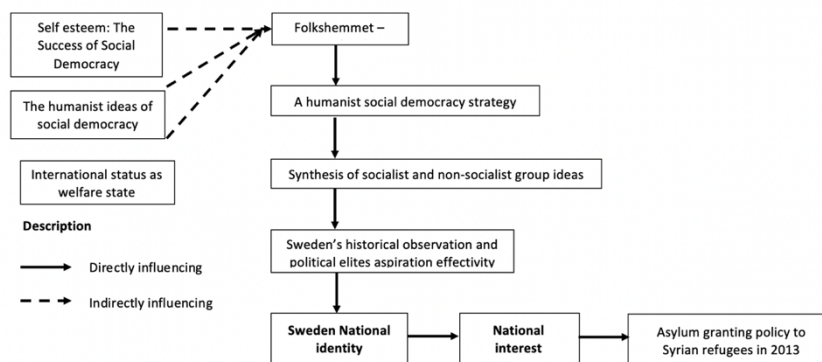Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2. Analytical Framework
Source: Own elaboration

3. Research Method

This research is explanatory research, which generally aims to explain the relationship between two or more variables. Lawrence Neuman also revealed that explanatory research aims to test a theory with different issues or expand specific issues to contribute to the theory (Neuman, 2007, pp. 15). The data collection technique used was a literature review through books, open access and reputable journals, official Swedish government documents and reports, and other electronic sources essential to support the article's analysis based on the proposed theory and argumentation. With this method, this article discusses the relation of history to Swedish national identity and subsequently describes the identification of the Swedish political elite, especially regarding the policy of refugee management. Eventually, this article explains the effect of Swedish national identity on granting asylum to Syrian refugees in 2013.

4. Results and Discussions

In aspirational constructivism, the historical experience can constitute various forms of power, prestige and status towards the acceptance, rejection or meaning of national identity. In this case, Clunan defines *national self-images* as collectively developing concepts about what not to do and what to do in a certain period. This concept is different from the national identity, a collective set of identities and values that form aspects of a country (Clunan, 2009, p. 27-28). Nevertheless, he still argues that national identity is a dynamic concept. Within this framework, political elites, academics, and media play an essential role in reformulating national identity based on various national self-images discourses that develop in public.

4.1. Swedish History and National Identity

Sweden's national history as a nation and state has exciting dynamics on the European continent. Historically, life in Sweden began thousands of years ago when Northern Europe was still covered by ice, known as the Ice Age. At that time, Swedish society was dominated by hunters who lived nomadic lives until it developed into an agricultural society in 500 AD. Furthermore, the development of Swedish society experienced a crucial period in the Viking occupation, which occupied Denmark, Norway and Sweden from 800 to 1050 AD. This nation is known for its glory in shipping and trade routes in Northern Europe, which passed through France, England, the Black Sea, and the Caspian Sea to Istanbul and Baghdad. Not infrequently, their trading activities were also dominated by war and violence, but also slowly began to spread Christian values with

their mythologies known to this day, such as Odin, Thor, and Freyr (Bjork & Davidson, 2001, pp. 19-20).

Trade then became the economic power of Sweden and the Scandinavian countries in general until the 16th century (Middle Ages). The Baltic Sea that stretches across Northern Europe became the centre of trading activity controlled by the Hanse, the trade league in North Germany. A critical point in the current Swedish government is the formation of a parliament – Riksdag, which represents the aspirations of the four classes of society, namely the aristocratic, clergy, urban population and peasant class. However, the existence of this parliament was in contrast to the regional conditions in Scandinavia at that time. The joining of Sweden, Norway and Denmark as the Kalmar Union at that time and the election of the Danish king, Christian II as king of Sweden made most of Sweden's political elite want a separation of government. The climax was the battle between Danes and Swedes in Stockholm, known as the Stockholm Bloodbath in the 1520s (Bjork & Davidson, 2001, pp. 21-22). The next era was marked by Sweden's progress in agriculture and weapons and the formation of Sweden as a nation. The victory of the Swedish army over Denmark made Sweden begin to form as a nation whose population tended to come from certain ethnicities (ethnic-nation). During this heyday, Swedish territory also included present-day Finland and parts of Russia, Estonia, Poland, Norway to Germany. Sweden's heyday began to experience a transition in the 19th century, which was marked by the defeat of the Swedish army against the Soviets and caused the country to lose part of its territory in the east, namely Finland. This period also marked the worsening of relations in the Kalmar Union until Norway decided to leave in 1905, which also marked the independence of Sweden as a country (Rojas, 2005, pp. 4).

The industrial revolution and the massive development of capital in Europe in the 19th to 20th centuries made Sweden experience economic liberalization and the formation of its national identity. In 1830, the Swedish Parliament began to enact laws to liberalize shipping. In addition, the Swedish government also transformed with the abolition of the old Riksdag model, the establishment of a local government and the elimination of particular opportunities for the nobility to have a career in government (Rojas, 2005, pp. 16). The process of forming a national identity was also seen in the Swedish Constitution reform, continuing to be amended until 1991. The Swedish constitution focuses on the four fundamental laws of the state (Grundlagar), namely royal succession based on descent (1810), freedom of the press and assembly (1949), instruments of government originating from the people (1974), and freedom of expression (1991).[3]

Furthermore, the 20th century was marked by the development of social democracy in Sweden. It originated with the development of the labour movement in Sweden starting in 1910, which demanded their rights amid industrialization and the development of capitalism. In its movement, the group of labours (Landsorganisationen i Sverige – LO) got much support from the Social Party Democrats (Sveriges socialdemokratiska arbetareparti – SAP). An important figure in social ideas democracy is Albin Hansson, SAP leader who became Prime Minister of Sweden from 1932 to 1946. The idea he began to formulate in the 1920s focused on regulating parties, the state, and society's movement in capitalism, by establishing wage regulation and expanding tax policy. The idea of social democracy is also known as The Swedish Model, which emphasizes Sweden as a prosperous country (welfare state) with the successful collaboration of large corporations and the strength of the trade union movement. In addition, social democracy also emphasizes the importance of the state's role in the family and community supporting aspects,

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[3] Summarized from the "Swedish Constitution", in http://www.isn.ethz.ch accessed on 24 December 2013, at 21.12

such as education and health. Therefore, this idea is known as *Folkhemmet* (Home for the People), which became a patriotic project until the middle of the 20th century (Rojas, 2005, pp. 24).

World War II then presented its consequences on the idea of social democracy. The defeat of some Europeans at that time presented realpolitik and "Social-Democrats dreams" in the Swedish political elite. Although Sweden was not involved in World War II, it also experienced its fear of war again. On the other hand, Sweden's non-involvement in World War II also had implications for the country's economic progress, as indicated by the highest per-capita income from 1948 to 1973. Therefore, the Swedish government began to pay for war reconstruction and increased labour wages and expenditures in the public sector (Rojas, 2005, pp. 42). However, Sweden's economic progress was not accompanied by an increase in the number of workers in the country. In 1954, the Swedish government signed an agreement on the labour market by opening its borders to enter workers from Northern European countries. On the other hand, a sizable flow of labour also came from Mediterranean countries, such as Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia and Turkey, through a collective system regulated by the state authority of the Swedish Labor Market (Englund, 2002, p. 7). Several years earlier, the Swedish government also signed the Geneva Conventions of 1951 regulating the responsibilities and commitments of states to refugees. It had implications for the increasing number of non-European immigrants entering Sweden, both workers and refugees. The marked difference in identity between immigrants and the Swedish population raised concerns over national integration, so in 1967 the government began to restrict the entry of immigrants from outside the Northern European region (Hinnfors, 2012). The 1970s marked several conflicts in the Middle East, Africa, and South America. They contributed to the increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden. On the other hand, advancing the social democracy idea presented negative consequences for Sweden. *Folkhemmet*'s idea, with its four strengths, namely ethnic homogeneity, a strong nation-state, an expansive economy, and technological-organizational developments, impacted the state monopoly in the public sector. As an implication, the significant energy absorption in the public sector was not comparable to absorption in other sectors (Rojas, 2005, p. 5). The economic growth rate exacerbated it in Sweden. It declined from 8.2 per cent in 1960-1965 to 0.4 per cent in 1975-1980.38 In terms of immigration, there were a decrease in the number of incoming migrant workers and an increase in the number of refugees. A sizeable flow of refugees in Sweden in the 1970s came from Chile and some of the Assyrian/Syrian and Kurdish ethnic communities from Turkey and Lebanon (Allwood et. al, 2006, p. 6).

The high unemployment rate and the decline in the Swedish economy impacted the level of public support for SAP. The public had also begun to turn to parties with a centre-right ideology that was not expected to implement the social democratic idea as radically as the centre-left group. However, ironically, the Swedish government, under Prime Minister Carl Bildt's administration, coming from the Moderate Party 1993, issued a budget policy of 73 per cent of state revenue for the public sector (Rojas, 2005, p. 49). Meanwhile, from 1993 to 1994, Sweden was one of the European countries that received Yugoslavia conflict refugees in large numbers. In 1994, a total of 40,000 Yugoslav refugees obtained asylum from the Swedish government. However, the unresolved economic crisis prompted the return of SAP to the Swedish government in October 1994. Some of the new ideas that the party brought were the growth of private schools and a reduction in government spending in the public sector from 73 per cent to 54 per cent in 2001 (Rojas, 2005, p. 66).

The next period marked the revival of Sweden and some of its contemporary problems. Like other Scandinavian countries, Sweden faces a projected high dependence on productive age. According to Mauricio Rojas, from 2002 to 2032, Sweden is projected to experience an increase

in the population aged 65 and over from 1.53 to 2.33 million and a decrease in the productive age population (24 to 65 years) by one million. This problem raises three significant problems in Sweden. First, the high population dependence will also increase the population's dependence on guarantees provided by the public sector, such as pensions and health insurance. In addition, a reasonably high tax system also puts pressure on the upper class in Sweden and tends to make this class choose the private sector over the public sector. The third dilemma is the increasing level of immigration in Sweden. It continues to be a matter of debate within the Swedish political elite. On the one hand, Sweden will need at least 750,000 immigrants as its workforce over the next 15 to 20 years (Rojas, 2005, p. 72-78). Still, this immigration also raises concerns regarding the ability of these immigrants to integrate into Swedish employment. The high number of immigrants from non-European continents, such as the Middle East, also poses problems for Sweden's national identity, predominantly related to its secularization process that has been undergone for a long time.

4.2. Identification of Sweden's Political Elite and Refugee Management Policy

One of Clunan's main arguments in aspirational constructivism is the role of the political elite as agents who can change national identity. In this case, the political elite acts as a party that encourages certain national self-images to follow society's social order and a vision that can encourage the state's national self-esteem. Clunan revealed three main strategies carried out by the political elite to form national self-images and political aspirations, encompassing mobility, competition, and creative strategy. The mobility strategy summarizes the mobility and assimilation of political elites from one group to another. Meanwhile, the competition strategy refers to the competition for aspirations of diverse political elite groups. Furthermore, the creative strategy is the ability of political elites to redefine group attributes and how the political elites formulate patterns of behaviour (Clunan, 2009, p. 33-35).

The Swedish governmental system is a constitutional monarchy with democratic parliamentary representation. Parliament or Riksdag is one of the essential bodies in the Swedish government whose members are party representatives at the country level through general elections every four years. Under the Swedish Constitution, the parliament is the highest representative of the people, while the king is the head of state. In addition, the Swedish government is divided into several representative areas, such as landsting, which is a representative area that specifically deals with health issues, and kommuner or smaller representative areas responsible for education issues and family health other local issues (Bjork & Davidson, 2001, pp. 30).

In addition to representation in parliament, the Swedish government's executive power is also represented in a cabinet or Regeringen led by a prime minister. This cabinet consists of several ministers in ten existing ministries, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finance, and the Ministry of Education. Meanwhile, parliament still plays a vital role in formulating policies on issues that are considered necessary. The decisions or policies of the parliament and cabinet are then implemented into public authority bodies, such as the Migrationsverket (Migration Board), which regulates immigration policy and the Integrationsverket (Integration Board), which regulates the integration policy. Immigration policy regulates the government's role in entering residents and refugees from other countries, emphasizing equality, freedom of choice, and cooperation. Therefore, since 1997 the Swedish government has formulated an integration policy and separated it from the immigration policy (Englund, 2002, p. 9). The integration policy emphasizes the process of recognizing the rights of minority groups as well as fostering tolerance in Swedish society.

Like most European countries, the ideology and policies of Swedish political parties play an essential role in government. As many as seven political parties have occupied the seats of the Riksdag parliament. The oldest party in Swedish politics is the Social Democratic Party (SAP), which was formed in 1889. Another party that has also been influential in Swedish political life is the Moderate Party (Moderaterna). Ideologically, these two major parties have two major alliance groups. The SAP and Left Party are often referred to as the socialist bloc or centre-left group in the Swedish government. Meanwhile, the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party, the Center Party and the Christian Democrat Party are non-socialist bloc or centre-right group members. From a policy perspective, the socialist bloc supports public sector solutions by believing that the state should increase its responsibility for the welfare of society. On the other hand, non-socialist groups tend to carry out advocacy policies to support freedom and human rights to live through their endeavour (Englund, 2002, p. 35).

Historically, the SAP was the dominant party in the Swedish government. However, from the early 1990s and later in 2006, representatives of the non-socialist coalition were elected prime ministers. The seat of Prime Minister of Sweden was occupied by Fredrik Reinfeldt, from the Moderate Party. In 2010, Reinfeldt was re-elected prime minister and later formed a cabinet whose members were all from non-socialist coalitions (Rosenbad & Annonbyra, 2013). In parliamentary seats, the SAP had the most representation, but the victory of the non-socialist bloc made the SAP and the socialist bloc sit in the opposition camp. The following is a map of the representation of political parties in the Swedish parliamentary seats.

Table 1. The Mapping of Political Parties and their representatives in Swedish Parliament

Political Party	Number of Representatives
Social Democratic Party	112 seats
Moderate Party	107 seats
Green Party	25 seats
Liberal Party	24 seats
Centre Party	23 seats
The Sweden Democrats	20 seats
Left Party	19 seats
Christian Democratic Party	19 seats

Source: Sum Up from "The Parties" at www.riksdagen.se

Several Swedish government policies could reflect the ideological differences between the socialist and non-socialist blocs. Regarding refugee handling policies, until the 1970s, SAP assumed that granting asylum and residence permits in Sweden was only for political refugees. Those can be seen with the legislation proposed by SAP in 1976 to limit the number of refugees from specific areas, namely the restriction of ethnic Assyrian refugees from Turkey based on concerns about the nation's integration process (Hinnfors et. al., 2012, p. 10). In contrast to SAP, the Center, Liberal, and Moderate Party coalition in 1980 proposed legislation that focused on facilitating asylum procedures and granting refugee residence permits. This group also emphasized the definition of "refugees" status, which should consider the de facto and humanitarian aspects. The difference was generally shown by SAP's stricter attitude towards handling refugees compared to the Moderate Party. SAP's closeness to the Labour Union, concerned with economic fairness, had increasingly pushed more stringent policies for handling refugees.

The rise of the non-socialist bloc in government positions in the early 1990s also influenced the ideology of political parties in Sweden. The non-socialist bloc, also known as the Conservative group, tended to adopt the idea of liberalism and began to form alliances with parties with liberalism ideology. The idea of this non-socialist bloc was known as the "freedom of choice revolution", which criticized the patrilineal ideology of socialist groups (Rojas, 2005, p. 64). In addition, this centre-right group also criticized the idea of socialist groups over the policy of ethnic homogeneity in Sweden. This new group began to fight for ethnic heterogeneity in Swedish society. It can be seen in granting of asylum and residence permits to tens of thousands of Bosnian (Yugoslav) refugees in 1994.

The return of the SAP to the Swedish government in 1994 showed a slightly different view of the ideological clashes between the two blocs. Some of the ideas of "freedom of choice" were later adopted by SAP by establishing policies that were more based on humanity and individual freedom. However, it still showed a reasonably strict attitude regarding handling refugees. Despite supporting the previous government's policy toward Yugoslav refugees, SAP re-emphasized the definition of a refugee that it must be appropriated with the Geneva Conventions of 1951 (Hinnfors et. al., 2012, p. 13). Furthermore, in 1995 and 1996, SAP also began to formulate laws related to the repatriation process of temporary refugees to their countries of origin.

SAP's leading position in the Swedish government began to be challenged in the early 2000s. Several corruption scandals within SAP until early 2005 caused a decline in public trust. Meanwhile, the Moderate Party strengthened its strength by setting an economic strategy with reliable Swedish economists. In addition, the party had also formed strong alliances with other centre-right groups, focusing on issues of gender equality, better education and household tax adjustments, which were previously rejected by SAP. As a result, in the 2006 general election, the SAP garnered only 30 per cent of the vote and marked an increase in the position of the Moderate Party in the Swedish government (Rojas, 2005, p. 75).

4.3. The Effect of Swedish Identity on the Granting of Asylum to Syrian Refugees in 2013

Taking certain national self-images in the national identity and interests is carried out by considering several factors. The process of forming a national identity is based on examining historical aspects, aspirations and the reasons that make a national self-image can dominate other self-images. The ability of a national self-image to persuade political elites and society is also a factor that can increase the intersubjectivity between historical experiences and the aspirations of today's political elites. To test the effectiveness of historical experience and political aspirations on national identity, Clunan reveals three main factors that must be considered, namely the inter-objectivity of the historical experience of specific policies, the success or failure of political elites or prominent figures on policies, and perceptions of other state actors (Clunan, 2009, p. 37).

The Swedish government's policy of granting asylum to refugees from conflict areas is not new. The debate on immigration policy and integration between the two elite political blocs continues. The escalating conflict in Syria, the discovery of chemical weapons to attack the people, to the high level of refugees and asylum seekers from Syria led to different reactions from the people and the Swedish political elite. In public opinion, Brett Wilkins, through his interviews with some Swedish people, concluded that there was support for this Swedish government policy. On the one hand, people think that this policy supports human values, but they are concerned about the distribution of taxes and increasing crime rates. As a consequence, the Swedish people wanted the government to be cautious in implementing this policy.

In general, regarding asylum and refugee policies, SAP considers it a critical humanitarian problem, but it demands clear procedures for refugee status and asylum granting evaluation. It is stated in the SAP Refugees and Migration policy as follows.

> "The right to asylum is a fundamental pillar of Swedish social democracy. It is a human right based on people's need for protection and fear of persecution. We want Sweden and the EU should have a common right, safe, humane, compassionate and effective asylum policy. Sweden has taken and will take considerable responsibility for protecting refugees. Each candidate's reasons must be examined individually, and it is right to have their case heard in court. We believe that the term "particularly distressing circumstances" has come to be interpreted too narrowly, and thus we want to see it changed.
>
> A worthy and viable return for the people who are denied asylum applications is a vital part of the Swedish migration policy. The Immigration Service, through a good motivation at work refusals, can motivate and push for a recognized return."[4]

Meanwhile, the Moderates tended to be very positive regarding refugee and asylum policies. Mikael Cederbratt, a member of parliament from the Moderate Party, revealed three keys to formulating immigration policy. First, immigration is an asset to Sweden. The granting of asylum to refugees due to conflict should be carried out indiscriminately but must also be stipulated by specific regulations. In addition, the asylum policy should be determined based on humanitarian principles and a clear timeframe[5]. Therefore, according to the Moderates group, the asylum granting should be carried out by prioritizing family reunification. Since 2010, family reunification in the Swedish government's asylum policy stipulates that a refugee must have a sponsor or officially obtain asylum to bring his family to Sweden. This sponsorship or guarantee, including housing guarantees, will speed up the integration of refugees into Swedish society. However, responding to the growing conflict and political instability that has led to a high flow of refugees, Cederbratt then expressed the urgency of expanding Sweden's asylum policy,

> "...But today's security requirements are eroded. It is natural that many newcomers want to reunite with their loved ones as soon as possible, whether they received support themselves. Current regulations allow too many exceptions. The requirement currently covers only one per cent of connected people. We want to expand the scope of the requirement, and we currently have a working group on migration, integration, and discrimination that is now discussing how to achieve a good balance."[6]

The Swedish government's policy to provide asylum in guaranteed housing to family reunification opportunities for Syrian refugees in September 2013 certainly presented pros and cons. The far-right Sweden-Democrats party, for example, had planned a campaign against this granting asylum policy. They argued that granting asylum to one Syrian refugee can help hundreds to thousands of people in Syria with food and medical assistance, as Kent Ekeroth, a spokesman for the party, said.

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[4] Quoted from "SAP Refugees and Migration Policy", http://www.socialdemokraterna.se/Var-politik/Var-politik-A-till-O/Flyktingar-och-migration/, accessed on 28 November 2013, 01.32

[5] Quoted from "Migration and Integration Today" http://www.moderat.se/nyhetsartikel/migrations-och-integrationspolitsk-dag&usg=ALkJrhi-5vXIm31IqubbCr8bCsPN64Bb8Q, accessed on 28 November 2013, 01.44

[6] Quoted from "Dependent Migration", http://www.moderat.se/migration-och-integration/anhoriginvandring&usg=ALkJrhg8jCDHYJgHrgrmG0BVMfzj2sL3ag, accessed on 28 November, 01.47

"For one immigrant that comes here, we could help hundreds, maybe thousands of people [in and around Syria] with food, medicine, and everything. So it is an inhumane policy to bring them here to Sweden."[7]

Several important world events became the starting point for Sweden's increasing number of immigrants. Significant changes in Sweden's demography occurred after World War II, namely the increasing flow of refugees and workers. This high immigration flow gave rise to a new phenomenon in Swedish demography: a multicultural population. According to Grondahl (2007), in 2002, 11.8 per cent of Sweden's population came from outside Sweden (from other ethnicities and born in other countries). The increasing number of immigrants from Finland to 450,000 people in 1999 made this community group synonymous with the term "Sweden-Finns" and classified by the government as a Swedish national minority group. In addition, the other largest immigrant groups in Sweden were Iranians (70,000), Bosnian-Yugoslav people (70,000), Syrians (45,000) and Kurds (20,000 to 50,000). Meanwhile, the original Swedish ethnicity, namely the Sami or the laps, which inhabit many Scandinavian countries, including Finland, only reached 15,000 to 20,000 people (Grondahl, 2007). The increasing number of non-European immigrants in Sweden continued to increase until 2005, as shown by the following chart.
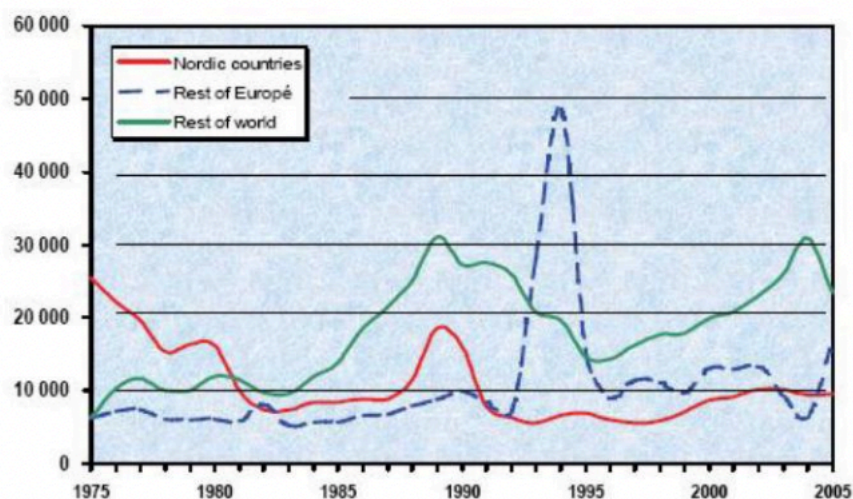

Figure 3. Registered residents of Sweden from Europe and non-Europe Immigration 1975-2005.
Source: An analysis of immigration to Sweden (Allwood, 2006)

From this background, Sweden's Syrian people were a sizeable minority ethnic group. The similarity of the Assyrian / Syriac ethnic group65 includes some Iranian, Iraqi and Syrian people in Mesopotamian civilization, making this group historically quite familiar with Sweden, starting with the Viking era until the Gulf War in the 1980s. The existence of nationalization and occupation by the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th century resulted in the genocide of some Assyrian/Syriac people. Pressure on this group continued until the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and increased the flow of Assyrian/Syriac refugees to several European countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden (Thomsen, 2007, p. 11)

Protection and conditions as a welfare state give Assyrian/Syriac groups in Sweden considerable freedom. This minority group even has its television station, diverse communities

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[7] Quoted from "Sweden's asylum offers to Syria", in http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24635791, accessed on November 26, 16.00

and several representatives in the Swedish parliament (Dulzeyen, 2013). One of the Assyrian/Syriac community centres is located in Södertälje, southwest of the Swedish capital of Stockholm. The football matches held by the community with several other local communities formed a Middle Eastern identity in Swedish society. In addition, one form of the Swedish government's support for the Assyrian/Syriac group was the government's recognition in 2010 of the genocide committed by the Ottoman Empire during World War I (Sayfo). Sweden is the first country in the last 95 years to acknowledge this genocide, and the Assyrian/Syriac ethnic diaspora has encouraged several governments to do the same, such as Switzerland and the United States (European Syriacs Union Newsletter, 2010).

In dealing with immigration and integration issues, the Swedish Government has implemented several policies. The concerns over the high unemployment coming from these immigrants made the Swedish government try to create jobs for them. Still, it did not provide social security with a process similar to the Swedish people (Rojas, 2005, p. 72). On the other hand, the Swedish government established an integration policy focusing on protecting minorities in 1979 and then again in 1990. In 2001, the Government of Sweden, together with Finland, Norway and Denmark, ratified the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Several minority groups in Sweden have been recognized, including Jews, Roma, Sami, Sweden-Finns and the Tornedalians (Tornedalians-Finns) (Grondahl, 2007, p. 25). Internationally, Sweden has also received a pretty good status regarding the integration and handling of refugees. According to a 2011 British Council and Migration Policy Group study, Sweden ranked in the top position in immigrant integration policies. This position was based on employment opportunities, access to education, anti-discrimination legislation, and national policies' conformity with EU policy standards. This study also revealed that the Swedish government's emphasis on the principle of equitable justice makes this country seen as a country with the best integration policies and legislation in the world. This principle of equality makes discrimination against minority groups in Sweden relatively minimal due to the fairness of rights and obligations based on the legal status of the population. From the media side, Sweden is also noted as a country that reports a lot on pro-immigration policies and provides little room for xenophobic, racist and nationalist opinions based on certain ethnicities (Allwood, 2006, p. 17).

The position of the non-socialist bloc in the Swedish government has powerful implications for the country's immigration policy. Jonnas Hinnfors, et al. noted that the Swedish government's policies were quite open during the reign of the non-socialist bloc in 1980, 1991 and 2008 (Hinnfors, et.al., 2012, p. 2). Regarding the last policy, Hinnfors noted that since 2006, the non-socialist bloc had formulated policies formally to re-open the territory to working immigrants from non-EU member countries. This openness was also encouraged by the background of several political elites of the Moderate Party. The background of the Swedish Foreign Minister, Carld Bildt, who previously served as Prime Minister of Sweden, reflected the image of the party that cares about human values. After serving as Prime Minister in 1994, Bildt was a mediator for the Balkan conflicts and became the UN Secretary General's special representative on Balkan issues.

The non-socialist bloc's policies, which tended to be populist, created a shift in Swedish national identity. Since 2006, several ideas' syntheses with SAP and the non-socialist bloc ideas dominance have made Sweden's national identity in the 21st century closely related to equality and equality of rights, welfare, and stable market and labour conditions (Hinnfors, et.al., 2012, p. 15). The historical experience of the presence of the Assyrian ethnic community/Syriacs, which is the root of the Syrian population, and the creation of the intersubjectivity of the Swedish political elite regarding immigration policy have influenced the Swedish government's policy of

granting asylum to Syrian refugees. The difference is that SAP tends to pay more attention to procedural issues, while the Moderate Party emphasizes moral values in granting asylum, including the opportunity for family reunification. The success of Sweden's integration policy, as seen in international recognition, media support, and a reasonably populist party policy, has increasingly supported this asylum-granting policy.

5. Conclusion

Aspirational constructivism theory supports research arguments that Sweden's identity, interpreted from the political elite's historical aspect and aspirations, has influenced the Swedish government's asylum-granting policy for the Syrian refugees in 2013. Sweden's national identity is reflected in its current national self-image, a synthesis of SAP's Social-Democratic values that prioritize the state's role in the public sector and human values brought by non-socialist groups. There is a change in Swedish national identity; from an agrarian society, moving to an industrial society that is open to capitalism, to a Social-Democratic society, to a multicultural society today shows the aspirations of the political elite who adjusted their policies to the phenomena that occurred at that time. *Folkhemmet*'s idea initially referred to as "home for all the people", gradually changed its meaning. The Swedish government's attention to equality and equity, economic well-being and the stability of labour conditions reflects the current notion of "home for the people". It is inseparable from the dominance of the political aspirations of the non-socialist bloc, which strongly recognizes individual rights and moral values.

Sweden's national self-image, seen in its current political goals and status as a welfare state, has helped shape in-group and outgroup strategies and behaviour, both politically and in Swedish society. From a political perspective, the mobility and competition strategy is shown by the intersection of several ideas between SAP and the Moderate Party and the long debate between the two blocks regarding immigration and integration policies. From the community side, the acceptance of the Assyrian/Syriac ethnic group that has been going on for quite a long time has positively affected public opinion regarding the policy of granting asylum. This behaviour encourages the political elite to use a creative strategy by reformulating the Swedish national identity following the current Swedish national self-image. In this case, Sweden's national identity is reflected through the aspirations of the political elite, especially the non-socialist bloc, which remains based on *Folkhemmet*'s ideas. The difference between "people" in the previous *Folkhemmet*, which emphasized the native Swedish population and "people" at this time, who are very concerned about equal rights and equality, has transformed Sweden's national identity into a multicultural society based on humanity. It was later translated into Sweden's national interest through the policy of granting asylum to Syrian refugees in 2013.

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