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Master's thesis

The Marginal Social Worker

Exploring how Namibian social work students perceive and implement knowledge from a study exchange in Sweden.

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Preface

This thesis is a result of my strive to get a deeper knowledge and understanding for social work as a contextualised practice. It is also an attempt to achieve increased knowledge of the Namibian social work practice in relation to the Swedish one. My personal situation of residing in Namibia and wanting to practice there but encountering difficulties due to the content of my Swedish degree in social work prompted me to seek for perspectives.

I want to thank the Namibian social workers and social work students that have taken their time to participate in this study; it would not have been possible without you!

I also want to thank my supervisor Peter Hultgren, who throughout the process of writing this thesis has given me valuable opinions and ideas on how to move forward. Thank you also for your encouragement and for interesting conversations!

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Abstract

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This study explores how social work approaches and methods developed and practiced in one context can be interpreted, transferred and implemented in another. Additionally it focuses on how cultures and societies are organised both in individualistic and collectivistic societies and its effects on different approaches and conditions for social work. The data was collected from Namibian social work students that have participated in the Linnaeus Palme exchange program, which is an ongoing cooperation between the Swedish University West and University of Namibia. The results show that what the Namibian students foremost learn during their exchange studies in Sweden has to do with client interaction, critical thinking and dimensions of increased self-awareness. The assimilation of knowledge and possibilities to transfer and implement what they have learned in Sweden in a Namibian social work context is understood with the help of the theoretical concepts of *the marginal man* and *transferability of knowledge*. Shaped by the Namibian hybrid society, where the respondents are part of an ongoing negotiation between different antipoles and mediation between various cultural contexts, I argue that they are marginal social workers. Through their marginal experience they are in possession of qualities that are crucial in their process of *transferability of knowledge* and further create conditions for implementing new knowledge in the Namibian work practice.

Keywords: Social work, exchange studies, Namibia, Sweden, collectivism, individualism, transferability of knowledge, the marginal man, the marginal social worker

PREFACE
ABSTRACT

1. SOCIAL WORK, A CULTURAL CHALLENGE

In a recently published debate article in the Swedish daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* (12.11.2013) eight Swedish social workers and known social work professors discuss and raise a question of what has happened to the Swedish social work practice. They argue that there has been a shift of perspectives from a previous focus on the societal context and its structural boundaries towards clients into perceiving individuals as isolated objects. They discuss how the increased focus on an individualised social work practice has shaped a generation of social workers who have left the field and moved into their offices, where they work with clients individually and isolated from their context instead of operating in the field with the changed conditions of society. Simultaneously the social workers presence in the field has been replaced by increased police, safety guards and surveillance cameras (Sernhede et. al. 2013). Sweden, like other English speaking and West European nations, has increasingly developed into an individualised society where there is a major focus on individual responsibility and self-realization (Neuliep 2009). The authors of the debate article are expressing their concern regarding that societal structures that are excluding individuals are these days not a matter for the social worker anymore and social problems are rather seen as individual failures. This is a contemporary discourse in the Swedish social work field. I obtained my bachelor degree in social work and social pedagogy in Sweden in September 2012. In the second year of my studies, I came to participate in an exchange program that brought me to Namibia. My studies hence were influenced by the exposure to social work practice in the Namibian context. There, social workers make use of collectivistic methods when working with clients and this is closely linked with the Namibian culture. The exposure to Namibian social work gave me insights into the social work profession as contextualised. Different contexts and cultural conditions create a multidimensional practice.

While in Sweden there is a great emphasis on individual interventions, in Namibia the social problems are approached through community and group work methods (Linnaeus Palme Evaluation 2012). Namibia, as many African Asian and Latin American countries, has a traditionally collectivistic culture and organisation of society (Neuliep 2009) and this has an impact on how social work is carried out. Referring to one culture however is not possible when it comes to both Sweden and Namibia, while in Sweden increasing immigration is bringing cultural diversity into a growing multiethnic contemporary society (Jacobsson Pettersson 2008) the Namibian society has various ethnic groups, so called *tribes* that make

up the Namibian population. There are ten tribes that all have their own languages, traditions and cultural customs (Malan 2004). In the Namibian society dimensions of traditional and modern exist side by side together within the different tribes and their variety of cultural norms and beliefs (Hailonga-van Dijk and Lafont 2007). This is a complex reality of practice for Namibian social workers whereby cultural competence is a necessity and a skill that is emphasised by teachers at the social work course at University of Namibia (UNAM) (Fog 2005).

In today's globalised world distances have shortened through the tear down of geographical and communicative obstacles (Scheyvens 2002) and the economic globalisation and labour market has increased mobility amongst people. This has contributed towards increased levels of internationalisation in many professions, which has further led to a demand of global knowledge and cultural awareness incorporated in Swedish higher learning institutions. A given part of this internationalisation process is international exchange programs. Through receiving foreign students and sending out Swedish students in the world, the Swedish government argue that the Swedish educational programs are receiving valuable perspectives in terms of development and quality of their own disciplines. This will continuously improve Swedish educational programs and make Sweden ready for competition on the global arena (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet 2005).

During my exchange studies at University of Namibia I was exposed to Namibian perspectives on social work and how the Namibian social work course was composed. There was a focus on actual and concrete methods of implementing social work through individual-, group- and community work models. In the Swedish course I did not learn specific methods as such. Later on after graduation I came back to Namibia to look for work and then tried to register with the Social Work and Psychology Council, which is a council aiming to ensure professionality amongst practitioners in the given fields. Registration is needed in order to legally practice social work in the country (Social Work and Psychology Act 2004). I then encountered difficulties getting registered due to the content of my degree. I was told that my knowledge in how social work is practiced in Namibia was not sufficient. This made me think about the social work profession and field that I had previously regarded as somewhat international. Later on I became aware of contemporary discourses on the social work profession and its methods containing postcolonial critique that is referring to social work as a western invention. The critique, which is mainly expressed by western practitioners, indicates

the fields focus on methods and theories based on social science research that is produced in western individualized societies and thereby viewed as universal truths. This is seen as a case of ethnocentrism which means that one culture is considered to be ideal while other cultures are considered less important (Allwood 2008, Ife 2007). I found this discussion particularly interesting due to my personal situation and struggle for getting my degree accepted and being registered to practice social work in Namibia.

Michel Foucault (1977) states that knowledge is bound to culture because knowledge is being produced in certain contexts that are depending on time, space and environment. This means that we cannot discuss knowledge as something universal, but as something which is influenced by the specific settings in which it is produced (Foucault 1977). In an article *The transferability of contextualised learning: A study of the importance of workplace-based learning on the social pedagogic programme at the University of Trollhättan/Uddevalla, Sweden and in social work studies at the University of Namibia, Namibia* (2006), Elsebeth Fog examines the question of how the knowledge that students gain during their periods of practice survives. She discusses what Fook, Ryan and Hawkins refer to as *the transferability of knowledge*. This is described as the ability to modify, change and develop theory and knowledge so it can be made relevant in different contexts and where the emphasis is on relevance. Fog also refers to Säljö (2002) who argues that learning is determined by the situation we find ourselves in and the opportunities that it presents. Säljö emphasise the value of situatedness as a tool of interpretation and points out that it is of importance to establish an awareness of the fact that contexts are constantly changing and never exist independently of human action and that at the same time the context is also part of the student's learning process. Säljö (2002) further believes that learning depends on who we are; what experiences and knowledge we bring into a new learning situation. This prior knowledge, he argues, is as important as is the situation in itself and also constitutes a contextual ingredient. The learning outcomes depend on how we conceptualise the impression we get and how we interpret the situation, what it demands from us and what it makes possible or permits. Fog (2006) refers to Napier and Fook who define a reflective approach to learning as one where the relationship between theory and practice is an ongoing process in which the two constantly inform and develop each other. Fog explores how with regards to the various tribes and different customs constituting Namibian society the Namibian teachers emphasise cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity and make sure that the social work students develop this knowledge. Fog describes what Green refers to as *ethnic competence*, which regards being able to conduct

one's professional work in a way that corresponds with behaviour and expectations that members of a distinctive culture recognize as appropriate amongst them selves. Fog gives examples of this competence as knowledge of how to greet someone and awareness of different family constellations where different people possess different family positions depending on cultural beliefs. To be ethnically competent is being aware of one's own cultural limitations and at the same time being open to cultural differences. Fog's results show that the experience from practice enables the Namibian students to understand that "gaining knowledge from a textbook is one thing but reality is another" (Fog 2006 p.79). The students' learn to adjust what they learn in class into local theories so that they can work in different areas of the country where cultural customs differ. This is something the teachers are also used to as they continuously translate and adjust books written in other cultural contexts into fitting the Namibian society (Fog 2006). In her concluding paragraph Fog raises the question of what happens to the meaning of concepts when they are being transported from one cultural setup to another and which tacit understandings are included in the concepts. She further reflects on what impact the cultural differences have on students' abilities to transfer theory into practice. I aim to explore these questions in study, however not as a general phenomenon. Instead the questions will be explored specifically through the participants of this study and their abilities to transfer knowledge from Swedish social work into a Namibian practice.

2. RESEARCH TASK AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1. Aim and purpose

This study will concentrate on how knowledge obtained in one cultural context can be transferred into and used in another. This will be done by looking into how understandings in social work and skills focused on individual interventions obtained at a Swedish university are being transformed, interpreted and implemented by Namibian social workers in a practice that is characterised by collectivistic views on social work. Additionally the study will look into what the Namibian students consider valuable from what they learned and got exposed to from Swedish social work.

2.2. Research questions

1. How are the Swedish social work studies being *interpreted*?

2. How are the experiences from the studies in Sweden made useful for a Namibian collectivistic social work context?

3. In what work and study situations do the Namibian social workers *implement* the knowledge obtained from the studies in Sweden?

4. What do the Namibian students consider valuable from the exchange studies in Sweden with regards to ***professional knowledge?***

2.3. Relevance to the social work field

With the increased opportunities for Swedish social work students to partake in international exchange programs this study is of relevance since it puts focus on the possibilities of transferring knowledge from one cultural context to another. It also looks into what skills are needed in order to do this successfully. The study further examines differences in the international social work fields originating from cultural and historical organisations of societies. Here valuable understandings of social work as a contextualised profession are demonstrated. It is of relevance for the Swedish field to unveil and discuss that social work practices differ and that we cannot consider social work universal. This is important to be aware of not to mention when working with clients that come from other cultural contexts where social work might be perceived differently.

3. THE SOCIAL WORK EXCHANGE

To get a better understanding of the different conditions for social work in Sweden and Namibia I here present a brief history of the discipline in both countries. In order to create awareness of what ideas and underlying images have guided the development of exchange programs in Swedish higher education I also present a paragraph on this. Finally I describe the situation in Namibia where there is no major focus on aspects regarding internationalisation of the higher education system.

3.1. Social work in a historical context in Namibia and Sweden

In Namibia the social work profession has developed as a scientific discipline since the early 1950's. At this time social work was mainly facilitated and carried out by churches. During the 50's non-governmental organisations (NGO's) that specialised in specific services were established (Muinyangue 2013a). The first professional training of social workers started in 1983 at a learning institution called Academy for Tertiary Education (University of Namibia 2008). After independence in 1990 the University of Namibia was established in 1992. The faculty of humanities and social sciences has been represented at the university from the start offering the course of Bachelor of Arts in Social Work (University of Namibia 2013a).

In Sweden the social work profession has developed since the 19th century but at that time it was called *charity work* or *work with the poor* and mainly focused on preventive healthcare and homes for orphans, blind, old and disabled people. In 1904 the women of National Organisation for Social Work (NASW) - who strongly believed that social work needed to be more professionalised - started giving lectures on social work and in 1910 the first semester long course was established. The NASW organised the social work course themselves for almost twenty-five years untill the government overtook the operation and increased the number of courses (Meeuwisse & Swärd 2006, Centralförbundet för Socialt Arbete 2013). Social work was established as a university discipline in 1977 when a university reform stated that social university colleges should be incorporated with universities (Elmér 1983).

Sweden thereby has a longer tradition of social work as an established profession than Namibia. The Swedish social work field however has changed a lot over time and is still developing in terms of defining the aim of the work, what methods to use and so forth

(Pettersson 2001). It is important to consider such conditions and their differences, as they inevitably seem to affect social work practices in both countries.

3.2. The development of international study exchange programs in Swedish universities: underlying ideas and images

In a governmental proposition from the Swedish former Ministry of Education and Culture (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet) (2005) it is described that the university world has a tradition of science exchanges between teachers and researchers from different countries and that international contacts always have been valued. During the last decades however the internationalisation has come to include larger groups of higher education. The concept of internationalisation has changed over time. In the end of the 20th century the focus was on the mobility whereas today all aspects that contribute towards an international dimension of the education are emphasised. The internationalisation of higher education during recent years is strongly linked with the economic globalisation and labour market and the increase of international mobility amongst people. This contributes towards increased levels of international elements in many professions. Globalisation creates new possibilities but it also results in tougher competition. In the development of the globalised world the Swedish government emphasise that Sweden needs to strengthen its position through competition of knowledge, competence, creativity and quality. Simultaneously the demand for higher education is increasing and it is estimated that a lot of people will take part in higher education programs not only in their own country but also in other countries. This has inspired universities to offer courses for foreign students, which has created a growing global market for higher education. The Swedish government view internationalisation of the higher education system as a factor that will contribute towards enhancing the quality of the education. They describe how according to the government the participation of foreign students and researchers will add valuable perspectives for the quality and development of the disciplines. Another motivation for the increasing internationalisation, expressed by the Swedish government, is the way it contributes to promote understanding and respect for various other cultural perspectives and traditions as well as international solidarity (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet 2005).

During the late 1960's and early 1970's the Swedish government started working harder towards an internationalisation of Swedish universities. The ambitions were motivated both

with regards to the international competitiveness of Swedish industries and the wish to promote solidarity with countries and cultures in the non-industrialised world. Students above all had a strong commitment to support developing countries (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet, 2005). In a report (*Utbildningens internationalisering, UKÄ-rapport 21 1974*) from the formerly Swedish Higher Education Authority (Universitetskanslerämbetet) presented in 1974 the goals of internationalisation are describing that *"an internationalised education should create global openness, awareness and readiness to act as well as understandings and respect for other kind of people and cultures. A broader perspective should be a link in the universities ambition to provide students with a comprehensive, critical and value-aware approach to deal with problems"* (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet 2005 p.33). This description clearly indicates what the Swedish Higher Education Authority wanted to achieve with the internationalisation of Swedish education. As a result of a government bill concerning education and research within the university world (prop. 1976/77:59) a general educational goal to promote the understanding of other countries and international relationships was added in the University Act of 1977. The government expressed that internationalisation should be considered an overall goal in the whole educational system. In the University Act of today this goal remains with the addition that not only the courses should promote internationalisation but that all the operations of the universities should foster understandings for other countries and international relationships.

In order to stimulate collaborations with universities in developing countries government created The Linnaeus Palme Program in 2000. This program has grown immensely since it was initiated but still the exchange with developing countries is a limited part of universities international cooperation (Utbildnings- och Kulturdepartementet 2005).

3.3. Internationalisation at University of Namibia

Looking into the historical development of higher education in Namibia, one can perhaps better understand some of the most significant differences while comparing it with the Swedish context of today. Namibia became independent from the South African apartheid rule, which was the second colonisation of the country after Germany, in 1990 (Landguiden 2013b). According to the Ministry of Education the educational situation during the time of independence was characterised by an unequal access to education and training at all levels of the education system. There was fragmentation of education along racial and ethnic lines and

a lack of democratic participation within the education and training system (Ministry of Education 2013). As mentioned previously, two years after independence in 1992 the University of Namibia was established (University of Namibia 2013a). Following the years of apartheid it seems that the university focuses on priorities concerning a national agenda. The declared mission of University of Namibia does not include any official standpoints when it comes to internationalisation processes. The mission statement of UNAM is described as one to "engage in socially and nationally relevant academic and technical training, research and educational programs […] within the cultural context of the Namibian people" (University of Namibia 2013b). The operational principles in this statement has a focus on developing the university as "a leading national institution and a major contributor to nation building" (University of Namibia 2013b); that the university should serve as a platform for the development of national values and culture; that the university should undertake basic and applied research with a view of contributing to the social economic, cultural and political development of Namibia; that the university in different ways should work towards enhancing the country's productivity and socio-economic development and lastly the University of Namibia should promote national and regional unity and understanding (University of Namibia 2013b). However in a message from the vice chancellor published on the university home page he points out that UNAM cherishes diversity and encourages multiculturalism and that against this background the university welcomes international students from all over the world. He explains that international students besides from adding value to the already rich diversity also enable staff and students to learn about other countries and cultures (University of Namibia 2013c). From the mission statement and the guiding principles of UNAM one can see how there is a clear focus on working towards national goals and this needs to be understood with the historic episodes in mind. The stated vision of University West (UW), as well as of most of the Swedish higher learning institutions, on the other hand incorporates a clear standpoint with regards to dimensions of internationalisation. UW states that the university has *a clear international perspective* (Högskolan Väst 2013).

4. CULTURAL DIVERSITIES AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL WORK

In this chapter I present previous research and the theoretical framework of this study. Through introducing different factors and perspectives I try to provide a picture that is demonstrating the complexity of being a social worker in contemporary Namibian society. Namibian social workers have to approach and relate to several different antipoles in their practice. These are *traditional* and *modern*, *African* and *Western* and additionally the various cultural groups, so called tribes, which make up the Namibian population (Lafont and Hailonga-van Dijk 2007). Through the study exchange and their exposure to Swedish social work practice the respondents of this study further need to relate *individualistic* and *collectivistic* dimensions and approaches in connection with social work. This heterogeneous and complex reality has shaped the respondents into mediators between different ways of living life with regards to those different antipoles and cultural diversity. Similar mediation has been discussed in the theory through the concept of *the marginal man* (Park 1937). Park and Stonequist (Trondman 1994) describe how the marginal man has access to two cultures (worlds), which gives him or her both a richer personality and greater competence when it comes to mediation. He or she can see problems from different perspectives (Trondman 1994). In the social work profession social workers them selves are the main instruments, using central skills and concepts such as *conscious use of self* and *self-awareness* (Heydt and Sherman 2005). This will also be explored in this chapter. To start with I will provide a paragraph that is exploring how one can understand Swedish and Namibian societies through the help of individualistic and collectivistic perspectives. By referring to a comparative study I will demonstrate how those different approaches affect the social work practice in the two countries.

4.1. Individualistic and collectivistic approaches to Social Work

Hofstede (1984) defines individualism and collectivism as ways of describing the individual's relationship towards society. While in the individualised society the citizen is being defined through individual terms, in the collective society the individual is defined with regards to a societal and cultural context. Bauman (2002) explains that characteristics of an individualised society include shifting changes from a collective support to an individualised responsibility. The citizens can no longer to the same extent rely on and support one another because the individualisation of society acts disuniting towards the people. Beck (1998) further describes the individualisation as a value-system promoting the citizen's project towards self-

realisation. There is a focus on the individual performance and the citizen's responsibility to become successful. Hui and Triandis (1986) conclude that characteristics of individualists are their way of prioritising their own goals in relation to the group and that they are more independent. In collectivistic cultures on the other hand the citizen prioritise the goals of the group rather than their own. Typical behaviours of the collectivistically fostered citizen are further described as the sharing of material and immaterial assets, the participation in other peoples' lives and the way of considering how the own decisions might affect others (ibid.). Triandis (1995) has found that countries of individualistic character tend to be modern industrial countries with economies based on specialization. With regards to a schematic classification these cultures are found in English speaking countries in the world and in the West European countries. Collective cultures are found in non-industrial developing countries including the main parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

By describing a study that was carried out with a comparative approach picturing social work in England and South Africa, perspectives on representative individualistic and collectivistic approaches to social work can be defined. While England is being characterised as a post-industrial Western country that focuses on a more *individualised* social work, South Africa, being considered a new post-colonial country, has a society where *the collective* traditionally has been culturally valued and where it is of importance that social work is practiced through community and group work (Lawrence, et al. 2003). These different approaches to social work are explained through historical aspects and through contemporary societal organization. England is identified as an extreme example of a liberal welfare regime (Espen Andersen 1999) whereas South Africa is seen as a country where nation building has been an important goal for government following the collapse of apartheid. Language plays a big role in defining reality and through the word and African concept *Ubuntu*[1] (literally: We are what we are to others) and the Zulu word *Simunye* (We are one) strive for connectedness is constructed for a people who have historically been divided by race. These words do not seem to exist in England where the emphasis on individualism has never been greater. While

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[1] ***Ubuntu***
It is closely related to African humanism.
It incorporates notion of an African collective consciousness and universal brotherhood of Africans.
Its values include sharing, treating other people as humans, empathy, warmth, sensitivity, understanding, care, respect, patience, reciprocation and communication.
Relating to communalism, it perhaps finds its clearest expression in saying that:
A person is a person because of other people (Coetzee PH and Roux APJ 1991).

Margaret Thatcher stated that there is "no such thing as society", social workers in the South African context are working towards forms of practice that are promoting inclusion, community building and nation building (Lawrence, et al. 2003). England in this case can be described as a Western country and South Africa as a non-Western country. When drawing parallels from this study to my own Sweden can be compared with the individualised British society while Namibia share many characteristics with the collectivistic culture in the South African society.

4.2. Perspectives on Namibian culture – the traditional and the modern

In the previous paragraph I have presented a way of understanding different approaches to social work through individualistic and collectivistic organisations of society. This is done with regards to a schematic classification where Sweden as a modern industrial country is being defined as an individualistic culture and Namibia being a non-industrial developing country is defined as a country having a collectivistic culture. In this paragraph I will further draw a picture of the dynamic and complex mix of cultures that influence the Namibian society and contribute towards a collective mindset.

In a Legal Assistance Centre publication (2007) on gender and sexuality in Namibia Hailonga-van Dijk and Lafont explores the complexity of culture in Namibian society. Hailonga-van Dijk states that in Namibia historical processes including the time of colonisation, the apartheid era and Independence have resulted in the creation of a hybrid society. She further explains how after Independence in 1990 people had to negotiate between local and global in the creation of norms and values representing the new Namibia. Exile Namibians who escaped the country during the liberation struggle brought back new ways after returning to Namibia and migrants from other parts of the world also contributed to changes in the Namibian society (Hailonga-van Dijk 2007). Lafont explains that at the same time traditional cultural beliefs and customs within the different ethnic groups were and still are strongly integrated into everyday life of the people. They remain crucial and important (Lafont 2007). In the globalised world of today with economics being the overall important factor, the flows of goods, labour markets and information is bringing American and European cultural values into Namibian society creating a new situation whereby culture again has to be negotiated between local and global in an ongoing process. Hailonga-van Dijk (2007) concludes that a hybridised tradition has developed in Namibia containing elements of

indigenous, colonial, Christian and foreign cultures. Own observations from the time I was studying with the social work course at the University of Namibia gave me valuable understandings of this hybridised society that Hailonga-van Dijk is referring to. While many of my fellow students were living modern student lives and being quiet liberal in their views, the often very conservative norms and values from the village, their *culture,* were present and had to be negotiated somehow. Culture and cultural beliefs were ever present in classroom discussions and as I perceived it, many of my fellow students were parts of two worlds, the modern student life in the capital city and the traditional life back in the village. These two worlds however were seldom compared or put against each other. Instead they exist side by side constituting different parts of life (Samuelsson 2012). Lafont (2007) describes a similar situation claiming that human rights discourse is often in conflict with the 'new' Namibian national identity and morality. She expresses that there is a desire especially among young people to be modern, politically correct and Namibian but at times it has not been easy to settle these values and integrate them within national identity and statehood. The idea, that human rights include gender equality and sexual rights, Lafont states, conflict with some perceptions of the Namibian 'traditional' values.

Similar doubleness and relation between modern and traditional values has been explored by Stina Jornefelt (2008) who concentrates her master's thesis on Namibian university students and their reflections on social identity. One of her research questions focus on the students' thoughts on possible difficulties when it comes to being part of the world of university studies in the capital with regards to their growing up environments in rural areas. Jornefeldt is interested in another cultural conflict, which is the one between the traditional and the modern. Her results show that the students are proud over UNAM as both a national and international meeting place and explain that they have gained greater knowledge and tolerance towards other cultures through their university studies. They all talk about their origin, the north of Namibia, with warmth and explain the special meaning this area has for them. At the same time however they express the importance of life in the capital with regards to the new perspectives they have gained through the university studies. Jornefelt concludes that the students have made a journey from rather rural areas where the family functions as a social safety net and the collectivistic way of life is a reality, to a more individualised environment with salaried employment and nuclear families in the capital city. Jornefelt identifies three areas where the students express dual feelings. These include the extended family contra the nuclear family, the North contra the capital, and African contra Western

inspired culture. These somehow shattered feelings towards the antipoles of the traditional and the modern seem to result in ongoing reflections for the students.

4.3. The marginal man

In the previous paragraph I have tried to demonstrate how the Namibian society is containing different elements of culture that influence peoples lives and that when moving from one context to another, such as from the traditional life in the rural areas to university studies in the capital, this has to be negotiated in an ongoing process. In this paragraph I will explain how such negotiation processes can be understood through the theoretical concept of the marginal man. By using the concept of the marginal man I find a way of understanding this situation, which is helpful when looking into how they experience and perceive knowledge from the exchange studies in Sweden.

The term the marginal man was coined by Robert E Park in the 1920's and incorporates a thematic and synthesised description of a "type of personality" that can be seen as characteristic of modern society. With Park's 1930's perspective society is no longer dominated by the small and stable ethnocentric group, the conditions for societal life have changed with the rise of "the modern world". These drastic changes however do not change the human nature or her link to the small group. Park argues that it is still in the local community that the individual develops norms, habits and personal character. What has changed following the rise of the modern world is the individuals increased contact with people from other "worlds" e.g. cultures, countries and social groups. The most typical quality of the marginal man personality is that he/she lives in and is shaped by two different worlds (societies, cultures, traditions) (Trondman 1994). Park gives the following definition: *"The individual who through migration, education, marriage or some other influence leaves one social group or culture without making a satisfactory adjustment to another finds himself on the margin of each but a member of neither. He is a marginal man* (Park 1937 p.3)*"*. Stonequist (1937) adds that this situation results in feelings of alienation towards the both worlds and that the marginal man experiences a "dual personality" and a "dual conscious". Park and Stonequist make use of a theme from Simmels concept "the stranger" which is the idea that the stranger, the marginal man, through his or her access to two cultures has both a richer personality, greater competence and an ability to act more objective towards the surrounding world. The access to two sets of languages, habits, attitudes and norms gives the

marginal man the opportunity to take the role as the mediator. He or she can see problems from more than one perspective. But although the marginal man could very well assimilate fully in the new world many of them chose not to do so. They seem to experience problems no matter what world they chose. Although they might have gained both economical and social factors in relation to their old world they cannot fully live their new lives. The past cannot be forgotten and it brings up social and moral confusion (Trondman 1994). As I have described, the concept of the marginal man has mainly been used in class travel theory. I have not examined whether the respondents of this study are class travellers or not. What is interesting for this study however is the aspect that the respondents are individuals who travel between parameters of indigenous culture, African culture, Western culture and dimensions of modern and traditional. They do not only travel between two milieus as the concept implies but they travel between several different ones. They do not only have access to two sets of norms, languages etcetera but to several. There are risks involved when using theories and concepts and applying them on other individuals or situations than what they were originally created for. In this case however, I do not see any obstacles with using the marginal experience as a tool to understand how the respondents assimilate knowledge from the exchange studies.

4.4. Self-awareness and conscious use of self as central skills for the social worker

When aiming to find out what the respondents considered valuable new knowledge that they obtained during their exchange period in Sweden, it is of relevance to point out what skills and knowledge are important for social workers. In this chapter I will demonstrate the social workers use of the tool of oneself and argue that it is the social workers most important competence.

Several authors have described the planned change process in social work and the typical social work skills that are used in this process. These skills are used no matter if it is on a micro-, mezzo- or macro level as they are used in the context of *the helping relationship.* With his interactional theory of social work practice Shulman (2012) suggests that the skill of the social worker is to create a positive working relationship with the clients through which he or she consciously influence the outcomes of the practice. Heydt and Sherman (2005) discuss how Neuman and Friedman point out the importance of *self-awareness* and *conscious use of*

self in the process of building the client relationship. Self-awareness should be achieved through mastering one's own feelings and motivations. They emphasise that it is of great importance that social work students get encouraged to work with these concepts and to reflect on and compare conscious use of self with its opposite. Cournoyer (2011) discusses how the social work practice involves the conscious use of oneself and the social worker becomes the medium through which knowledge, attitudes and skills are expressed. Self-awareness therefore is of major importance and a skill that the social worker requires in order to not develop emotional or behavioural patterns that might eventually harm the clients. Heydt and Sherman (2005) concludes that the personal values, attitudes, prejudices and beliefs of social workers have a great impact on and affect how helpful they can be to clients. These values and beliefs are being expressed in the professional relationships both directly and indirectly and hence the more aware social workers are of how their own beliefs, perceptions and behaviours impact on their professional relationship, the more consciously they can choose how to influence the specific helping relationship in which they are involved. Unexamined attitudes on the other hand and lack of self-awareness will create barriers in the relationship and in the practice. They further argue that developing self-awareness is connected to and must also include working towards the development of *cultural competence* (Heydt and Sherman 2005).

4.5. Conclusion of the theoretical framework

In this chapter I have tried to draw a picture of the setting in which Namibian social workers practice. I have explained different factors that are influencing the Namibian contemporary society and how they affect the respondents both in their work practice and as Namibians. I have also presented a theoretical framework that can be used in order to understand how the complexity of Namibian society is affecting the social workers and their practice. Through the concept of *the marginal man* one can understand how the exposure to different so-called antipoles and the ever-present cultural diversity shapes the social workers into becoming culturally competent and skilled mediators. This becomes a crucial tool in relationship building with clients and is also of importance with regards to the importance of self-awareness and the conscious use of self. The concept of the marginal man will further be used in the analysis of my results together with perspectives of collectivistic and individualistic approaches to social work. This will also be linked with the concept of transferability of knowledge, self-awareness and conscious use of self.

5. IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH

In this chapter I will describe how this study has been carried out. I will present what kind of a research it is, what data collection methods I have used and how I have worked with the analysis of the data. I will further discuss ethical reflections and what decisions I have made throughout the research process. In the final paragraph I will discuss the chosen methods and what impact they have had on the results. Being part of a western tradition of carrying out research with people in a country far away from home I feel a need to demonstrate consciousness. This I choose to do by thoroughly describing the procedure of how this study has been carried out. Berg (2004) who has written a book on racism, nationalism and the multicultural society in Namibia – and Sweden, expresses in his book how it has been and still is typical for western travellers, explorers, scientists and missionaries to travel the world, fall in love with what they find and later consider themselves as experts on the given area – the country. I find it imperative to be aware of this tendencies and that is why I have allowed myself to extend this chapter a bit. In order to give a picture of the specific exchange program that the respondents have been taking part in and what modules they took at University West I will start with a paragraph on the Linnaeus Palme exchange.

5.1. The Linnaeus Palme exchange

The former Swedish Programme Office (2013) describes Linnaeus Palme as an international exchange program aiming to stimulate cooperation between universities and university colleges in Sweden and developing countries. The overall purpose is to strengthen the internationalisation of Swedish institutions. Through a long-term bilateral collaboration between teaching institutions in Sweden and in developing countries, the quality of Swedish educational programs will improve through various perspectives and new knowledge that is added or exchanged. The program includes both student and teacher exchange, the latter aiming to deepen the cooperation between the departments in the two countries. While Swedish students benefit from lectures given by teachers from the developing country with regards to the international perspective, the Swedish teachers that go abroad to lecture gain valuable international experiences and understandings that they can later on use in their own lecturing. The students gain international experience, understandings of different cultures and a broadened knowledge of their field of study. Swedish teaching institutions and departments that wish to establish a Linnaeus Palme program at their university together with a university in a developing country prepare an application to the International Program Office. The Swedish teaching institution is responsible for operational matters linked to the cooperation.

The program is funded through the governmental Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) (Programkontoret 2013).

The aim of the specific Linnaeus Palme project that the Namibian students have participated in has been the cooperation between the Swedish learning institution, University West, and the University of Namibia. This cooperation should promote intercultural educational methods; knowledge of research, theories and practice of social work and work integrated learning (WIL) in an intercultural perspective. An additional aim has been to promote research cooperation in social work arenas in both countries. Expectations on the project has been to get insights and understandings of the different conditions for social work practice in Sweden and Namibia and other parts of the world since all students study together with other international students.

During the exchange semester in Sweden the Namibian students follow the modules *Swedish for Beginners*; *Power, Gender, Ethnicity and other Patterns of Inequalities* and *Field Work in Social Work with focus on Social Psychiatry*. The both last modules include a five-week theoretical period and a five-week field period of work under supervision. Due to language barriers and the fact that the entire Social Work course at University West is in Swedish the Namibian students unfortunately cannot join the Swedish social work students. They therefore mainly interact with other exchange students from different parts of the world who are also participating in the above-mentioned modules (Evaluation Linnaeus Palme Project 2012).

5.2. Gathering the data

With this study I wanted to focus on the respondents' perspectives. I was interested in their thoughts and reflections and that is why I chose to use the qualitative research method. Qualitative research is mainly found within the social sciences and implies that the researcher studies the social reality with the objective to describe and analyse culture and behaviour within individuals and groups. The individuals that are being studied always constitute the base of this method (Bryman 2010).

Already at the initial stages of this study when defining the problem area of the research I was aware that there was a limited group of students that could act as respondents and from whom

I could collect my data. The exchange program was initiated in 2009 and up to now only a certain amount of students have participated. I decided to try and get in touch with all participants and see if they were interested in taking part in this study by filling out a questionnaire with questions on my area of research. The questionnaire is constructed like an interview guide with similar questions that I would have used if I had been able to carry out interviews. It is not a classic questionnaire that serves to find out specific opinions from a bigger population of respondents in order to create statistics and generalizable data. Instead, the questionnaire is adjusted to fit the specific settings of this study where I am interested in the respondents' experiences and views regarding Swedish social work and how it was to study in Sweden. The geographical distance to the respondents cancelled out the most appropriate methods for data collection such as personal interviews, group interviews or other ways that could have been done on a face-to-face manner. I was left with options of collecting data either orally (telephonically or recorded by the respondent him/herself) or written (questionnaires or other texts written by the respondents). After considering the pros and cons with oral data collection I came to the conclusion that in this case it would not feel comfortable. The reasons for that were mainly practical. The limited Internet accesses as well as mobile network coverage were obstacles since some of my respondents are working in rural areas where they do not have access to neither. I also considered the somewhat unreliable project of calling telephonically from Sweden to Namibia. I had learned from several previous experiences that also when both parts are in good network coverage the line might be unclear at times. I regarded this fact as possibly stressful and disturbing in an interview situation for me as well as for the respondents. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) argue that using interviews as a method when conducting research is a moral dilemma containing ethical and moral questions that have to be considered by the researcher. I also gave some thought to the fact that if I would conduct interviews telephonically I would not be able to make sure that the respondent was in a comfortable location were he or she would not feel stressed, overheard or disturbed. This reflection made me further realise that I did not find it appropriate to conduct interviews telephonically. Further on for the respondents to be able to orally record reflections and answers this required technical equipment to some extent and it would also be more time consuming for them. Some of the respondents had already hinted that they were very busy at the time and so with that in mind and with regards to the need of a recordable device I decided not to use this data collection method.

The questionnaire as a data collection method also has its pros and cons with regards to trustworthiness. Although I do not use this data collection method in a classic way several of the factors are still relevant. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue that no other method is as effective when the researcher is aiming to fully *understand* people than to observe and listen to what they have to say. When using the questionnaire to collect data factors of observing and listening are left out. At the same time however Bryman (2005) argues that the presence of an interviewer is also associated with several problems. Factors such as gender, age, social class, race and appearance have proved to have an effect on the respondents' answers. Further on, Bryman argues, the interviewers expectations and desired outcome might be communicated in the interview situation and thereby affect the respondents' way of answering. Some of these possible sources of error are eliminated in the case of self-administered questionnaires. In a way the listening dimension is still present when it comes to questionnaires because the respondents express themselves when answering the questions and the researcher when reading what they have written listens to what they communicate. What is being expressed however is not as spontaneous as would it have been in the interview situation. Through the questionnaire the respondents are given time to think about and to express themselves in a way that they wish and that is something I consider very valuable. By using the questionnaire as a data collection method I do not have to consider my own possible effects on the respondents as would I have had to in the interview situation. Instead I can just hope that the respondents have followed my instructions, to give some thought, reflect on the questions and then sit down and write everything that they feel like writing within the given frames of the questions.

The process of finding and getting in touch with all the students were more time consuming than I had expected. I already had contact details to three of the students, two of them I had met a few times during their time in Sweden and also I had been in contact with them afterwards. The other one I only met briefly at UNAM during my exchange semester. From these three participants I managed to get a hold of some of the others and I was further assisted by a contact person at the University West who provided me with a list of most of the participants and their contact details. In the end I had contact details to all participants. I then contacted all of them through e-mail, SMS, chat programs or social forums to ask if they were interested in participating. All of them agreed to participate. I then wrote an informative letter containing general information on the research topic, how their participation would be arranged and their rights as respondents (see appendix 1). This was e-mailed to them.

A questionnaire (see appendix 2) containing twenty semi-structured questions was sent to the respondents via e-mail and they were given two weeks to fill it out before submitting. They were encouraged to take some time and reflect before writing down their answers and I emphasised that with regards to the purpose of the study I was interested in their thoughts and reflections and that they should feel free to write as much as they wanted. However while all of the respondents agreed to participate initially in the end four of them ended up not submitting the questionnaire. According to Bryman (2005) it is a known disadvantage with self-administered questionnaires that they can generate lower, and often much lower response rates than interview-based research. As I have reflected on possible reasons for this, I have concluded that it might have had something to do with the fact that at UNAM at this time it was examination period and students were very occupied and focused on this. I was not aware of this at the time when I decided to send out the questionnaires and even if I would have been I would not have been able to postpone the sending out of the questionnaires nor for them to be put earlier. Getting in touch with all of the participants to start with was a time consuming activity and I also had my limitations and time frames regarding this research. Another motive why respondents did not submit might have been connected with the fact that some of the ones that are working are staying out of office a lot, working in the field in remote areas for periods of time and hence have a limited access to computers as well as Internet connection.

When going through the questionnaires I quickly realised that the data material was a bit thin. Although I could see some patterns in the material and some of the respondents had reflected a lot, others had not answered all of the questions and sometimes some of the answers where not very much relating to the questions. Other times the answers were in line with the questions but they were more of a shallow character and did not further develop into more deep reflections. It is hard to say whether the respondents had difficulties with comprehending the questions or if they just found it hard to answer with regards to their experiences. Bryman (2005) explains that this is another disadvantage with using self-administrated questionnaires because there is no interviewer available to help the respondents if a question is not understood. Bryman hence emphasises the importance of the questionnaire to be structured in a way that is easy to follow. I had previously given the questionnaire to friends both in Namibia and Sweden and told them to go through it and give me feedback on the questions and the structure. I got some feedback and I changed the questionnaire a bit so

that it would be as clear as possible. In the instruction I also told the respondents to please contact me should there be anything unclear regarding the questionnaire. However I was not contacted by anyone. Afterwards I have gone through the questionnaire several times and reflected on the questions and if my way of constructing the questions might have affected the partly poor outcome. I have then reflected on the fact that some of the questions are a bit abstract and that this might have been a bit foreign for the respondents with regards to the more direct ways of learning with less focus on independent reflections that they are used to in the study situation (Evaluation Linnaeus Palme 2012). Other than that I also got the impression that some of the respondents were in a hurry when filling out the questionnaire and hence there might not have been time for any deeper reflections. This can be understood with regards to the same possible causes why some respondents did not submit at all.

An inspiration for this study was an evaluation report on the Linnaeus Palme exchange program between University West and UNAM that was carried out in collaboration between the both learning institutions. When reading the evaluation I became very interested in the Namibian students and teachers reflections on how we do social work in Sweden. After realising that my data material was not sufficient I decided to ask the authors if I could get access to the data that they had collected. They had conducted structured interviews (see appendix 3 and 4) with six of the student participants and four of the teacher participants and I was given the transcribed material. The evaluation covered all the five years that the program has been active and focused on three perspectives: the teachers', the students' and an administrative perspective. The students' perspective included reflections regarding pedagogy, their individual learning, what they have learned professionally, the usefulness of this knowledge in their own home context, dimensions of personal development and what increased value for the social work profession they have gained through participating in the program. In the evaluation report some aspects of professional learning and the relevance for a Namibian context is presented but I was further interested in getting a deeper understanding of the transferability of knowledge with regards to individualistic and collectivistic approaches to social work. I was interested in the respondents' reflections on the Swedish social work practice where individual interventions are prominent. And further what possibilities they saw in how they can make use of their knowledge from Sweden in Namibia. Against the background discourse that social work is too westernised I wanted to understand how the respondents reflect on what we learn and how we practice in Sweden. The evaluation report was more of a general approach and that is how I initially motivated to further collect

data from the same respondents. The transcribed interviews that I was given from the authors of the evaluation however turned out to be very useful for me. This data had a deeper character than the data I got from the questionnaires, which was rather shallow. In the data from the transcribed interviews the respondents gave deeper explanations, shared more thoughts and also gave more examples of what they had experienced and how the exchange has had an impact on them both personally and professionally. This material hence added a width to my data and at the same time it confirmed some of the interesting points that I had discovered in the data from the questionnaires. When adding the two materials together I felt that I had the data I needed in order to allow myself to proceed. The material however was still not of the in-depth quality that I had initially expected and wished for and this has affected the analysis of this study. I cannot claim the analysis to be of generalisable kind because the quality of my collected material cannot be considered deep enough. I choose nonetheless to emphasise my findings relying on the fact that the reader will, after reading this chapter, be aware of the somewhat poor outcome from the data collection. Still, I am confident that my findings are interesting in the way they draw a picture of these particular respondents, their thoughts about Swedish social work and their abilities to transfer knowledge into a Namibian practice.

The exchange program has been ongoing since 2009 and hence the first student participants have graduated while some of the last participants that came to Sweden are still enrolled at UNAM. This means that the perception of what impact the studies in Sweden has had on them differ. The ones that have graduated now have three to four years of work experience and are able to reason on Swedish social work practice and understandings with regards to their own current work and possible other work experiences they have had. The respondents that are still at UNAM have been carrying out internships for four months (University of Namibia 2008) or done other practical work incorporated in the course and thereby might have been able to reflect on the exchange studies with regards to these different practices.

5.3. Method of analysis

According to Kvale (2010) analysis and interpretation is taking place during the whole research period and process. When it comes to the concrete analysis of the material however Bryman (2005) states that a common approach to the analysis of qualitative data is the elaboration of patterns and themes that are linked with different concepts and then further

extended to a wider theoretical domain. One by one as the questionnaires were submitted I went through them several times trying to distinguish patterns and themes. I then wrote a summary of every questionnaire where I described the essence of what had been said. When looking at the content of the summaries themes and topics arose and with regards to my research questions I tried to analyse what was actually expressed. I could see that there were different themes explaining what knowledge the respondents had gained through their studies in Sweden. There was *professional conduct and attitudes, Practical skills and concrete knowledge* and there were *dimensions of independence*. I also found themes that were related to *culture* and to *differences and similarities in the social work practice*. When I later got access to the transcribed interviews I went about the same way with them, wrote short summaries and searched for themes. I found that no new themes arose from the new material but that more or less the same themes were found as in my own material. The new material thereby brought more strength to my own empirical findings and it also brought some width since more examples and experiences were shared. Looking at the different themes I tried to figure out how I could understand them from individualistic and collectivistic points of view. With help from previous research and theories on individualistic and collectivistic cultures I started to understand the material through these two different approaches. With a better understanding of characteristics of behaviours, relationships between individuals and the relationship between citizen and society with regards to individualism and collectivism I could see how these aspects were expressed in the themes and how they affect the conditions for *the social work context*, *the client interaction* and *the social work identity and knowledge.*

5.4. Trustworthiness

In the world of qualitative research the concept of *trustworthiness* is important as it aims to value, control and approve the legitimacy of studies (Svensson 1996). Bryman (2011) describes how trustworthiness is a concept of quality and further specifies that there are four different criteria for trustworthiness within qualitative research. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and the possibility to proof and confirm. These four criteria are equivalent to concepts of reliability and validity that originates from quantitative research. *Credibility* has to do with the fact that there are various ways of describing the social reality. To ensure credibility in the results the researcher has to make sure that the research is carried out according to existing rules and that the results are reported to the group of people that have been studied. *Transferability* refers to the fact that results would be the same if the study

were to be carried out in another environment. This is usually hard to determine since qualitative research is normally carried out intensively on a few individuals that are having similar qualities. *Dependability* means that the researcher has a scrutinising approach towards his or her research and that all parts of the research process are accurately described. *Possibility to proof and confirm* has to do with the insight that there is no complete objectivity in social science research. At the same time however the researcher must demonstrate that he or she has not purposefully been guided by personal values or favoured any theoretical orientations to impact on the implementation and results of the study (Bryman 2011).

In order to achieve high trustworthiness in this study I have consistently tried to explain and motivate my different decisions. In this chapter research method, data collection methods and methods of analysis are being discussed as well as the position of the researcher and general ethical reflections. In the chapter on previous research and theoretical framework I motivate the relevance of the concepts and theories that I present so that it will be easy for the reader to follow. My aim has been to guide the reader through my reflections and to be very clear with what I aim to do, what I am doing and later what I have done. By focusing on the research questions and purpose throughout the research period I have tried to ensure that I did not get lost in my research. However since I was having a certain amount of knowledge regarding my area of research and another amount of preconceptions I sometimes found it hard not to assume things or jump into conclusions based on rather my personal experiences. Here I had great help from my supervisor and also others that I discussed my thoughts with. I constantly reminded myself to be critical to my own text and to question what I concluded out of the material. Since my aim was to let the respondents reflect on their experiences from studying in Sweden and to focus on how they expressed what they had learned, I decided to frequently make use of their quotes in the result chapter in order to increase trustworthiness. Further on when sending out the questionnaire I promised the respondents that they would later on get access to this study. This promise further motivated me to be critical to my own material and to make sure that I really gained approval for my conclusions from the data material. This was not a stressful factor for me; instead it motivated me to carry out this study fairly.

In the process of trying to catch the respondents' perspective however several factors need to be addressed. It is hard to say whether all of the respondents expressed their own views and opinions consistently. Different factors might have influenced the respondents in the way they constructed their answers and this might have had something to do with perspectives on North

and South and a political correctness that is frequently incorporated in these kind of areas of research. However I am confident that I described the aim of my research well enough for the respondents to feel comfortable to share their true views and reflections in the questionnaire. Maybe here the fact that I have also been a participant of the same exchange program contributed as a positive factor because the respondents knew that I had experience from studying social work at UNAM. Other factors to consider with regards to trustworthiness have to do with the written data material. Questions such as how comfortable the respondents are when it comes to expressing themselves in writing; how well they feel that they can express themselves freely in English and how used they are in reflecting and draw abstract conclusions or perceive abstract questions have to be taken into account. Another factor to consider is my way of interpreting the so called Namibian English[2] that the respondents to different extents used when answering the questions. Here my two and a half years in the country have given me valuable understandings for specific expressions and ways of constructing sentences that are characteristic for the Namibian English. I am confident that this did not create any misunderstandings the case of this study but would I not have been familiarised with the country this could have caused problems in the process of understanding the material and hence I find it to be an aspect of high relevance.

5.5. Ethical aspects and the position of the researcher

Ethical dilemmas that have been brought up to date in the process of this study have mainly had to do with the small group of possible respondents and my aim to ensure confidentiality. Since there have only been ten participants in the exchange program so far there were only ten possible respondents. Due to my personal relation to Namibia and this specific exchange program I wanted to use the participants of this program as a case for the study. My area of interest was specifically with Namibia and Sweden. If there had been different circumstances, I would have looked into the topic on a more general level and searched for respondents from different countries who had been participating in social work exchange programs in Sweden. I do not know whether this would have been possible or not but it could have increased confidentiality towards the respondents. In order to ensure confidentiality however, I chose

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[2] Since independence in 1990 the official language in Namibia is English. Prior to independence both English and Afrikaans had an 'official language' status but most official communications were conducted in Afrikaans. Around 30 different languages and dialects are spoken in Namibia and these influence how English is spoken in the country. Most Namibians have English as second or third language and many local terms and expressions have thereby been adopted into the hybrid language that is commonly known as *Namlish* (Haushona-Kavamba 2013).

not to personalise the respondents, not even with imaginary names. Instead they are simply called *respondents* or *students* and in the case of the teachers they are referred to as *teachers*. For similar reasons as argued previously, I have also chosen not to differentiate between female and male respondents, neither has it been relevant for this study to specify their age.

Another ethical aspect that I have considered has been whether or not to anonymise the two learning institutions. Should they also be treated with confidentiality in order to increase the confidentiality of the respondents? In order for this study to be useful for the both Swedish and Namibian learning institutions and further on for the funder of the program, SIDA, I decided not to anonymise University of Namibia and University West. In Namibia there is only one university that is offering social work courses and hence it was already obvious that it is UNAM that the Namibian students come from. In Sweden on the other hand there are various universities and higher learning institutions that offer social work courses. There is only one however as far as I am concerned that is having an ongoing exchange program with a Namibian university. Therefore it would not have been hard to figure out that the Swedish partner university is University West. Also if I should have kept UNAM and UV confidential there was further the question if I could mention the Linnaeus Palme exchange program or if it would also have had to remain confidential. In order to fully ensure total confidentiality I would have had to anonymise the two countries as well and then it would not have been possible to carry out the study. I made the decision to write out the names of the universities and the exchange program also with regards to the respondents. They are not a vulnerable group in society and I evaluated that it will not harm them that it is no secret that they are part of this study. Further on only the people who know them might be able to distinguish who is who.

Malterud (2001) has stated that the perspective or position of the researcher shapes all research no matter if it is quantitative, qualitative or even laboratory science. She specifies that the researcher's background and position will affect what he or she chooses to investigate, the angle of investigation and the methods that are seemingly most adequate for the purpose. The researcher will later on also choose the findings that are considered most appropriate and finally the way of communicating the conclusions. However in the distinction between bias and preconceptions she means that preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them. In the spring semester of 2011 I participated in the Linnaeus Palme exchange program between UW and UNAM and studied one semester

with the third year social work class. The following semesters I did both a three months internship and collected data and wrote my bachelor thesis in Namibia. Ever since graduation in September of 2012 I have been in Namibia looking for work. These experiences have given me a valuable understanding of the Namibian society and of the social work profession in Namibia. My gathered experiences have been helpful in the work with this study. At the same time however they compose my base and background as a master's student researcher. I decided to carry out this research because I was specifically interested in the connection between Sweden, Namibia and the social work profession. Aiming to work and live in the country I had a keen interest in getting a deeper understanding for how Namibian social workers reflect about Swedish ideas and approaches to social work. With regards to my situation as an unemployed Swedish social worker in Namibia I wished that the respondents would express positive views on Swedish social work theory and practice and that what they had seen and learned could also be transferred into fitting a Namibian work practice. My approach and my aim however has throughout the process been to understand and portrait a true picture. I have actively worked with my own preconceptions and possible bias partly by giving other people my texts to read and comment. Further on I have had a critical approach towards my conclusions.

5.6. Some concluding reflections

As I have discussed throughout this chapter the different decisions that I have made in this research process has an impact on the outcome of the study. Should I have collected my data with other data collecting methods this could have given me different answers. However it could also have given me similar answers. It is important that I present my awareness regarding these facts and that I make sure that the reader is also aware of the impact that my different decisions have on the results. I hope that after reading this chapter it will be clear to everyone how I have reflected on decisions that I have made in this process and further what thoughts I have had regarding other perspectives of the implementation of this study.

6. STUDYING IN THE INDIVIDUALISED CONTEXT – NEW PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL WORK

6.1. Disposition

With this study I wanted to look into how the Namibian students' exposure to the Swedish social work context would impact on them as instruments for social work. I also wanted to find out how they interpreted the Swedish way of studying social work and what they thought of it. Further on I was interested in understanding whether their experiences from Sweden could be made useful for a Namibian context and if so, in what situations the respondents would be able to implement the knowledge obtained from the studies in Sweden.

Relevant topics and themes for the study were found in the data material through the analysis. These themes explain what the respondents have learned and what experiences have been fruitful for them as social workers. It also gives an insight into what possibilities they have to make use of the knowledge in a Namibian context. Further on, preconceptions that the respondents had regarding Swedish social work prior to the exchange are made visible as well as what differences they experienced and their views on social work and culture. In the paragraph *Learning* I will present what the respondents learned professionally both with regards to actual methods and perspectives as well as attitudes and professional conduct. The respondents also express in what situations they do implement the new knowledge. In the final paragraph, *Social work and culture,* the results will picture the respondents' views on the importance of cultural awareness in the practice. I will start with a paragraph that is showing what preconceptions the respondents had with regards to Swedish social work, *Images of differences, experience of similarity but still different*.

6.2. Images of differences, experience of similarity but still different

Prior to the exchange the students expected to encounter a social work practice in Sweden that would be very different from the Namibian one. They had these ideas with regards to images of a more developed context in Sweden. The students had expectations on adding an international perspective to their social work understandings, to exchange knowledge at an international level and to learn about effective methods and different interventions outside of Africa. In addition some of the respondents were curious to get exposed to another university and teaching style. Others expressed it as a value in itself to go abroad and get exposed to life in Europe. One respondent mentioned specific areas of interest that he/she wanted to explore

in Sweden. These had to do with the political atmosphere and how asylum seekers were perceived in the communities. He/she also had a keen interest to get exposed to how the rights of homosexuals are protected in Sweden and expressed it as one of the highlights. In Namibia same-sex marriages/unions are not legal. The expected differences that the respondents had turned out not to be so major and they explained that with regards to the methods used in both countries and the social work values guiding the work the practice is quite similar. One respondent said:

> They both focus on a generic approach in dealing with social problems and use the same social work methods, which are group work, individual and macro intervention.

Another respondent said in addition that the holistic and solution focused approach is also used in the both countries. Many of the respondents however mentioned differences too with regards of through what methods social problems are approached. They all expressed that they noticed that in Sweden there is a focus on individual interventions and that this has to do with the more individualised culture in and organisation of Swedish society. One respondent said:

> Social work in Namibia is geared more into community work and some bit of group work while in Sweden according to my personal observations it was more individual and family therapy.

Another respondent said:

> I strongly believe that in Namibia, social work practice is family and community oriented, while in Sweden its more individual. People in Sweden keep it to themselves; they are very reluctant to share their problems or opinions with strangers even if they are social workers.

Other differences they mentioned were how in Sweden social work is operated from the municipality while in Namibia it is operated through the different ministries. Further on the respondents explained how in Sweden social workers have the liberty to specialise in different areas because of the variety of social work services available. In Namibia the situation is different and social workers have to be ready to work with different clients and various situations. This requires a broader competence on general methods. The respondents linked this with the fact that Namibia is having fewer social workers than Sweden in relation to the size of the population. Namibian social workers are under more pressure and, as one respondent put it, *"burned with a heavy caseload"*. One of the respondents described the

Swedish practice as one where social workers are restricted to one particular practice, either casework or group work.

The respondents regarded the Swedish social work practice as similar to the Namibian due to the values guiding the work and the methods that are used. At the same time however they expressed that it differs with regards to the same methods and the actual implementation, which is more individualistic. They further expressed the difference when it comes to possibilities to specialise within the field, where in Namibia this is not really possible.

6.3. Learning

6.3.1. Professional conduct and attitudes

What the students foremost regard as something they have learned during their studies in Sweden is on a more abstract level and have to do with how to view, approach and work with clients. They talked positively about how in Sweden social workers have a democratic way of practicing whereby they do not judge clients and instead put a lot of effort into establishing good relations. Many respondents mentioned how they learned the importance of respecting the clients and to be open to different ways of living life. One respondent said:

> The studies in Sweden definitely had an impact on my professional identity because after taking note of how clients were treated with the utmost respect and dignity I make it my business to treat each client uniquely as are the social work values.

The respondent related this approach to the international social work values that, as mentioned in the previous chapter, are regarded as universal and a guiding force in the practice in both countries. The same respondent continued:

> I realized that social work requires a lot of patience and understanding on the part of the social worker. It also helped me realize that each client is unique and deserves a great amount of understanding and time.

The same respondent also explained that through the fieldwork module where he/she got opportunity to visit various different organisations and experience social work practice he/she once again realised the importance of confidentiality and trustworthiness towards all clients. The respondents frequently mentioned how in Sweden social workers are working more patiently with their clients and how they take the time to really listen. One respondent expressed that an important thing that he/she learned was to listen rather than to talk. The

same respondent also mentioned how it was amazing to see how social workers "lower their status" to be at the "same level" with those they serve. He/she further said that he/she gained valuable understandings in how to better interact with "different people at various levels" and mentioned specifically the elderly and disabled clients.

The way in which social work is carried out with old people and people living with disabilities is something that the respondents mentioned without exception. Being exposed to these practices seems to have contributed towards a lot of new perspectives regarding these groups of clients. The respondents started perceiving people living with disabilities as active agents that are having the same needs as everyone else. In Namibia there are few institutions working with the mentioned groups and hence this was a new experience for the students. One respondent explained:

> I visited a home in Lysekil for people with disabilities. It was really interesting to get the knowledge how people with disabilities can cope in their own environment. One can say that the whole society helps them to be self-sustainable. You can find out that they have their own interest and like different activities. I think that in Namibia we forgot that here they are not to be regarded as ordinary people; in Namibia they don't have that possibilities and that can't be called social justice.

Some of the respondents also mentioned how in Sweden they got inspired by the social workers' way of treating clients irrespectively of colour or tribe and one respondent says that working with diversified communities opened up his/her mind. The same respondent expressed how the experiences in Sweden made him/her mature and realise that:

> One needs to be aware of who we are and how that shapes our understanding and view of the world we live in and how we perceive others problems. It has changed my personality and perception about peoples' choices, e.g. homosexual people. Being a social worker I need to be very inclusive and accommodate all people from different spheres of life.

Another respondent reflected on how the exposure to different types of cultures in the literature and by fellow exchange students in the class made him/her understand the importance of uniqueness and the differences that each and every one of us has within ourselves. These insights made the respondent learn more about him/herself. The increased cultural awareness seems to have contributed towards better ways of understanding different clients. One respondent said:

> I think that I have got a better understanding of clients that are living under difficult situations, and that circumstances influence how they cope with their lives. I think I'm better now to put myself in the shoes of the client and not to be that judgmental. When I came to Sweden I was more judgemental when I described other people. I'm much more accommodative to accept people with different backgrounds.

One respondent mentioned how what he/she learned in Sweden will help him/her in identifying factors regarding social problems. The respondent said that through a more holistic approach he/she gained a broader view on social problems.

Through the exchange the respondents have gained various perspectives and understandings of clients, social work and of themselves. Through the use of study seminars they have learned to discuss different topics where they have been required to look into themselves and their own culture for answers. This has contributed towards personal development and made them become more open towards different ways of living life. The experiences from the exchange have also made the respondents reflect on the relationship with clients and several mention that they have perceived the importance of respect in the helping relationship.

6.3.2. Practical skills and concrete knowledge

While the respondents expressed perspectives on and attitudes towards clients as being the main new knowledge some also mentioned concrete and new ways of working that they gained through the studies. One respondent explained how he/she had previous ideas that social work was more office-bound but came to realise that healing can be done outside of the office too and gave examples such as in the nature, near the ocean, in a car or while swimming. He/she said that he/she learned the importance of "thinking outside of the box". Regarding possibilities of implementing the skills gained from the exchange studies the respondent said:

> I work mostly with children with behavioural problems and I normally do my therapeutic counselling outside of the office. I take them out to the nature, and I act on their feelings then and try to improvise reality to them and that's what I learned while in Sweden. You bring back clients to the reality.

The same respondent said that he/she further has made use of the knowledge from Sweden through creativity in the final year at UNAM by involving drama and music in a community work assignment. Another respondent expressed that through the studies he/she learned to

observe individuals and to integrate theory and put it into practice. Here the field placement played a big role because the respondent got exposed to how social workers practiced when working with parents and their relationship to their children. This experience has been useful for him/her in his/her practice today where he/she tries to shift parent's perspectives so that they look at how they influence children in their way of doing things.

Through the exposure to how social workers in Sweden work with people living with physical and mental disabilities the respondents learned concrete methods on how to work with these clients. They expressed how they started seeing people living with disabilities in a new way. One respondent said:

> The field experience was extreme for me. The way the social workers in Sweden worked with people with disabilities and mental illness. That these people can manage things, do things and take part in activities and that they enjoy the same things that everybody else are enjoying.

One respondent mentioned how he/she realised how pedagogy can be useful when working with mentally ill people. Regarding concrete skills on how to work with people living with disabilities another respondent said:

> What I have learnt there, I always practise it in my session with the client […] teaching some disabled people that being disabled is not an inability, they can still do a lot, e.g. cooking, washing themselves and I can even teach them how to take a bath. I learnt all that during my practise time in Sweden.

Two other respondents had similar experiences that they have implemented into practice in Namibia:

> […] And now I use that in my own casework to work more mobilizing with people. If I work with people with abuse problems I can teach them how they can take care of themselves, bathing, take a shower, making dinner and so on. It's really working well in my practice to use these methods.

> During my internship I worked with vulnerable groups, the elderly, mentally and physically disabled people etc. Although it was on very poor and undeveloped circumstances, I was able to apply some of the knowledge and skills that I have obtained during my studies in Sweden. I brought in entertainment, personal growth and dealing with stressful situations and empowered them on different areas of their lives. I was able to reach my goals with all the groups of people I worked with, because interviewing the social workers in Sweden and observing, sometimes participating in the daily activities of the elder people and the people living with disabilities made a huge contribution in my work.

One respondent explained how in Sweden through his/her fieldwork he/she got exposed to working with elderly clients. This experience later encouraged him/her to write his/her thesis on the elderly group in her final year at UNAM.

The practical and concrete skills that the respondents developed mainly had to do with how to work with people living with disabilities. Here the comprehension that one *can* work with these clients was maybe the greatest discovery and learning factor. The respondents got exposed to how in Sweden people that are living with disabilities are having the same personal value as people living without and that support needs to be organised in a way that enables the individual to live as independently as possible. This made the respondents start viewing these clients as active agents and they also learned concrete ways of how to work towards increased independence with these clients. Other concrete skills that the respondents gained have to do with how do view social work as something flexible that does not have to be carried out only inside an office but that can be done in different contexts that might fit the client.

6.3.3. Increased independence through independent ways of studying and living

The respondents expressed and discussed that they have become more independent through their time in Sweden both with regards to the way of studying and thinking about social work but also in terms of personal development. They emphasised the different pedagogic that is used in the learning situation and learning process in Sweden and related the differences from Namibia to what resources are available but also to different approaches to education. Another important factor they mentioned was that while in Sweden the social work profession is well established and respected in Namibia the situation is different and practitioners have to educate the people on what social work really is and that social workers are there for the people. As mentioned earlier social workers are also fewer in Namibia and hence there are few opportunities for practitioners to specialise. One respondent explained the differences:

> The teaching methods at UNAM are more direct. You go there and you gather the information from the teachers and then you learn it and then you have to give it back in a certain way. In Sweden you have to do more research. You read like fifteen books and articles and then you discuss the matter and in the discussion there is no right and wrong. I did really gain interest in reading, to extend my reading and that this is a way to develop more knowledge on a topic. At UNAM there are more guidelines that you have to follow.

Many of the respondents expressed that they valued the different learning process that they were exposed to because it made them reflect more independently and to develop a critical thinking and new perspectives on social problems. One respondent said:

> They have few models or courses per semester in comparison to University of Namibia, which enables students free learning because of its minimal teaching and promote students to read literature. I also find it more research based, something that facilitates students to be updated with the social problems prevailing in the community. […] Because of the seminars, students have opportunity to learn from one another and sharing experience from different fields and perspectives. This enables students to determine the best methods and practice to address such social phenomenon.

Another respondent said:

> We had different professionals present a variety of topics, sharing experiences and classes took place in a very relaxed and informal setup. This I really enjoyed, because it helped me relax while still learning from others and sharing a lot of experiences.

The students were not used of having seminars but they expressed that they enjoyed and learned a lot from them. They gained new perspectives from discussions with students with other cultural backgrounds but also because they had to consider their own culture and background in relation to the topics. In the seminars the students had to develop a more independent way of thinking because they were required to discuss their own point of views. Being in a smaller class was also valuable for the students who were not used to such visibility in a classroom context. In the social work class at UNAM they are usually between sixty to seventy students. One respondent said:

> The interaction in the classes were more active, we were given the chance to take part and that my opinion matter. How I understood things and how I could use it in social work. The participation and critical thinking and the freedom to choose are the things I really remember.

The freedom to choose is something that the respondents discovered both in Swedish social work studies and in the work practice. They explained how in Sweden social workers have more their own approaches to the social work they carry out, that they have the freedom to work more independently. They also pointed out that in Sweden there are more different kinds of social workers and different kinds of services. One respondent explained how he/she experienced the independent way of learning:

> The take home exams were great because it gave me time to think and reflect on the concepts... Because we were not subjected to read and follow only one book, but we were exposed to various books and articles. This allowed me to analyse the various themes by not using only one opinion, but the opinion of many authors. This enabled me to draw my own opinion and thoughts in an objective manner.

Another respondent mentioned how his/her report writing skills improved while he/she was in Sweden because he/she got exposed to writing essays and reports. Several respondents mentioned that they discovered the importance of reading and that they are really enjoying it. In Namibia because of limited resources students do not read a lot of books for every module and, rather, the teacher decides what parts from the book are relevant and then lectures on those different chapters. A teacher at UNAM who has participated in the teachers' exchange explained his/her view on the differences in learning processes:

> I knew the pedagogical in Europe from earlier experience. Most students have another school background and the Swedish students are more open and take more responsibility in their own learning. Namibian students have to be more directed in studies. They don't have the reading background. It's not in our culture. So we have to do it in this way to tell them what they should learn. […] There is a different studying way in Sweden compared with UNAM. There is another approach to education. UNAM is more a teaching university than a research university and there are a lot more work here in Namibia.

Another Namibian teacher said:

> The students here in Namibia may not have the book. We don't have the reading culture and some are unprepared. Students may not take the possibility. There is a different way at UW and we can reflect on how we can make the best of this in a good way at UNAM. Our students learn more about some things in depth and the Swedish more about the overview. It should be a combination.

One of the student respondents expressed how he/she finds it imperative that social work students in an exchange program like this one share cultural differences such as what impact the postcolonial regime has had on the Namibian people with regards to the poor educational background amongst many Namibians. He/she explained that this fact might conflict with modern practices of doing things and this can be one reason why many people prefer their traditional ways of solving problems. One of the teachers also pointed out that the students in the Namibian course constitute a very heterogeneous group because they come from the whole southern Africa and belong to different ethnic groups, as do the Namibian students. In the teaching situation teachers have to consider this and additionally that the students have

different levels of study background. These are factors that Swedish teachers do not have to consider in the same way because in Sweden most students have similar school backgrounds.

The independent way of learning and studying combined with living independently in a country far away from home has contributed towards dimensions of personal development and feelings of becoming "your own person". This development is later used as a skill back home in study and work situations. One respondent explained:

> The studying methodology and seminars are different. I had to do a lot of individual reading and studying. This made me stronger and made me work more individually. […] I could work alone and do individual research and reading rather than waiting for the lecturer to provide notes and present lessons.

Another respondent explained how the critical thinking that he/she learned in Sweden helped him/her when he/she got back to Namibia:

> I suppose that I learned the more critical thinking. In Namibia it's more of remembering something and then to reproduce. I could get a better understanding of topics when I got back because I now try to understand more.

One respondent explained how his/her time in Sweden contributed towards increased independence:

> Far from home, but one gets to really explore your individuality without the protection provided by family boundaries. This allowed me to grow and become my own individual and one who learned to live on his/her own and be independent.

However while the personal development is considered something positive by the respondents some mentioned how coming back home was hard because people were not used to their independent ways of doing things. One respondent explained that people got offended because he/she expressed herself more after returning from Sweden.

The focus on independent learning and emphasis on reflections and opinions in the learning situation has turned the respondents into becoming more independent and open but yet critical and reflecting students. Through discussions with other exchange students from different parts of the world they have become more open-minded regarding different ways of living life. At the same time through reflecting on their own opinions they have become more aware

of how they are shaped by their own cultural background. Managing on their own in a country far away from home has also contributed towards feelings of becoming more independent. Some of the respondents refer to these experiences as "getting to know themselves better" and "becoming mature".

6.4. Social work and culture

The respondents discussed how culture plays an important role in social work and that in Namibia social workers have to be culturally sensitive because they are dealing with various traditional groups with different sets of norms and values. This is a quality that some of the respondents mentioned as something Swedish social workers could learn from Namibia. One respondent said:

> The Swedish people can learn cultural diversity like it's done in Namibia.

Another respondent reflected on the same topic and said that Namibian approaches to life and beliefs are more shaped by cultural norms, values and practices and that they have to be understood as such, taking into consideration backgrounds and different perspectives. He/she further explained how believing in traditional ways of doing things has a huge influence on how individuals perceive professional intervention. The respondents emphasised this cultural competence. While some of the respondents said that they in Sweden learned to work more including with clients and to work with diversified communities they later stated that Swedish social workers can learn from how cultural diversity is practiced in Namibia and to understand different approaches to life depending on cultural norms and values. At the same time another respondent expressed his/her views on social work and culture in the two countries as follows:

> The social work and cultural contexts in both countries are distinctive and complementary, both practicing under their means and the social issues affecting their indigenous populations.

When reflecting on what Swedish social workers can learn from Namibian social work practice several respondents mentioned intervention through community work. One respondent said:

Social work in Namibia is geared towards reaching the masses. Community work is regarded as priority and social workers are more vocal and informative in whatever is seen as an obstacle in the local communities.

This indicates that the respondents might have seen a need for community work practice in Sweden in order to reach bigger groups of individuals and bring about change in society. Another respondent said:

Swedish social work students should also try and do a full year practical in the working/professional level and to do social work on all levels: casework, group work and community work.

The respondents emphasised the cultural awareness and competence and discussed that this is something that Swedish social workers could learn from Namibian social workers. They further emphasised collectivistic social work interventions such as community work as an approach that could be used in a Swedish context in order to "reach the masses".

6.5. Conclusion

Through the exchange studies in Sweden the respondents have gained perspectives and knowledge on client interaction, approaches towards clients and some concrete methods on how to work with specific groups of clients. In addition they have developed dimensions of independent reflection and learning, critical thinking and a deeper understanding for what cultural factors impact on their professional conduct. They have experienced the focus on individualism in the Swedish social work context and linked this to the individual organisation of Swedish society. Back in Namibia the respondents make use of perspectives and methods that they have gained from the studies in Sweden in both study and work situations. The respondents reflect on similarities and differences regarding Swedish and Namibian social work and express the importance of a cultural awareness in the Namibian practice.

7. THE RESPONDENTS AS MARGINAL SOCIAL WORKERS

In order to understand the empirical results in relation to my research questions I have made use of different concepts and theories. In the first paragraph I will analyse the different approaches to social work in Namibia and Sweden with help of the concepts of *individualism* and *collectivism*. In the second paragraph I will analyse the *transferability of knowledge* that the respondents perform with help of the theoretical concept of *the marginal man* and, later, *the marginal social worker*. I will try to map out what impact the marginal man has in the process of transferability of knowledge and how the respondents as marginal social workers identify possibilities when it comes to implementation of the knowledge in a Namibian practice. In the third paragraph I will analyse the results with help of the concepts of *self-awareness* and *conscious use of self* in order to see what impact the exchange studies have had on the social workers professionally.

7.1. Understanding collectivistic and individualistic approaches to social work through three perspectives

When applying individualistic and collectivistic mindsets in relation to the results three different perspectives becomes visible through which individualistic and collectivistic approaches to social work in this specific case can be interpreted and understood. These are *the social work context*, *the client interaction* and *the social work identity and knowledge*. In the figure below I demonstrate how the findings from my data material can be understood with regards to these perspectives.

	Sweden (individualistic)	Namibia (collectivistic)
The social work context	The main focus is on individual interventions.	The main focus is on collectivistic methods such as community work and group work
The client interaction	There is an individual focus on the client. The client is viewed and understood in relation to his or her specific person and situation.	There is an emphasis on understanding the client with regards do his or her collective group belonging. The social worker needs to approach dimensions of traditional and modern and be aware of different ethnic groups with changing cultures/norms.
The social work identity and knowledge	During the studies the social work student does independent studying and is required to form own views and opinions regarding methods and implementation. Later on in the work practice the social worker has a lot of individual freedom in the implementation of the work.	Social work is being understood through settled frames. There is a direct way of teaching and learning. There are very few possibilities to specialise and in the work practice there is less freedom when it comes to implementation.

The social work context

All the respondents expressed that social work in Sweden is implemented mainly through individualistic interventions or in a family setting whereas in Namibia focus is rather on community work and group work. Several respondents pointed out the different conditions for social work in the both countries where lack of resources is affecting the Namibian practice and more availability of resources is creating more possibilities in the Swedish practice. Resources might have a huge impact on different ways of organising social work practice but the differences must also be understood with regards to individualistic and collectivistic relationships between the citizen and society. The Namibian society is seen as a collectivistic culture where *the collective* traditionally has been culturally valued (Hofstede 1984) while Sweden on the other hand has a very individualistic organisation of society which can be understood as a value-system promoting the citizen's project towards self-realisation (Beck 1998). The different conditions for social work hence can be understood through those different relationships between individual and society.

The client interaction

Looking into how the respondents expressed their learning outcome during the exchange studies the emphasis can be seen on client interaction. They explained that they have gained understandings for the importance of creating a client relationship that is built on respect, democracy and a non-judgemental approach. They further discussed the uniqueness of every individual and that Swedish social workers are treating clients irrespectively of colour or tribe. At the same time however, with regards of Namibian social work practice, the respondents emphasised the importance of having knowledge and being aware of customs and culture within the different ethnic tribes. This is also something that is being underlined by teachers in the social work course at UNAM, expressed as the importance of cultural competence (Fog 2005). Looking at the figure above it becomes clear that these different ways of discussing what factors are important when it comes to client interaction can be understood as expressions of individualism and collectivism. Hofstede (1984) has found that while in individualised cultures the individual is defined through individual terms, in the collectivistic society the individual is defined with regards to a societal and cultural context. It seems that Namibian social workers put a bigger focus on the specific group belonging of the client and that the client is understood and approached with this in mind. In the Swedish social work context due to the individualised society social workers aim to treat and approach each client equally yet unique. There is a focus on the uniqueness of every client.

The social work identity and knowledge

The respondents all brought up the different conditions that exist for the social worker in the two countries both in the study and working situation. In the study situation they emphasised the independent learning and the way in which social work students in Sweden are encouraged and expected to reflect independently, be critical and have own opinions and point of views. During the exchange studies the respondents got introduced to study seminars whereby different topics from the course literature was being discussed. The students had to do a lot of independent reading in order to prepare for the seminars where they were expected to take active part. Some of the respondents described this as a learning process whereby they realised the importance of reading, to reflect critically and further started to think more about how their own culture and background have an impact on their opinions. In the seminars the students were able to share experiences and elaborate on what methods of intervention would be most suitable for different situations. One respondent referred to the study situation in Sweden as one with *"free learning"*. With regards to the work situation the respondents expressed how Swedish social workers have the liberty to specialise due to the several different social services available. They also mentioned how the social workers in the Swedish context are freer in the implementation of their work. These both descriptions again are characteristic for the individualised society where there is a focus on individual performance and the citizen's own responsibility to become successful (Beck 1998). Independence is rewarded in the individualistic society (Hui and Triandis 1986). The respondents' experiences are understood against the background of the Namibian context where both the study and the work situation are more settled. Hui and Triandis (ibid.) explain how in collectivistic cultures the citizen' prioritise the goals of the group rather than their own and how there is a collective way of sharing, getting involved and considering the group. The respondents' ways of describing the learning situation at UNAM as more direct and less reflective, that there *"are more guidelines to follow"* imply that there is a focus on the collective learning, that everyone learns the same. This differs from the study situation in Sweden where students are required to reflect independently and come up with own views and solutions. These different approaches to education hence can also be understood with regards to the concepts of individualism and collectivism. In the collectivistic culture dimensions of self-realisation and independence are not as crucial for the citizen as they are in the individualised society, where the individualisation is acting disuniting towards the people (Bauman 2002) and there is a need for citizens to be independent. Further on the

individualised study situation foster Swedish social work students into becoming independent practitioners that are prepared for a practice with room for amounts of individual freedom.

7.2. The Marginal Social Worker and transferability of knowledge

As I have demonstrated previously there are various parameters, *antipoles*, that the respondents face in the Namibian social work practice and that are also incorporated within them selves, being Namibians. There is the aspect that the population is very heterogeneous including several traditional tribes, Namibian indigenous people, Namibian whites originating from Germany or South Africa, exile Namibians and foreigners that are coming from all parts of the world. The different tribes traditionally populated different areas of the country but due to urbanisation and unemployment people are nowadays relocating a lot and can be found in most of the regions (Malan 2004, Landguiden 2013b). There is further on the dimensions of *modern* and *traditional* (Hailonga-van Dijk 2007) that the respondents approach and deal with in relation to both themselves and to clients, two worlds existing side by side (Samuelsson 2012). A third aspect is African concepts and traditions contra European or Western concepts that are also influencing Namibian society (Hailonga-van Dijk 2007). An example of this is how the respondents in the study situation at UNAM are using theories and methods originating from the West that are being adjusted into fitting a Namibian context. From the Namibian context they later might need to be adjusted further into fitting local settings and cultures (Fog 2005). One could say that there is a constant mediation and negotiation ongoing on different levels, being of great importance and a crucial skill for the social work practitioner. I have argued that the respondents are marginal man because of the several different cultures, traditions and worlds that they are somehow part of and that they are mediating between. Accurately with Park's (1937) description of how the modern world is bringing people from different groups or cultures together, urbanisation, unemployment and further studies has lead to an increasing relocation and the people of Namibia are now living more mixed (Malan 2004). The university brings students from different regions of the country and of the whole Southern Africa together and there is a mix of origins and culture represented in the lecture hall. The exposure to this cultural variety does not necessarily interfere with the individual norms and characters of the students, Park argue, but the constant presence of the mentioned antipoles contribute to students developing a *dual conscious*. Park and Stonequist (1937) further link this dual conscious or personality to a both richer and more competent personality which has the ability to act more objective and is able to see problems

from more than one perspective. They further argue that the marginal man with his or her access to two cultures, languages, habits and norms is given the opportunity to act as the mediator (Trondman 1994). With reference to the importance of self-awareness and the conscious use of self for social workers in the practice and in establishing good working relationships with clients (Heydt and Sherman 2005) I further argue that the Namibian social workers are *Marginal Social Workers* that are using their marginal experiences as skills and transforming them into a crucial instrument in their work practice as social workers. Their access to different sets of languages, attitudes and norms gives them as marginal social workers the opportunity to take the role as mediators because they can see problems from different perspectives.

When aiming to understand how the respondents as Marginal Social Workers do transferability of knowledge with regards to the knowledge they have gained from the exchange studies in Sweden one needs to understand that they are already used of transferring knowledge on a regular basis. Transferability of knowledge is the ability to modify, change and develop theory so that it can be made relevant in different contexts (Fook, Ryan and Hawkins according to Fog 2005). As marginal man the respondents are used to mediate between different worlds and as Marginal Social Workers they further bring this skill into their profession where it constitutes an important tool in understanding and building relationships with clients. As have been expressed by Namibian teachers (Fog 2005) and also emphasised by some of my respondents being culturally competent is of importance in the Namibian social work practice. One respondent explained how Namibian approaches to life and beliefs are shaped by cultural norms, values and practices and that they have to be *understood as such.* The respondent further linked this with situations where individuals might be resistant to social workers because they are used of traditional ways of solving problems. With regards to the concept transferability of knowledge it seems that the respondent as a Marginal Social Worker here took into account the different contexts of people and their position with regards to modern practice or traditional ways. In the same way it seems that the respondents when participating in the exchange program look at the knowledge and perspectives in relation to the specific context that the Swedish individualised society constitutes. The respondents as Marginal Social Workers thereby understand approaches to social work in relation to context and culture. This seems to be done in similar ways whether it has to do with understanding individuals in rural areas of Namibia or in the setting of understanding social work approaches in university studies in Sweden.

So if the respondents are able to understand and interpret the new knowledge with regards to the specific context in which it has developed, are they then able to transfer the knowledge so that they can make use of it in their work in Namibia? It seems that as Marginal Social Workers the respondents are able to implement the new knowledge and perspectives regarding social work just as how they are used to during their studies at UNAM where western theories are adjusted into a Namibian context and later on adjusted into fitting local contexts (Fog 2005). When it comes to Swedish social work practices with people living with physical or mental disabilities it seems that the respondents - while being aware that there are very few institutions in Namibia accommodating these groups of clients - still value the increased knowledge on how to work with these clients and how to view them. Several respondents' mentioned how they learned valuable methods regarding work with these clients and that they are making use of them today in their work practice. I do not know if the exposure in Sweden encouraged the respondents to seek institutions that are working with these clients or if they have been able to include them in other practices. However it seems that there are good possibilities when it comes to implementing new methods and ideas with regards to the Marginal Social Worker's ability and competence to distinguish situations where they will have a fruitful effect.

7.3. New professional knowledge from the exchange studies

As pictured in the results the main new knowledge that the respondents have gained from the studies in Sweden has to do with themselves as the main instrument in the practice and is linked with dimensions of increased self-awareness and perspectives on the conscious use of self. Heydt and Sherman (2005) discuss that self-awareness according to Neuman and Friedman is a skill that can be achieved through mastering one's own feelings and motivations. Some of the respondents mentioned how prior to the exchange they were more judgemental towards clients with regards to for example sexual orientation or tribal belonging and how they became aware of these attitudes during the exchange studies. Cournoyer (2011) emphasise self-awareness as an important skill that the social worker requires in order to not develop emotional or behavioural patterns that might eventually harm clients. Some of the respondents mentioned how they are now more open to different ways of living life. These new insights were achieved partly in discussions with students from other places and partly by the exposure to Swedish social work practice where the respondents witnessed a more

democratic and accommodating approach towards clients. The respondents also gained knowledge in terms of how to study more independently, develop a critical thinking and getting used to share opinions and ideas in a class room setting. These skills seem to have empowered the students and made them get to know themselves better, which also contributes towards increased self-awareness. Some respondents expressed how the studies in Sweden made them realise the importance of reading and being updated on social science research. This is something that they can keep doing in both a study and work context and that can further contribute to develop and improve the skill of self-awareness in an ongoing process. The increased self-awareness and perspectives on themselves in relation to the Swedish individualised society supposedly brings further development into the many-sided Marginal Social Worker.

7.4. An additional finding

When analysing the data material from my respondents I started to sense a discursive difference between theory and practice. I could see that there was a difference in how the respondents were talking about theory and how they were talking about practice. The respondents expressed that they are regarding Swedish social work practice as similar as the Namibian one due to the values that are guiding the work and the methods that are used. The values that they referred to are the international social work values and the methods are casework, group work and community work implying social work on micro-, macro- and meso levels of society. At the same time however they expressed that the Swedish practice differs with regards to the same values and methods. This can be understood against the background that the Namibian students make use theories and methods from the West as we do in Sweden but that they are being adjusted into to being implemented in a Namibian context. This might create a discursive difference whereby practice differs from original theories and methods.

8. DEVELOPING THE SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTICE IN NAMIBIA

The results of this study indicate the importance of considering individualistic and collectivistic organisations of cultures and societies when aiming to understand different conditions for and practices of social work. As I have demonstrated these two different ways of viewing the individual and its relation to society has a huge impact on the practice as a whole. For a Swedish social worker it might appear unfamiliar that the respondents express such amazement for the client interaction they experienced in Sweden; the way of viewing the client uniquely and work towards an understanding of the specific situation that he or she engages with. Against the background of the collectivistic values that guide the Namibian practice however, one has to shift the perspective from the individual focus to a more collective understanding of the client. The Namibian client is part of a family, of a community and of a tribe and this is central in the understanding of the client. The different ways of approaching clients are linked with expected behaviours within certain groups and hence there is an emphasis on cultural competence amongst Namibian social workers. There are collectivistic cultural behaviours and family structures that have an impact on how people interact with one another. In Sweden clients are probably expecting a democratic and equal approach from social workers because of the individualised society where there is strive for and focus on independence and equality. Understanding how the collectivistic learning processes have a huge impact on the respondents' lack of experience regarding critical reflection and expressing themselves independently I have come to wonder how possible clients, Namibians in general, are also influenced by this. Can one assume that as citizen of a collectivistic society, many clients are not used to express themselves and their problems like how clients are doing it in Sweden? If so, how does this impact on the client and social work relationship?

In this study I have used a schematic classification of Sweden as an individualistic culture and society and Namibia as a collectivistic one. I have also emphasised the importance of a tribal belonging and what impact it has on the people of Namibia. I have not mapped out cultural factors of importance in the Swedish society due to the limitations of this study. However, I have mentioned that the Swedish society is culturally diverse too but not primarily with regards of ethnic Swedes as in the case of the Namibian tribes. In Sweden cultural diversity is created by the increasing immigration from all parts of the world. Reflecting on the

differences between being part of an individualistic culture and of having a tribal belonging, a more collective way of belonging, I have wondered about the strengths of the different social networks that individuals are part of. Initially I was under the impression that in the more collectivistic cultures networks would be stronger and create a greater sense of safety for the members of the specific network. This might be true, but after becoming familiarised with network theory I have realised that it is more complex than so. The American sociologist Mark Granovetter (1973) has through his concept "the strength of weak ties" described how the biggest change in the shift to a modernised society is the increased importance of having a lot of contacts, so called *weak ties* within social networks. With help of different models, Granovetter argues that individuals in a strong social network with *strong ties* to the members of the network are usually having similar characteristics and living similar lives. They move within the same social spheres of society and access and possess the same kind of information. Granovetter has found that it is hence in the interaction with individuals with whom one is having weak ties, that he or she is getting access to information that is needed to find a job or in order to achieve other crucial information. Such information cannot to the same extent be provided by the strong ties or the close contacts because they are more likely to have access to the same information as one self. One can assume that for individuals who are living more traditional lives for example in rural areas of Namibia and to some extent also in Sweden, neighbours and other people in the surroundings are the ones that help out in hard times. Hence in such a context it is crucial to have strong ties to the people around you. In the modernised world and in the individualistic Swedish society, and parts of the collectivistic Namibian society, with increased information and the development of social media, the case is quite the opposite and shallow contacts are increasingly important tools to move forward careerwise but also in other situations. It seems that depending on the context and if one lives in an information society or not, strong or weak ties are more or less important and needed. While in Sweden the weak ties are needed due to the urbanisation and individualisation of society, in Namibia, depending on where and how you live your life, it is possible to live more independently in a strong network and to manage with strong ties to few people.

As Marginal Social Workers the respondents benefit from the exchange studies in Sweden because they have the ability to understand the individualistic methods and approaches in relation to the individualistic society they are studying in. Being used to mediate between different cultures and also between dimensions of Western and African ideas the respondents'

are well equipped with skills that are required in processes of transferability of knowledge. Being used to the usage of Western theories and methods adjusted into fitting the Namibian social work context the respondents are able to adjust the knowledge that they gain in Sweden into specific practices with specific clients. I believe that this explains the discursive difference that I could distinguish from the results. The respondents regarded the Swedish practice to be similar and different at the same time, with regards to the social work values and work methods. The Namibian social workers base their work on the same international values but cannot implement them fully as they are formed in a Western context that has a different way of viewing the social worker as well as the client

With regards of my own situation as a Swedish social worker struggling to get registered and find work in Namibia, the process of writing this master's thesis has given me valuable insights and new perspectives. I feel now that I understand better what it meant when I was told that I do not have sufficient knowledge on how social work is practiced in Namibia. I was aware that Namibia was having a more collectivistic society but I was not aware of how this creates different conditions for social work. With new perspectives and a sincere wish to further develop understandings for the complex hybrid Namibian society I hope that I will eventually develop the sufficient knowledge to get registered and allowed to practice. I do believe that in social work, a profession where the use of one self is crucial in interacting processes to bring about change, the cultural (contextual) competence is significant. With a growing marginal experience due to being part of both my upbringing milieu, which is the individualistic culture and at the same time increasingly getting integrated in a new milieu, the Namibian collectivistic culture, with time I might be able to transfer this into a useful skill just like the Namibian social workers do.

As a closing remark I believe that for a profession like social work, where the use of one self is crucial and where self-awareness is a very important skill, exposure to different realities will always have a positive impact on the practitioner, in one way or another. Through experiencing social work practices in different cultural contexts new perspectives are inevitably achieved and the social worker's cultural competence keeps developing.

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Appendix 1

Linnæus University
Sweden

Informative letter

My name is Jonna Aisindi and I am a master student in Social Work at the Linnaeus University in Växjö in the south of Sweden. During the fall semester of 2013 I will be writing my master thesis. I aim to focus the thesis on the topic of *international social work*. This I will do by specifically looking into the case Sweden/Namibia through the Linnaeus Palme exchange program that is offering exchange for students and teachers from the both countries. I am interested to find out whether Swedish social work understanding and skills are applicable and useful in a Namibian context. To do this I need to gather information from Namibian students that have been taking part in the exchange and studied social work in Sweden at a Swedish university. I also need to collect data from teachers from both countries that have been taking part in the exchange in order to get in touch with professional views and perspectives on the similarities/differences in the Swedish and Namibian social work field.

The data will be collected through a questionnaire with topics on my area of research that will be sent to the respondents via e-mail. The questions will be answered by the respondents and later returned back to me via e-mail. There might be need for additional data collection through telephonically conducted interviews if possible.

The participation in this master thesis is fully voluntarily and if you agree to take part you must know that you have the right to cancel you participation at any time during the research process. You also have the right to choose what questions you want to answer and what questions you do not want to answer. The participation is fully confidentially which means that your identity will not at any point be revealed during the research process or in the final product, the thesis. The collected data material will only be used for the purpose of this thesis and shall be destroyed afterwards.

Do you want to participate in this study? If so then please contact me. Should you have any questions concerning the research or the data collection then you are also most welcome to contact me.

Best regards
Jonna Aisindi

Contact details:
xxxxx.xxxxxx@gmail.com
(+46) XX XXX XX XX

Appendix 2

Linnæus University
Sweden

1) What year did you participate in the Linnaeus Palme exchange program?
2) What modules did you take during your exchange semester at Högskolan Väst?

PRIOR TO THE EXCHANGE
3) What were the contributing factors that made you decide to participate in the exchange program?
4) What expectations did you have that the exchange social work studies would have on you as a social worker?

DURING THE EXCHANGE
5) How did you perceive the Swedish social work frameworks compared to the Namibian ones?
6) How did you perceive *similarities* in how social work is generally practiced in the both countries?
7) How did you perceive *differences* in how social work is generally practiced in the both countries?
8) What were your reflections on how the content of the modules could be of use for you in a Namibian context?
9) What modules did you find to be most interesting in terms of giving new/further knowledge that could be useful in Namibia?
10) Were there social work modules that you considered not to be of use for you in a Namibian context with regards to the content? If so, which ones and in what ways?
11) Did you encounter any challenges when it came to the content of the modules? If so, what kind of challenges were these?
12) When you look at yourself as a social worker, has the studies in Sweden had any impact on your professional identity? If so, in what ways?

AFTER THE EXCHANGE
- IN THE FINAL YEARS OF STUDIES
13) How did your studies in Sweden affect your understanding of social work?
14) How did your social work experiences from Sweden impact on you in your final years of studies at UNAM?
15) When back in Namibia how did you describe the social work studies in Sweden (with regards to the content) to your fellow students at UNAM?

- IN WORK LIFE (only answer if you have experience from work life)
16) In your work life today, do you feel that your experiences from Swedish social work (theory and practise) can be used in the work you carry out? If yes then give examples. If no then explain.

OTHER

17) What is your opinion on the possibility to take part in an exchange program and study social work abroad? What advantages and/or disadvantages are there with regards to doing social work in another cultural context? Explain!

18) In your opinion, what could Swedish social work practice learn from how Namibian social work is practiced?

19) How do you reflect on social work and cultural context in the cases of social work in Namibia and social work in Sweden?

20) Is there something else you would like to add? Feel free to do so!

Appendix 3

Student interview

1) **Please tell me about your stay at the University of Namibia?**

2) **What about similarities and differences in pedagogy?**

3) **What field experiences did you take part in, study visits?**

4) **How can you compare similarities and differences between the two contexts of social work?**

5) **How useful do you feel the knowledge is the context of your own country?**

6) **Personal development?**

7) **What about home coming?**

8) **What would you like to ad that could be useful for students in future or other collaborative programs?**

Appendix 4

<u>**Teacher interview**</u>

1) **Please tell me about the stay at the University West?**

2) **In what areas did you lecture?**

3) **Can you describe similarities or differences between lecturing in a new context?**

4) **Did you experience differences in pedagogical concepts between UNAM and University West?**

5) **What input does the stay at another University result in for the teaching at your own University?**

6) **Did you have possibilities to informal networking? Was it possible to establish contacts that have been continuing after the stay?**

7) **Was it possible to implement some of the experiences from your stay when you did return to your own University?**

8) **How can you compare similarities and differences between the two contexts of social work?**

9) **Are there dimensions of personal development? In what way? Things that may be difficult to measure?**

10) **In what ways can the collaboration be strengthening?**

11) **What would you like to ad that could be useful for teachers in future or other collaborative programs?**

12) **Something to think about for the Namibian students?**