

Who are “the immigrants”?

A discourse analysis on forming “immigrants” as a group in
the Swedish party leader debates of 2013 and 2017

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Abstract

Using Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory, this thesis examines how the discursive formation of "immigrants" as a group has developed in the Swedish party leader debates of 2013 and 2017. During these years the number of immigrants had a record year and the conversation and politics on immigration changed drastically in Sweden. This thesis is used to find out if the discourse on the conversation on immigrants, forming them as a group, has changed as well as the politics during this time. The analysis found that three antagonizing discourses occurred in the 2013 debate. Two of these discourses formed "immigrants" as an opposite to the group "the Swedes", one framing "immigrants" as something positive for Sweden and one as something negative. The third discourse avoided defining "immigrants" as a group entirely. In 2017 this third discourse disappeared as the other two gained popularity. Conclusively, the antagonizing discourses on forming the group "immigrants" has changed from 2013 to 2017. This quite possibly because as long as a group is described in relationship to "us" and "our" need for "them", the step between defining "immigrants" as something positive to being something negative for Sweden is not big.

Key words: discourse, immigrants, immigration, Sweden, politics

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Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Political background information	2
3	Purpose and research question	4
4	Earlier research.....	6
4.1	The “different cultures”	6
4.2	The immigrant identity and representation	6
5	Theory and method: Discourse theory.....	8
5.1	Why discourse theory?	9
5.2	Three different approaches	10
5.2.1	Foucault’s discourse	10
5.2.2	Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory	10
5.2.3	Fairclough’s Critical discourse theory	11
5.3	Analyzing identity	11
5.4	Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory	12
5.4.1	Group formation	12
5.4.2	Articulation.....	13
5.4.3	Elements and moments.....	13
5.4.4	Nodes.....	13
5.4.5	Floating signifiers.....	13
5.4.6	Chains of equivalence	14
5.4.7	Representation	14
5.5	Method: Applying discourse theory as an analytical tool	14
6	Choice of material.....	16
6.1	Selection of material within the debates	17
6.2	Translating in to English	17
7	Analysis and result.....	19
7.1	Group formation of “immigrants”	20
7.1.1	“They are just like us”	20
7.1.2	“The Swedes”	20
7.2	The antagonizing discourses	21
7.2.1	1. “Only Human”	21
7.2.2	2. “The Positive Immigrant”	22
7.2.3	3. “The Negative Immigrant”	23

7.2.4	Representation	23
7.3	Comparing 2013 and 2017	24
8	Conclusion	26
9	References.....	27

1 Introduction

There is no denying that the discussion on immigration has become very much alive in Sweden these past few years. Immigration was the object of the most extensive media attention in Sweden in the last quarter of a century (Brune 2004). In 2016 a larger amount of immigrants entered Sweden than ever before (SCB, 2018), parallel to this the government implemented temporary law changes in 2015 and 2016 to reduce the amount of immigrants entering Sweden (Bet. 2015/16:SfU16). Law changes included temporary residence permits and stricter border control between Sweden and Denmark (ibid.). Alongside these political reformations, journalists saw the Swedish debate on immigration change drastically (Silberstein 2015). Instead of a majority of the parties talking about human rights and helping refugees and immigrants as they had done before, there was talk about a “collapse of the system” and a “refugee crisis” (ibid.).

The conversation and politics on immigration has seemingly changed drastically in a few years, but what has happened to the conversation on “immigrants”? This thesis will try to find out. Using Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory this thesis will analyze how “immigrants” are formed semantically as a group in the Swedish party leader debates of 2013 and 2017, the time during which big changes on immigration occurred in Sweden, and if this formation has changed from the first to the second debate.

The construction of the group “immigrants” is not a new concept in Sweden. The group “immigrants” is often described in Swedish media as a group distinct from “Swedes” (SOU 2006:21). Due to negative connotations, the group falls prey to structural discrimination and are linked together with attributes that represent the Middle East; traditional, oppressing and patriarchal (SOU 2006:21). How do the party leaders form the group “immigrants” and has it changed at the same time as the political changes on immigration? The political and conversational changes within the area of immigration together with a record year for the amount of immigrants coming to Sweden in 2016 is reason enough to believe the discourse has changed and if it has not, that is also worth observing.

2 Political background information

In order to deepen the understanding of the party leader debates it is necessary to know the political context within which the debate takes place, for instance; who governed and how big the party with strict immigration laws as their most important issue was at the time (the Sweden Democrats). To create this greater understanding of the political time of these debates, this section is included in the thesis. It contains a short description of the parties, which parties were governing at the time and the immigration politics during the time between 2013 and 2017. This background information is especially important to provide for someone reading this that is not well versed in Swedish politics.

In 2013, the governing parties are the Moderates (Moderaterna), the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna), the Centre Party (Centerpartiet) and the Liberals (then called Folkpartiet, now called Liberalerna), after winning the 2010 election. Together they form the Alliance (Alliansen). Swedish politics is traditionally divided into two blocks: the right and the left block. The Alliance is considered to be on the right side. The Left Party (Vänsterpartiet), the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna) and the Environment Party (Miljöpartiet) are considered to belong to the left side. The parties within a block have historically been more likely to co-operate with each other. The Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna), who entered the parliament in 2010, are left out of any of the blocks, considered by many to be a far-right party. Immigration increased with 12% in 2013 and was at its highest numbers ever in Sweden (SCB, 2014). Just days before the party leader debate in October 2013, more than 200 refugees capsized in the Mediterranean Sea (Sydsvenskan, 2013).

In 2014, the Social Democrats and the Environment Party win the election with voting support from the Left Party and therefore govern Sweden from 2014 to 2018. The Sweden Democrats, the biggest far-right party in Sweden, grows rapidly in the election of 2014. They entered the Swedish parliament in 2010 with 5.7 percent of the vote, exceeding the 4% barrier for entering parliament. The party receives 12.86 percent in this next election in 2014 and become the third biggest party in the Swedish parliament.

In 2015 a larger number of refugees enter Sweden than ever before and the governing parties answer with temporary law changes in 2015 and 2016 to reduce the amount of refugees getting in to Sweden (SfU16). Law changes include temporary residence permits and stricter border control between Sweden and Denmark (ibid.). These changes go through parliament and the then governing parties, the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna) and the Environment Party

(Miljöpartiet) have since been widely criticized by their voters for going against what they had said previously about the importance of taking care of refugees and not closing the borders. The parliament votes in favor of stricter border control, with the Social Democrats, the Environment Party and the Sweden Democrats voting for, the Left party and the Centre Party voting against and the Moderates, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats abstaining from voting. In the vote on temporary residence permits the vote is exactly the same, with the difference that the Moderates vote in favor of the motion.

In 2017, the Social Democrats and the Environment Party are still the governing parties and the temporary law changes on immigration in 2016 are still effective. The number of applications for asylum has decreased rapidly from 2015, going from 163 000 to this year coming in at 25000 (Gerdfeldter 2017).

In conclusion, during the years between 2013 and 2017; the government shifted, immigration increased higher than ever before and immigration laws got stricter at the same time as the Sweden Democrats grew bigger. With these changes this thesis will now look at if the conversation about the people very much affected, the “immigrants”, changed as well during the time.

3 Purpose and research question

I will be textually analyzing the party leader debates using Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory. The theoretical concept of theirs that I use as my starting point is that of "group formation". Group formation is used when analyzing the way in which groups are semantically formed through discourse analysis (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51-53). Analyzing how groups form is very important for our contemporary understanding of the world. When a group is constructed, the whole of society is represented, as groups form in relation and contrast to all other groups (ibid.). Therefore analyzing how a group is formed through discourse analysis is a big part of analyzing how the whole of society is built up (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 53). Understanding how we politically create groups is of great importance to understand how we create our society and therefore might be able to change it. Analyzing how "immigrants" as a group are formed does not only give us a picture of how immigration policy might affect how we speak about immigrants – but the opposite: how the language used might affect immigration policy. The creation of groups, like "immigrants", is not constant. Groups are created and change with how we speak about them and who speaks about them. The language we use, in writing and in speech, has to be studied for us to clearly grasp how people think and act. How the party leaders talk about "immigrants" says something more than what decisions they make in parliament. It can say something about what has become more or less accepted to say about immigrants and what views lay behind different decisions on immigration.

My thesis will cover what the formation of the group "immigrants" looks like in the Swedish party leader debates and how it has developed during this politically changing time in Sweden. The main question this thesis wants to answer is:

How has the forming of the group "immigrants" changed from the Swedish party leader debate of 2013 to the Swedish party leader debate of 2017?

The subsequent sub-questions are:

- How are "immigrants" formed as a group in the Swedish party leader debates of 2013 and 2017?
- Has this changed from the debate of 2013 to the debate of 2017?

To answer this, step one in the analysis will be to discursively analyze how "immigrants" as a group is described in the separate debates. Step two will be to compare the two debates to see if the discourse has changed together with the

changes in immigration policies or not and if so; how. Analyzing why it has changed or not would be very interesting, perhaps comparing if any of the active discourses now have been active before during other changes in immigration policy. However, this is much too great a task to take on in this paper. The depth of the analysis for my current questions would have to take a toll to make room for these further questions and therefore I have chosen not to include them.

4 Earlier research

Under this headline, earlier research is collected that has focused on analyzing the semantic formation of and attitudes towards immigrants as a group in Sweden, with the help of discourse analysis. Relevant to this is also research on the formation of race and culture – as this affects how we view and form “immigrants” as a group.

4.1 The “different cultures”

An Official Report of the Swedish Government (SOU 2005:56) was made with the task to investigate structural discrimination in Sweden. It showed, just as other research, that the concept of “race” (more popular in the 19th century Europe) had been replaced with “culture” to represent stereotypical attributes and differences between groups of people. In its introduction it therefore declares that it is hard to separate structural discrimination from actual racism, as it has grown in to being the same thing. Forming “immigrants” as something separate from “us” might in the party leader debates appear in this subtle way – by constructing “immigrants” as belonging to a “different culture”. Another conclusion in the report was that “immigrant’s” and “Swede’s” cultures are described with incompatible attributes, as if to be each other’s opposites. I will take this in consideration as comparing “immigrants” to “Swedes” might also occur in the party leader debates.

4.2 The immigrant identity and representation

Another Official Report of the Swedish Government (SOU 2006:21) investigated how immigrants are portrayed in Swedish media. Their conclusion showed how media created “the immigrant” as an identity connected to being culturally “Middle Eastern”, filled with negative attributes, such as being traditional, oppressive and patriarchal. The report also confirmed that people with foreign background are underrepresented in media, this being an issue as they do not get to represent themselves in debates about themselves. Ulf Mörkenstam conducted a famous Swedish discursive study about the Saami people in Sweden, also known as Sweden’s indigenous people (1999) where he commented on the fact that the

Saami people have not been a part of creating their own identity. They have not been invited to form their own rights, as this task has been handed to certain experts consulting the government. Mörkenstam means that the rights that the Saami people have in Sweden is based on the identity Swedish politicians and experts have given them (1999, 2). Just as Laclau and Mouffe mention, who gets to represent your group matters in the formation of identities and groups (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 52-53). I will be taking representation in to consideration in my analysis, looking at who gets to represent who “the immigrants” are as a group – by for example looking for real life examples of “the immigrant” used in the debates.

In Laclau’s and Mouffe’s theory on group formation, the construction of a group is dependent on comparing and differentiating it to other existing groups (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51). How the separation of the group “immigrants” in relation to other groups happen is something I will analyze in the debates. One of Mörkenstam’s conclusions is that a lands minority politics is dependent on the preconceived image of that group, here being Saami people – separating that group from other groups in society (1999). Lastly, Mörkenstam concluded that the construction of the Saami identity was a consequence of political decisions made by parliament (1999, 2). Much like Mörkenstam, I see relevance in looking at how the group, in my case “immigrants”, are formed in relation to the political decisions affecting them – being the time between 2013 and 2017 when the politics on immigration changed a lot.

My method is somewhat inspired by the method Mörkenstam uses in his study, the “analogy chain”. This chain resembles the chain of equivalence described in Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 50-52), connecting different attributes to a certain theme, in Mörkenstams case the Saami identity, and in my case “immigrants”.

5 Theory and method: Discourse theory

Discourse analysis is grounded on social constructivism; hence this thesis is ontologically and epistemologically based on social constructivism (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 11-12). Using social constructivism means having a critical approach to what knowledge is and realizing that how we perceive the world and what we hold as truths changes depending on historical context (ibid.). Our perception of the world is continuously constructed through social interaction, where certain actions become perceived as natural and others unthinkable (ibid.). Discourse theory examines how we construct these certain subjects as natural.

Discourse analysis is used as both a theory and a method (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 57-62). I will describe them together, by explaining how I will use each theoretical concept in this first theory part and summarizing my method in the end of this chapter.

I have used the book “Diskursanalys som teori och metod” written by Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2000) to describe Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory. This was an early choice I made, as Winther Jørgensen and Phillips provide a clear structure for the theory, rather than Laclau and Mouffe who repeatedly include more politically loaded couplets in their book. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s book “Hegemony and Socialist strategy” (1985) is not customized to use for research, as the focus is split between explaining their own theory and picking apart other philosopher’s theories. Winther Jørgensen’s and Phillips’ book is continually used for educational purposes and by other bachelors when writing their thesis.

There are many definitions of the word “discourse”. This thesis conforms to Laclau’s and Mouffe’s idea that discourse is in essence every type of social interaction (Bergström, Boréus 2018, 254). Words, formulations, actions, body language, social and cultural codes all happen within or in relation to – the discourse. This thesis will focus on the textual part of discourse analysis. A discourse is the way we speak about a certain subject. We analyze this by for example identifying what words we use when we talk about the subject, what that means and what the consequences might be for people listening. Discourse analysis is the analysis made on the grounds of discourse theory (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 7). It is used to describe how the subject is discussed, debated and described, if it’s talked about in different ways and why. The premise

of the discourse analysis is that all of this happens subconsciously and therefore is perceived as natural. The whole point of discourse analysis is to illustrate and illuminate this unawareness (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 47). Discourses can change over time and these often subconscious actions help form them.

Discourse theory does not view politics as being merely different parties holding different views; it views politics as the invariable conflict and formation of our social reality (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 41). Politics form society by excluding other possible ways of viewing reality. Politics is the arena where the fight for which definition will rule, takes place. When there is consensus about a definition, that definition is viewed as objective. My paper analyzes what different formations of the group “immigrants” are fighting to be the ruling definition. It also looks into if any of the formations have gained ground from 2013 to 2017.

5.1 Why discourse theory?

I have chosen discourse theory because it focuses on the language used to describe different subjects. It does not focus on the explicit meaning of what the person is saying but rather allows me to examine what is said “between the lines”. It is not as easy as to say that there are merely negative or positive attitudes towards “immigrants”. The message you put forward can have an explicitly positive view on immigration, for example; speaking of “immigrants” as something that enriches Sweden’s culture you are saying that immigration is enriching Sweden rather than impoverishing or threatening Sweden. By expressing this you are however implicitly assuming that all “immigrants” have a significante other culture than people born in Sweden. You are differentiating a homogenic Swedish culture – that is a culture for all “Swedes”, and “other cultures” represented by “immigrants”. Why is this type of wording important to take a part and analyze like this? It has an impact on how we view immigration and “immigrants” in the longer haul. How we speak about something is effected by what society looks like, but how we speak about something also shapes what society looks like. How we talk about “immigrants” restricts what is later accepted as legitimate in political decisions about “immigrants”, similarly to what Mörkenstam concludes on the treatment of Saami people in Sweden (1999). If we talk about “immigrants” as people fundamentally different from people born in Sweden it is easier to make decisions for “immigrants” that treats them differently than people born in Sweden, cutting down on their access to the welfare system for example.

Important to know about discourse analysis is that it is not used mainly to make any broad generalizations (Esaiasson 2017, 20-21). The purpose of the theory and method is to, with help of analytical tools, thoroughly read the material and argue that it says something of relevance. Therefore I am required to uphold a higher

standard of intersubjectivity and strong argumentation for my methodological choices and interpretations of the material throughout the thesis (ibid.). Intersubjectivity meaning upholding as much of an objective and transparent research that I can.

5.2 Three different approaches

5.2.1 Foucault's discourse

There are different theoretical approaches to discourse analysis that can be divided up into three traditions (Bergström, Boréus 2018, 254). The first, poststructuralist approach is represented by Michel Foucault. Michel Foucault defines discourses as social interactions between subjects and focuses on the power relations he means exist within every discourse. Discourses create frames within which we can act, like social rules and codes. Who gets to speak and what this person says is controlled by the discourse, through what Foucault calls rules of exclusion. These rules of exclusion create a limited capacity for action by deciding what is right and wrong, what is tradition and what are acceptable social codes and behavior. Michel Foucault does not propagate for everything being included in a discourse, he opens up for certain things being non-discursive. This thesis will not be using his discourse theory specifically, but his theories are important to mention as he is somewhat of a founding father for discourse analysis.

5.2.2 Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory

The second approach to discourse analysis is represented by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Their approach differs from Foucault in that they believe all social phenomena can be included within the discourse (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 32-37). Laclau's and Mouffe's theory fits this thesis' research question best as it easily describes how a group is constructed with the help of looking at what words and concepts are connected to that group. On the subject of divergence on the meaning of concepts Laclau's and Mouffe's perspective on discourse theory fits well. They describe the conflict on conceptualizations as a fundamental part of creating a dominating discourse (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 54-55). Laclau and Mouffe argue that there is a constant discourse antagonism on what discourse should rule and represent "the truth" about different subjects, including groups (ibid.). This goes well with me finding out if there are different, conflicting representations of what attributes immigrants as a group should be given, which I might find as different parties tend to hold different standpoints. Laclau and Mouffe focus on politics, as shown in

“Hegemony and the Socialist strategy (1985), also suits the choice of material for this thesis. This is the discipline which I have chosen to analyze my material with and therefore I will describe it more adequately a bit further on.

5.2.3 Fairclough’s Critical discourse theory

The third tradition within discourse theory is the critical discourse analysis, mostly represented by Norman Fairclough. Using discourse analysis Fairclough takes social practices in to account and the discourse is put in to a bigger context (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 67-71). Critical discourse analysis also has a more explaining ambition, trying to explain the discourse with what happens in the non-discursive sphere. Fairclough defines some things as non-discursive, which is what happens in the social practice – outside of the conversation being had, such as political decisions. This thesis will not be using any of the concepts of critical discourse analysis when forming the method for my thesis but it is easy to see that some theoretical aspects of critical discourse analysis line up with parts of my thesis. For instance, I find it relevant to present the political reform and attitude towards immigration at the time of the debates. Like Fairclough, I see relevance in what is happening outside of the specific debate and taking that in to certain consideration when analyzing the construction of immigrants as a group. However, in line with Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory I do not use these “social practices” as an element as important to my analysis as what is said in the actual debates.

5.3 Analyzing identity

The concept of identity according to social constructionism is not a naturally created, anatomic thing, but rather something socially constructed through socialization (Burr 2003). The identity of “the immigrant” for example is created through portraits and norms in media, politics and other socializing. As a group, “immigrants” are then expected to follow the group-identity put on to them. An identity, just like a discourse, is not something firmly determined to forever be so, it is changeable.

Groups are formed through and within the discourse (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51). They are not formed standing by themselves, but are rather formed in relation to another group- “the other”. This process is called “othering”. We can see these processes by analyzing words like “us” and “them” in speeches for example. The group being “othered” is the group described as “them”. Stuart Allan, professor in journalism, talks about something called binary oppositions that creates “us” as something familiar and close and “them” as something unfamiliar (Allan 2005, 268). Who gets to form these groups has to do with power

relations that are formed by and within the discourse (Bergström, Boréus 2018, 255-256). The discourse pushes in certain directions, steering our actions. Who is included and not included in these actions, who gets to speak about certain issues and who does not, is controlled by the discourse and has effects on power relations (ibid.).

How the party leaders talk about “immigrants” in relation to themselves and Swedish born citizens can be analyzed through looking at their use of certain language. Using “us” as describing Swedish born citizens and “them” when describing “immigrants” is a way of separating and othering “immigrants”. As I have said earlier, describing someone as something else than part of the “us”, the familiar, further creates a base for “them”, in this case “immigrants”, being treated differently than “us”.

5.4 Laclau’s and Mouffe’s discourse theory

As I have mentioned I will be focusing on the concepts brought forward in the discourse theory represented by Laclau and Mouffe. I choose these concepts for my research as I see it best helps me identify group formations in the debates. To better help me look for the creation of the group “immigrants” in relation to other groups I will also be looking for binary oppositions and if othering is occurring. Laclau’s and Mouffe’s concepts on how a group is formed discursively are explained below. I have put them in this order as the first concept needs to be understood to understand the second and so on.

5.4.1 Group formation

I am looking for the discursive forming of the group “immigrants” in the debates. The forming of a group identity is the forming of reduced possibilities (Winther Jörgensen. Phillips 2000, 51). The constitution of a group happens when a relationship forms between certain people and certain attributes; attributes that identify that group and attributes that are irrelevant for the group. In discursive group formations “the other”, the identity that your group is formed in relation to, is excluded and so are any differences that might occur between individuals within the group. I will be looking at the group formation of the group identity “immigrants” and how it is constructed in the debates. This also means looking at how “immigrants” are constructed in relation to other groups mentioned in the debates.

5.4.2 Articulation

Articulation is the situation when elements are put in relation to other elements so that they get their meaning and turn in to moments (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 35). Putting a word for example in relation to another word gives it a certain meaning. Winther Jørgensen and Phillips use the word “body” to describe an articulation where “body” is put together with the word “soul” and there for put in to a religious discourse (2000, 33). The debate I’m analyzing will be filled with articulations, putting the word “immigrant” together with other words, giving the word “immigrant” different meaning.

5.4.3 Elements and moments

Using discourse theory means analyzing symbols – whether it is spoken words or visual symbols (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 67) These symbols Laclau and Mouffe call elements (ibid., 34). Elements are symbols that have not yet gotten one meaning but mean many different things - they are ambiguous. A flag for example means different things in different situations, in different discourses. During a memorial for dead soldiers, it is a symbol for national grief (Wendt – Åse 2016) and during a Swedish graduation party it has a totally different meaning. The specific discourse gives these elements an unambiguous meaning – and that’s when they turn into moments (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 33).

5.4.4 Nodes

There are different ways of connecting different elements in a discourse to each other, and one of the elements can play a distinct role to other elements. This element is called a “node”. The “node” can be a specific word, a concept, like “immigrant”. What other word or concepts are connected to “immigrants” for example is what helps form and fixate the discourse.

5.4.5 Floating signifiers

Floating signifiers are elements that in high regard are open for the attribution of different meaning. They are symbols that different discourses are trying to give different meaning to (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 54 and 57). The difference between a floating signifier and a node is that the node refers to the specific discourse whereas the floating signifier refers to the antagonism of the meaning of different symbols between different discourses. One word can be a node in the specific discourse you are focusing on, but also a floating signifier when looking at other discourses. The floating signifier/node I will be looking at in the debates is ”immigrants”. How do different elements or moments connect to “immigrants” as a group?

5.4.6 Chains of equivalence

A chain of equivalence puts the moments and nodes together, creating chains to describe a group identity for example (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 57-58). The attributes and moments that are connected to a certain identity or node will create a chain. This chain is the discourse forming the group. The attributes in this chain can be both negatively and positively related to the theme or node. One can use two different chains to show how they are each other's opposites. For example a chain of equivalence of the identity "woman" can be put in relation to the chain of equivalence of "man". This will further show what identifies the woman, as she will be compared to an identity with attributes she does not have. In the same way comparing the chains of equivalence of "immigrants" and "Swedes" tells me what defines both groups.

5.4.7 Representation

Laclau and Mouffe describe representation as an important part of forming discourse. To form a group the group needs to be talked about or talked for. The group is not formed before it is mentioned – as it does not objectively exist on its own (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 52-53). The meaning of representation is that someone represents you when you cannot be there to represent yourself. Who gets to represent the group is an important thing to take in to account when analyzing the discourse, because the formation of a group is in all a formation of society. When a group is represented and described it is constructed in contrast to all other groups, there for the whole of society and all groups it contains is included when creating that certain group. Who gets to represent the group "immigrants" in the debates and in what situations?

5.5 Method: Applying discourse theory as an analytical tool

Finding certain patterns that together create certain discourses is not an easy task. I do not know in beforehand what might occur in the debates and keeping an open mind in relation to my material is therefore important. When it comes to using Laclau's and Mouffe's discourse theory as a methodological tool there is no ready methodological form to just apply to any material (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 57). However, it has been done numerous times before. I will use the theoretical concepts of Laclau and Mouffe to analyze the party leader debates, creating chains of equivalence with "immigrants" as the leading word to connect other words and concepts to. Chains of equivalence is the analytical tool used to describe a discourse on group formation (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 50). My focus will be on analyzing how "immigrants" as a group are constructed. By doing this I will be able to find other identities or group formations in the debates,

identities or groups that help construct the “immigrants” as a concept by being put in relation to them.

The formation of a group does not only happen in such a simple way as when people explicitly give a certain group certain attributes. Group formation happens in many, more subtle ways. What the party leaders are implying about “immigrants” and what occurrences they are letting portray immigrants for instance is also what forms the group and I will take this in consideration in my analysis.

As mentioned, I will use the chains of equivalence to form my analysis. “Immigrants” will be used as a floating signifier which might change meaning with what concepts and attributes (elements and moments) different party leaders connect to it. “Immigrants” might become a node in the debates if there is a consensus on what “immigrants” stands for - but I have to be open to the party leaders forming “immigrants” with different elements and moments, therefore going in to the material it will be a floating signifier.

Here is an example of what a presentation of a discourse, a chain of equivalence, might look like in my analysis and result:

"The Entertaining Immigrant"

Floating signifier/Node:"Immigrants"

Elements/Moments: happy - funny - entertainer

Parties in 2013: the Moderates, the Liberals

**Parties in 2017: the Moderates, the Liberals ,
The Left party**

The headline “The Entertaining Immigrant” is the name of the discourse and underneath you can see the floating signifier or node (depending on if there are antagonizing discourses on the meaning of the word) “immigrant”. The elements or moments are what attributes are used in connection to “immigrants” and included in the end are what parties use this discourse at what debate.

I will outline what discourses are present in what debates. There might be a consensus on what “immigrants” are or there might be antagonism between different discourses. The discourses and possible antagonism might stay the same or change from 2013 to 2017. What the chains of equivalences will contain as well as if the discourse has changed I do not know in beforehand. This is for me to find out by using the discursive theoretical concepts of Laclau and Mouffe. Lastly, I will look at the representation in the debates. By whom and in what situations are “immigrants” represented?

6 Choice of material

I have chosen to analyze the party leader debates on the public service channel because it reaches a lot of people. What is said there is heard by a huge part of the general public in Sweden. The debate in 2013 was viewed by approximately 850 000 people (Sweden consists of around 10 million inhabitants) (Thomsen, 2015). What is said in media has a great impact on our thoughts (SOU 2006:21). It can frame different issues so that only one or a few perspectives are shown – which gives people few options of opinions. What people with power say has an even greater impact, as it gets much media coverage and might reach out especially to those who are thinking of voting for either of the parties. If the debate portrays “immigrants” in a certain way, this contributes to the group formation of “immigrants” in society as a whole.

I chose the party leader debates from October in 2013 and October in 2017 because I wanted to analyze two, by certain aspects, differentiating periods close to two elections. The big “refugee crisis” happened in 2015 together with political changes on immigration. I will not analyze why the debates might differentiate, but analyzing two very different periods is still of importance as it might or might not inflict on the group formation of “immigrants” in the debates.

A benefit with using a discourse analysis is that one smaller piece of the material can represent the whole (Bergström, Boréus 2018, 290). All pieces are a part of the entirety of the material and are there for contextually bound to it. This means I do not have to explain every single sentence in the debates to draw a conclusion on the construction of “immigrants” as a group. I can shed the light on some parts of the debate in order to explain the whole picture. This also means I do not have to analyze all the debates between 2013 and 2017 to say something about how the party leaders portray “immigrants” as a group. I know that what the politicians say will not differentiate to a significant extent every debate and these two chosen debates parts are representative of the whole.

Who the party leader is at the time can of course have some impact on what is said in the debate, but my focus is not on what one specific person is saying but on the entirety of the debate. Also, it is not the party leaders that construct the group formation but the party leaders themselves are affected by the discourse. Actors and reasoning about why the individual says something is not the focus within discourse analysis (Bergström, Boréus 2018, 257). Individuals are not autonomic beings, their way of expressing themselves is part of the greater picture: the discourse in which they exist within. This does not take away the importance of what the party leaders are saying. What is said by people in powerful positions does contribute to what is perceived as natural to believe.

6.1 Selection of material within the debates

I have gone through both debates in their whole and picked out the parts where they speak about immigration or “immigrants”. I have been generous in my interpretation of sorting out when the politicians were talking about these subjects to make sure I did not miss anything important in the material.

When I use the word “immigrant” people will naturally have some differentiating ideas of what and who I am speaking about. Immigrants are and have been described in different ways in Sweden, in for example media; as a person who has merely migrated from one country to another or as a person who also has certain traits and is more likely to commit to certain things because of these traits. My analysis on how “immigrants” as a group is described in debates will look at how the leaders portray people who have moved to Sweden from another country with the intent of living here for a year or longer (Hammar 2018). This is the official definition of what an immigrant is, according to the National Encyclopedia of Sweden. However, I will also include how the party leaders speak of “immigrants” when using other definitions, merely when using the word immigrant. This includes for example when using immigrant as a word for someone born in Sweden with one or more parents who are immigrants. This also includes when the party leaders talk about “refugees” and “immigrants” as belonging to the same group.

My aim in this paper is not to analyze what the political leaders in Sweden define as actual immigrants, but rather to explain how “immigrants” as a constructed concept, is described in the debates. People are affected by what group they are assumed to belong to – not solely by what group they themselves identify with. If you are described as belonging to the group “immigrants”, you will be treated as if you have the same attributes as said group. To only analyze when and in what context the word “immigrant” is used would be to miss out on times where it might be clear that someone is talking about “immigrants” without using the actual word. I will therefore analyze situations when it is clear that the leaders are talking about actual “immigrants” but also about who they perceive as “immigrants” – as they are all put in the same group.

6.2 Translating in to English

I realize it could be a bold move to write about a Swedish debate in English, since the wording will not be exactly the same and might not give the reader the same exact effect that it would have done in Swedish. However, I saw greater benefits than disadvantages with translating. First of all, my non-Swedish-speaking supervisor could read my thesis, but that is not the biggest advantage. Much research about Sweden (and other non-English-speaking countries) is written in English to reach out to more people. The research in English that I found focuses on governance. However, research made with the help of discourse analysis is mostly written in Swedish. By writing in English I hope anyone can read this and use it to write about the discourse on immigration in their country.

If there is no exact translation of the word or the specific Swedish word has a huge significance for the text, I will find the best translation and include the Swedish word in brackets. Hopefully, more discourse research about Sweden will be written in the more international language of English to reach out to a broader audience.

7 Analysis and result

In my analysis of the Swedish party leader debates in 2013 and 2017 I found that there is no consensus on what the group “immigrants” is. The discourses change between the 2013 and the 2017 debate, not only does one discourse disappear but all parties except for the Sweden Democrats change what discourse they conform to. There are three antagonizing discourses in the 2013 debate; I decided to call them the 1. “Only Human”, 2. “The Positive Immigrant” and 3. “The Negative Immigrant” discourses. In 2017 the two latter discourses remain and the first disappears. In the 2nd and 3rd discourses “immigrants” as a group are continuously formed in relation and opposition to the group of “the Swedes”. As Laclau and Mouffe describe it, a group is formed in relation to other groups (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51). “The Swedes” is the group identity which the party leaders conform themselves and the viewers to by relating the group to words like “us”. “Immigrants” are described as “them”- thus being “othered” in relation to “the Swedes”.

To best display my analysis and result I will first explain how the group “immigrants” are formed as a group in relation to “the Swede”. Secondly, under the headline “Antagonizing discourses”, I illustrate what discourses are fighting to be the winning discourse that gets to define what “immigrants” are. The discourses are numbered and explained separately. I mention if they appear in both the 2013 and 2017 debate, what parties use them and illustrate examples from both of the debates to show how. I could have explained the 2013 and the 2017 debate separately, but that would have been at the cost of clearly displaying the discourses – which are the focus in the discourse analysis. This would also lead to a lot of repetition, where I would have to show the same discourses in 2013 and 2017 – only describing them with different quotes and examples. Now I have collected all relevant examples under the discourse they belong to. Instead I have created a separate headline where I demonstrate the differences between the two debates. Under each discourse I show the chain of equivalence and explain how I found the discourse with important quotes and examples from the debate. The floating signifiers are also called nodes, as they are nodes in that specific discourse. However, since there is not a ruling consensus on one discourse in either of the debates, “immigrants” are still floating signifiers when you look outside of one specific discourse. The same goes for the elements – being moments in the specific discourse but having different meaning depending on what discourse you look at. Further, “representation” is presented separately as it does not affect the discourses separately but is important to mention as a part of “unfamiliarizing” immigrants as a group.

7.1 Group formation of “immigrants”

7.1.1 “They are just like us”

In both the 2nd and 3rd discourses the group “immigrants” are formed as a group by putting them in relation to “us”, being people who have not migrated to Sweden. The group formation of “immigrants” are created in relation to “the Swede” (being “us”) in these two antagonizing discourses – one describing immigrants as something positive for Sweden and the other as something negative. Just like the Swedish government report showed (SOU 2005:56), “Swedes” and “immigrants” are described as each other’s opposites – the only difference being that here they are described as each other’s “group opposites” whereas in the report their cultures were described as opposites.

In the discussion on what to do to help refugees, the Liberals party leader says that “They are not different from Karl-Oskar and Kristina” (two Swedes moving to the US in the famous book “Utvandrarna”, written by Vilhelm Moberg) (2013). Even though this is an attempt to familiarize “immigrants” as a group to make people gain sympathy for them – it puts “them” at an arm’s length; in relation to “us”. The group “immigrants” are not fully accepted as part of the community, but merely seen in relation to “us”, a group which they are not invited to join. Interesting is also how the Moderates party leader puts Sweden in relation and contrast to the world. “A broken world affects Sweden” (2013) the Moderate says. It’s like the country Sweden is the same as the group identity of “the Swede” – separate from other countries as well as other groups and not a part of the world or a part of the world’s population.

More examples of othering can be seen under the description of the 2nd and 3rd discourse and the forming of the group “the Swedes” where this continuously occurs.

To further understand how the group “immigrants” is formed, I will now describe how the contrasting group “the Swedes” is constructed.

7.1.2 “The Swedes”

Node: Swedes

Moments: equal –employed – enterprising – trust

“Immigrants” as a group, is formed in relation to “The Swedes”. As Laclau and Mouffe describe it; to form a group is to put it in relation to all other groups and therefor defining what the formed group is not (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51).

“There is so much that is good in Sweden. The trust that exists between Swedes, equal society, gender equal society – there is so much that is good. But that’s why you also have to dare to see and admit to the problems there are. That people don’t get in to the labor market, subsidy-dependency which grows strong amongst non-natives. (...) Gang criminality is growing. These things exist at the same time” (2017).

This quote from the Moderates party leader is a good example of how two groups are depicted in the debates. He separates what Sweden is from what “immigrants” are – therefore creating a “typical Swede” and “an immigrant” as two opposites. “The Swedes” are equal, gender equal and they trust each other. The “immigrants” are subsidy-dependent gang criminals. Describing these groups in contrast to each other like this also adds the opposite attributes of “the Swedes” to the “immigrants” as Laclau and Mouffe describe happens when forming groups (Winther Jørgensen, Phillips 2000, 51). As the Moderates party leader says “these things exist at the same time” – these opposite situations (groups) exist at the same time. The “immigrants” therefore become “unequal”, “patriarchal” and “untrusting of others”. Further, “The Swedes” are represented and brought up in relation to being a boss at one of Sweden’s biggest hamburger chains (2013) and a café-owner at a popular small town café (2013), there for earning the elements “enterprising” and “employed”.

7.2 The antagonizing discourses

In 2013 there are three existing, antagonizing discourses – all fighting to become the winning definition of what the group “immigrants” is. The last two discourses both try to define the group “immigrants” with different elements. What these two have in common is separating the group “immigrants” from the familiar by using othering; using words like “us” and “them” – separating “the Swedes” from “immigrants”. What separate the last two discourses is describing immigrants as something positive or negative for Sweden and “the Swedes”. The first discourse entirely avoids defining “immigrants” or “refugees” as a group distinct from “the Swedes”. In 2017 the first discourse disappears and all parties change discourses – except for the Sweden Democrats.

7.2.1 1. “Only Human”

Floating signifier/node: People who flee

Elements/moments: in need - oppression - poverty

Parties using the discourse in 2013: the Centre Party, the Left Party, the Environment Party, the Christian Democrats

Parties using the discourse in 2017: None

This discourse only occurs in the 2013 debate and is in that debate the discourse represented by the highest number of political parties. What separates this discourse from the other two is that it avoids forming “immigrants” as a separate group from “the Swedes”. Where the 2nd and 3rd discourse would use words like “immigrants” or “refugees” for the same people, this discourse merely mentions “people who flee”. This creates a discourse where a journey a person has made does not define them or put them in a certain box together with certain attributes they are expected to follow.

“There’s a reason why people flee” (2013). The Christian Democrat party leader speaks about the act of fleeing a country in despair rather than the group that does so, and does not at any time in the debate even mention the words “immigrants” or “refugees”, he rather speaks of

people who flee. The same goes for the Centre Party leader, only mentioning children who are freighted in containers in their dangerous journey to Sweden (2013).

The Left Party leader points to the fault in the Sweden democrats blaming “refugees” and “immigrants” for economic issues in Sweden (2013). He merely points out that the Sweden democrats create the group “immigrants” to blame them for different issues, rather than creating this group himself.

Reoccurring in the 2013 debate on immigration is the Environment Party leader’s apparent attempt not to mention the word “immigrant” or “refugee”. She stops herself mid-word or corrects herself after the sentence on occurrence when using these words, rephrasing with “people that flee” or other words (2013).

7.2.2 2. “The Positive Immigrant”

Floating signifier/node: Immigrants

Elements/moments: enriching for the Swedish economy – added workforce – asset – unemployed- uneducated

Parties using the discourse in 2013: the Social Democrats, the Moderates, the Liberals

Parties using the discourse in 2017: the Left Party, the Environment Party, the Centre Party

“The Positive Immigrant” discourse is active in both the 2013 and 2017 debate, however with differentiating parties representing it. Its name refers to how it frames the group “immigrants” as a group separate from “the Swedes”, but with “them”, being the “immigrants”, having a positive meaning for Sweden. This does not mean all elements or moments connected to “immigrants” in this discourse are inherently positive.

There is a somewhat underlying, unspoken truth in the debates that “immigrants” are harder to get employed as they are uneducated. The Moderates party leader mentions that his party has succeeded with getting a lot of “immigrants” employed (2013) as if this was an achievement greater than getting other people employed. The unemployment is by many in the debate described as a natural consequence of “immigrants” being uneducated (2013 and 2017). The Liberals party leader outright says that “immigrants” have a low level of education (2017) and the Moderates party leader as well as the Sweden Democrat party leader claim “immigrants” come from a tradition of lesser education (2013).

The Social Democrat party leader describes immigration as something positive for Sweden, as the “immigrant’s” labor is a huge asset to the Swedish society (2013). He compares it to when people from Yugoslavia and Italy came and helped build the Swedish industrial society (ibid.). Furthermore, the Moderates party leader says “we” (as in “the Swedes”) need “immigrants” to strengthen the Swedish economy and for the survival of Swedish welfare (2013). Similarly, the Left Party leader explains how everyone, including “immigrants”, is needed on the labor market and therefore his party is investing greatly in vocational education that leads to jobs (2013). The Liberals party leader compares “immigrants” coming to Sweden with “Swedes” coming to the US a long time ago, as pioneers – therefore putting a positive light on what “immigrants” could contribute with to Sweden (2013). In a whole, the positive attitudes towards “immigrants” are expressed as a fulfilling of “the Swede’s” needs.

7.2.3 3. “The Negative Immigrant”

Floating signifier/node: Immigrants

Elements/moments: a cost for Sweden – unemployable – uneducated – gang criminality – no attainments

Parties using the discourse in 2013: the Sweden Democrats

Parties in 2017: the Sweden Democrats, the Moderates, the Social Democrats, the Liberals, the Christian Democrats

“The Negative Immigrant” discourse appears in both the 2013 and the 2017 debate, with a growing number of parties contributing to it in 2017. This discourse also forms the group “immigrants” in relation to the group “the Swedes” but unlike the first discourse it frames “immigrants” as something negative for Sweden.

The word “immigrant-dense” (in Swedish: invandrantät) is neither put in a positive nor a neutral context. When the Liberals party leader mentions that a neighborhood is “immigrant-dense” this is directly connected to the area being filled with gangs or other criminality (2017). The same goes for when the word “segregation” is mentioned. It is then assumed that everyone understands that the word implies areas segregated with specifically “immigrants” (no other groups) and automatically being a bad area (2013).

The Social Democrat party leader mentions that lowering “immigrant’s” wages is bad as it could also affect “regular people’s” wages – regular people here referring to people who are not “immigrants” (2017). Mentioning “immigrants” in relation to “regular people” means describing “immigrants” as something else than “regular people”, defining them as something irregular and different. Furthermore, saying this he is implicitly saying that having low wages is only bad when it affects “the Swedes”, not when it affects “immigrants”, implying that “immigrants” as a group deserve lower wages than “Swedes” as a group. He also describes a group of “immigrants” with “no attainments” (ibid.). Neither him nor anyone else in either of the debates mention “Swedes” with “no attainments”. However, when speaking about the group “immigrants”, they are framed as inherently unattained, uneducated and unemployable.

7.2.4 Representation

None of the people in either of the two debates belong to the group “immigrant” in the real sense of the word or as second generation “immigrants”. Neither do they in any of the debates identify themselves with the group. Just as in Mörkenstam’s research on Saami people in Sweden, the group talked about does not get to represent themselves and therefore create their own identity (1999). The only existing person that is used as a real example in either of the debates, that gets to represent the group “immigrants”, is Fatemeh Khavari. She is a somewhat famous name in Sweden, leading the strike against deportations to Afghanistan among other things, herself coming from Iran in 2015.

Fatemeh is sitting in the audience and is mentioned by the Left Party leader in a reply to the Sweden Democrat party leader:

[...] Your replacement when you were gone, one of the heaviest names within the Sweden Democrats; he is lying about someone who is in Sweden with a permanent residence permit, Fatemeh, who is sitting over there. He claims that

she is here illegally; he is trying to bring disgrace on her with a horrendous act of terror that happened, even though she has escaped from a country where terror happens every day. That is how you work, that is how you hound on people from other countries. (2017)

Fatemeh gets to represent the group “immigrants” as a positive figure here, an immigrant with a residency permit. However, she is not described with any other attributes other than merely being an immigrant.

In both the 2013 and 2017 debate, the Liberals party leader, the Centre Party leader and the Christian Democrat party leader use the examples of real life people, in the debate on work and taxes and the debate on security, to make their point in the debates (2013). This, however, never happens in the debates on immigration, other than when the Left Party leader uses his example. It is never mentioned if the honest and hardworking people that are mentioned as examples by the Liberals party leader or the Centre Party leader are “immigrants” or not. Whatever the case is, it is a fact that the other party leaders do not explicitly mention any examples of “immigrants” as honorable members of the Swedish society.

7.3 Comparing 2013 and 2017

In the 2013 debate, what is said by the Sweden Democrat party leader is what contributes to the most binary oppositioning and the most negative attributes being connected to “immigrants” as a group. Even when the topic is not immigration, he constantly brings up immigrants as the problem for “us” Swedes. “They”, talking about immigrants, cost money, are unemployed and make school results go down (2013). The Sweden Democrats are single handedly upholding “The Negative Immigrant” discourse in 2013. However, “The Negative Immigrant” discourse gains ground from the 2013 debate to the 2017 debate. The Social Democrats, the Moderates, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats all move from creating the 2nd to appealing to the 3rd discourse. The “Only Human” discourse has completely disappeared in 2017. All parties conform to describing “immigrants” as a separate group from “the Swedes”. All parties have changed discourses, except for the Sweden Democrats who stay where they started.

If we hypothetically view all three antagonizing discourses of what “immigrants” are as a progression from not forming “immigrants” as a group separate from Swedes, to doing so but viewing “immigrants” as positive for Sweden to at last seeing “immigrants” as something a negative for Sweden - everyone has moved one step closer to “The Negative Immigrant” discourse in 2017, with the exception of the Christian Democrats who moved two steps and the Sweden Democrats who stayed put. Without speculating too much regarding why these changes have happened, a possible theory to explain this would be that it might be harder to uphold “immigrants” as not being a separated group to “the Swedes”– when describing them as a separate group with negative effects on Sweden has gained so much popularity. Upholding the “non-group” way of speaking might be too far away from the “The Negative Immigrant” discourse to be able to challenge it. Looking at these changes together with the changes in the conversation and politics on immigration, it does seem to follow a pattern where the stricter more negative attitude towards “immigrants” and immigration has won more ground during the same time.

The Social Democrats, the Moderates and the Liberals going from describing “immigrants” as enriching (“The Positive Immigrant” discourse) to being a burden (“The Negative Immigrant” discourse) might seem like a huge step, but looking at the similarities between the two discourses it is not. Even when “immigrants” are described as something explicitly positive for Sweden this framing always puts the “immigrants” in relation to if Sweden and “the Swedes” have any use for “them”. The antagonizing discourses, “The Positive Immigrant” and “The Negative Immigrant”, might seem as each other’s opposites, but in that way they are very much the same. What happens if the politicians stop believing “immigrants” are enriching enough for Sweden and “realize” Sweden does not need “immigrants” anymore? They may change their mind on how to invite this “other” group into “our” country; they may decide on stricter borders for example. These decisions are of course easier to make once you have separated the group from yourself and the majority of the people voting.

This just shows how important it is to analyze not only the discourse on immigration but the group formation of the affected group. If “immigrants” are always described as a separate group with different attributes than domestically born “Swedes” – they will always be treated in the same distanced way. Making decisions that harm “us”, the group you belong to, is a lot harder than making decisions that harm “them”, the other group from which you have distanced yourself or been distanced from.

8 Conclusion

As the conversation on immigration has changed (Silberstein 2015) together with stricter immigration laws, the discourse on forming the group “immigrants” has also changed. In 2013 there are three antagonizing discourses fighting to be the objective definition of the “immigrants”. One discourse refuses to form “immigrants” as a separated group from “the Swedes” and the two other discourses antagonize on forming the group “immigrants” as positive or negative for Sweden. All parties in 2017 conform to forming the group “immigrants” as a group opposite from the group “the Swedes” and the Sweden Democrats are no longer alone in framing “immigrants” as something negative for Sweden. All parties moved one step closer to framing “immigrants” as something negative for Sweden in the 2017 debate and this progression might seem hasty. However, as long as “immigrants” are distanced from “us” by being described merely as something in relation to what “we” need – attitudes toward immigration might change swiftly. The step from being needed to not being needed any more is not that big.

There is a lot of further research to be made on the topic of the group formation of “immigrants”. How is this increasingly negative forming of the group “immigrants” visible in social practices? Has the increased “othering” of “immigrants” affected the ability for people belonging to this group to get employed? Researching other Nordic countries forming of “immigrants” as a group or scrutinizing what the discourse might look like historically are other examples of interesting further research to explore. I hope this thesis inspires to any further research on the matter as well as creating a greater understanding of our society.

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