Between Dark Days and Light Nights: International PhD Students’ Experiences in Uppsala

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Abstract

Analysing what it means being neither immigrant nor tourist in a foreign country, this thesis looks at the experiences of international PhD students and their supervisors in the Swedish university town Uppsala. The Faculty of Science and Technology of Uppsala University and the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) are the universities studied. Based on anthropological methods, this thesis focuses on the individual actors as they attempt to match the objective of doing a PhD while at the same time being in a different country. Using practice theory, the study highlights that the experiences of international PhD students and the people working with them vary greatly from PhD student to PhD student. Yet, almost all undergo a certain form of self-formation and adjustment process to match the requirements of not only their host country, but also the international field of science they attempt to enter. Being connected to other people in similar situations can help them adapt to this new environment, and many international PhD students join communities of practice. I argue that most develop an internationally recognised habitus, which helps them being recognised by the international community. The habitus can further, under certain circumstances, become partially conscious.

KEY WORDS: International PhD Students, Supervisors, Higher Education, Practice Theory, Sweden, Anthropology, Mobility

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Figure 1 Map of (West) Uppsala
1 Introduction

“So, what are you doing?” somebody at my table asked me. It was this question I had feared a little before arriving at the PhD Gasque. I was sitting at the end of a long table at Norrlands Nation in Uppsala having a conversation with five other guests at the Gasque, all ‘real’ PhD students, all from different parts of the world. “I’m studying anthropology,” I said, thinking for a split second to leave it there. “But I’m not a PhD student; I’m doing my Master’s”. The faces around me looked puzzled. “How come you are at the PhD Gasque then?” someone else wondered. “Well, because I’m studying international PhD students and I had asked the organisers if I could come along.” For a couple of seconds the people at my table turned silent; I could see them thinking, sorting me into a different place in their heads. This moment would determine how the rest of the evening would go. Then: “So you’re basically studying us?” - “In a way, yes.” - “Why?”

Ever since I had been an Erasmus exchange student in Birmingham, Great Britain during my Bachelor’s degree, I had been thinking about international students and the relationship people have to their host countries. Many of my classmates returned to Germany from their exchange semesters and complained that it was impossible to make friends with students from their host countries and that they had a difficult time. And although I had made some British friends, mostly because I lived with them, I felt similar and was glad once the semester was over. Three years later, in March 2014, I found myself on another side of the ‘international student exchange network’ (Chen & Branett, 2000): I had started an internship/volunteering service with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) in Jakarta, Indonesia. One of my tasks was to partially coordinate two scholarships for Indonesian PhD students who were about to start their PhD education in Germany. Because of this I wrote emails with scholarship holders, German universities, and other stakeholders. Additionally, I participated in a ‘pre-departure course’ in Jakarta, where new scholarship holders were supposed to get prepared for their stay in Germany.

I was fascinated by this whole idea that people from Indonesia go to Germany for their PhD and from there to wherever and that it is possible to do that, despite the differences in education systems and culture. I talked to some former scholarship holders who had returned to Indonesia after their PhDs about their experiences, and they stressed that it was a great experience, but also very challenging. In Indonesia, I saw two sides: the people who were about to embark on their journey to Germany, and the people who had already returned. Yet,
I could not stop wondering what happens between the two sides. How is life for international PhD students in the host country? Do they have similar experiences to my own during my exchange semester? If they do, how do they deal with this? So, when I started my Master’s degree in Uppsala, Sweden in September 2014, I took those thoughts with me and decided to look at the experiences of international PhD students. In this sense, I am looking at how international PhD students experience and deal with the objective of doing a PhD, which, in itself is a challenging experience, while at the same time being in a new country. More specifically, and using a practice theory approach (Bourdieu, 1977), I ask the following research questions:

- What happens to the habitus of international PhD students when they enter the new social fields in Uppsala?
- How and why do international PhD students experience and overcome the hysteresis effect (Bourdieu, 1977)?
- Which forms of social, cultural and scientific capital do international PhD students acquire in order to navigate the new fields and how do they acquire them?

Furthermore, during my time in Jakarta I had encountered emails from supervisors who were wondering how to support their future Indonesian PhD students in the best way. I also had accompanied some German researchers in Indonesia who were interested in a partnership with an Indonesian university. They, as well, had wondered how to make those collaborations work across potential differences. Hence, the question what is with the people whom international PhD students work with? Is it the same as for local PhD students? What benefits and challenges do they face? This leads to a secondary research question, in which I ask how supervisors engage with the potentially different needs of international PhD students. More specifically:

- How do supervisors and international PhD students interact with each other despite that their habitus were usually formed in different fields of doxa?

When I arrived in Uppsala, I was amazed by the amount of international students in general who were part of the city. I had previously studied at a small university of applied sciences in southern Germany where international students were a rarity, and although there were many international students in Birmingham, I did not notice them as much as I did in Uppsala. So, when I had to pick a field site for my thesis project, I decided to stay in Uppsala and study the international PhD students here. This also gave me, at least in my opinion, an advantage as opposed to returning to Germany or going somewhere else because I, myself,
am an international student and can therefore relate many things toward my own experiences in Uppsala.

Two universities call Uppsala their home: the bigger and much older Uppsala University, and the smaller SLU (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences). The two universities are very different in size and scope and therefore difficult to compare: 41 470 students were enrolled at Uppsala University in 2015 (Uppsala University, 2015a) compared to 3 812 students at SLU (SLU, 2016b). This thesis is therefore no comparison between Uppsala University and SLU. Rather, they complement each other, as I got very different kinds of data from each university, which I will elaborate on further in chapter 2, Methodology. I decided to look at both universities as I already had access through a friend to a group of international PhD students at SLU; and to Uppsala University, as I study here myself and it is so much bigger. Occasionally, it also happened that I traced groups of people across the boundaries of the two institutions, as, quite often, the borders were fluid: PhD students from SLU attended events at Uppsala University and vice versa, and friendships span from one institution to the other. However, to limit the scope and to keep it at least to a minimum comparable, I decided not to look at Uppsala University as a whole but focus on the Faculty of Science and Technology because those are also the disciplinary areas that are the most related to SLU’s focus. An additional reason for this selection of academic disciplines is that most international PhD students can be found in science, engineering, or agriculture in OECD countries (OECD, 2016:1).

PhD studies have often been described as a rite of passage (e.g. Barnacle & Meburn, 2010) separating the student from the researcher. A whole franchise has been founded around the theme PhD studies, highlighting this character: the so-called PhD comics, in which PhD stands for Pilled Higher and Deeper1 (e.g. Cham, 2000). This franchise started with simple comics and there are now many merchandise products and even two movies. The second one of the movies, The PhD Movie 2, was screened in Uppsala, an event I attended during my fieldwork. Other products modified especially for PhD students were part of this fieldwork as well, such as the game Cards Against Humanity and songs about PhD students. Because of all those products and opinions in public discourse, I would like to argue that PhD students are often seen as in a special phase of their life, a phase that is often described difficult and

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1 The PhD comics’ protagonists are mostly students of natural science, with one PhD student studying anthropology: her thesis subjects are PhD students.
challenging, much more difficult than other phases of education. Hence PhD students are a special group in itself, worth studying.

So, what are PhD students in the context of this thesis? PhD is an abbreviation for Doctor of Philosophy. Other terms to describe a PhD student are PhD candidate or doctoral student. I use the label PhD student since this is the most common writing style I encountered in Sweden. By PhD student, in the context of this thesis, I mean a person who is enrolled in the third cycle of the Swedish Higher Education System with the predominant goal of obtaining a PhD degree. International PhD students are the ones who crossed an international border in order to get their degree. An additional criterion was that at least their Bachelor’s degree had to have been done in the home country in order to make sure that the international PhD student had experienced different education systems. Hence they are different compared to Swedish students as they are new to the system and culture.

In 2013, over 4.1 million students were considered internationally mobile students\(^2\), including students on the Bachelor, Master and PhD levels, making up about 1.8% of the total amount of students (UNESCO, 2016). On the doctoral level, an average of 25% of all PhD students in OECD countries are international students. In some countries like Sweden, the number is even higher, reaching almost 40% (OECD, 2016:1). Although it could be said that this number is small compared to the overall population, the impact that those PhD students can have due to their education makes them clearly worth studying. Since they are potentially the professors, lecturers, and researcher of tomorrow (and often already today), they have the ability to influence future generations on the education level and make contributions to scientific discoveries.

While there are many studies looking at the quality of PhD education or the experiences of international students in general, including studies at Uppsala University looking at the quality of doctoral education (Ingesson & Wolters, 2009) and at the quality of research (KoF11, 2011), there are not many studies looking qualitatively at the experiences of international PhD students in particular. Especially in Sweden, there is not much research about this group of people according to Mählck and Fellesson (2016:105), despite the fact that they are such a big group.

\(^2\) “Internationally mobile students” are students who have physically crossed an international border between two countries to participate in education (UNESCO, 2016).
From another perspective, this thesis could be categorised as ‘fieldwork at home’ in which I have been studying up and sideways (Hannerz, 2006). I see it as fieldwork at home because, although I am not from Sweden, universities as core of this thesis have been part of my life since 2009. Further, it often happened during my fieldwork that my informants became part of my life I had established before I started fieldwork. Hence ‘fieldwork at home’ because it is a study about a familiar setting in terms of university life and I did not explicitly change the country for this research. Therefore this study has also a self-reflexive approach.

1.1 Mobility, Higher Education and Science

International (PhD) students are a group that is difficult to classify. While some literature analyses them from an immigration perspective (e.g. Brooks & Waters, 2013), others compare them more to tourists (e.g. Huang, 2008). At the same time, young people have been described as occupying a new cultural space, seeing themselves as neither immigrants nor tourists, but simply as mobile (Brooks & Waters, 2013:8). I would like to take this later approach and look at international PhD students first from the perspective of anthropology of mobility, since many international PhD students do not stay in Sweden after their degree and are hence not permanent immigrants.

Although I would like to agree with anthropologists like James Clifford who wondered if cultures have not always been travelling (1992) and that hence we have always been living in a transnational public sphere (Gupta & Ferguson, 2014 [1992]:524), it is also important to acknowledge that there has been an increasing amount of literature focusing on mobility since the beginning of the 1990s (Schiller & Salazar, 2013:183). This increase in literature is partially related to the notion of globalisation which claims that, through globalisation, there has been an increased mobility of people, ideas, goods, images, and money (Appadurai, 1996:33); because those movements became more apparent in the 1990s, there were also more people explicitly studying them (Lelièvre & Marshall, 2015:434+5). Those studies during the last twenty years have covered many different areas, ranging from refugees to tourists, consultants, return migrants and athletes (Schiller & Salazar, 2013; Lelièvre & Marshall, 2015). Some of those ethnographic studies have shown that new subjectivities can be created through those border crossings and that the experiences of those people are very different because of different backgrounds and motivations (Lelièvre & Marshall 2015:437). Other authors have found that mobility, similar to the way young people describe themselves, can construct new cultural and social spaces (ibid.:438).
While international (PhD) students do fall into the category of mobile people, there is little to no literature looking at their experiences from an anthropological point of view. However, there is a lot of literature using anthropological methods in the higher education literature and drawing on some anthropological theory; Arjun Appadurai, in particular is a frequently quoted anthropologist in this literature (e.g. Spring, 2015; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Marginson, 2008). Most anthropology of higher education literature focuses on institutions rather than individual students (e.g. Shumar, 2004); yet, there are a few examples of anthropologists who studied social mobility within higher education from an individual perspective (e.g. Brandt, 2007; Brayboy et al., 2007). At the same time, there is a vast amount of scholars coming from the disciplines of higher education or sociology who studied international (PhD) students; hence, I draw mostly on this literature when it comes to the mobility of international PhD student from a higher education perspective. In relation to this thesis, the most important theoretical approaches are those ones who try to understand the relationships between international (PhD) students and their host countries.

The classical functionalist approach in the higher education literature toward the experiences of international (PhD) students in their host countries is the ‘adjustment paradigm’ in which:

international education is imagined as a journey from the home country culture to the host country culture, facilitated by language proficiency and cross-cultural engagement. Each culture is modelled as constant. International students progress through host institutions by acquiring local attributes necessary to psychological well-being and academic success. The host country culture is normalized, the host country institutions are taken as given, and the international student is seen as in deficit in relation to host country requirements. The implicit objective of the student journey is the achievement of harmony with a host country seen to be in equilibrium. (Marginson, 2014:8)

This approach often sees the underlying principles of the home country as an obstacle because the assimilation and normalisation of migrants into the host culture is prioritised (ibid.). This view does not only hinder a discourse about progresses of academia (Robinson-Pant, 2009:418), but also forgets that international PhD students are not going to another country in order to simply be ‘filled’ with ideas there but rather that they already possess knowledge and have agency. The whole idea of having a ‘deficit’ toward another culture’s requirement and that they want to achieve ‘harmony’ is based on assumptions which are based on theories about centres and peripheries (Wallerstein, 2011), because of the mobility patterns. Additionally, much literature tries to generalise international (PhD) students into a
“homogenous group who similarly experience border crossings” (Gargano, 2009:332). Yet, recent literature tries to challenge the ideas of the adjustment paradigm, acknowledging the international (PhD) students’ agency and stressing the chances and possibilities that international people can bring to the host country, and that each student has different experiences (e.g. Robinson-Pant, 2009; Gargano, 2009; Marginson, 2014). This is also the approach this thesis follows.

Although this thesis is not a study about science and technology per se, it is about the people who are working with science and technology, the people at the universities. Hence, the thesis will also draw on conceptions from this research area. Some literature in this field of expertise looks also at the mobility of researchers and scientists (e.g. Melin, 2004, Zink, 2013, Jacob & Meek, 2013). Theories in this area are diverse and follow different approaches. Two of the most famous theorists in here are Bruno Latour and Pierre Bourdieu. Both authors aim to explain what science is and how it is produced (Latour, 1987; Bourdieu, 2004). While the former objective, explaining, what science is, is not part of this thesis, how it is produced is to some extent part of this thesis because I am looking at the relations of people who work with science. Each of these authors uses a different theory: Latour, together with John Law and Michel Callon, can be considered as the founder of the actor-network-theory, and Bourdieu as the founder of the practice theory. The two theories are fairly different and work differently. I decided to use Bourdieu’s practice theory because of the objective of my study. In the next section I will explain why I chose him and how his theory works.

1.2 A Theory of Practice
International PhD students cross borders in order to pursue their education. Because there are people who do this, the universities and countries they move to create new organisations for them. One example at Uppsala University is the International Faculty and Staff Service (IFSS), which started in 2014 because there was a need to establish such a service due to the amount of international people at Uppsala University. This organisation was necessary to help the large amount international faculty and staff, but even more the departments at Uppsala University, to work successfully together despite differences. The organisation for example offers welcome seminars for international faculty and staff, including international PhD students, where they explain the underlying principles, how the system works, of Sweden and Uppsala. Further they help departments understand the different needs of their international guests and sensitise them. Because this organisation exists, new international
PhD students will have different experiences than people who did not encounter such organisations before, but because they give comments to the organisers of such organisations, will develop them further. In this sense international PhD students influenced the field they entered at the same time as they were influenced by it. This is a very simplified example of the processes that are described by practice theory.

The anthropologist Sherry Ortner described the theory the following way:

The fundamental assumption of practice theory is that culture (in a very broad sense) constructs people as particular kinds of social actors, but social actors, through their living, on-the-ground, variable practices, reproduce or transform—and usually some of each—the culture that made them. (Ortner, 2006:129)

In other words: people are influenced by the world around them, while they are influencing this world at the same time. This is why using practice theory is a very useful tool for this thesis. The French social theorist3 Pierre Bourdieu was, so to speak, the founding father of this theory with his book, Outline of a Theory of Practice, which was published in French in 1972 and translated to English in 1977. Although there are other thinkers who developed the practice theory further (see Ortner, 2006:1), this thesis is mostly based on Bourdieu. The reason for this is that his theories are used not only within anthropology, but also education and science studies, and this thesis can be found somewhere in the middle of these topics, and his theories helped me to understand the relationship between the international PhD students and Uppsala better, as the example at the beginning of this chapter showed.

Bourdieu’s theory is based on three main concepts: field, capital, and habitus (1977). Around those concepts are many more theoretical aspects that are important for this thesis, which I will explain more as they become important. In the following I will explain my understanding of Bourdieu’s main concepts, why they are useful, and how I will use them.

A field, according to Bourdieu, is a “set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital)” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:16). Fields provide people with structures in which they can position themselves and others; they are “structures of probabilities – of rewards, gains, profits, or sanctions – but always [imply] a measure of indeterminacy” (ibid). Bourdieu further explained that the dynamics of a field are based on the structures and the distances, gaps, and asymmetries between the forces

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3 Bourdieu started as a philosopher, then moved to anthropology and finished his career as a sociologist (Bourdieu, 2004:94-114).
within the field (ibid.:101). Fields are overlapping and often interrelated, with the field of power crossing through all other fields. The ‘main’ field is the field of forces which is conserved and transformed by the field of struggles\(^4\) (Bourdieu, 2004:33). A field of forces only exists through the agents and their capitals, who again are influenced by the field: “it is the agents, […] defined by the volume and structure of the specific capital they possess, that determine the structure of the field that determines them” (ibid.). To explain this further, I first have to explain what Bourdieu meant with capitals.

Capitals or resources are assets for the agents they can acquire through different means that determine not only their positions in the field but also if they are able to access it in the first place. People with more capital have also more power over a field (Bourdieu, 2004:34). There are three basic forms of capital: economic, cultural, and social. The underlying idea here is that all three can, under certain conditions, be converted into money, with economic capital being the capital that has the direct function of doing so.

Cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied state, objectified state and institutionalised state (Bourdieu, 1997 [1986]:47). The embodied state of cultural capital is the fundamental state of this kind of capital and is “linked to the body and presupposes embodiment” (ibid:48). In its embodied state, as opposed to its objectified state, cultural capital cannot be inherited but has to be learnt and is acquired through what Bourdieu called self-improvement. Cultural capital in its embodied state is for example language. In the objectified state, cultural capital can only be defined in relation to its embodied state. It can be found in material forms, such as paintings, instruments etc. which can also be related to its symbolic value (ibid.:50). The institutionalised state, on the other hand, can neutralise or at least adjust some of the uneven distribution of cultural capital, for example, through academic qualifications (ibid.:50). Institutions confer academic qualifications, for example a PhD degree, which is seen as an objectified state of cultural capital; yet at the same time this cultural capital is based upon the biological limits of the agents, hence the embodied state of cultural capital. (ibid). Bourdieu states that “by conferring institutional recognition on the cultural capital possessed by any given agent, the academic qualification also makes it possible to compare qualification holders and even to exchange them” (ibid.:51). This is the

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\(^4\) Bourdieu wrote that each field consists of two different kinds of fields, a field of forces and a field of struggles. The field of forces is the main field I am looking at in this thesis. A field of struggles is “a socially constructed field of action in which agents endowed with different resources confront one another to conserve or transform the existing power relations” (ibid.:34+5).
reason why the institutionalised state of cultural capital is very important for this thesis, because through the academic qualifications PhD students either already possess or will possess in the future they can overcome the differences from different fields.

Social capital are potential or actual resources somebody has through the “possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (ibid.:51). In this sense, each member of the network can access collectively-owned capital, meaning capital that is in the possession of somebody else as well. For example if an international PhD student does not know how to write a grant proposal, he or she can through the connection to somebody who knows how to do this either acquire this skill or just get help in general. Yet, social capital has mostly to be earned as well and is not a naturally given.

Related to social and cultural capital is symbolic capital. This form of capital is based on the credit other people give to a person or a group of people based on, for example, names (Bourdieu, 1977:41). Scientific capital is, according to Bourdieu, a form of symbolic capital: “[i]t is a power which functions as a form of credit, presupposing the trust or belief of those of those who undergo it because they are disposed (by their training and by the very fact that they are belonging to the field) to give credit, belief” (2004:34). In other words: symbolic capital is based on the beliefs of other people that it is worth something; this belief, however, it is structured by the field which, in return, is structured by the agents in it. The more capital somebody possesses, the more power he or she has over the field and to make others believe that they have power, and so on. Agents aim to increase their economic capital to get more symbolic capital and try to get more symbolic capital to get more economic capital (1977:178).

This, however, brings me to the third, maybe most important and at the same time most discussed, theory of Bourdieu: habitus. The above description of power over other agents distinguished by capital suggests that people do this consciously; yet, according to Bourdieu, this is not the case because people are unconsciously controlled by their habitus. The habitus is a learned system of interactions with the environment (Bourdieu, 1977:72+3); it is the “durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations” (ibid:78), which enables agents to react to unforeseen situations by creating practices based on “strategy-generating principle[s]” (ibid.:72). These practices are based on the objective structure in which they were created (ibid.:73). However, the objective structures are also based on the
habitus, which means that the habitus, based on objective structures, is influencing itself as it influences the objective structures. Bourdieu further wrote that “the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agents’ disposit, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted.” (Bourdieu, 1977:165). Hence ‘doxa’ refers to the things that are taken for granted and work without explanation. However, if the opposite occurs, meaning that the habitus of an agent is confronted with a field that is very different from the “objectively fitted” environment that the agent is normally confronted with, for example through the move to a different country, negative sanctions follow. Bourdieu called this the hysteresis effect (ibid.:78) in which the previously learnt practices do not make sense anymore. However if a person is able to navigate two or more fields with different doxa, he or she can be considered having a cleft habitus (Bourdieu, 2004:111).

One critique of Bourdieu is that his theories are based on steady and only slowly, if at all, changing environments, for example, over generations. The example of the hysteresis effects is based on the assumption that the doxa, what is taken for granted or the “definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable” (Bourdieu, 1977:78), has changed over time between generations, which then can lead to a negative effect when agents from different fields of doxa meet. The problem here is the time according to Appadurai (1996). Instead of slow processes in which the habitus can adjust to and change the fields, the world today is constantly in flux and the search for “steady points of reference” becomes difficult. Appadurai wrote that:

culture becomes less what Pierre Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an area for conscious choice, justification, and representation, the latter often to multiple and spatially dislocated audiences. (1996:44)

This claim is in contrast to Bourdieu’s idea of habitus, which is not conscious. Others have described the habitus as something that is not possible to change, and if it does change, it happens only very rarely (e.g. King, 2000). The two critiques of Bourdieu’s theory are both related to the habitus: the first comes from Appadurai, who claimed that the unconsciousness of the habitus cannot work in a world where there are no stable conditions to be formed in and acted upon; and the second, related, claims that the notion of a habitus does not fit in with the overall idea of practice theory (King, 2000:417). Nevertheless, those who critique Bourdieu on the habitus mostly refer to his early writings in Outline of a Theory of Practice.
In his last work, however, Bourdieu wrote that “The habitus, as I have said so many times, is not a destiny, and none of the contrasting dispositions that I have mentioned is inscribed, ab ovo, in the original habitus.” (2004:44). Therefore, I will use Bourdieu’s notion of habitus in the way that he described in his last book, *Science of Science and Reflexivity*, and not how it was critiqued before. Additionally Bourdieu claimed that if any habitus is conscious, it is the scientific habitus, which uses methods and other tools consciously to do research (Bourdieu, 2004:40), which is also touched upon in this thesis. Appadurai’s critique, that an unconscious habitus cannot exist in a world that is changing at high speed, will be discussed in the ethnographic chapters.

### 1.3 Chapter Overview

In this first chapter I gave an introduction to why I chose this topic, why it is relevant and how I will approach it. I explained the ideas behind the anthropology of mobility, higher education, and science. I further gave an overview of the main theoretical concepts to be used based on Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice. In the next chapter, Methodology, I will give an overview of the fields studied in this thesis, followed by the methods used to do so. This chapter also includes the ethical considerations and limitations of this thesis. The third chapter will provide the background knowledge for this thesis, giving a short overview about the Swedish Higher Education System and Uppsala.

The ethnographic chapters, chapters four to eight, tell different stories of PhD students during their PhD journeys. They are stories between dark days and light nights, ranging from negative experiences to positive ones. Yet, the ethnographic chapters are not a timetable of events that are happening in the lives of international PhD students; rather, they are a glimpse into their lives at different points in time. The ethnographic chapters start with an introduction to Sweden and some of the structures international PhD students are subjected to once they arrive here. Followed by this is a chapter about the ‘dark days’, the difficult times they can have in Sweden. ‘Spaces for dialogue’ is a chapter about the experiences that international PhD students can have with other people. The last ethnographic chapter closes the circle and focuses on the ‘light nights’, the positive experiences of international PhD students.

In the thesis conclusion, I will give a short overview of the most important points made throughout the thesis and highlight the theoretical claims I made. This is followed by a very brief epilogue.
2 Methodology

This chapter will explain the fields I have been studying followed by a description of the methods I used to gather data. In a final section I will explain the ethical considerations of this thesis and its limitations.

2.1 The Fields

In the traditional sense, one could call my field site the municipality of Uppsala. This is where the universities that I studied are located, where the people that I talked to lived, and where I was the most during my fieldwork. However, this section is not about the more traditional ‘field site’, which will be described more in the next chapter, but, rather, about the field in the Bourdieuan sense: the social spaces (Bourdieu & Warquant, 1992:17) in which my informants moved around and which I accessed as well during my fieldwork.

Because I decided to focus my research on international PhD students and the people they interact with, I also decided against studying one single field in Bourdieu’s sense. Although Bourdieu’s opinion was that the field should be the main focus of a researcher (Bourdieu & Warquant, 1992:107), I would say that through the focus on the agents within the fields, it is possible to see beyond one single field and trace the connections between different fields by following the agents as they move between fields. Many of those fields are overlapping and interconnected, which becomes clearer when focusing on the agents instead of just one single field⁵, and I would also say that by focusing on just one field, one might overlook things. Nevertheless the main focus of this thesis are the social fields, meaning the social interactions of international PhD students with others.

Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered multiple fields within which international PhD students navigate: the social fields of Uppsala in general, the international field of science (Bourdieu, 2004), and the field of higher education in Sweden (Bourdieu, 1988). There are many more, but those are the ones I found most important for this study. By the social fields of Uppsala, I mean ‘normal life’ in Uppsala, not necessarily related to the PhD: it can be contacts to the people working in a supermarket or students from other disciplines, or the people in the department. The international field of science has been described lengthily

⁵ Bourdieu described four interconnected field levels: “the field of power, the broad field under consideration, the specific field, and social agents in the field as a field in themselves” (Thomson, 2008: 79). Studying all of those fields equally would be very difficult (ibid.). Hence, I focus mostly on the last one, the "social agents in the field as a field themselves".
in one of Bourdieu’s last books, *Science of Science and Reflexivity* (2004). The field of science is the field in which science is produced, and scientists are the agents in the field. The field of higher education is similar to the field of science, combining the ideas about higher education and the people working at universities.

In order to enter each of those fields, the international PhD students need to have certain forms of capital. A person who wants to be successful in in the social fields of the university needs the capitals necessary in the social world as well as in the scientific world. According to Bourdieu, it is therefore crucial to define the forms of capital that are active in a certain field; yet, at the same time, they only function within a field (Bourdieu & Warcquant, 1992: 108). However, as I will show throughout the following chapters, there are certain forms of capital that can be helpful in more than one field and it is possible to transfer them from one field to another.

2.2 Methods

I began my fieldwork in early February 2015 and finished most of the interviews in the middle of April 2015. I started my fieldwork by contacting the International Office at Uppsala University and, asking if they could provide me with a list of international PhD students. I was quite surprised that they replied to me that there was no such list. However, they gave me the contact details of the PhD students that were in their database because of the Erasmus Mundus scholarship programme they handled. Once I found out about the International Faculty and Staff Services at Uppsala University I asked them the same question about a contact list and how many international PhD students studied at the departments. They replied with the same answer as the International Office, adding that it is difficult for them as well to know whom to contact. They look at the name register at the departments or contact the departments directly. Yet, this can be very difficult because the name is not a reliable source to determine the origin of a person. They told me that somebody once was called Peter Gustafson, and everyone assumed he was Swedish while he was actually American, so nobody contacted him to see if everything was alright. The numbers of the Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), as well, are based on the numbers from the Swedish Migration Agency and not on numbers from the universities. Their definition is:

An international third-cycle student is someone who has informed the Swedish Migration Agency that third-cycle study is the reason for applying for residence in Sweden and who arrived less than two years before these studies commenced. (UKÄ, 2016:37).
While I did not know this detail until mid-March, I was not idle until I got the non-existent list. I did the same thing as the IFSS: go to the department websites and look for non-Swedish sounding names. Once I got the first contacts, I used the ‘snowball’ method to gather further possible informants and their contact details. Additionally, I got a contact to the ISP (International Science Programme), which connected me further with people. I also continued looking for suitable interview partners on the university websites.

Getting to know PhD students at SLU was a lot easier because I already had multiple contacts there. So, I asked my friends if they could connect me with the people in their surroundings. Additionally to those people, I looked for other people involved in PhD education at SLU and contacted them separately.

Because of the different kinds of sampling, there are also different kinds of data. While the data at Uppsala University is more related to nonprobability sampling, crossing multiple departments and disciplines, SLU focuses mostly on one department. I call it the ‘Animal Studies Department’, which is not its real name. However, at both universities, I used the same method to get contact information to supervisors: I asked the PhD students. Sometimes, they did not want me to talk to their supervisors; other times, they only said that I should not mention them to their supervisor; and yet other times, they highly recommended their supervisors.

Once I had access to my field site, I used a number of different methods to gather data. Bernard points out that a mix of methods is indeed on the rise and anthropologists are more and more pursuing a ‘mixed-method strategy’ (2011:288). I used the method that seemed the most appropriate and useful at the time I was in the field and changed things depending on the situation. In the following, I will explain those methods in more detail.

2.2.1 Interviews
In total, I interviewed 63 people: 33 PhD students, 6 supervisors, and 24 other people involved in PhD education such as the SLU Ombudsman, the presidents of both doctoral boards, a representative from SULF (Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers), and many more. Some of the 24 other people were PhD students or supervisors at the same time; yet as I interviewed them in their respective roles, I did not include them in the other lists. Altogether, I conducted interviews with people from 25 different countries: Argentina, Brazil, China, Colombia, Ghana, India, Iran, Italy, Malaysia, Mali, Montenegro,
Nepal, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Vietnam, three countries in Central America and one of the Baltic States.

All of my interviews were semi-structured. The interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 2.5 hours, with most being around 45 minutes. The advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it is possible to gather a lot of information in a rather short time, especially if it is not clear that it will be possible to talk to that person again. Although I asked all of my informants if I could contact them again in case I had some more questions, I did not conduct further interviews with them; yet I met many during times when I did participant observation. I also collected some email responses when questions surfaced while listening to the interviews again at home. The feeling of professionalism that the semi-structured interviews provided helped me in the way that Bernard described: “[i]t shows that you are prepared and competent but that you are not trying to exercise excessive control” (Bernard; 2011:158).

When possible, I took notes during the interview and also recorded them. I asked each interviewee if they consented to recording the interview and assured them that it would be confidential. I tried to arrive at the interview place at least ten minutes in advance, so that I could sit down and take some notes of the surroundings. This was, of course, more difficult when the interviews were scheduled in the informants’ offices; in such cases I was often waiting outside the department corridor, observing the environment. I also took notes of the body language, appearance, and other things that came to my mind during the interview.

My interviews did not start at the moment I turned on the recorder and started asking questions. Quite often, I had to be picked up by my informants in a public area, as the offices were only accessible with access cards; or, we met in their offices but then changed locations. This ‘fieldwork on foot’ (Lee & Ingold, 2006) was a very important part of my fieldwork, since it not only allowed me to talk with my informants informally, but they also showed me around their environment. In the cases when we would not meet in the offices of my informants, I sometimes asked if they would mind showing me their office or laboratory. That way, I accomplished two things: they had to walk with me and show me around, and I saw their office or laboratory. Taking notes about the office soon became very important, because I realised the different ways the desks of the PhD students looked and how this in many cases reflected the things they said. For example, PhD students who were more content with their education had decorated and/or messier desks while unhappy PhD students often had no personal things on their desks.
Charlotte Aull Davies points out that it is important to keep in mind the interview context between interviewer and informant and focus should not only be on what is said directly (2008:106). It is therefore important to mention that because I asked certain questions, or phrased things in a certain way, I most likely influenced the answers. Interviewing is, according to Davies and others, “better understood as a process in which interviewer and interviewee are both involved in developing understanding that is constructing their knowledge of the social world.” (Davies, 2008:108+9). Sometimes, people told me that they had never thought about that particular question, so I gave them some time to think about it. Quite often, they also ‘constructed their knowledge’ during the interview, seeing new connections after they started answering the question.

While most of the interviews were one-on-one interviews, I also had some interviews with two people each. Those interviews were a very interesting addition to the rest, since I could experience in real-life how communication between different nationalities works within a PhD group, and also what the themes of the PhD group were, as sometimes, they would just talk about a certain topic I did not ask about before, such as the type of degree they are getting, etc.

2.2.2 Participant Observation

Participant observation, the basis for most anthropological research, is seen more as a strategy that includes multiple research methods than just one simple method (Davies, 2008:77, Bernard, 2011:257). A big part of the lives of PhD students happens on campus, and although I was not observing them while they were working on their project directly, I still met them in their ‘natural environment’ and was able to spot some interaction with other people. Particularly, the ‘fieldwork on foot’ approach I mentioned earlier was very useful for this. Most of the participant observation at formal events I was able to do occurred during the second period of the spring semester 2015. The most important events formally organised by the universities or other stakeholders I attended were:

- ‘Working in Sweden Seminar’ SULF (SLU)
- Erasmus Mundus Action 2 Grantees Meeting (UU- Uppsala University)
- PhD Gasque (UU & SLU)
- PhD Days (UU)
- TNDR Board Night (UU)
- ‘Building Future Networks Seminar’ from Sida and ISP (all of Sweden)

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6 Brackets indicate where it was and who organised it
SANORD Conference (UU and other)

I got invited to most of the above events because of the contacts I established during the interviews. That way, the organisers knew I was there doing fieldwork, and as soon as I talked to participants of the events, I explained what I was doing. The other events were found by following Facebook groups and looking at the noticeboards I will describe in the next part. In those cases, I contacted the organisers beforehand, asking if I could come and do research.

Additionally to those official events, I went to department fika (Swedish coffee breaks, see chapter 4.1) and lunches, had dinner and movie nights, went snowboarding, and went to the screening of The PhD Movie 2. All of those events were very important and gave me a better insight into what it can mean to be an international PhD student in Uppsala. Most of those informal events happened within one department (except for some other fikas), the Animal Studies Department at SLU. The reason for this is that one of my friends is a PhD student in this department and invited me to their meetings.

Moreover, I became an observing participant (Bernard, 2011:260) during other occasions, such as a PhD defence as well as simply sitting in the campus building, observing the people around me without any interaction.

While the interviews helped me gain access to the field and are most certainly the foundation for this thesis, the times I got the chance to do participant observation were the times when I understood a lot more about how it must be being an international PhD student in Uppsala. During participant observation I increased the number of people coming from different countries again. I had additional unstructured interviews with people from: Canada, USA, Turkey, Germany, Kenya, and Myanmar. I also realised that every time I met my former interviewees again, they became a little bit more open, less reserved, and told me more about their stories. Through the participant observation times, I could confirm or question some of the things my informants had told me before.

2.2.3 Noticeboards, Pamphlets and Other Documents

Throughout my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time at different university campuses. Since I occasionally got lost within the maze that such campuses can be, I started by visiting the reception area of each campus on my first visit. Mostly, those reception areas are very visible; at other campuses, the reception area is in the middle of the maze. However, since the
reception area was still easier to find than other places, I met with my informants here from time to time. So, it happened that I spent a lot of time in reception areas, waiting either for my informant to pick me up, or to locate the office I was about to search. During my second interview, I noticed the noticeboards that are at each campus, sometimes more hidden than others, and I started taking pictures of them, just to see what happened to them and how they compared to other campuses. Most noticeboards are divided into two sections: one for PhD theses that are about to be defended, and the other one for all kinds of notes from the departments, language courses, unions, and so on. I never saw anybody else looking at the noticeboards, so I am not sure how much they are actually used. Nevertheless, they are a way of communicating information and therefore important, at least for one side.

Furthermore, I became a collector. I started collecting all kinds of pamphlets, books, brochures, and documents intended either for (PhD) students or the people working with them. I went to both the international and the Swedish student fairs at the beginning of the semester at Uppsala University, writing down the different stalls and collecting their pamphlets, as well as a separately organised International Fair for all the international staff at Uppsala University. Furthermore, I asked all of my interview partners working with PhD students if they gave any documents to new PhD students once they arrived. That way, I also learnt about studies and reports conducted by the universities and other sources about the quality of doctoral education. I was forwarded survey results online and connected to websites and ‘hidden’ parts of the universities’ websites I had not found before by myself.

Regarding such documents which are used additionally to the main ethnographic methods, Davies writes that it is important to stay critical toward them and question them as well as the other methods (2008:198). She further says that those resources should be treated the same way as the data from fieldwork and interviews, namely examined at three levels: text, interaction, and context, with the addition of looking at production and reception (ibid.:200). Those documents, noticeboards, and pamphlets were not only good as a way of getting further information about my informants and accessing the field, but also for ‘following’ the information they receive and therefore understanding the kind of knowledge and information they get during their time as international PhD students in Uppsala.

2.2.4 Auto-Ethnography

Anthropological epistemology is ultimately about the way we imagine others as human beings. Thus the question “What can I know about the world?” is always bound up with who I am, for myself and for others. (Moore & Sanders, 2014:16)
What Moore and Sanders are saying here is a very important aspect of anthropology: in a way, anthropological research is always also about the researcher. In the introduction, I gave an overview of how I came to study international PhD students. Because of my experiences as an exchange student in Birmingham and now as a full time Master’s student in Uppsala, many experiences that the international PhD students described to me were also my own. This is why using the method auto-ethnography lends itself in the context of this thesis, also in relation to the use of Bourdieu’s theory, since he always stressed the need for reflexivity.

Analytic auto-ethnography is a method where the researcher “turns the lens of inquiry on to their own personal accounts of events that concern them.” (Sturthers, 2014:184). The memories and the experiences of the researcher are used as data. The findings are then analysed in the light of existing theories. This method can challenge the previously held thoughts of the researcher and contribute to new findings (ibid.). The auto-ethnographic writing style can be identified by the use of ‘I’ in the ethnographic texts. Nevertheless, this thesis is not about me; it is about the people I met during fieldwork described as how I see them and also how I can relate my own experiences to theirs.

One of the biggest advantages I had during my fieldwork was indeed my own background. I always wrote in my emails that I am German, yet, quite often, Swedish speaking informants would address me first in Swedish, and international PhD students always asked me if I was from Sweden. However, I do not speak Swedish and had never been to Sweden before I started my Master’s in September 2014. This helped me in two ways with my informants: first, it created a certain feeling of trust and understanding between me and the PhD students I talked to, as I often faced similar problems like finding accommodation or understanding the higher education system. They could speak freely to me about the issues they had in Sweden, without being afraid that I might be offended. On the other hand, the Swedish faculty and staff saw in me a fellow European, with a fairly similar culture. Quite often, they would say something like, “In Germany, this must be similar,” or, “You must understand this, coming from Germany?” However, in this thesis’ use of auto-ethnography, I will use it to highlight the experiences of an international student and not as a ‘European’ working in an international environment.

Despite all of this, I am a Master’s student in cultural anthropology, and I am therefore in a different position than the PhD students I talked to and the supervisors. Yet, my
own experiences can be a useful tool in understanding international PhD students’ experiences in Uppsala.

2.3 Ethics and Limitations

Every study has an ethical frame it is subjected to and, further, always has certain limitations that need to be considered in order to put the study into context. In the following section, I will highlight the most important ethical considerations and limitations, when these were not already discussed in previous parts of this chapter.

2.3.1 Ethical Considerations

The AAA (American Anthropological Association) points out that every anthropologist has moral obligations toward their own social heritage and toward the people they study. (AAA, 2012:359). The Code of Ethics further states:

In conducting and publishing their research, or otherwise disseminating their research results, anthropological researchers must ensure that they do not harm the safety, dignity, or privacy of the people with whom they work, conduct research, or perform other professional activities, or who might reasonably be thought to be affected by their research. (AAA, 2012:361).

This is very important because the people I studied are not just study objects. To ensure the guidelines of the AAA, unless otherwise stated, all the names of the informants have been changed to pseudonyms. However, because of my sampling methods, it is most likely possible to identify the individuals if somebody knows who took part in my study. Therefore, I decided not to reveal the department or field my informants study, although this could be very interesting because there are big differences between the departments. Also, in cases where the nationality could identify a person, I only stated the part of the world where those people came from, or left it out completely if it was not relevant, in order to guarantee their anonymity. Further, I did not state the relations between who was supervising whom, as this could lead to further conclusions; an exception to this is the Animal Studies Department at SLU. The reason for this exception is that I got the contacts separated from each other and that I interviewed more than one supervisor at this department. In cases when the information the informants shared with me was very sensitive, I asked the informant about it to make sure that it was okay to use it in my thesis.

2.3.2 Limitations

Bourdieu suggested three different types of biases which can interfere with conducting research: the individual researcher’s social origins and coordinates (class, gender, ethnicity,
etc.); the position of the researcher in the academic field (objective space of possible intellectual positions offered); and the intellectualist bias which entices us to construe the world as a spectacle, as a set of significations to be interpreted rather than as concrete problems to be solved practically” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:39, emphasis in original) Or in other words: where I come from, what I know already, and what I want. All of those points are valid limitations also to this study. With the use of auto-ethnography, I try to limit those points in explaining and including my own background, keeping in mind a reflexive approach.

All of the interviews were conducted in English. English is my second language and it is also the second, sometimes third, language of most of my informants. Therefore, misunderstandings due to language differences were quite common during the interview. Often I understood what my informants had said only after I heard the interview again, and sometimes not even then. Of course, all of my informants had a high proficiency in English, but it still leaves some uncertainties. At the same time it also shows some of the realities of multinational and multilingual departments.

Furthermore, I can only include in this thesis what I know. This is particularly important when it comes to the selection of the informants. I was only able to talk to people who were willing to talk to me. As Davies says, selecting informants is a two-way process, and just because I would have liked to talk to them, it does not mean they wanted to talk to me (2008:89). For example, out of the 15 emails I sent to international PhD students in the first round, only three replied that they would like to take part in my study. In a second round, I sent nine emails to PhD students from China with zero replies. I only got to interview Chinese PhD students after I established contact with one other Chinese PhD student who helped me in getting contact to the others. Also, I focused particularly on PhD students coming from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which gives this thesis a tendency toward those continents. I had further anticipated interviewing more supervisors; yet, as I decided to start with the PhD students and look for supervisors more toward the end of my fieldwork, I got many replies that they were too busy, or got no reply at all.

Another point is that although I have a relatively even share of gender among my informants (19 of the 33 PhD students were male and 14 female); and although the term gender did pop up in my interviews from time to time, I decided not to focus on gender issues in this study, even though there are certainly many points that could be highlighted. My
female informants mostly commented on the limited number of other women in the department, which gave them often a difficult position. Especially the lack of female mentors was seen as difficult (see also Rosser, 2012). Yet, gender was not the scope of my project, and I do not have enough data to write about it in an informed way.

The last point is that I kept switching the terminology of my thesis during my fieldwork. At the beginning, I had anticipated studying African PhD students; however, it was rather difficult to ‘find’ them. Then, I decided to go for PhD students from developing countries. However, since a majority of PhD students come from China and India, I was not sure if ‘developing’ was really the right term and what I was looking for. So I switched again briefly to people from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) countries. This, again, did not prove sufficient, as it was difficult to find people specifically from those countries, so for the major part of my fieldwork, I classified my informants as ‘non-Western’. This term however, as I see now, is highly problematic and not relevant to this thesis either: from my own experience and what I learnt during my fieldwork, many of the stories in this thesis could also happen to European, ‘Western’ PhD students and some experiences might even be shared by Swedish students. Yet, all of the PhD students interviewed share that their habitus was formed in social fields different to Sweden, with different doxa. Therefore, in this thesis, the PhD students are called ‘international’. However, this search for terminology is important for understanding the context in which I conducted the interviews.

2.3.3 When Fieldwork Ends
The official time period for fieldwork during the Master’s at the department of cultural anthropology and ethnography at Uppsala University is ten weeks. However, since I did not leave my field physically, the ‘end’ of my fieldwork was more a process than an abrupt halt. As I mentioned earlier, most of the officially organised participant observation events occurred during the second half of the semester and some even happened in the fall of 2015. Therefore, I took those opportunities, even after the official time frame was over. I also did a few interviews with people who I had contacted between February and April but who were too busy during this period and had asked me to contact them at a later time. However, there is a limit to the amount of time one can spend in the field. And although there were many more people on my list whom I would have liked to talk to and events I would have liked to go to that I did not know about before, I decided to stop at a certain point: I did not schedule further interviews after June 2015 and did participant observation only at events I would have attended anyway from December 2015 onwards.
3 Background

In this chapter, I will give an overview of the background information relevant for understanding the following ethnographic chapters. I will start with a brief overview of the Swedish higher education system with a special emphasis on doctoral education. This is followed by a description about the characteristics of Uppsala and an introduction to the two Universities that can be found within the municipality: Uppsala University and SLU. This part will also include some remarks on the special features Uppsala has to offer to its student population, including but not limited to PhD students.

3.1 Swedish Higher Education System

The largest public-sector service provider in Sweden is higher education (UKÄ, 2016:2). Thirty-one higher education institutions in Sweden are public-sector institutions in which 90% of the students are enrolled (ibid.:14). Uppsala University and SLU both fall under this category. Although the universities are government-funded, they are supposed to remain autonomous to a high degree, with their mission being mainly “to offer education based on scholarship or artistic practice and on proven experience” (ibid.) and further being required to conduct research and development (R&D). Over half of the higher education institutions conduct research and third cycle education because most publicly funded research in Sweden is done within institutions of higher education (ibid.).

Internationalisation is a big topic within the Swedish higher education discourse. Two recent bills (Bill 2008/09:50, Bill: 2012/13:30) are aimed at increasing the position of Swedish higher education in an international comparison, and knowledge transfer between different countries is considered highly important (Mählck & Felsingsson, 2016:112). Sweden is further one of the highest investing OECD countries into R&D, spending just under 12 000 USD per tertiary education student (OECD, 2016:4).

Higher education in Sweden is influenced by factors from outside of Sweden. Sweden is part of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which was started in 1999 with the goal to increase mobility, increase employability and promote the competitiveness of Europe (Sweden.se, 2016a). Tuition is free for Swedish and European Union citizens. Following membership in the European Higher Education Area, the higher education system in Sweden changed, and as of 2007, Sweden has introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and divided higher education programmes into three cycles: Bachelor, Master, and Doctorate/Licentiate (ibid.).
The three cycles are based on the Higher Education Act and are progressive, meaning that one is based on the other (UKÄ, 2015:17). One year of full time study is the equivalent of 60 Higher Education (HE) credits. Forty-five percent of Sweden’s population of 25-34 year old’s have a tertiary education degree; this is more than the OECD average (UKÄ, 2015:6).

### 3.1.1 Doctoral Education

It is difficult to write anything general about studying at third-cycle level, because there are such big differences between higher education institutions (HEIs) and programmes. Even the working conditions and view of doctoral students vary.

Here are a few general factors:
- Third-cycle education includes courses, private study, research and writing a thesis in close cooperation with a supervisor.
- Many programmes also have various types of research seminars [...].
- The majority of doctoral students have some form of employment at their HEI, which often includes teaching at first and second-cycles (Bachelor’s and Master’s).

(Studera.nu, 2016)

As Studera.nu, a website about higher education in Sweden managed by the Swedish Agency for Higher Education (UHR), writes: it is very difficult to generalise about PhD education in Sweden. Nevertheless, there are, additional to those mentioned in the quoted text above, some more general factors. Usually four years of study are required to get a doctoral degree. However, many PhD students have additional positions in the department or at the university, which increases this time to five years. According to Studera.nu, the average period to finish a PhD was 4.2 years; however, those 4.2 years correspond to the actual time worked on the dissertation and does not include other work at the department (Studera.nu, 2016).

Thirty-eight percent (1,140) of the newly admitted third-cycle students in 2015 are considered international (UKÄ, 2016:38.). In OECD countries, 53% of the international PhD students are coming from Asia, and 23% are from China (OECD, 2016:1) and also in Sweden.
most international students come from Asia. Regarding PhD education in Sweden, it is also relevant to say that two-thirds of third-cycle students are studying at six universities in Sweden out of 29 who are legally allowed to confer degrees. Uppsala University is one of those six (UKÄ, 2016:34).

A book published originally in 2014 by The Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF) and translated in 2016 under the title, The formation of doctoral education, written by authors from Uppsala University and Lund University, was given to me by one of my informants. In it, one can read that doctoral education is seen as an “intersection between the three major missions of universities: research, education and outreach” (Elmgren, et al.:2016:14). The authors describe doctoral education as a ‘boundary object’, something that can inhabit multiple ‘communities of practice’ at once and satisfy the requirements for all of them (ibid.:15). This is also related to the different fields I mentioned in the previous chapter and that international PhD students are not only part of one field.

3.1.2 Funding for PhD Education
Prior to admission, a PhD student needs to prove that he or she has sufficient funding. This is either done directly via the department, in which case the PhD student is formally employed (also called a doctoral studentship) or via an outside form of funding, such as a scholarship. Further, there are external organisations, outside of universities and government, involved in doctoral education, such as SULF (Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers), which tries to help PhD students get the funding and the rights they are due to. In 2012, a new bill Research and innovation (Govt. bill 2012/13:30) regulated that the conditions of scholarship holders should be more equal compared to employed PhD students and, therefore, employment should be the desired way of financing PhD students. Following this, 66% of PhD students in Sweden in general were employed in 2015 opposed to 57% in 2014. Yet, there was also a decline in new PhD students (UKÄ, 2016:38).

In my interviews with the IFSS, SULF, and others involved in PhD education, the differences between employed PhD students and scholarship holders was the biggest issue they saw. This is because of the lesser social security and fewer rules of scholarship holders. Most scholarship holders receive less money and often have problems in identifying where to go to apply for money to go to a conference, for example. Also, if they become unemployed, there are different rules. During my research, I talked to people within two major funding
schemes: those fully employed by the universities, and those funded by a scholarship\(^9\). Below is a comparison of the differences between scholarship and employment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Scholarship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate of remuneration</td>
<td>Lowest salary: 23 500 kr (before tax)</td>
<td>Minimum = level of study grant after tax, c. 11 000 kr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid holiday?</td>
<td>Yes (28 – 35 days)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants right to social security entitlements (SGI)?</td>
<td>Paid sick leave</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grants right to social security entitlements (SGI)?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid parental leave?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pension contributions?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group life insurance?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work injury?</td>
<td>Covered by insurance for, and legislation on, work-related injuries.</td>
<td>Not covered by insurance for, and legislation on, work related injuries. Instead covered by the university’s student insurance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 comparison funding employment vs. scholarship (PhD Handbook, Uppsala Student Union, 2013)

Although I could not find a number saying if statistically there are more international PhD students on a scholarship than Swedish students, the comments from supervisors and also from others suggested that international PhD students are much more likely to be on a scholarship in Sweden than their Swedish counterparts. The economic aspects are very important for the experiences of international PhD students, because they determine what possibilities they have. However, it is not that all international PhD students who come via a scholarship have less money and benefits than people who are employed. It is highly dependent on the kind of scholarship. I saw the biggest difference between scholarships that were organised by Sweden or Europe and the ones that were scholarships from the home country.

3.2 Uppsala

Uppsala is the fourth largest municipality in Sweden, with a population of just over 200,000 (Uppsala Kommun, 2016). It is located in central Sweden, only about 70 km north of Stockholm. More than 40 000 students are studying at the two universities, full and part time,\(^9\)

\(^9\)There also used to be something called a ‘doctoral grant’, but this is no longer in use. Also, in theory, there could be other forms of funding, yet I did not encounter any other means of funding, which is why I will only focus on the two. (UKÄ, 2016:38)
that are located here: Uppsala University and SLU. University and higher education teachers are the second most common occupation in Uppsala (Uppsala Kommun, 2016), which is another example of the presence of the universities. As the Lonely Planet states:

Drenched in history but never stifled by the past, Uppsala has the party vibe of a university town to balance out its large number of important buildings and general atmosphere of weighty cultural significance. (Lonely Planet, 2012:109)

Uppsala is a university town, which is visible throughout the whole city. Uppsala University’s main building; Carolina Rediviva, the main university library; and Museum Gustavianum, the university museum, all located in the city centre, are top tourist destinations.

Although students can be found in all parts of the city, there is a physical barrier dividing the city into two parts: the river Fyris. Most of the campuses of Uppsala University and the campus of SLU are on the western side of the river, and so are the Student Nations and most of the student accommodations. This is, of course, also closely related to the history of Uppsala, as the cathedral of Uppsala, the most iconic landmark of the city, is on this side of the river and Uppsala University was founded under an initiative of the Catholic Church of Sweden as the first university in Scandinavia (Uppsala University, n.d.), hence the closeness to the cathedral. Historically, the city was also divided between academics and ecclesiastical people on the west side of the river, and traders and craftsmen on the east of the river (Länsstyrelsen i Uppsala län, 2014:53).

Uppsala is, compared to the number of people living here very spread-out: the municipality spans 2,182 square kilometres. The map I included at the beginning of this thesis shows only the western side of the city. In other words: biking from Flogsta, the area where most of the international PhD students I talked to lived, to Ultuna, where SLU is located, takes about 30 minutes; from Flogsta to the city centre takes about 15 minutes; and from SLU to the city centre is roughly another 20 minutes. Biking is one of the most, if not the most, common means of transportation for students in Uppsala, although most international PhD students I talked to use busses at least during the winter. Busses run frequently to many parts of the town and are most often slower than biking and require a change of busses in the city centre.
3.2.1 Uppsala University

Uppsala University is the first and therefore also the oldest university in Scandinavia. It was founded in 1477 on an initiative of the Catholic Church of Sweden, as previously mentioned (Uppsala University, n.d.). The University is divided into three disciplinary domains: Humanities and Social Sciences, Medicine and Pharmacy, and Science and Technology. Those disciplinary domains are, again, divided into nine faculties, which are then subdivided into departments. In 2015, 2,437 PhD students studied at Uppsala University, most of them in the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology, which hosted around 900 PhD students, and about half of the total number of PhD students were called employed by the university (Uppsala University, 2015a). The university has twelve campuses, one on the island Gotland, with each campus dedicated to a certain field of study. The university is frequently among the top 100 best universities in the world in global university rankings, such as the Times Higher Education Ranking, or the Shanghai Ranking. In the university mission one can read:

The mission of Uppsala University is to gain and disseminate knowledge for the benefit of humankind and for a better world. Uppsala University is a local, national and international meeting place for knowledge, culture and critical dialogue. The internationally prominent position the University enjoys is strengthened by its continuing change and its ability to forge new paths. New areas of knowledge arise in cross-disciplinary cooperation. (Uppsala University, 2014:3)

Uppsala University has four missions and core values: World-leading research, First-class education, Attaining excellence and benefiting society, and Development areas in focus.

I conducted my fieldwork mostly on the campuses of the Ångström Laboratory, BMC (Biomedicine Centrum), ITC (Information Technology Centre) and Geocentrum. The Ångström Laboratory, the newest building of Uppsala University at the time, and the Information Technology Centre are often referred to as one campus: Polacksbacken. This campus is located about three kilometres away from the city centre, roughly halfway between the city centre and SLU. There is a direct bus from Flogsta to Polacksbacken; otherwise it is about 20 minutes by bike. Twenty-six percent of the university’s PhD students are studying in those two areas which, combined, make up 20% of the university buildings (Polacksbacken, 2014). These campuses are home to the Disciplinary Domains of Science and Technology. Within sight of Polacksbacken, one can find Biomedicine Centrum. This campus is one of the few campuses hosting departments from all three disciplinary domains. Geocentrum, on the other hand, hosts only one department, the Department of Earth
Sciences, part of the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology. Geocentrum is located a bit closer to the city, right in the heart of an area with many university campuses.

Doctoral education at Uppsala University is under the regulations of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, just as the rest of the universities. Underneath this governing body are the overall regulations of Uppsala University. The responsibility for doctoral education has been reassigned from the Vice-Chancellor to the board of the disciplinary domains or faculties (Uppsala University, 2009:4). This board has the overall responsibility, yet the operative responsibility lies within the department, which, together with the supervisors, has disciplinary domain boards and faculty boards to ensure the quality of the education (ibid.).

Since I conducted my fieldwork within the Faculty of Science and Technology (Teknat), which is equivalent to the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology, I will now focus on this faculty. The faculty has six subsections: mathematics and computer science, physics, technology, chemistry, biology, and earth science. Although the overall responsibilities for PhD education lie with the faculty board, many things are delegated to the postgraduate board, FUN (Forskarutbildningsnämnden), when it comes to PhD education. The department heads hold the overall responsibility for activities at the department level. Each person in the department has different responsibilities: Professors are responsible for his or her subject in general; professors responsible for postgraduate studies have more duties and are responsible for the training of PhD students in their subjects. Supervisors (main and supplementary) are supposed to have taken part in a supervisor course. The director for postgraduate studies coordinates doctoral education and has to make sure that PhD students and supervisors are receiving the support they need (Teknat, 2014:17-8).

Additional to those regulations, there is the doctoral board organised by the student unions. The doctoral board ensures that “those conducting PhD studies at Uppsala University are able to do so with security and legal certainty, from admission until disputation” (Doktorandnämnden, n.d.). The chair of the doctoral board regularly attends meetings with the Vice-Chancellor of Uppsala University, coordinates meetings with the doctoral councils at the faculties, and much more. Each faculty has a PhD students’ council. In the Faculty of Science and Technology, this is called TNDR (The PhD students’ council of the Faculty of Science and Technology). TNDR represents all PhD students within the faculty, aiming to resolve any issues related to doctoral education (TNDR, n.d.). The Uppsala Student Union
employs an ombudsman for PhD students, who helps PhD students when they need it. There are further ombudsmen on the faculty and department level.

3.2.2 Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

SLU, short for Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet but always only referred to as SLU, was founded in 1977, exactly 500 years after the founding of Uppsala University. The university is located in Uppsala, and also spread throughout the whole country with branches in Alnarp, Umeå, Skara, and Skinskatteberg. The branch in Uppsala is the main campus. The university has four faculties: Landscape Architecture, Horticulture and Crop Production Science; Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences; Forest Sciences; and Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. In 2015, 638 active doctoral students were researching at SLU (SLU, 2016). Its mission is described in the following way:

SLU develops the understanding and sustainable use and management of biological natural resources. This is achieved by research, education and environmental monitoring and assessment, in collaboration with the surrounding community. (SLU, 2016)

This mission is also omnipresent in the research focus of SLU, which has a clear environmental approach.

The campus in Uppsala is located about six kilometres south of the city centre, next to the Fyris river. It is connected to the city by roads, a number of bike lanes, and frequent busses. The campus buildings were recently built new, and while I conducted my fieldwork in early 2015, some departments were in the process of moving from the old buildings to the new ones, while others were still adapting to the new environment. I was mostly in the VHC (Centre for Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science), which is a brand new building roughly in the middle of SLU’s campus area.

There are many different mechanisms in place to ensure the well-functioning of PhD education at SLU. The overall system is fairly similar to the one at Uppsala University. At SLU, the Vice-Chancellor is responsible for doctoral education. The faculty board are supposed to delegate the decisions of the Vice-Chancellor. SLU also has a doctoral education committee (FUN). Each faculty has at least one director of studies and a doctoral education officer. A PhD student should further have at least two supervisors who are responsible for him or her. (SLU, 2015). Since SLU is spread throughout the whole country, there are multiple student unions at SLU. SLUSS (SLU:s samlade studentkårer) is the uniting body for
those unions. SLU has one PhD students’ council for the whole university as well as several smaller ones for each faculty. SLU also has an ombudsman for PhD students, who takes take of the problems and issues of these students.

3.2.3 Student Life in Uppsala

As I have written above, the universities and the students shape the cityscape of Uppsala. There are some areas where almost entirely students are living, where it is impossible to walk ten steps without seeing a university building, and where only students, or at least former students, can enter. All of the above is related to the student life in Uppsala. PhD students, while working at the university, also enjoy the benefits of the student town of Uppsala. The two most important parts of student life in Uppsala I want to discuss in this section are the Student Nations and the housing situation, as those were important during my fieldwork.

There are 13 Student Nations, in the following simply called Nations, in Uppsala. Each Nation represents a region in Sweden and most Swedish students are supposed to join the Nation where they are from, although it is not that strict anymore and international and Swedish students can join any Nation they want. Only students at a university in Uppsala can join a Nation, hence also PhD students, and if alcohol is served, one has to show one’s Nation Card, a membership card of any Nation which gives access to all other Nations as well, in order to enter the premises. After graduation, it is possible to remain a member of a Nation. Although it is not mandatory anymore to become a member of a Nation, most students do. The Nations are an important part of the student life of Uppsala, since they have restaurants, pubs, choirs, sport groups, craft groups, and many more activities. Each Nation has a building where such activities are offered. They also rent out their premises to other events and groups, for example the PhD Gasque. A Gasque is a banquet-like formal dinner with a dress code and many more rules (such as how to cheer, how to sit, when to go to the bathroom, etc.), which also includes a lot of singing and other forms of entertainment. However, as I got to know during my fieldwork, there are some international PhD students who either do not know that they can join a nation, or are, in general, not interested in them. Nevertheless, the Nations are part of the lives of many of the international PhD students I talked to and part of my fieldwork was done in a Nation, for example, during the PhD Gasque.

The housing situation in Uppsala is a topic that is omnipresent in conversations. Although not as bad as in 2010 and 2011, when many students could not find a place to stay and had to sleep in tents or in other less permanent homes (The Local, 2010), it is still, for
many, a challenge to find permanent housing in Uppsala. Most times when I asked my informants (PhD students and others alike) what the biggest challenges in Uppsala are, the answer was finding a place to stay. The housing situation can be a big part of the experiences of international PhD students, for better or worse. Many departments help new PhD students to find accommodation, and PhD students coming via some scholarships even have housing guaranteed, but often only for a year. Fee paying students are entitled to one year of guaranteed housing, and students coming via an exchange programme have housing guaranteed as well. Yet, those benefits do not apply to most international PhD students and even the ones who got their accommodation arrange will most often look for a new place after a while. Since it is easier to find a place to stay in some areas than others, there are whole neighbourhoods almost entirely filled with students, also because some housing companies require the tenant to be a student. One of the reasons why it can be so difficult to find housing in Uppsala is the queuing system. People have to virtually queue for housing, and the longer somebody stands in line, the higher the chances they have to get a first-hand contract. Since international students mostly know only shortly before their arrival that they are coming to Uppsala, they have a disadvantage, as compared to Swedes, who often start queuing long before. One of my informants for example bought a house because it was easier for him to buy a house than rent one.

Flogsta is possibly the most infamous of the student neighbourhoods, and also the area where many new Swedish students and most international students live. It is also the area where most of the international PhD students I talked to lived, at least for a few months. I live here, too. Therefore, I will explain Flogsta as an example of student housing in Uppsala. Although Flogsta is more than just the 16 high rises shaping the landscape of the neighbourhood, most people refer to Flogsta as those buildings. Inside those high-rises are seven floors with two corridors consisting of 12 separate rooms with their own bathroom. The only things people living inside those houses share are the kitchen and a very small common area. It is possible to rent the rooms furnished, although they are then more expensive than if rented unfurnished (about 3400 SEK as opposed to 3900 SEK), which has been criticised by some of my informants who felt that this system was not just. Because Flogsta corridors are mostly populated by international exchange students and new Swedish students, there is a constant fluctuation of tenants of the corridors, which gives the area its own dynamics.
Flogsta corridor parties are legendary among the student population of Uppsala, although not everyone is fond of them. Since there are at least 12 people living in a corridor, there are often different ideas about parties and about how to clean the kitchen for example. The picture on the right, taken in one of those corridors, shows only some of the points of frictions that can occur between the different tenants of the corridors. Most of my informants who lived in a corridor like Flogsta mentioned some problems with living there and tried to find other accommodation, yet, this is often rather difficult and takes time.

3.3 Conclusion
In this chapter, I gave an overview of the objective structures that influence the fields and also some aspects of the social fields international PhD students can encounter in Uppsala. Through the way doctoral education is governed and the ideas the Swedish government has for PhD students, international and Swedish alike, their experiences are influenced. Higher education in Sweden is not only subjected to Swedish developments, but also reacts to international developments, such as the Bologna Process. The fact that Sweden invests a lot of money into R&D can make the country very attractive to international PhD students, which again influences the number of international PhD students coming to Sweden.

The habitus of international PhD students are influenced by all of those objective structures in the different fields in Uppsala. These are the settings they encounter and in which they need to acquire the necessary capital in order to do their PhD abroad. While the higher education system is based on the field of higher education, student life and also to some extend the organisation of Uppsala University and SLU are based on the social fields in Uppsala. These social fields require different capitals, for example the ability to life with many different people, from different countries and in different phases of their education, in a Flogsta corridor. In the next chapter, I will explain what this means in more detail.
4 Welcome to Sweden

The stage of this thesis is Uppsala and, with it, Sweden. Without the stage none of the stories I am about to tell would have been possible. Uppsala and Sweden are the setting in which all of the stories were made possible and in which they make sense.

Most literature about international (PhD) students is based in Anglophone countries. This literature sometimes forgets that there are other countries where large numbers of international students are welcomed and where English is not the local language. Further, Appadurai’s (1996) claim that migration and the media are the reason for the increased interconnectedness of the world has a strong focus on the United States, where he moved for his education, and the United Kingdom, which has had a big impact on India due to colonisation. This does not mean that Sweden is not present in the media or other forms of communication: it is, after all, the birth country of ABBA, IKEA, H&M, Spotify, Volvo, and many other well-known names. Considering its number of inhabitants of just under ten million (Sweden.se, 2015) and its location in the far north of Europe, Sweden is probably still better known than some other countries with a similar size and/or location.

However, most of the PhD students I talked to did not know much about Sweden in general before they arrived here, nor were they explicitly planning on going to Sweden. If a country was mentioned where they wanted to go initially, it was mostly the USA and, on rare occasions, also the Netherlands and Germany. Most of the time, however, the country was irrelevant for their decision where to do their PhD. Yet, they all came to Sweden for their education. One of my informants said: “A PhD is a lifestyle for four years and it will determine your lifestyle in the future”. Also others PhD students, who had been accepted to more than one university, commented that they chose Uppsala due to the image they had in their head about life here. If this is the case, what role does the country in which the PhD education takes place have?

Almost all of the international PhD students I talked to mentioned the dark and cold days of the Swedish winter. For many, those dark winter days were some of the biggest challenges they faced in Sweden, which is why I gave this thesis the title Between Dark Days and Light Nights. The following chapter, however, sets the stage for the rest of the ethnographic chapters, highlighting what role Sweden, as a rather small, non-Anglophone country, has in the education of international PhD students. Hence, this chapter is about the doxa, the underlying principles of the lives of international PhD students in Uppsala and the
forms of capital they need in order to navigate the fields successfully. This chapter is important in order to understand the following chapters.

4.1 Fika

Swedes prefer not to translate the word fika. They don’t want it to lose significance and become a mere coffee break. It is one of the first words you will learn when visiting Sweden, right after tack (thank you) and hej (hello).

Fika is much more than having a coffee. It is a social phenomenon, a legitimate reason to set aside a moment for quality time. Fika can happen at any time, morning as well as evening. It can be savoured at home, at work or in a café. It can be with colleagues, family, friends, or someone you are trying to get to know. It is a tradition observed frequently, preferably several times a day. (Sweden.se, 2016b, emphasis in original)

During my fieldwork, but much more during my two years of living in Sweden, I came to the conclusion that the above statement from the website Sweden.se, an official website by the Swedish Institute intended to promote Sweden in the world, is indeed correct: In Sweden, fika is much more than a coffee break; it is an institution and too important to translate for many. There have been few days since my arrival in Sweden when fika was not mentioned at some point. It is possible to have fika at any time of the day, and it can be used as both a noun and a verb; for example, “do you want to fika” or “should we have fika?” Although, traditionally, it includes something sweet to eat and coffee or tea, I also encountered fikas with Swedes that were more like a snack or dinner.

Swedish universities, at least the ones I have been to so far, have official department kitchens where the faculty and staff can get free coffee and tea, heat up their lunches, or have other meetings: in short, it is a place for fika. Most of my interviews happened in those department kitchens; therefore, it is no wonder that fika was a frequently touched-upon topic: about half of the interviews I conducted either happened over fika (in other words, a coffee or tea) in the department kitchen, people mentioned it during the interviews, or I was able to participate in departmental fikas as a participant observer.

During the ‘Future Networks’ seminar, an event organised by Sida (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) and ISP in Stockholm, one of the speakers suggested to ‘take fika home’. He encouraged people to look behind the façade and take fika not only as a coffee break but rather as a ‘social innovation’ during which problems can be solved. This idea that international PhD students should take fika back home has also been voiced by one of the ISP supervisors I interviewed, who said that there is the hope that international PhD students take some things how they are handed in Sweden back to their
home countries. And indeed, some of the PhD students I talked to said that they would miss *fika* when they return to their home countries. The cultural importance, mentioned in the introductory quote, also reached the consciousness of some of the international PhD students: “One of the first words I learned in Sweden is *fika*. It is a very important cultural thing. Never stand between Swedes and their *fika,*” was a comment from one person. But in Sweden, *fika* is much more than just a ‘cultural thing’. Erik, a supervisor at the Animal Studies Department at SLU, described *fika* as a forum for networking:

> “When you are here, you will get part of the network. During the coffee break,¹⁰ you will get informal information, and this informal information, the group that is not taking the coffee break will not get. There are things that cannot be spread through each other via email.”

Some of the PhD students were aware of this aspect of departmental *fika* in the sense of networking, as I had people reschedule interviews saying that *fika* was the most important time of their working week because that was when they got the most information and actually understood what was going on. The department *fikas* I participated in were organised by the senior faculty in the department, sometimes supervisors would even bake cake and bring it for the rest of the department.

*Fika* can be seen in the Bourdieuan sense as a way of how international PhD students can get a ‘feel for the game’. In his book *The Logic of Practice* from 1990 Bourdieu describes how anthropologists (should) encounter their ‘fields’. International PhD students and anthropologists have one thing in common: they are both trying to make sense of a new environment, often in a different country, although for different reasons. In Bourdieu’s ‘feeling for the game’ metaphor, he further writes that it gives a fairly accurate idea of the almost miraculous encounter between the *habitus* and a field, between incorporated history and an objectified history, which makes possible the near-perfect anticipation of the future inscribed in all the concrete configurations on the pitch or board. (1990:66, emphasis in original)

During department *fikas*, international PhD students are, often for the first time, able to get a ‘feel for the game’: their *habitus* meets the new field, and their incorporated history gets new input. *Fika* is, in many departments, the time when new PhD students are introduced, and it is therefore also the first time when the *habitus* of the PhD students encounters their new field. *Fika* is their entrance point, where they not only get a ‘feeling for the game’, but are also able

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¹⁰ He used the word ‘coffee break’, different to the claim in the introductory quote.
to understand the ‘rules of the game’, when they can figure out the doxa, the underlying principles. When I attended department fikas, the way people addressed each other, how they were sitting, etc. gave me a clue to understanding the departmental structures. It happened, for example, that once the ‘most important person’ (i.e. the one who was considered to have the most symbolic capital) left the room, the conversation topics changed immediately and that people sat more relaxed. The reactions were also different depending where the person came from. Of course, not everybody reacted to this, and I also do not think it was a conscious form of behaviour: it was part of their habitus.

*Fika* is a social ritual within Sweden, not only within the universities. For Bourdieu, social rituals can be seen as “rites of institution” (1991:118), similarly understood as rites of passage. When a new international PhD student attends a department *fika* for the first time, the way he or she is introduced to the rest “signifies to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone” (Bourdieu, 1991:121); yet, the same can also be said about the other participants of the department *fika*. That way, the structures of the field are laid out, and the position of the PhD student can be determined. Attending *fika* can build social networks and generate a feeling of ‘one of us’, because people are seeing that person on a regular basis (Barnacle & Meburn, 2010:439). If somebody attends *fika* on a regular basis, he or she can increase social capital though the connections and networks established during *fika*, and, in the Swedish sense, also enhance their understanding of the Swedish culture and therefore acquire a form of cultural capital. *Fika* is hence a way to acquire social and cultural capital at the same time.

*Fikas* are important informal interaction at the workplace which is key to understanding the dynamics behind the underlying structure of the department (e.g. Pettersen, 2015). During *fika*, a new PhD student has a chance to get a glimpse of the ‘hidden hierarchies’ of Swedish academia. Although Swedish organisations are considered to have a ‘flat organisation’, there is nevertheless some sort of hierarchy. For many international PhD Students coming from different academic traditions, the flat hierarchies in Sweden can be difficult at first. *Fika* is a good way to at least try to understand this. *Fika* itself is a good example of the flat hierarchies in Sweden, because, although there are unspoken rules of *fika*, everyone can take part and has the same tasks and is officially considered equally important. Having coffee with supervisors, or in Sweden *fika*, has further been described as a ‘humanising’ process (Hemer, 2012: 834), which can allow international PhD students to overcome their fears or other difficulties they have toward their supervisor.
Yet, at the same time, because of this importance of *fika* in the daily routines of academics in Uppsala, if a person does not want to participate in *fika* or does not understand the importance, it can be a large obstacle. One of my informants told me that at the beginning, he always thought that the department had a lot of meetings and was wondering why he was not invited until he understood that people were having *fika* and that he was invited, just not as formally as he had expected. Hence, *fika* can be an important factor in the experiences of international PhD students in Uppsala, for better and for worse.

Through *fika*, international PhD students have a chance to understand how the field works and can get a ‘feeling for the game’. On the other hand, *fika* can be a way for supervisors to interact with their PhD students on a different level, other than just the professional, which can help in overcoming fears and problems. During *fika* the doxa of the fields in Sweden can become visible, *fika* itself could even be part of the doxa. And further international PhD students can acquire important cultural and social capital during *fika*.

### 4.2 Internationalisation at Home

“It is very important, with internationalisation, in a way, the term ‘internationalisation at home’, because we are located geographically in Sweden; but even though we are, if we attract international students and international staff, then we can create an international environment here. As a ‘small international island’. And even though some domestic students never go abroad, they will still have the flavour of internationalisation at Uppsala University, because they will meet students from nearly all over the world, and academic staff as well, having different backgrounds.

I guess it’s better acknowledging that it is enriching when we’re mixing different perspectives, and cultures, and whatever. It’s a good preparation for yourself, in your personality development, of course, being more aware of the surrounding world; but it is also an important skill for work life. Because it is increasingly demanded of highly educated people that they can work across borders. And if you do that already during your education, then you are better prepared as when it happens afterwards.” (Interview with Åsa Kettis, Head of division at Division for Quality Enhancement, Uppsala University)

‘Internationalisation at home’\(^{11}\) is a concept that was born in Malmö 1998 according to Bengt Nilsson (2003:27). He explained that in order to remain competitive on the global market, while still having a mixed welfare economy, international education was seen in Sweden as a way “that Swedes could fill important positions abroad” (ibid.). Additionally to this, another value was added: “a new sense of global concern and a solidarity with countries in

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\(^{11}\) Although this topic is also related to the concepts of Brain Gain, Brain Drain, and Brain Circulation, I will not go further into those concepts, as this is not the theme of this thesis.
developing countries” (ibid.:28). So, the Swedish Commission on Internationalisation developed a set of goals in order to fill this gap:

- An internationalised education should prepare students to view the priorities of other cultures from the perspectives of those cultures.
- With a perspective broadened this way, students engulfed in Western cultures should be able to analyse their own value structures and habits more critically, as well as pinpoint problem areas in international relations.
- To communicate successfully across cultures demands proficiency in languages and other skills that must become a greater part of Swedish university training (Kälvemark, 1997 in Nilsson, 2003:28)

Almost twenty years later, those ideas are still embedded in the higher education system in Sweden, as my interview with Åsa Kettis showed. The engagement of international PhD students is not seen as a one-way road, where the PhD students learn everything, adjust, and then leave again; they are also seen as a way to enhance the community around them, at least in Sweden. However, this does not mean that the ‘adjustment paradigm’, as explained in the introduction, does not exist at the same time, hidden in he structure. This is important to mention in order to understand into what kind of system international PhD students are thrown into after their arrival in Sweden, what people are expecting, and also what they can expect.

This ‘internationalisation at home’ strategy shapes the field of higher education in Sweden. It has been influencing the way Swedes see the world in a way that by now it might have become part of the doxa in Sweden: it is taken for granted that internationalisation is a good thing, but also that there is a ‘we’ as Swedes and an ‘other’ in the form of international students. While I am not suggesting that this is wrong, or even bad, seeing the world like this can, and does, affect the experiences of international PhD students. International PhD students are not always seen primarily as young researchers but as ambassadors both for their countries and, once they are back, for Sweden; this can be seen in the example that fika should be taken home, as described earlier.

International PhD education has become highly political. For example does the earlier mentioned envisioned change from funding a PhD student via a scholarship to funding somebody via full employment can be tricky as the following quote from a supervisor at Uppsala University shows:

“It is said by the university that when we hire grad students, you should have Doktorandanställning, right? And stipends should be used just a little bit. But now
with this internationalisation thing, we accept more and more [international] stipend
students, because they come with their funds already so… It clashes.” (Supervisors,
Uppsala University)

PhD students and supervisors alike are sometimes stuck in this limbo between
internationalisation, research, and policies.

Additionally, this ‘small international island’ created at least two side-effects: one is
that there are so many international people in Uppsala that they do not necessarily need to
mix with Swedes. There are enough people in a similar situation like themselves which
makes it easier to mix with other international students than with people from the host
country (Marginson, 2014:13). Most of the international PhD students told me that they do
not have any Swedish friends and that it is very difficult making Swedish friends12. In many
cases they even had the feeling of being actively excluded.

On the other hand, there are the Swedish students. Åsa Kettis, as well as the people at
the International Office, mentioned the fact that the amount of Swedish students going abroad
is not very high and the university intends to increase this. However, one of my friends, a
Swedish undergraduate student in biotechnology at Uppsala University recently said,
“Because I have been living for a year with internationals, I don’t need to go abroad anymore.
I already had my exchange semester in Sweden.” He also has laboratory courses that are
given by international PhD students and other courses in English because of the high amount
of international staff at Uppsala University. He further commented that he thinks that there is
a Uppsala version of English, because there are so many internationals and refuses now to
speak English unless really necessary. In this case, the Internationalisation at Home strategy
turned into something that was not intended: international students stick to themselves,
because there are enough to create an own group within a group, while Swedish students do
not need to go abroad anymore because they are already part of the ‘international island’,
through courses and other forms of formal education, yet not necessarily in the form of
lasting friendships.

When international PhD students come to Uppsala, they presumably enter a city that
is prepared for them: people speak English; there is a large amount of other international
people; there are extra events for international PhD students intending to prepare them for

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12 This is an experience I do not share, but I think the fact that I have many Swedish friends is related to my
active membership in a sport club as well as my housing situation.
what lies ahead, such as the International Fair organised by the IFSS, welcome seminars organised by SULF, the universities, and others; and yet, because most of those events are targeted explicitly toward internationals, Sweden and the Swedes become less prominent. International PhD students first have to find their way around the infrastructures set up for international people before they get to use the Swedish ones. For Swedish people, on the other hand, they can just ‘pick’ bits and pieces of the international atmosphere as they go along, yet they are, as well, excluded from many events targeted at internationals. Internationalisation at Home has in Uppsala created something like a ‘subculture’, with its own structures and events. The ‘rules’ of the international community are often different than the ‘rules’ of the Swedes and yet they share the same physical space.

4.3 ‘Jag pratar inte Svenska’

Johan is a professor at Uppsala University. He is nearing retirement and has seen many changes within the university. When I entered his room, I first had trouble finding him. There were so many papers and books lying around everywhere that it was difficult to find a place to sit; in the end, he uncovered a chair for me and I put my notebook on top of a bunch of documents. Throughout our interviews, I could hear the constant ‘ping’ of his email programme; occasionally, his phone vibrated; and at one point, somebody knocked at the door: he seemed to be a very busy and highly respected person. I had interviewed one of his current PhD students before and he had praised Johan highly. During this first interview with the PhD student, Johan had come into the department kitchen where the other interview was happening and I could observe some of the interaction between the PhD student and the supervisor: they did not only speak Swedish with each other; they also had a joking tone.

However, Johan was quite critical toward some aspects of the internationalisation policies of Uppsala University. For him, the biggest problem was most international staff’s (including international PhD students) lack of Swedish language skills. As a result, most of the “boring jobs”, as he called it, are left to the Swedes, such as administration and teaching, while internationals can focus on their research. To him, the huge amount of international people is creating a “glass bubble” which prevents them from integrating with the Swedes because there are enough internationals and it isolates the internationals from society. For him, encouraging international PhD students to learn Swedish was highly important, especially when they are staying in Sweden. “It is a non-integrative aspect of Swedish university people trying to be so extremely international, which is in some way denying the society around them,” was one of his comments. He explained this further:
“It is a very odd outcome; we have so many non-Swedish staff, and because most of them [other Swedish speakers] – not me, and some few others don’t do it – always address those people in English, never in Swedish. Even if they are almost fluent in Swedish, they are always addressed in English. So, because of this, the foreign staff is gathering once or twice a week in the entrance hall, for what they call the ‘Swedish Club’. So they talk Swedish with each other. Because they are not being treated properly by the Swedish speakers. So, in order to get a chance to speak Swedish, they assemble themselves, speaking Swedish to each other. That’s weird! – Not all, but most foreign people want to be integrated, want to know the place where they live.”

What Johan describes is the other side, the side of the Swedish people, of what many of the PhD students I talked to had told me. Somebody said, for example: “The only sentence I can actually say in Swedish is jag pratar inte svenska – I don’t speak Swedish”. Quite often, when I asked the PhD students what they think would make their lives in Sweden easier, they responded with the acquisition of the Swedish language, which is not really a problem because Sweden offers free language courses to people who stay longer than a year. However, only a very small group of PhD students actually spoke Swedish: some had started learning it but then stopped after a while, still hoping to learn it eventually, while others had given up completely mastering the language.

My own experience in this is that I tried to learn Swedish after I arrived in Sweden, but I was discouraged after a while for numerous reasons: my biggest problems while learning the language was the language school I chose, and that getting used to Sweden and a new academic system was very demanding in the beginning. Of course, neither of this is a reason not to make an effort, yet I would have probably learnt the language by now if there would have been a greater attraction to learn it; but the fact is also that it is possible to live in Uppsala for a couple of years, to have a fully functioning social life (including many Swedish friends), without being able to speak Swedish. After having lived in Sweden for two years, I can barely say more than “jag pratar inte svenska”.

Bourdieu argued that in order to be able to access a certain field, one has to be familiar with the ‘rules of the game’, meaning the unspoken rules, the different forms of cultural capital, in order to understand it completely. Learning a foreign language is, in this sense, needed in order to become part of the game (Bourdieu, 1990:66+67). In Language and Symbolic Power, Bourdieu describes that language is always related to “the social relations within which it functions” (1991:38) and that there are “no longer any innocent words” (ibid.:40), because they always need to be seen in relation to social relations.
Taken all of this together, I would argue that international (PhD) students are well aware of the ‘rules of the game’; however, there are two games to play at once: the game of the field of science and the game of the ‘Swedish society’, as Johan called it. Often, the two overlap; yet, within language, the distinction becomes the clearest. International PhD students add to their habitus through the acquisition of different forms of social and cultural capital in Sweden, and English and Swedish are two forms of embodied cultural capital that compete with each other for the time of the international PhD students. Johan’s PhD student, with whom I had the interview and who speaks Swedish, commented: “The language [Swedish] is basically only for social reasons because in the academia, everyone speaks English.” For many international PhD students Swedish is hence not a form of capital that is as important as other forms, because it has not as much value for them as other forms of capital.

One example for the difference in value of forms of capital is Li from China. He told me that, at the beginning of his PhD, he thought that it was very difficult to adapt to the language. When I asked him if he meant Swedish, he said no: he had problems with the ‘academic language’ that was spoken in Sweden. Bourdieu, as well, commented on the academic language as a ‘well-kept open secret’ that had different rules than ‘normal’ English, yet this ‘secret English’ was needed in order to access the field of science (2004:21-24). Previously, Li had been writing everything in Chinese and the change to English was difficult for him; combined with academic English, it was even more difficult. Obviously, learning Swedish as well did not have a high priority for him. He chose the cultural capital of (academic) English, which was more important for his PhD because it can also be seen as a form of scientific capital required in the international field of science, over the cultural capital Swedish, which would have been potentially more important for his life in Sweden. Of course, one could also argue that only because he already possessed English as cultural capital was he able to come to Sweden in the first place. However, his comment about how he had to adapt to the use of the language further also shows that he might have had enough capital - cultural, social, and economic - to access Sweden in the first place, though not enough to access the scientific field further. He had to decide and, hence, consciously chose English over Swedish.

Throughout my fieldwork, the separation into different languages remained a topic. I got comments about how people with the same mother tongue stick together during fika breaks (independent of Swedish), or how department emails were in Swedish and how people felt excluded through this. Further, many positions within the universities require the use of
Swedish (for example, to be a chair of the doctoral board), which often leads to only Swedes having such positions, whether they want them or not. Bourdieu argued that language can (often unconsciously) be the source for symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991:51). Symbolic violence is violence that is not perceived as such because it is inscribed in the structures of the field which are in return structured by the habitus. Therefore a person using Swedish instead of English in front of somebody who does not understand Swedish can intimidate the other person without realising it.

In this sense, it can be argued that the use of the Swedish language within departmental emails, but also the speaking of other languages during fika, is a form of symbolic violence: the person sending those emails probably did not think or realise that there were other people who could not understand Swedish; and also, the ones speaking something other than English were most likely not actively excluding the others. Yet, for the people without the ability to speak that particular language, who are “predisposed by their habitus” (Bourdieu, 1991:51), it can create a feeling of exclusion, of silencing, also a form of violence. This is, of course, a big dilemma: some Swedes also do not feel comfortable speaking English, and some people, such as Johan, have voiced concerns about the increased use of English within the Swedish universities (e.g. Hult, 2004).

Also outside of the university, language plays a role. Invoices that international PhD students cannot read, important websites such as online banking; contracts are signed even though they are not understood; or food menus in the university cafeteria: all of these things can be obstacles for international PhD students in their new lives in Sweden. Compared to universities within English speaking contexts, this is an issue that does not occur there. The language of society is the same as in the workplace. In Sweden, however, there is a difference, sometimes creating difficult situations for the international PhD students as well as for the Swedish people. The friction they encounter here can lead to awkward moments where both sides feel uncomfortable.

4.1 Supervisors without Borders?

Johan, the same professor at Uppsala University as mentioned in the earlier section, told me the following story:

“It was a very, very clever Chinese PhD student I had. He was severely sick for many months. So he just stayed away from work. He had officially a salary, he was employed. And he had the impression that once he got well, he would go to a doctor and get some kind of paper showing that he had been ill. And it was very, very close
that he was kicked out. If you are just disbanding your workplace for many months and don’t inform your employer where you are, this is an absolutely sufficient background to fire that person. So I had to tell him that ‘you were very close to being kicked out of Sweden, very close of being kicked out of the university. You have to go to the doctor on day one, to get this paper, that’s how the system works’. I mean he simply didn’t understand. He was not aware of how the system worked. And that could have been totally fatal for him. Actually, he had moved from one residence to another, and I had to track him personally. And I found him in a very bad shape, being helped by his Chinese girlfriend. It is very problematic, and that is an example of what can happen when you don’t understand the system. So I had to argue at the department that he should not be fired. That he simply did not understand the system.”

The reason for telling this story is that it shows the roles that supervisors can find themselves in when supervising international PhD students: they are not only supervisors, but often also guides to the Swedish system, advocates, and ‘detectives’, in some cases trying everything in their power to help the PhD students achieve their goals. Of course, not all supervisors are like that, and generalising about all PhD student-supervisor relationships is not possible; yet, these relationships are among the most important, if not the most important, relationships of PhD students during their PhD journeys and afterward (see also Zink, 2017). International PhD students need different help than their local counterparts, because they are not familiar with the structure of the fields in Sweden; Johan’s story is just one example of this. Others have identified the following issues that international PhD students have compared to local PhD students: language, time, separation from support networks, separation from the familiar, cultural differences in dealing with hierarchies, other cultural differences (excluding dealing with hierarchies), stereotypes, and what happens after the PhD is over and the PhD student returns home (Winchester-Seeto et al., 2013:615). Johan’s story, as he said himself, would not have happened to a Swedish PhD student.

Supervisors are, further, important agents within the international field of science; they have the capital that can provide access to this and other fields. Additionally, they can teach PhD students about the needed cultural and social capital for further collaborations and can support them with the economic capital in the form of how to write grant applications, which could be seen as a form of cultural capital that then leads to economic capital. With their support, the international PhD student can either learn to navigate the structures of Uppsala successfully, or not. A study on Swedish postdocs has found that the connections to senior colleagues, established during the PhD, can enable further access to other social capital networks (Melin, 2004:101). This is also true for non-Swedish PhD students. Supervisors are important mentors for PhD students: “the mentor provides career-related support and
guidance to the protégé as well as helps younger academics understand formal and informal structures within academia” (Luthar & Sadl 2007:245). The supervisor holds the scientific capital, a kind of symbolic capital based on recognition and knowledge (Bourdieu, 2004:34) that the international PhD students need in order to access and to be recognised in the international field of science. To say it with Bourdieu:

\[ \text{the structure of the distribution of capital determines the structure of the field, in other words the relations of force among the scientific agents: possession of a large quantity (and therefore large share) of capital gives a power over the field, and therefore over agents (relatively) less endowed with capital (and over the price of entry to the field) and governs the distribution of the chances of profit.} \] (Bourdieu, 2004:34)

Supervisors, therefore, do not only hold capital; they also have power over the fields, which in reverse determines which and how much capital somebody needs to either access the field or change position in the field. A supervisor can therefore be an enabler or a barrier for PhD students. To take Johan’s example: if he would have chosen either not to check on his PhD student or if he would not have taken a stand for the PhD student in front of the department, the whole story would have turned out differently, and the PhD student would most likely have lost his PhD position; therefore Johan used his power over the field of the department at Uppsala University to help his PhD student. In this sense, supervisors can be holders of positive social capital, when they are supportive, or negative social capital, when they are not recommending PhD students further.

However, there are often difficulties between supervisors and PhD students, not only due to cultural differences. The SLU Ombudsman told me during our interview, that problems with supervisors are the most common problem for which PhD students visit her; she also told me that, sometimes, the supervisors call, not because they have problems with the PhD student, but the PhD student has problems and they need advice on how to help them. In 2009, Uppsala University published a study called *Doctoral students’ perceptions of their studies at Uppsala University, Results from a University-wide survey: Faculty of Science and Technology*\(^\text{13}\). This study is part of a bigger study that targeted the whole university. In this study, 72% of the PhD students within the Disciplinary Domain of Science and Technology agreed to the statement that ‘supervision has worked well in the last year’. However, it is difficult to tell if this also applies to international PhD students, since only 9%

\(^{13}\text{Doktorandernas uppfattningar om sin forskarutbildning vid Uppsala universitet, Resultat från en universitetsövergripande enkätundersökning: Teknisk-naturvetenskapliga fakulteten} \)
of all the faculties answered the questionnaire in English. This, of course, does not mean that the amount of international PhD students who answered the survey is not considerably higher than 9%; yet, taking my experiences from my fieldwork into account, I would argue that not many international PhD students in the Faculty of Science and Technology answered the survey, which makes it difficult to see if their problems are the same as their Swedish counterparts.

Despite all of this, PhD students-supervisor relationships are very important for the success of the PhD study. They are not always plainly rational, but, as Mählck and Fellesson write, “emotional and full of pleasures, irrationalities and dilemmas” (2016:101). When doing participant observation among international PhD students, I often noted the high amount of times the supervisors were mentioned. I wrote down multiple times: “The supervisors are everywhere in the conversations.”

All six of the supervisors I talked to were very concerned about the well-being of their PhD students, and also, most of the PhD students I interviewed were happy with their supervisors, although they mentioned smaller misunderstandings or problems, based both on cultural differences and interpersonal problems. Difficulties that can occur between international PhD students and their local supervisors have also been discussed frequently (e.g. Mählck & Fellesson, 2016; Manathunga, 2014; Winchester-Seeto et al., 2013). There are further supervisor handbooks or courses that intend to help supervisors deal with their PhD students, as well as guidelines for PhD students on how to interact with their supervisors. At Uppsala University, there used to be a supervisor course called ‘Handledning utan gränser’ (Supervisors without Borders), which I was told about by one of the supervisors; the course now has a different name but still exists. ‘Supervisors without borders’ is also a very fitting name for all the supervisors I interviewed, because I got the impression that they tried to overcome the differences and help their PhD students in any possible way.

Further, it is important to note that not all supervisors are Swedish. Therefore, it is not always a Swedish-non-Swedish relationship. Two of the supervisors I interviewed were not Swedish; however, they were both from Europe. Nevertheless, there are many supervisors from countries outside of Europe. No matter where they come from, supervisors often function as guides to life in Sweden, because they either knew it from birth, or they already went through similar problems to those of their PhD students. Supervisors are for many PhD
students the focal points into life in Sweden, often even the reason why they came in the first place. Ivan from Malaysia told me:

“I chose Uppsala University, of course, because of my professor. He is known in [my] field; he is working at Uppsala University and I read his articles; and I approached him and I was admitted as a PhD student.”

In this sense, supervisors are connectors between prospective PhD students and the universities. They provide guidance, not only related to the scientific work of the PhD students, but often also in life questions, and in this way, they can provide a bridge between Sweden and international PhD student, going both ways. If a supervisor like Johan is a ‘dominant agent’ within the fields, he can make the structure work in his favour; in this example, he was able to prevent his PhD student from being expelled. They are maybe the most important actors in the reproduction of the social structures of academia and the related formation of the PhD students’ habitus toward an internationally recognised one which helps them to access the international field of science. Only through the interactions of agents and the “structures of the specific capital they possess” (Bourdieu, 2004:33) is the field of science created, which in return affect the agents. Contact with supervisors and other people in the university allows international PhD students to become part of the scientific field. Bourdieu wrote: “Research is a customary practice, learned by example. Communication is set up between people who share the same ‘background’ of problems and technical assumptions” (2004:22).

In this sense, the supervisors do shape the habitus of their PhD students and their experiences in Uppsala. At the same time, they also hold capital needed for future paths. But also the PhD students affect the supervisors as Johan’s story showed. The relationship a PhD student has toward his or her supervisor can be determinant for almost the rest of the PhD student’s life.

4.2 Conclusion

International PhD students in Uppsala are actors in multiple fields: the field of science, the field of higher education, the social field of Uppsala, etc. Through their being in Uppsala, they shape the city life and the university culture. However, they are also caught in two worlds: the social fields and the international field of science, which are interrelated. Bourdieu wrote that “it is indisputable that the scientific world is a social world” (2004:3), and therefore, the rules of the social world also, in many cases, apply to the scientific one; they are not completely separated. Moving from one country to another is, hence, in the
context of international PhD students, not only about a new country, but also about new institutional practices that need to be understood, as Robinson-Pant pointed out (2009: 419).

The fields of higher education and science are complex constructs of many different actors who possess different forms and amounts of capital and construct smaller social fields. A country, in this case Sweden, adds to this construct other dimensions through the objective structures and incorporated history of the country itself. This can be nicely observed through the idea of fika, but also through other concepts such as Internationalisation at Home. International PhD students enter these fields and try to find their position in the fields. Although each PhD student is different, their first place when they enter a new field has already been determined by the structures of the field, because of the way how and why they can access it in the beginning. Nevertheless, once they figure this out, they have the possibility to move within the field and use it to their advantage. Yet, not everyone is able to do so. Through the ability to speak Swedish or other forms of capital, international PhD students can increase their power over the fields and use them to their advantage. They can get help in this process through their supervisors, because they are the bearers of other forms of capital and can give PhD students access to this – if they want to.

This chapter showed how many different aspects affect the experiences of international PhD students. The first two sections in this chapter focused more on the underlying structures of Sweden and Swedish higher education, the doxa. The other two sections highlighted the interactions between agents in the field and what forms of capital are needed in order to navigate the fields in Uppsala. While some experiences are based on the ability of the international PhD students, like speaking Swedish as a form of embodied cultural capital, most other things are related to other structures: the example of fika showed how the objective structures of the host country affect international PhD students; Internationalisation at Home was an example of how national and international politics have an influence on international PhD students; and the PhD student-supervisor structure showed the underlying power structures within the department and the university. All of those different aspects are important when it comes to international PhD students. The next chapter will show the difficulties that international PhD students can have in understanding and accessing those structures and how they deal with some of those problems.
5 Dark Days

The distance between Uppsala and the Arctic Circle is about 750 km, which means that there is daylight on all days of the year and the sun does set completely during the summer months. Nevertheless, there are days that can seem particularly dark during the winter, especially if there is no snow and it is rainy. And although even the Swedish winter comes to an end eventually, it can sometimes feel like an eternity. I conducted my fieldwork mostly between early February and mid-April 2015, or in other words, the time when winter does not seem to end. During my first weeks of fieldwork, the roads appeared to be more like an ice rink, and getting from A to B was a challenge; sunshine was scarce and even some of my Swedish friends commented that it was a particularly grim winter. Therefore, it was no wonder that the winter was a recurring theme during my fieldwork, and many of the international PhD students would tell me that the biggest challenge for them was the darkness and the cold during winter.

However, this chapter is not about the dark days of winter, at least not exclusively. Sometimes, the brightest summer day can feel very dark and cold when there are other things that make life difficult. And dark and cold winter days can feel nice and warm when there are good things happening. In this chapter, ‘dark days’ is an allegory for the difficult times in the lives of international PhD students. It might be just a short period, or it can last for the entire PhD degree. PhD students’ experiences vary greatly and there are not two PhD students who experience exactly the same thing, which is why ‘dark days’ are also experienced differently and are dealt with in different ways; similar to the different experiences of daylight described in Denmark by the anthropologist Bettina Hauge (2015).

The different strategies of how PhD students deal with the darker periods of doing a PhD also has something to do with why it happened. Each cause is different. Sometimes it is the PhD degree in general that is painful, whereas, at other times, it has nothing to do with the PhD. It can be related to physical infrastructures, such as finding a place to live, getting all the bureaucracy done, or how to find means of transportation. At other times, it might be the social infrastructures, friends and family, which are worrying (see also Marginson, 2014:13). There are many reasons for the challenges PhD students go through during their education in Uppsala.

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14 November 2014 had been the darkest November in over 100 years (Lagerblad, 2014).
This chapter tells the stories of three international PhD students and their challenges in Sweden, and how they dealt with them. While the PhD itself is always part of the stories, the stories are not about the problems of the degree itself, but rather about the social and physical structures that are the reasons for ‘dark days’.

5.1 Raima’s Arrival

Raima came to Sweden due to her love for physics. All her life, she had been striving for excellence, wanting to be the best. However in her home country, Pakistan, she lacked opportunities: she was looking for more freedom in research, especially related to the laboratory equipment she needed for her studies. Back at her old institution, she was not allowed to use the laboratory equipment herself because it was considered too expensive and only specially trained people were allowed to use it; in Uppsala, though, she was offered different means and got the opportunity to do the experiments herself. When I met Raima, she was in her mid-twenties, in her second year of her PhD and told me that she is very happy to be in Uppsala. All her expectations she had prior to her arrival came true. However, her transition to Sweden had not been easy. Especially her start was difficult.

Prior to Raima’s arrival, her department had found her a place to stay. Her supervisor and his wife picked her up from the airport and drove her to her new accommodation. Once there, her supervisor explained to her where to get food and where to get a bus card for the public transport system and gave her a map for easier navigation. Then he left her in her new surroundings. Raima, however, had never used a map, nor was she used to an official public transportation system or the pay-by-card system in Sweden. In fact, she had never left her country, never lived alone, and had never done grocery shopping before. Where she is from, all of those things are not appropriate for women to do. Her father and her brothers had always done the grocery shopping, and when she went shopping for clothes she had always been accompanied by her mother. So, when she got the map from her supervisor, she did not know what to do. She was too scared to leave her place and was afraid of not being able to find her way back again. It was not only a new country and a new education; it was a whole new life. Because she was too afraid to get lost, she did not leave her place for two days. She had no food at home, and only found some tea which she accidentally mixed with salt instead of sugar, so she did not eat anything the first few days. Luckily, she knew somebody from Pakistan who lived in Stockholm. He was a former student at her alma mater and was now studying in Sweden as well. This person had a Pakistani friend in Uppsala, whom he contacted; and in the end, this friend came by with his wife and helped Raima get settled.
When Raima told me her story about her arrival in Uppsala, she had just been released from the hospital because she had been sick. She had been sick because she had visited her family in Pakistan, and once she returned, she became ill from the water in Uppsala, as she had gotten used to the Pakistani water again. “It is not uncommon,” she told me, when I asked her how this was possible. Raima and Uppsala seemed to have a really difficult relationship. Although her story is by far the most unfortunate story I encountered during my fieldwork, it can tell a lot about the difficulties international PhD students can have when they enter the new fields of Uppsala.

When Raima arrived, her physical needs were taken care of, at least from the point of view of her supervisor: she had transportation to Uppsala, a place to sleep, a grocery store nearby, and the possibility to take the bus in order to get around. Her supervisor had provided her with the resources he assumed necessary for her to get started. However, Raima’s problem was that she could not access this information he gave her because she could not read the map her supervisor gave her. Literally speaking, the map was standing between her and Uppsala: it was supposed to give her access to Uppsala, but, in fact, did the exact opposite. The map failed its purpose, and actually proved itself ad absurdum.

While the map can be seen as an image for many things, I would like to describe it as field, and the roads on it, as the structures of the field. Raima encountered an unfamiliar map that she did not understand. Bourdieu wrote that:

“culture” is sometimes described as a map; it is the analogy which occurs to an outsider who has to find his way around in a foreign landscape and who compensates for his lack of practical mastery, the prerogative of the native, by the use of a model of all possible routes. (Bourdieu, 1977:2)

Yet, at the beginning of her stay in Uppsala Raima could not compensate her “lack of practical mastery” because she was not familiar with the different routes. Instead of using the new routes, she stayed inside and connected to the routes already familiar to her: other Pakistani people, who she already knew.

Looking at the story more closely, it is possible to understand why Raima’s first experience was so difficult. The map was not the problem itself, just the trigger of a bunch of other reactions. Raima had been accepted as an employed PhD student at Uppsala University on the basis of her previous experience. Like many other PhD students coming from countries like Pakistan, she had already been employed at a university, researching and
teaching. Nevertheless, getting accepted to a “prestigious university like Uppsala University” was a big success for her. Raima had been already part of the international field of science before she came to Sweden, yet the social field was different. So, her first experiences were not mainly related to her research, but to such seemingly banal things as going out of the house.

Because Raima found herself in a situation so different from the social field she was used to, she experienced something Bourdieu called ‘hysteresis effect’, something that happens when “the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that to which they are objectively fitted.” (1977:78). Her habitus was formatted in a totally different environment than Sweden, so different indeed that her “structuring structures” (ibid.:72) did not make sense anymore in Uppsala and all her normally functioning strategies were useless. Added to that was that her doxa and the doxa of her supervisor were very different: the supervisor took for granted that somebody who is capable of coming to Sweden for a PhD was also able to read a map. Yet, Raima’s doxa was built upon different principles where reading a map was not needed. In Pakistan, so it seems from the telling of Raima, the people, or in other words the social capital, provided the structures to orient oneself opposed to a piece of paper in Sweden. Maps in Sweden and Pakistan look hence different. It was not only the physical structures, such as the transportation system, that made it almost impossible for her to settle in Uppsala; it was the underlying principles of the social fields in Sweden and Pakistan. The social capital she already possessed in Sweden, connected to her supervisor, was more or less useless because she could not even access the field in which this capital would have been able to help her.

Yet, she had another set of social capital: the connections she had back to Pakistan. Through those connections, traced all the way back to Pakistan and then back to Sweden, she was able to eventually access Uppsala. Another agent within the fields, the fields in Pakistan and in Sweden, who possessed the capital needed to be successful in both countries, connected her with a third person who was also capable of accessing Sweden and Pakistan in order to help Raima. The persons who helped Raima had already understood the underlying structures of Sweden and had hence found ways to navigate the Swedish fields successfully. Yet, at the same time, they were also able to understand Raima’s problems and help her. The Pakistani in Uppsala became translators of the social fields of Uppsala for Raima’s habitus.
Raima’s story is not only a story about dark days; it is also a story about different understandings of what is taken for granted and how life works. Although Raima is now settled in Sweden, she also said that the first months were “very tough” for her and that those experiences were important enough to tell them to me even two years later. It is not easy to find a place within the field if neither the habitus nor the capitals that one possesses match the structure of the field toward. The beginning of Raima’s time in Sweden were very dark days.

5.2 A ‘Terrible Mistake’?

“Actually, Sweden chose me,” Daniel told me when I asked him why he chose Uppsala for his PhD. Daniel is from Central America and came to Sweden with a scholarship from Sweden. When I met him, it was his final year as a PhD student at Uppsala University and he was preparing for his PhD defence. He explained to me that a Bachelor’s degree in his home country normally takes five years, and that, although there are limited options to do a Master’s in his country, he had to go abroad for his PhD. So in his last year of his Bachelor’s, the scholarship issued a call for applications specially targeted toward people from his university and Daniel was encouraged by his friends to apply. He was chosen in the end to do his PhD at Uppsala University. However, Uppsala University might not have been the best option, as his research interest is in another area than the university’s expertise. In fact, his PhD was prolonged by more than three years because his Bachelor education did not introduce him to the research methods he needed for his PhD and he did, according to him, not receive sufficient support to compensate this faster. In general, he told me, he had to learn how research works because his education at home was not sufficient. According to him, not doing a Master’s before the start of his PhD was a “terrible, terrible mistake”.

In this case, Daniel was part of a project that intended to enhance the research capacities in Central America. One of the objectives of the project was to build networks among the supported PhD students, which is why they were all sent to Uppsala University regardless of whether this university was the best choice or not. Daniel’s PhD experiences were shaped to a large extent by his scholarship. The scholarship provided him with housing, insurance, and many other aspects. They even took care of a certain amount of the social life by organising events for their scholarship holders. And yet, when I talked to Daniel, many aspects of his life in Sweden seemed to be very frustrating to him. The lack of academic capital (Bourdieu, 1984:18), meaning the understanding of how research works, and cultural capital he had at the beginning of his PhD were a large obstacle in being able to access the international field of science. Nevertheless those obstacles would not have been so high if his
supervisor would have helped him more: Daniel told me that he lost up to three years because his supervisor was not able to help him in the way he would have needed it. Additionally, he had many troubles with his scholarship because he did not know what payment they were supposed to give him in relation to changes in his private life. When I asked him what tips he would give somebody from his country about to embark to do a PhD in Sweden, he answered:

“"We [group of other PhD students with the same scholarship] came here, without knowing what rights we have as a PhD student and what our obligations are. So, I think we are not formally employed by the university. So that very much limits ourselves for some things. For instance: we don’t have all the rights that PhD students employed by the university have.”

This ‘knowing how the system works’ has been described also by other members of this group as well. I talked to multiple people in this scholarship scheme and one person called them the ‘Disaster Group’ because so many things had gone wrong. In this particular quote, Daniel basically says that he could have dealt with the new structures of the fields in Uppsala better, if he would have known about them before. This not knowing, using again Bourdieu’s game metaphor, not understanding the rules of the game, was what made his life very difficult. This can also be described as part of the hysteresis effect: not being sure on how to deal with the new environment. This is why he continued with his advice:

“"So, my advice to somebody coming from my country would be to find out at the beginning what your rights as a PhD students, and what your obligations would be. And what are the obligations of the people around you as well [he stressed this]. Because I believe the success of a PhD study is not only dependent on the PhD student but also the people around you. So, if you have a supervisor who is willing to make your PhD successful, then the road will not be so bumpy. But if you’re alone, then it will obviously take you a longer time. So my advice would be: learn the language, try to define from the beginning what you are expected to do – and what are your resources available, and what are the obligations the people around you have.”

Daniel’s final advice to somebody from his country is basically: get cultural capital in the form of learning the language; acquire academic capital, meaning understand what you are supposed to do and get knowledge of how things work; and make sure your social capital works as well; in this case, connect to the person who has the most scientific capital and therefore a lot of power over the field. Especially, his advice to know what the supervisor is supposed to do was extremely important to him, because he had made bad experiences here. To him, as he told me during our interview, this was the most crucial factor in becoming a successful PhD student. Winchester-Seeto, et al. pointed out that, indeed, “mismatched
expectations of roles and responsibilities; maintenance of a positive candidate/supervisor relationship; and written and oral communication” were the biggest difficulties in the PhD student-supervisor relationship, not necessarily only in reference to international PhD students (2014:612). Hence, as I explained in the previous chapter, supervisors play a very important role for PhD students, and not only when it comes to science.

Through understanding the structures that were making it difficult for him to finish his PhD successfully, he overcame those obstacles: he learned to overcome his limitations by combining the resources that were at his disposal to his advantage15. Especially by connecting himself to the social group around him, he made sure that he could use the field in his favour. Nevertheless he also told me that Uppsala was still very difficult for him and that he was still trying to adapt, even though he had been in Uppsala for many years. Daniel never really overcame the hysteresis effect in relation to Uppsala, because the capitals he thought he would have in order to help him, turned out to be not sufficient. Because of this, he did not only lose a lot of time, but I would also say self-confidence, which made it even more difficult to navigate the fields in Uppsala.

5.3 ‘Sweden is a Good Definition of Silence’

The whole room is bursting with emotion. Alex, a PhD student from Makerere University in Uganda and a Swedish university16 gives a presentation at Sida’s and ISP’s ‘Building Future Networks’ seminar about his experiences in Sweden. For 30 minutes or so, the room is filled with affirmative head-nodding, ‘yes’ shouts, and other means of support. It is obvious that Alex’s presentation is exactly what others are thinking, too. Alex would later write me: “I prepared the power point after getting views from my fellow PhD students and using my own experiences and I think, as you must have observed, they were a true reflection of experiences of most if not all the students”.

At one point, the crowd turns silent. “Most of us will go through this,” Alex says, “because where I come from, if you hear no noise, you know there is something wrong. I come from Makerere University; now, in Swahili, Makelele means noise. So, my university is called Makerere, and this is a good approximation of the word, a very nice meaning. There is always noise. Now you come to Sweden, and you get a good definition of silence.”

15 Daniel has successfully defended his PhD by now.
16 He is the only PhD student in this thesis who did not study in Uppsala, yet I think that his experiences are similar to the experiences of PhD students in Uppsala, which is why I include his story.
“Because,” he continues, “this is truth. I was once in a bus; I was sitting in the front seat, and somebody else was in the back seat – on a Saturday morning around nine o’clock – and he was having headphones, hearing music. And I could hear his music in the front of the bus. And I was just wondering: how can this happen?!” Alex further explains how in Uganda, this would have never been possible. In his accommodation, he says: “I play music, there is always my neighbour playing music, and then if my neighbour is playing music I play louder music. Because you either increase your own volume or you listen to other people’s music.” He explains how there are so many different music styles that each time one switches a room, one can experience another culture. Then Alex turns serious again. The PowerPoint slide now reads:

Alone and have no choice
Do not feel part of a group.
No one to share your feelings and experiences.
Feel disconnected and alienated from the surrounding.
Anxious about study and feel in conflict about spending time on social activities.
Loneliness.

“But here, you need to adjust. Silence. You get used to being lonely. Even if you live with other students, you have different time schedules, reading schedules. Everything is really different. But it allows you to be, in a way, independent; you plan your life according to what is right for you.” Alex continues with his presentation. He explains how one of the most frequently asked question back home is, “When are you coming back?” and how the separation is especially hard for people with families. Then, he says: “African men don’t cook; they don’t know how to do the dishes or how to do laundry.” The audience, while having been very silent before bursts into laughter again. He continues: “When you come to Sweden, you learn not just your mathematics, or your science. You learn your social life – everything you have not learnt.”

Alex’ use of the metaphor of ‘silence’ is a telling one. He is referring to two forms of silence: the first one is the absence of noise, and the second, more important one, the difficulties he had in Sweden. The term ‘silence’ has been used by other authors to express, consciously and unconsciously, forms of exclusion (e.g. Mählck & Fellesson, 2016:111), and Alex feels excluded as well. His statement, “when there is no noise, there is something
“wrong,” cannot only be related to the absence of noise, but also toward his scepticism toward the Swedish culture. His own habitus, which was formed mostly in Uganda, and the Swedish reality clashed, creating some form of Bourdieu’s hysteresis effect. The poem he wrote is a very good example of how the hysteresis effect works: he feels alienated from his surroundings, because his habitus is too far away from the fields within which it was objectively fitted. Now, he has problems finding his position in his new field, Sweden.

Yet since he made the conscious choice of coming to Sweden as part of his PhD, he was able to also see the positive sides of life in Sweden as well: The silence in Sweden created for him a good learning environment, which is something that has also been observed by others (e.g. Zink, 2017). The “glacial force of the habitus [moved] into the quickened beat of improvisation” (Appadurai, 1996:6) through the difficult experiences he had during his stay in Sweden. In this ‘beat of improvisation’, Alex was not only able to adjust, but also to successfully achieve a degree\(^{17}\). Michel Foucault, who lived and studied for a period at Uppsala University, is attributed with saying something similar about Sweden:

> What might have gotten me to start talking and developing this tireless talkativeness, which I am completely sure must make a Swede angry, is the Swedes' muteness, their major silence and habit of always only expressing themselves so soberly and elliptically.\(^{18}\) (Lindung, 1968:204; translated by Stephen Maconi)

The silence for Alex, however, is not only created through the Swedes, but also through the absence of his established social networks in Uganda. Social isolation and loneliness triggered by the separation from established social networks is even more enhanced by cultural differences and the separation from close family over a long period and can therefore be found particularly among international PhD students (e.g. Sawir et al., 2008; Boud & Lee, 2009). Many fill this loneliness by working on their PhD projects (Zink, 2017).

In his poem, Alex explains how his loneliness is created: he describes a vicious cycle in which he is alone because he has the feeling that he needs to study, which again does not give him anybody to talk to, which makes him even lonelier. In this case, he lacks social capital, the connection to people who support him not only academically but also privately: his family and friends, which would probably make it easier to adjust to some parts of the

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\(^{17}\) He recently defended his Licentiate and is planning on finishing his PhD in 2018.

\(^{18}\) “Det är kanske svenskarnas stumhet, deras stora tystnad och vana att alltid bara uttrycka sig så sobert och elliptiskt som fick mig att börja tala och att utveckla denna utsingla pratsamhet vilket jag är helt pådå på det klara med måste förarga en svensk.”
experiences of being an international PhD student. Additionally, the fact that he left his family behind and cannot tell them when he will be back creates an additional issue and adds another perspective to the vicious cycle.

Alex is living in at least two worlds at once: his physical world, in this case Sweden, where he is with his body, and a mental one with his family. In a recent study about multicultural learning environments in the UK, Viv Caruana found that:

participants reveal the discomfort and frustration of functioning in an unfamiliar, often unpleasant and sometimes hostile, social environment which manifests in a host of different ways challenging the sense of self, causing anxiety in the absence of new coping strategies and re-negotiation of identity.” (2014:92)

This discomfort and frustration with his new life is something Alex expressed with the term ‘silence’. He, as well, felt anxious and challenged by his time in Sweden. Although Alex chose to be in Sweden, and in the end he was rewarded with a positive outcome, his “day-to-day self-formation mostly wears the cloak of necessity, of survival and coping, rather than voluntary adventure” (Marginson, 2014:13). On the other hand, Alex has been ‘renegotiating’ his life because he is very busy learning new things, not only his mathematics, but as he puts it, his ‘social life’: how to do laundry, how to cook, how to do the dishes, etc. He was able to add new things to his habitus and learn all of those ‘household’ jobs while away.

I wrote Alex an email to ask him some questions about his presentation and if I could use it in this thesis. I also asked him if, in his opinion, going through all of this is worth it. His answer is very important to get a glimpse into the lives of international PhD students, especially in combination with his presentation described above:

“Well, personally, I think this is a very enriching experience. In my presentation, one could easily be misled to believe that we go through bad experiences only, but that is not the case. Yes we go through all these cultural shocks but after all the achievements outweigh the costs. In any case, some experiences might look bad on face value when, in actual sense they help us as PhD students. For example, I have made very many friends both African and European whom I don’t think I would have met if I hadn’t come to Sweden. I have learnt so much about so many different cultures both African and European, most especially the Swedish People. Lastly and most importantly, Sweden provides an excellent academic and research environment which enables us to carry out our PhD studies. The guidance we get from the supervisors and the opportunities for further collaboration between WE as African students and the Swedish supervisors and students together with the opportunity to finish our PhD studies are worth every cold winter we face.”
Alex’ email answer shows that being a PhD student in Uppsala is not only about the ‘dark days’. It is about the people, the culture, and so many more things that international PhD students can learn here. Although Alex was missing his family and friends as emotional and affective support in Uganda, he also acquired new social capital and new support through the contacts he established in Sweden. For him, the bad experiences led to his personal and academic growth, as he says: “some experiences might look bad on face value when, in actual sense they help us as PhD students”. In this sense, the fact that there were ‘dark days’ during his PhD experience in Sweden was relativised by the opportunities and chances he has now and in the future after his successful defence.

5.4 Conclusion
When international PhD students leave the fields in which their habitus were objectively fitted they often encounter the hysteresis effect. The previous strategies of the habitus become almost useless in this new environment, because of the underlying principles, the doxa, of the new field. In this chapter I told the stories of three PhD students who experienced the hysteresis effect differently and who also dealt with it in different ways. Being confronted with a social field which works very differently than the one where somebody comes from cannot only affect the social life of a person, but also the academic life and hence the scientific life. Additional problems arise if the capital a person already possesses, or thinks to possess, are not working in the way they should.

Raima’s story was a story about how different doxa affected her arrival in Uppsala. In her case, the difficulties started already right at the beginning, because the social field in Uppsala was so different to her used social field that she literally was not able to access it. Yet, she was able to help herself through tracing her already established social networks, which eventually helped her to get settles. Her hysteresis effect occurred right at the beginning of her stay in Sweden. Daniel on the other hand had more problems with the capitals needed for the international field of science than the social field. Yet, because the bearer of scientific capital in his social network, his supervisor, was not able to help him in the way how he needed it, his social field was affected too. His hysteresis effect happened mostly in relation to other actors whose doxa was built on different principles. Finally Alex story showed how the hysteresis effect can occur because of a separation from his used social fields and how the difficulties in Sweden can be enhanced through this separation. Hence all the PhD students in this chapter were confronted by ‘dark days’.
6 Spaces for Dialogue

I am an Argentinian citizen, whose postgraduate education is the product of Swedish taxpayers. We joked a lot about this during our PhD: so how are our taxes doing? When we think about communication as a right of citizens, we need to think also more creatively and in innovative ways, and in ways that go against the rationalities of Facebook, for example, about how to create true spaces for dialogue.

One of my most significant experiences of meeting the world, took place in Malmö in 2005 when I was a student of the Master’s in communication for development - with funding from Sida. I was there only for a year, we were the first batch of international students. So they brought us all to Malmö and to Stockholm and it is not that I met Sweden for the first time, I met the world. And colleagues from Africa, and from India, they became friends and today they are my go-to persons when I need to discuss something about their countries.

Florencia Enghel said those words during the roundtable discussion of the Southern African-Nordic Centre (SANORD) conference 2016 in Uppsala. The conference theme, Beyond New Public Management? Exploring New Paradigms of Governance and Public Service Provisioning, had little to do with what she said, and yet the discussion had arrived at a point where her words were relevant. They became relevant because people were wondering who was paying for the collaborations and what they were worth in the end. For Florencia Enghel, bringing people to Sweden and paying for their education is much more than just a game of numbers; it is a ‘true space for dialogue’.

In the earlier chapter, I looked at another experience of a Sida grantee: Alex from Uganda. When I had asked him in an email if he thinks ‘it was all worth it’, his response was similar to the statement of Florencia Enghel: “I have made very many friends both African and European whom I don’t think I would have met if I hadn’t come to Sweden. I have learnt so much about so many different cultures both African and European, most especially the Swedish People.” The people Alex and Florencia Enghel met were some of their most important experiences of their PhD education in Sweden.

I gathered comments similar to this during my fieldwork: at the end of the interviews with the PhD students, I had always asked if their departments were international and what the challenges and benefits were of being part of an international department. All of the 33 PhD students said that, for them, it was much more beneficial than challenging, not only from a professional aspect but also on the personal level. International PhD students are not only encountering Sweden; they are also ‘meeting the world’ in the form of other PhD students,
faculty, and staff members. This is a large part of the experiences of international PhD students, and can sometimes (not always) change dark days to light nights.

In this chapter, I will look at ‘true spaces for dialogue’- how international PhD students are meeting other (international) people in Uppsala and what this means for their PhD experiences.

6.1 Who is in Your Address Book?
Alex’ presentation, which I described in the previous chapter, took place at Sida’s and ISP’s ‘Building Future Networks’ seminar in October 2015. This seminar was organised at the Sida headquarters in Stockholm and brought scholarship holders from Asia, Latin America, and Africa, studying and researching all over Sweden, together to discuss and share experiences.

When I arrived at the seminar, the room was already half full and buzzing with conversations. Instead of theatre-style chair rows, there were multiple round tables, providing space for up to eight people. I sat down at a table together with Julia from Central America, one of the PhD students I had interviewed previously. At our table, there were also one more person from Central America, one from Kenya, one from Myanmar, and one of the administrative staff of ISP. Not everyone at my table knew each other, so we engaged in quick exchanges about who we were and what we were doing before the presentations started. Throughout the opening speeches, the speakers continuously emphasised the importance of mutual partnerships and that a PhD should not only be about science, but that it should also be a chance for social development. One of the speakers, the same who saw fika as a social innovation, told the audience: “It is not what’s in your CV; it’s who is in your address book.”

Those words were, of course, part of the whole idea of why the seminar was happening: to ‘build future networks’. In this sense, the seminar can be seen as an obvious example of what Florencia Enghel meant by ‘true spaces for dialogue’. However, in the context of this seminar, the earlier quoted statement from Florencia Enghel gets a new dimension: her words focused more on the personal, individual level, while the statement of the speaker at the seminar had a clear work-related focus. True spaces for dialogue are spaces to gather social capital, which, again, can help a person to get access to other people, places, and networks. ‘Meeting the world’ here also means: with whom can I work in the future?
Bourdieu used the word ‘network’ in two ways: to describe how social capital is created through the “possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (1997 [1986]:51), as in this case, the participants of the seminar; and he defined a field as a network “of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:97). In this sense, the participants at the ‘Future Networks Seminar’ did two things at once: they increased their social capital through building connections, while at the same time creating a (sub-)field of its own. While Bourdieu generally disliked the term ‘scientific community’ as a whole, because he did not think that scientists are a homogenous or unified group (2004:45) – and I do agree with him here – the term community, in the sense that people become part of smaller communities within the field (ibid.:46), makes sense in this context. Following this idea, I would like to argue that the international PhD students at the seminar were creating a community within the bigger field of science: one where they could help each other and share their social capital, within self-created structures; one that fulfilled their needs.

Caroline S. Wagner, an American scholar in the field of science and technology, described in her book, The New Invisible Colleges: Science for Development, that self-organised networks of scientists span the earth and these networks are today the most notable feature of science: without them, there would be no science. She describes those networks as ‘invisible colleges of researchers’:

who collaborate not because they are told to but because they want to, who work together not because they share a laboratory or even a discipline but because they can offer each other complementary insight, knowledge, or skill. (Wagner, 2008:2).

The term ‘invisible colleges’ has been used since 1645 to signify connections that go beyond institutional borders (Wagner, 2008:18). Bourdieu has used it as well when he talked about French philosophers who are part of his ‘invisible college’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992:64). The ‘Building Future Networks’ seminar was a way of how the ‘new invisible colleges’, the ones that go even beyond disciplinary and institutional boundaries, are created. Through the opportunity to mingle with other international PhD students, the social capital of the participants was enhanced and they were offered the possibility of finding a new position within the field of science because of the connections they made. Coming to Sweden for a PhD is about much more than just about ‘meeting Sweden’; it is about ‘meeting the world’ in the sense of finding a place in the international field of science and also finding future allies to make sense of this field.
During one of the breaks at the ‘Building Future Networks’ seminar, I scribbled down into my notebook: “Most people get up and get cake and fruits. Almost nobody speaks English anymore. Languages meet. Or departments. There is a lot of long shaking hands. And touching.” I can remember this situation vividly: being at this seminar felt as if I had left Sweden for a while and joined another world. I was very confused by the very long handshakes accompanied by one hand up on the shoulder of the other person, because this was something unusual for me\textsuperscript{19}. I truly felt like I was ‘meeting the world’ in the middle of Sweden. After I wrote this comment down, I got up and walked through the crowd, picking up scraps of conversations here and there as people switched back to English once other nationalities joined the conversation. Some people were introducing other people to each other; some were talking about their research; others spoke about their last meeting. In the end, I joined a group of PhD students from Latin America and Africa, because Julia was standing there. They were talking about the food at the seminar and about Sweden in general. There was a lot of shared understanding when somebody said, “I miss the food at home”. Because of the diversity of the group – different countries were represented, different disciplines, and different parts of Sweden – the conversation was more about getting to know each other than anything else. People shared their experiences with Sweden, like the weather, the food, or the Swedes, which was the common ground for their conversations. Those shared experiences created mutual understanding. Yet, people were not only looking for shared understandings related to Sweden; they were also looking for potential future collaborators: I saw many business cards changing ownership.

Being part of Sida’s and ISP’s scholarship programmes and participating in seminars like the one here described can change not only the way people see the world in general, but also how they see themselves. They align themselves with the new situation, like me when it came to handshaking, and modify their habitus according to the needs of the new field via acquiring cultural capital. Through the time the international PhD students spent in Sweden, but also through such seminars, they can modify their habitus and acquire new capital until their habitus is recognised as international, as has been described by Zink (2013:18).

The networks, the invisible colleges, of the seminar are very important aspects of meeting the world, yet it does not take into account who actually created the ‘space for

\textsuperscript{19}In such a situation in Germany, most people would just quickly squeeze the hand of the other person and then stand back half a meter.
dialogue’. In this case, it was Sida and ISP which not only brought the PhD students to Sweden, but also made sure that they had the possibility to meet and share their experiences. It was in this ‘space of possible’, the relation between a habitus and the field (Bourdieu, 2004:100), in which I was able to experience the feeling of ‘meeting the world’; and, as the comments from Florencia Enghel and Alex have shown, international PhD students do as well. The structure that ISP and Sida provided, as economic capital in the sense that it brought PhD students to Sweden mixed with social capital when it got all of the different people together, created ‘true spaces for dialogue’ where it was possible, again, to add new people to the ‘address book’.

6.2 Animal Studies Department

On a cold but sunny Sunday morning in early February 2015, three cars left Uppsala in the direction of a skiing location, around two hours north of Uppsala. In the cars were PhD students and a postdoc from Brazil, Vietnam, Nepal, China, Canada, Germany, USA, a Baltic State and me. I was not aware of it back then, but I just met the Animal Studies Department of SLU. Over the course of my fieldwork, I would visit them at SLU to have lunch, have movie nights and dinners, and I would go to events for PhD students with them, such as the PhD Movie 2 screening. One of my friends, Laima, was part of this department and just kept inviting me to the activities of their group.

So, it happened that I was standing on top of a snowy hill in the middle of Sweden with a group of people coming from eight different countries. I started skiing when I was four years old and switched to snowboarding about ten years later, so this activity was not new to me, and neither was snow. Yet, this snowboarding trip was something special for me as well because of all the people from different countries. For most of them, activities such as skiing or snowboarding were new because of the climate zone where they grew up. I will never forget the look on the face of Ana from Brazil when she exited the lift and saw the view from the top of the hill for the first time: she looked like a child on Christmas. It was her second time trying skiing, and we had convinced her to come with us (the more experienced people) to try the easy, ‘proper’ slopes instead of just the beginner’s slopes. While, at first, her skiing moves were a bit unsure and she was glad that some of the more experienced people showed her when to turn and she just had to follow, she soon became more self-confident and figured out not only how to deal with the other people on the slopes but also what to do when the slope got too tricky for her skills: sometimes it is perfectly fine to unstrap the skis and walk.
Ana managed to find her place in the field and used the resources she had available to her benefit.

Ana’s experiences on that particular day are a good example for some of the experiences international PhD students can have within a group: groups can lead the way, yet they cannot take somebody all the way. Certain things have to be figured out by oneself, and it is fine not to be able to do everything from the beginning. The capital somebody acquires through the connection to other people can only function if it used in combination with the habitus and within a field. Yet it sometimes can be transferred to another field: knowing how to ski is in Brazil probably not really important, but the connections she made during the skiing trip (or generally her time in Sweden) and the confidence she gained through learning skiing can help her even when she is back in Brazil.

This section, however, is not a story about Ana. It is about the Animal Studies Department at SLU and their spaces for dialogue. Although this is the department I got to know the best during my fieldwork, and I can therefore not exclude a certain bias, I think that this was a special department in general. While, in some other departments, PhD students would complain about the cold atmosphere between people, here, it was the opposite. Laima told me that she and the people from the department are “like family”. Also, when I talked to supervisors and other PhD students within this department, they always mentioned the friendly atmosphere and the support they give to each other. “They just suck them in,” was a comment from Eric, one of the supervisors, when asked about the arrival of new PhD students. He was referring to other PhD students in the department who were helping new students. Per, another supervisor, called them a “PhD student society”. And Selina, a PhD student coming from the Indian subcontinent, said that she had no time to miss her family in the beginning because there were so many things going on. The PhD students and postdocs in the Animal Studies Department created their own community within the larger field of science, similar to the scholarship holders at Sida, yet based on another similarity: the department and discipline.

6.2.1 A Community of Practice
My friend Laima had invited me to come over to her place to have dinner and watch a movie together with some of her friends from the Animal Studies Department. There were five of us: two Asians, two Europeans, and one Brazilian, all female. Together, we prepared our dinner and had some wine. While we waited for the food to cook, we had a casual
conversation about all different kinds of things. In our conversations, it did not matter where somebody was from: we were all strangers to Sweden, trying to figure out how things worked. We talked for example about the healthcare system in Sweden and how it works, what to do against the darkness during winter (one of them bought a lamp that imitates sunrise in the morning), and other related themes. Yet, because I was an outsider to their department and discipline, I could not relate when they started talking about things that were happening at work or problems they had in the laboratory; my own disciplinary habitus was different from theirs (Bourdieu, 2004:42). According to Bourdieu, there are disciplinary habitus, which are linked to education, and particular habitus, which are linked to trajectory and the position within the field (ibid.). In this case, my ‘particular’ habitus was similar to theirs – that of making sense in Sweden – while my disciplinary habitus was very different. The same thing happened, as well, during the snowboarding trip mentioned earlier: when they were talking about work, they could easily have been speaking a different language. Yet, the habitus of all of us had certain similarities, which is why we were able to do things together; neither our nationalities nor our disciplines matter within most contexts.

In Appadurai’s view of the world, globalisation and modernisation are based on migration and the media. When he talks about migration, he uses the term ‘diasporic public spheres’ (1996:4), and in relation to the media, ‘community of sentiment’ (ibid:10). In his opinion, those ‘diasporic public spheres’ will be the reason why the nation-state will cease to exist. However, current developments have shown that this is not the case and his theory is lacking there (e.g. Marginson, 2008). Yet, when Appadurai describes those spheres, he always mentions groups of people from one nationally: Turkish guest workers in Germany, Koreans in Philadelphia, or Pakistani in Chicago, who stay connected to their home via the media (1996:4). Further, when talking about the effects of the media, he uses the term ‘community of sentiment’, which means a group that feels and imagine things together (ibid.:8). He writes:

They are communities in themselves but always potentially communities for themselves capable, of moving from shared imagination to collective action. […] These solidarities are often transnational, even postnational, and they frequently operate beyond the boundaries of the nation (ibid.:10)

In Appadurai’s world view, neither nations nor places play a role to the people; however, at the same, time he describes a world that is highly related to the nations where people are from. He also fails, in my opinion, to address the connection to the ‘new’ places those
‘diasporic public spheres’ people are moving to. This approach has been criticised as “not bounded by time or space but contained within the boundaries of an ethnic/national identification” and therefore forgetting that nationality or ethnicity is not the only way to adapt to new surroundings (Schiller, 2005:442), which the Animal Studies Department will show.

The example of the Animal Studies Department at SLU could be described as a ‘diasporic public sphere’; Appadurai, himself, connects students and intellectuals with those spheres (ibid.:22). However, the department is not only related to one nation or one religion. And the connections the people in this department have made are not related to the media, either: they worked, studied, and partied together, independent from their origin but due to their interest in animals. The people within the Animal Studies Department remained Chinese, Brazilian, or Vietnamese, of course, but they also included another dimension into their daily lives: the cultural backgrounds of not only Sweden but also of the other cultures they were interacting with. Therefore, Appadurai’s notion of diasporic public spheres only makes sense together with communities of sentiment: the Animal Studies Department is a diasporic public sphere and a community of sentiment at the same time. Through the accumulated social capital of the people within the department, nationalities became almost unimportant. But sentiment was not the main purpose of the people in the Animal Studies Department. It was learning from and with each other.

Montgomery and McDowell (2009) argue that the common perception that international students are not mixing as much with their host students has negative consequences might, in fact, be wrong. They describe a ‘community of practice’ in which international students are developing bonds that help them create a supportive learning environment (ibid.:456). In the article, Montgomery and McDowell analyse how this community is not only about getting to know, in this case, British host culture, but also about the cultures of the other international students:

Although the most obvious purpose of the community of practice is learning how to be academically successful, students are also learning something else through their participation. This could be considered to be an aspect of “global citizenship” and preparation for living and working in a global community. (2009:464)

While Montgomery and McDowell have a clear separation between international students and host students, I would say that the PhD students, themselves, no matter whether international or Swedish, created their own ‘community of practice’. The notion of a
‘community of practice’ is something frequently observed in anthropology. It stands for a group of people “who share an interest, a craft, and/or a profession” (Squires & Van De Vander, 2012:290). Hence, I would say that the people in the Animal Studies Department formed a community of practice triggered by their study subject. Because of my interest in snowboarding and films, I was able to take part partly in this community of practice.

However, because international PhD students face different problems than Swedish PhD students, there are two communities of practice, two networks for each of the groups, which frequently overlap; the PhD students I interviewed told me that, depending on the kind of question they have, they go to different resources, with their peers, meaning other international PhD students, being the most frequently contacted network. Nevertheless, it is also the case that during my time at the Animal Studies Department, I only once talked to a Swedish PhD student who was having lunch with us. At no other time there were Swedish students participating in the activities, although they were part of the department in general. The space for dialogue did not really include Swedes, or maybe the Swedes did not include themselves because they did not need this particular kind of community of practice, which was built upon the combination of research interest and being in another country.

In the case of the Animal Studies Department and others, the habitus of the international PhD students did not only encounter the new social fields of Uppsala, including the doxa of those fields, but they also encountered other agents who came from other fields with different doxa. Yet, because they were all in a similar situation, they were able to help each other overcoming, and in some cases even avoiding, the hysteresis effect through the community of practice.

### 6.2.2 The ‘Chinese Mafia’

Within the Animal Studies Department, national boundaries, at least among international PhD students, seemed to disappear. Yet, there were two exceptions to this mentioned by the people within the department: the so-called ‘Chinese Mafia’ and a large group of Pakistani students who left the department shortly before I started my fieldwork. The two groups, although unrelated to each other, are examples of Appadurai’s diasporic public spheres, in which the members of a certain nationalities came together and supported each other. The reason why they formed a group can be found in Benedict Anderson’s notion of an ‘imagined community’ (2006). An ‘imagined community’ is a group of people coming from one nation who imagine knowing each other, although it is impossible to know every member within a
nation (Anderson, 2006:6). Hence, Chinese people helped each other based on the fact that they were Chinese, although they did not know each other before. Once in Uppsala, they formed a new group that was based on the imagined community. This also is an example of Appadurai’s theory of the ‘imagination as a social practice’ (1996:31), in which the imagined becomes practice.

There was a big difference in the stories about the ‘Chinese Mafia’ and the Pakistani group: while the members of the ‘Chinese Mafia’ were mostly accepted within the bigger community of the Animal Studies Department (one of them lent his car to others a couple of times and they joined the skiing trip), the Pakistani group was a reason to stress the difficulties there were between the different nationalities. People would comment, for example: “Well, normally there are no problems… But there was this big Pakistani group who just left who excluded themselves.” Most people who mentioned this group seemed to be quite frustrated because of their behaviour. Since I never got to talk to a member of this group, it is difficult to tell how the Pakistani felt and why this separation happened.

However, calling people the ‘Chinese Mafia’ also suggests a certain bias toward people from that country, although the term was not necessarily used in a negative way. In fact, the use of that term caused some need for negotiations between two international PhD students: one who had used the term, and the other who got offended; in the end, the situation had to be calmed down by one of the supervisors who had to explain that it was not meant in a negative way. My impression was that the term was meant in a joking way, acknowledging the efficiency of how the Chinese community in Uppsala operates and helps other Chinese to get settled in Uppsala; and yet, it also had a suspicious undertone. New Chinese students had most often already secured housing via their contacts; they had their own importation system for spices and other things not easily available in Uppsala, and they had their own association called ‘Chinese Students and Scholar Association Uppsala’ (CSAAU)\(^2\). However, at least in the Animal Studies Department, they did not stick only to themselves. Laima said: “They are a bit special, but that’s fine because they still talk to us and participate sometimes.” Nevertheless, especially PhD students from East Asia are often subjected to many stereotypes and are treated with suspicion from other people (Winchester-Seeto, et al., 2014:621). I would say that in the example of the ‘Chinese Mafia’, based on the idea of an imagined community, was not only seen as such by the members of that community, but rather was

\(^{20}\) \url{http://www.cssau.se/} accessed 20/09/16
also created through the biases of others. Chinese PhD students were expected to behave in a certain manner, which is why it was difficult for them to be seen as an individual rather than as a member of an already existing group.

Chinese citizens in Uppsala created support systems for each other. However, at the same time, it was excluding other people who were not part of the pre-existing structures. In this case, the spaces for dialogue were structured by the already existing structures, making it sometimes hard to develop new strategies of the habitus, also when it came to work time. Bourdieu argued that

habitus are principles of production of practices differentiated according to variables of sex and social origin and no doubt by country (through its educational system) and that, even in disciplines with a very large accumulated collective scientific capital, such as physics, an intelligible statistical relationship could be found between the scientific strategies of the various scientists and properties of social origin, trajectory, etc. (Bourdieu, 2004:42)

What Bourdieu is saying here is that although there is a disciplinary habitus in which people learn their methods and how to do research in general; this habitus is also affected by the ‘particular’ habitus they acquired outside of academia. This does not mean that people have two habitus, but that the habitus of every person is formed by different fields which need different strategies to deal with them. Yet, those different sides of the habitus are affecting each other. The supervisor Eric for example told me how one of his first PhD students, from China, would always stand up once he entered the room, and although he explained to her that this was not necessary, it was very difficult for her not to do it. He concluded, “She never really got over it.” In this example, the PhD student’s particular habitus was affecting also her work habitus, because her particular habitus was mostly formed in China, whereas her supervisor expected her to adapt to Sweden. While her standing up in front of her supervisor did not necessarily affect her ability to do research, it confused her supervisor in a way that could be described as negative. Her habitus formed in a different field of doxa than the habitus of her supervisor, and the habitus of her supervisor had to find practices that worked for both when performing science. Since the supervisor had more symbolic capital and hence also more power, the logical consequence was for her to adopt his social practices. Yet, this was a difficult task for her, as the comment from Erik showed.

True spaces for dialogue, therefore, do not only create new social networks; they are also subjected and regulated by the habitus that agents already possess in addition to the field within which they are taking place, and by the historically created dispositions of the habitus.
An imagined community, the basis for the creation of the ‘Chinese Mafia’, is in my opinion a form of historical disposition, structuring some aspects of the habitus of a person. Hence, the spaces for dialogue within the Animal Studies Department were again only possible within the ‘space of possible’ as Bourdieu called it, and not a naturally given.

### 6.3 Games

Playing games with people is a very interesting experience. The game dictates the structure of the day (or evening) and everybody who is playing follows. During the game, other aspects of life become unimportant and it is possible to forget other things; at least, this is how it is for me. In a similar way, play has been described as:

> a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life as being ‘not serious’, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. (Huizinga, 1950: 13 in Stromberg, 2008:431+2)

Bourdieu has often used the word *game* as a symbol for his theories (e.g. Bourdieu, 1990:66), although his theory differs in that there is no profit involved; he also described the game as providing structure. For Bourdieu, game is a symbol for the field, which sets the lives of the agents in it.

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to play games, in the original sense, with my informants twice: once, at a board games night organised by TNDR (The PhD students’ Council of the Faculty of Science and Technology), and the second time, at the PhD Gasque. Both times were completely different, and yet, the two situations can tell a lot about the experiences of international PhD students in Uppsala. Both times were ‘true spaces for dialogue’, although in totally different ways.

#### 6.3.1 Board Games

May 2015: It was a very nice spring evening in Uppsala and it already smelled like summer. I was on my way to play board games organised by TNDR in one of the department kitchens at the Ångström Laboratory. In my head, I always called this department kitchen the ‘tower’, because it was not only on the top floor of the building; it was also on two floors by itself and it was the furthest away from the main entrance. Finding this particular kitchen by myself would have been very difficult; luckily, however, I had been there multiple times during my interviews. I even had been introduced to a ‘secret entrance’, some circular stairs connecting one particular department with the kitchen. It was, in my opinion, the nicest kitchens of my
fieldwork, with a piano in one of the corners and a nice view. While I made my way up to the kitchen, I saw some of my informants playing volleyball outside and passed two other informants of mine while they were engaged in an intense match of ping-pong on the ground floor of Ångström. Once I arrived in the department kitchen, there were already a couple of PhD students present. I sneaked in together with two Swedish PhD students who arrived at the same time as me. Four of my previous informants were attending this event: Carlos from Colombia, Darko from Montenegro, Daniel from Central America, and Yash from India. Somebody was playing the piano in the background. I joined a group of PhD students, including Yash, who were about to start the board game, *Ticket to Ride Scandinavia*. I had played a version of this game multiple times with my family in Germany and could therefore explain the rules easily to the other players. Yash had never played the game before, so he and I teamed up, which was rewarded by victory. After this game, we played *Pandemic*, in which all players are playing against the game to save the world from a pandemic. After the two games, some people left; I stayed behind with a group of only international PhD students, and we talked and had snacks. Throughout the evening, the conversations were a playful mix of country anecdotes, for example: “In [insert country] we do …”, as well as serious topics about research, supervisors, and the future.

Both games were somehow very close to the reality of many of the international PhD students: *Ticket to Ride Scandinavia*, because one has to accumulate the right number of coloured cards (capital) in order to build train tracks to connect different cities in Scandinavia (Field). Also, for Yash, the fact that he and I were playing together (social capital) helped him not only to understand the game but also to win it; yet I would not have won by myself because he had different ideas than I did (without him, I would have probably turned into gamer mode, trying to gather as many points as possible, losing all in the end). We were helping each other. In the other game, our multinational team had to agree and communicate together on how to save the world by strategically placing research units, doctors, etc. on a world map. Although it was sometimes a close call, we managed to defeat the disease (probably also because we were playing the easiest version of the game and one of the players knew how to play it).

This space for dialogue was created by the PhD students themselves. It was a closed event and there was nobody other than PhD students (and me); it was a safe place for PhD students to come together and play without the external pressure of their supervisors, senior colleagues, etc. Yet, the event was organised within the university, at a place that is normally
work-related, and also by TNDR, a student run organisation, and not privately. That way, the board games night was a space within a space, somewhat private, but at the same time, not. It was technically accessible to everybody who knew about the event. The board games night was a break from everyday routines, and yet the everyday routines were still part of the night. It was one of those in-between things which I had observed so many times in the lives of international PhD students: not really a student and not really a researcher, not really at home but not really a stranger, not really [enter nationality] anymore but not really Swedish either. The habitus of the international PhD students is subjected to many new situations during their PhD; which is why it modifies itself within the new environment, as was obvious during the conversations after the games and also at other times during my fieldwork.

Bourdieu has described a habitus that is something in-between two different habitus as a cleft habitus (2004:111). He used it in relation to mobile people between different social classes or academic disciplines, but I would say that it can also be applied to international PhD students who are mobile between different countries. They are modifying their habitus in Uppsala toward an international one, while still keeping part of their ‘original’ habitus. It is not only about the acquisition of new capitals in order to find one’s position in the field, but also about this ‘new’ habitus also according to Lee & Kramer (2013:31). I would say that, often, the hysteresis effect, when the habitus is too distant from the original environment, can change over time to a cleft habitus, in which the new field and the old field are part of an in-between, cleft, habitus. I observed international PhD students only within their new fields, in Uppsala, and I hence cannot say what happens to the original habitus, and how international PhD students react to their original fields upon their return; returning to the home country has indeed been described as difficult for many because the original habitus has been changed (e.g. Zink, 2013). Yet, taken my own experiences into account and what I heard during my fieldwork, I would say that the parts of the cleft habitus are not exactly the same as they were before; rather they have been modified and adapted as well. Another example, also in regard to the way international PhD students communicate, will make this clearer.

Daniel, who had also been at the TNDR board games night, told me during our interview: “There are people now that complain going back home is ‘Oh my god, it was so terrible, because it was so hot’ ‘What was the temperature?’ ‘25 degrees...’ ‘Come on, you became Swedish already!’, that’s how we joke around.” Saying sentences like ‘you became Swedish already’ acknowledges the dual (or more) status of the habitus of international PhD students and also the already acquired forms of cultural capital. The playful use of words here
suggests that the presence in Sweden has changed the person’s habitus in one way or the other, while, at the same time, it highlights the differences to the original habitus. Hearing somebody who originally comes from Central America say that 25 degrees is too hot, while at the same time complaining about the cold weather in Sweden, bears a certain irony. This ambiguity of fitting in nowhere really, as also described by others (e.g. Lee & Kramer, 2013), but everywhere a little bit, is something that I saw at other occasions as well, yet it was not necessarily a bad thing. Instead of not fitting anywhere, most of the international PhD students I talked to fitted into multiple fields with different doxa. While international PhD students might develop a cleft habitus, somewhere between their home country and their host country, they can further modify their habitus toward an international recognised one (Zink, 2013:18). This internationally recognised habitus can give access to new fields in the future.

In the context of being an international student in Uppsala, telling somebody that he or she is behaving Swedish can be both an insult and a compliment, depending on the context. For example, when somebody says, “don’t be so Swedish,” it most often refers to a stereotypical form of behaviour (e.g. not eating the last piece of cake, etc.). It is not necessarily meant in a mean way but rather to tease that person a bit. “Don’t be so Swedish” can be said to a Swedish or a non-Swedish person who has been in Sweden for some time. The same goes for sentences with a positive or neutral attribute such as “you became Swedish already,” which is what Daniel told me during our interview. A different, but somewhat related, way of acknowledging the impact that Sweden has had on an individual is when somebody states themself as having “turned Swedish”. Another comment that I get occasionally when I return to Germany, for example, is: “You look Swedish”, mostly related to a certain piece of clothing. It also goes in the other direction, when my friends, for example, tell me, “You are so German”. Commenting on the nationality of somebody is a quite common thing among international students in Uppsala. I heard comments like this during my fieldwork, from my friends, and occasionally overheard somebody saying it in a Nation pub.

Those spaces for dialogue that the PhD students create themselves – for example, through those board games, PhD days, etc. – can help in the formation and making sense of a cleft habitus and the meaning of the acquired forms of cultural capital. The conversations at the board game night were a lot about figuring out what was possible and what was not, how to adapt, and also how to make sense of things. Sentences like “In [insert country] we do …” are not just simple comparisons between countries; they also help to understand what is
different and how to deal with these differences. Those words, just as ‘You became Swedish already,’ can be seen as ways to renegotiate one’s own origin and ways to learn to deal with those changes. Those particular spaces for dialogue, organised by PhD students themselves, also provide spaces for self-reflexion and mutual support.

6.3.2 Cards Against Humanity

I played Cards Against Humanity for the first time at the PhD Gasque at Norrlands Nation. We were six people playing it together, the other people at my table and I. The others were PhD students from different departments and different countries. I had met one person at the table before for an interview: she was the chair of the doctoral board and had given me an interview and got me into the Gasque. The game, Cards Against Humanity, was lying on the table for the guests to play. After the event the organisers gave it away for free, and the game became one of my ‘collectables’ from the time of my fieldwork.

The game is basically two sets of cards, black and white. The black cards contain phrases like “This article will fill the knowledge gap related to [blank]”, and on the white cards, one can find answers that could fit into the blank part of the previous phrase. For example, “Passive aggressive Swedes”21. One person reads the black card and all the others have to answer with a white one; the person who has read the black card then chooses the answer he or she likes the best. Here are some more examples of the version of the game we played at the PhD Gasque:

- “Thank you for your interesting presentation, but have you thought about conducting research on [blank]” – “Danish fish porn”
- “I usually meet weekly with my supervisor to discuss [blank]” – “Schitty schlager”
- “[blank] isn’t the only thing outsourced to PhD students” – “Hash brownie fika”
- “New research states that the darkness in Uppsala causes [blank]” – “Full frontal nudity”

The PhD Gasque version of Cards Against Humanity is obviously not the original version of the game. The original version of this game has been studied by the sociologists Strmic-Pawl and Wilson, who labelled it as “another way to ignore racially oppressive

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21 I was not able to take exact notes of the answers during the PhD Gasque, but I asked some of my friends in Uppsala to play it with me again, so that I could take notes. The answers here are from this game and are similar to my memory of the PhD Gasque.
implications of speech” (2016:364), and an author of The New York Times wrote a letter of complaint about the game:

“Cards Against Humanity” is a pun, of sorts, on “crimes against humanity” — which isn’t really funny. But if you got a half-dozen people to vote on it, they’d probably say it was. Individual taste becomes awful in groups, and nothing demonstrates this phenomenon better than Cards Against Humanity, a party game for horrible people. That’s not even my opinion; it says so right on the box: “A party game for horrible people.” The website elaborates: “Unlike most of the party games you’ve played before, Cards Against Humanity is as despicable and awkward as you and your friends.” (Brooks, 2016)

The Uppsala PhD Gasque version, however, has none of the original racial implications (although there are some hints against Danish people). In fact, I did play the game by now a couple of times with different people, and somebody once said that the Uppsala version is so much better than the original, and not only because it is related to the reality of students in this town. This does not mean that this version of the game is politically correct all the time, and different groups of people will find this game either hilarious or offensive (sometimes both). Since I have played this game now with different people, I can say that there is a big difference between playing it with people you do not know, like at the PhD Gasque, and people who are already your friends. However, in all of those different groups was one visible pattern: the cards with a relation to Uppsala always won.

There are two things that are relevant for this thesis when looking at Cards Against Humanity: the adjusted content of the cards, and the fact that the game was played at the PhD Gasque. To answer the first question, the game’s (black) cards represented a good summary of the conversation topics I had encountered during my fieldwork: research, supervisors, the darkness, or, generally, the weather in Uppsala, the housing situation, etc. Because of this shared knowledge, the game could be fun, and not only awkward, as the author of The New York Times article suggests. All the ‘really bad’ cards had been replaced by Uppsala cards, which made it possible to play this game at a setting such as the PhD Gasque, where not only multiple academic disciplines were present, but also multiple nationalities. Playing a game that is based on racial and sexual stigmatisation might have been difficult in this environment. Yet, through the individual touch of the PhD Gasque cards, the participants were not only not excluded, but, rather, reminded of their common features: that they were all studying in Uppsala. People could relate to this; it was a form of symbolic capital, because people recognised each other as being in a similar situation, that created a feeling of
belonging and understanding, which has also been described in other university contexts (Brayboy et al., 2007:187).

This brings me to answer the second question: why the PhD Gasque organisers decided to play this game. Throughout my time in Uppsala, I have been to a few Gasques, yet the PhD Gasque was the only time where there was a game on the table. At my table, we started playing it after the main course, more or less after all the themes related to introducing each other were used. The game provided a bridge between the six strangers at my table who did not have much more in common than the fact that all of us were studying in Uppsala. As has been said by others, the ‘I’ of a game can be a slightly different person than the original person: the rules of the social world are not the main rules anymore and the habitus can adapt to the new rules of the game (in this case a real game, not a synonym) (Stromberg, 2008:439). The organisers of the Gasque most likely saw the game as a chance to use it as an ‘ice breaker’ in case the situation got awkward. And indeed, unlike during the other ‘spaces of dialogue’ I described in this chapter, there were a lot more ‘awkward moments’ at the PhD Gasque than at any other time, which the game broke elegantly.

The awkward moments were partly created through the rules of a Gasque, for example, that the sitting order is supposed to be woman – man – woman, and so on. Also, there are songs that are supposed to be sung and, after every song, there has to be a toast done in a certain manner. In short: some aspects of the PhD Gasque-PhD student interaction can be described as the hysteresis effect, because the habitus of the guests encountered a very different field of doxa. For many, if not most, of the international PhD students, the Gasque was the first experience of this kind and, at least from my own experience, it can be a quite intimidating experience. Not necessarily unenjoyable, but definitely awkward. Not knowing what to do and when, and not knowing the songs, in combination with the pressure of making pleasant conversation with strangers, can be a very stressful but, also, interesting thing to do. The game, Cards Against Humanity, with its nonchalant way of communicating, created a space for dialogue within a space for dialogue, perfect to this situation and maybe almost comparable to the fika effect described earlier.

6.4 Conclusion

True spaces for dialogue can be found in many places within Uppsala: in department kitchens, the department corridor, at the student nations, in the student housing corridors, at seminars, and so on. Yet, they are all different and have different reasons and outcomes. In
this chapter, I have given different examples of spaces for dialogue in the lives of international PhD students: organised by a scholarship provider, by the people in the department, by a student organisation, or simply by some friends. Those spaces for dialogue can help international PhD students to negotiate and make sense of their lives in Uppsala through the exchange of experiences with other people in a similar situation. Those similar situations can, among other things, create so-called communities of practice in which international PhD students help each other to make sense of the new fields, the change their habitus are undergoing, and which new forms of capital are necessary to acquire and what to do with it.

At the same time, those spaces for dialogue are only possible within the ‘space of possible’, determined by the structures of the field and the habitus of other people in the field. Appadurai’s theory (1996) is based on the assumption that mobility reduces spaces and makes places unimportant. Yet the mobility of international PhD students has created new spaces where international PhD students meet other international PhD students and in some cases also Swedish PhD students. They can further reproduce already existing spaces, in this case the distinction between Swedes and internationals (Heyman & Campbell, 2009:138). Therefore, mobility not only creates spaces in general; it creates spaces for dialogue where it is possible to meet the world. At the same time as it creates new spaces, it also affects the habitus of the international PhD students who are mobile and have to make sense of their surroundings in this new field.

However, what has been missing during all the times I have been conducting fieldwork among international PhD students were the Swedish PhD students. Except for the PhD Gasque, and until a certain time during the board games night, they were not really participating, and if they were, they were not really playing a big role and were in the minority. Hence the ability to access those spaces is limited again, based on the will and ability to take part in them.

The spaces for dialogue were good to meet the world, but not necessarily Swedes. This was, indeed, mentioned by almost all international PhD students, that it was extremely difficult to make Swedish friends. The absence of Swedes in those spaces for dialogue casted a shadow over the experiences of international PhD students. However, just as there are shadows and dark days, there are also light nights, which will be the theme of the next chapter.
7 Light Nights

During summer, Uppsala does not turn completely dark anymore: the sky is not pitch black but resembles dark shades of blue, depending on the time of the day. People try to spend as much time outside as possible, making the most out of summer. During my fieldwork, the dark winter days gradually shifted into light summer nights, making it easier to bike around Uppsala again, and adding new topics to my fieldwork: instead of winter, we now talk about spring and summer. Just as with dark days, light nights are not only related to summer.

‘Light nights’ stand for the times in the lives of international PhD students when the world seems easy, when things are working out and when winter seems to be far away. Those times can occur while ‘meeting the world’ in the middle of the winter on top of a snowy hill, in or during an intense game of Pandemic. Sometimes, they are related to external experiences with others; at other times, they are personal moments of understanding. Often, they are a mixture of both. Physical infrastructures, like a new place to live, as well as social structures, like friends, can affect and create ‘light days’ as well. Similar to the dark days, they can stretch over longer or shorter periods, and some might never experience the light nights, because they are either too busy in their laboratories, or leave before summer.

While the PhD students I talked to did not explicitly tell me stories of when they were really happy and everything worked well, they did tell me how they learnt to navigate Uppsala successfully and how this influenced their experiences. Many would counterbalance their negative stories by adding a positive story to make sure I did not think that doing a PhD in Uppsala was only connected with bad experiences or that they were not capable of doing a PhD: I had very few interviews that were only about negative experiences or only about positive experiences. The most positive stories, however, were stories about how my interview partners understood something fundamental to them, and through that, they saw the world in a brand new light. This understanding, just as the transition from winter to summer during my fieldwork, was mostly not a radical moment, but a gradual change.

This chapter is about those stories when PhD students and supervisors looked beyond the dark days and saw the other side of things. When true spaces for dialogue turned into true spaces of (mutual) understanding of oneself and others.

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22 This is also because I did not specifically ask questions about this.
7.1 ‘How People in Science See Each Other’
Vihaan, from India and in his third year, was my first interview partner during my fieldwork. We met in the reception area at the Biomedicine Centrum and I was not quite sure whom or what to expect. Once we found each other, we sat down at one of the tables in the reception area. I noted that he seemed to be very self-confident. After the interview, I asked him if he could show me his office. So, we walked up there; I had a look at his office and a bit of the laboratory. Afterwards, we had a cup of tea in the department kitchen, during which we were joined by another PhD student from India. In the department kitchen, I found a graphic which displayed, ‘How people in science see each other’.23

![Figure 3 Graph in Department Kitchen Biomedicine Centrum](image)

The graphic is a matrix with different people in a department (undergraduate, PhD student, postdoc, PI/professor, and technician) and how those people (satirically) see each other. This graphic, is one example of the many humorous ways science is displayed, just like the PhD

23 The picture is not created by somebody within the department, but appears to be an internet phenomenon that started in 2011 via Twitter and then moved to a blog called biomatushiq (biomatushiq, 2011).
Comics. I asked Vihaan and the other PhD student about this graphic and we had a discussion about the different disciplines and the differences between academia in Sweden, India and Germany.

This discussion, as well as many of the following interviews I had with international PhD students, focused on how different nationalities see their PhD education. Vihaan and his colleague, for example, told me that they think that Swedish students are not taking their studies as seriously as they are. They came to this conclusion because of the different lifestyles they saw between themselves and Swedes; for example, drinking alcohol and partying were some of the differences they pointed out. On the other hand, they also thought that the flat hierarchy in Sweden was a great way to do research. Vihaan told me that there is much more space for discussion with his supervisor in Sweden than there is in India, which makes it possible to actually know things, because the supervisors do not dictate how “thinking is supposed to be done”. He said further: “[In India], only marks get priority, rather than knowledge. While here, even though I do one or two subjects, knowledge, it matters rather than marks.” This search for true knowledge had been the reason why he decided to pursue a PhD outside of India. He really wanted to know “how science works, what is really reality, how we can change? How we can make our life better”, without the constraints he saw in his religious education in India.

In the sense of Vihaan’s and his colleague’s discussion, it appears that it is not only possible to create a stereotypical graph of ‘How people in science see each other’, like the one in the department kitchen, but to add another dimension in which the different countries or continents are displayed as well, maybe called, ‘How different nationalities are seen in science’. Another example of this comes from a Chinese PhD student I interviewed who commented: “Asians are more efficient, but don’t really understand what they do”. While he said this, I was not entirely sure if his comment was meant in a negative way for either side or if it was just an observation of him. Nevertheless, comments like this occurred frequently with most PhD students associating education in Sweden with more freedom and less pressure, but, at the same time, also as not consistent enough and too ‘weak’. Others also commented on the way, for them incomprehensible, in which people interact with each other and do not seem to care for other people.

For Vihaan, for example, education in Europe was associated with freedom of research and a better life, while at the same time connected with less happiness. He said: “inner world
is better in India, outer world is better in Sweden,” and his colleague agreed with him. Striking here is that although Vihaan came to Sweden to do research freely without any ideological or religious constraints, he also sees his environment critically. Not everything Swedes do is for him the correct way of doing things, and he compared life in Sweden with life in India. I had the feeling that he almost felt sorry for the Swedes and their way of life as he experienced it. Vihaan clearly separated his social life from his professional life, while at the same time taking the things he deemed good from one to the other. I had asked Vihaan, for example, if he had Swedish friends and he denied this. When I asked him if he would like to have some Swedish friends, he was very confused by this question. It was not important to him at all to have Swedish friends; he said that he did not have anything in common with them and does not know what to say to them. He preferred to be by himself and think, or otherwise be with other Indians, because he had shared conversation topics with them. To me, this was a very confusing answer.

I experienced a similar confusion when I talked to another Indian who, when I asked him if he feels well integrated in Sweden, told me: “till now I have no problem”. He, as well, was perfectly fine being in his room and collecting stamps by himself, occasionally meeting with other Indians. I interviewed another Indian at 02:00 pm on a Sunday afternoon at Ångström, who also told me that, although he had first anticipated being more social in Sweden, once he arrived here, he was so carried away by his research that he did not want to do anything else; he even had a bed in his office. My first thought was: they must be very unhappy, because I would have been. I could not imagine having a life like this. However, neither of them seemed unhappy to me. In our interview, Vihaan had told me that the first three months of his stay were very difficult for him, but that he was now “sooo comfortable”. He had found a shop where he could buy his spices, had adapted to the Swedish winter, and had found his place in the department. To him, there were more important things than social connections when living in Sweden. He was fine with the social interaction he had every day with his colleagues at work; he was happy that way, or at least that is what he said.

For Vihaan and some other international PhD students I talked to, their research was their life in Sweden, literally. This was how they saw themselves, as researchers who focused only on this aspect. Connections to other people were mostly based on departmental ties or

\[24\] I do not want to suggest that this is a typical Indian behaviour; I also got comments like this from other PhD students, although mostly from Asia.
with people with a similar background. Yet, they stayed connected to their families and friends at home, as they told me that this was very important to them; physical connections in Sweden, however, were less important.

At the beginning of my fieldwork, I had always suggested to the PhD students to meet with me for fika at a Nation or somewhere else, but they always wanted me to come to their campuses, so, after a while, I stopped suggesting this. At first, I had this section in the chapter ‘dark days’, because to me this was how it looked: only working, with a very limited social life. In my case, limiting social life to mostly Germans did not seem very tempting, so I thought they were doing this because they had no other choice. But after reconsidering what the PhD students actually told me, I came to the conclusion that this section, in fact, belongs here, in the chapter, ‘light nights’. The reason for this is that they found a way to be happy in Sweden that worked for them; they found a way to balance their inherited structures from their home countries with the new structures in Sweden. I would like to argue that the decision to focus on research and mostly have friends from the home country is a form of self-protection. The habitus already has to modify itself in other areas, such as research; therefore, it is easier to stick with already known things whenever possible as long as there is no real reason to do otherwise. One of my informants said that he feels safer when he is with people from his country: he knows how to behave, whereas, with Swedes or other nationalities, it is more exciting but also more stressful.

However, saying that it was only the habitus that made Vihaan decide to focus on his research would limit his credibility. From my observations from the few hours I spent with him, but also with others, I would say that although this decision was influenced by his habitus, the decision was, in the end, more conscious than the habitus would suggest. This is because he clearly thought a lot about the difference between Sweden and India, and came to the conclusion that he would like to have the middle way: Outer life like in Sweden, inner life like in India. Therefore, he aligned his life in Sweden according to those principles, picking the best things from both lives for him. The next section will give another example of how international PhD students negotiate their lives in Sweden and how this can affect their agency.

7.2 ‘I found myself here’

One of the first things I noticed when talking to Mei was her purple tights that were covered all over with little red hearts. It was early March 2015, and the colours of her clothing
lightened up my Swedish winter day. I had earlier talked to her colleague and friend, Chen, who established the contact to Mei. Mei and Chen are both from China and are PhD students at SLU via a Chinese government scholarship, and they are both PhD students in an interdisciplinary subject between natural and social science. Mei has been in Sweden since the end of 2012. She came to Sweden because of the project and she already knew her supervisor before she applied, which made it according to her easier to transition. Nevertheless she also said that she was jet-lagged for three months due to the darkness, as she arrived in December. When she first arrived in Sweden, she had no expectations about how her life in Uppsala would be, and her sole focus was on her project. She had large self-doubts as to whether she would be capable of doing her project, despite the fact that she got the position at SLU and the scholarship. During our talk, it was almost as if Mei was going through the same stages as she did at the beginning of her PhD: at the beginning, her body language suggested a certain uncertainty at first, while, about halfway through the interview, she started to sit up tall and looked me into the eyes when she spoke. The change in body language was most evident when she told me about her change in attitude and that she now feels self-confident: “I am quite capable of doing my project. I am the best person to do this, and to know this project, than anyone else.” Her voice changed while saying this, as well: it almost sounded like a mantra she would tell herself every morning.

Mei seemed to be very self-reflexive. She stressed how the experiences of others can be very subjective, and just because somebody had a great time in Sweden or elsewhere, it does not mean that everybody has to. For her, however, Sweden has been a good experience: “I found myself here. This is really something for me.” When I asked what she means by this, she responded:

“It is also about the educational system in China. Because the educational system is quite different in Sweden. I was so used to the educational system in China, I lost myself in some way. Because I couldn’t see my vision, I couldn’t see my future, because I had no aim, no goals. Because I’m quite used to having somebody tell me what to do, and what you can do and what you can’t do. And I was quite used to this way. But here I found myself. This is a good or not good thing. But I pretty much like this feeling. Because I know what I want, I know what I’m doing, and I know what I’m doing next.”

Mei’s description of how she found herself in Sweden emphasises again what I have analysed in the previous section: the different education style in Sweden can enhance the ability to think in different ways. During Mei’s time in China, Bourdieu’s sentence, “objective structures ultimately structure all experience […] without following the paths of either
mechanical determination or adequate consciousness,” (Bourdieu, 1990:41) was true: Mei’s whole life was structured by the objective structures of her Chinese education, which influenced her original habitus. However, when Mei came to Sweden, she realised that there was another way of life, another possibility of learning. She was nonetheless not aware of this before she came to Sweden. Although she said, “I lost myself in some way,” her previous comments about being anxious about commencing a PhD in Uppsala suggest that she only realised this after she was already in Sweden.

Therefore, it is possible to see a weakness in Bourdieu’s theory about habitus. This part of Bourdieu’s theory has been criticised by many for not taking consciousness and agency enough into account (e.g. Appadurai, 1996; Ortner, 2005). Bourdieu himself has argued that, “If there is one area where it can be assumed that agents act in accordance with conscious, calculated intentions, following consciously devised methods and programmes, it is indeed the domain of science.” Here, he was referring to the scientific methods (Bourdieu, 2004:38). Nevertheless, for the anthropologist Sherry Ortner, there are more possibilities to act conscious than through science. For her ‘subjectivity’ is a “specifically cultural and historical consciousness”:

the basis of ‘agency’, a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings. (Ortner, 2005:34)

Looking at Mei’s story, I would like to agree with Ortner that there has to be more than the unconscious behaviour triggered only by the habitus. The change Mei went through during her relatively short period of time in Uppsala can not only be based on habitus, but rather on her own conscious ability to act. When she said, “I am the best person to do this, and to know this project, than anyone else,” it became very clear that she chose to “find herself”. Her subjectivity, in the sense of Ortner, triggered her own agency, which allowed her to not only to see the differences in the Swedish and Chinese higher education systems, but also to decide for herself which aspects she would like to use. She used her self-formation skills in order to not only adapt to the Swedish environment, but, also, to take the best parts of it and use them for herself. This was very similar to what Vihaan did; the largest difference between the two however is that Mei was more aware of this change and the chances it entailed.

Further in the interview, Mei also told me that she spends most of her time with other Chinese students in Uppsala, foremost her fiancé from China, whom she met in Uppsala. For
her, it is very easy to meet Swedish people, and they are helping her and teaching her a lot, but only on a superficial, small-talk level: “it’s not very easy to be warm, to get closer to them. Because, there is not so much deeper things to share that you can talk about. Unless you work together, you study together. To have something connected.” Here, Mei shows that she is not just ‘adjusting’, as the adjustment paradigm suggests, but, rather, that she is picking out parts of her Swedish life, in this case the possibility to have her own opinion in research, and mixing it with other aspects that make sense to her. She was not aiming to become ‘fully integrated’ and did not see a problem in the fact that most of her social life was happening inside the Chinese community in Uppsala. Rather, she took, so to speak, ‘the best of both worlds’ and made sense of her new life in this way, instead of choosing one way of life. She did not simply ‘adjust’ to Sweden but used her self-formation skills in order to do research and live her life in the best possible way for her.

Mei further sees another positive aspect of being an international PhD student in Uppsala, and that is the international character of the city. She sees this as beneficial for both Sweden and for international students

“Because international students may bring many, many exotic views, many new things into this country. And we can also contribute to this country’s research. If you look at social science: It could be very different from country to country. But if you take a look at the same questions from different perspectives, you can find a lot of different ideas with the same question. Because when you are used to a country, you may ignore some things.”

With those sentences, Mei demonstrates again that she is not only aware of herself in Sweden, but also sees the bigger picture. For her, her being in Sweden is not a one-way process where she learns everything, but rather also an asset for Sweden.

Mei’s ability to navigate not only her Chinese heritage but also her new reality in Sweden, combined with the international field of science, demonstrates that she has the agency to deal with all the differences between Sweden and China. The difference I see between Mei and other PhD students, for example, Vihaan, is that she not only adjusted to the Swedish education system in a way that worked for her; she also reflected on her own experiences and, in a way, became conscious of the structures of her specifics upbringing in China. Because she became conscious of this, she could say something like, ‘I found myself here’, changing not only her life in Uppsala but also the way she sees life in China. She hence modified her habitus towards a habitus that works in Sweden as well as in China, a cleft habitus.
7.3 Supervisors’ Perspectives

Simona is the only female supervisor I interviewed during my fieldwork. I had contacted others but none of them had time to talk to me. Also, scheduling an interview with Simona took two months. So, it was already early June when we had our interview. It was the time of the year when the students leave Uppsala and the city turns quiet. When I asked Simona about the differences between Swedish PhD students and international PhD students, she told me the following:

“The biggest difference is the cultural one. I think, it depends, because I had both from China, I have now, and then one was from Iran and the other from Latvia. With the Latvian, there was no problem, because I think it’s European, right? But the other ones I think it’s difficult for them to accept, for example, that they make mistakes or, for example, that they accept that they don’t know something. They have to understand that this is an education; the PhD is an education; it is supposed that you don’t know in the beginning, but you will learn. But it’s the cultural, I think; it is difficult. To say no, or to say ‘I can’t’, ‘I did a mistake’, and sometimes, they say, ‘yes, I understand’, but probably not; and then you have to pose the question in another way just to check.”

What Simona describes here is something I had heard during my fieldwork quite often. Most of the other supervisors voiced similar problems about international PhD students who did not understand correctly, which was not the problem per se, but they also did not reassure themselves that they actually knew what to do. Interestingly, during my interviews with the PhD students, they said the same things: that they (the PhD students) had some problems discussing issues with their supervisors, that they were not used to the system with a flat hierarchy, that they were confused that the supervisor was not present more, that they were surprised about the freedom they suddenly had, etc. Most of them were positive about this part, as I have shown in the previous section, although it was often difficult for them to approach the supervisors, even though they theoretically knew that they could go and ask for help. Some of the PhD students had developed strategies, just as Simona, to make sure they understood correctly without having to ask again: I was told a couple of times, for example, that they record the meetings with their supervisors so that they could re-listen to the things he or she said. Nevertheless, there was still a lot of conflict potential. Both sides, the supervisors and the international PhD students, were well aware of the differences, and both sides had developed strategies for how to deal with it, yet those strategies did not always work.
Many of the problems are related to the doxa, the things that are taken for granted in a field; the larger the differences between the doxa of different people, the higher the chance that misunderstandings will occur. For the six supervisors I talked to, all European, all having been in academia for a long time, being able to discuss and criticise things was something normal, something every undergraduate student is supposed to learn. Yet, for international PhD students, who grew up with another education system, or in a country with a different idea about hierarchies, this can be a big change (see also Winchester-Seeto, et al., 2014:618). Even for me, coming from Germany, the flat hierarchy which exists in Swedish academia is sometimes still something unusual. If the habitus of a supervisor and a PhD student were primarily formed within fields with very different doxa, it can lead to very difficult situations, creating the hysteresis effect.

However, as I have shown throughout this thesis, there are not only negative things related to the differences between people coming from different countries; it can also be a possibility to ‘meet the world’ in various ways. During our interview, Simona continued:

“But also, it’s fascinating, I think; the environment gets much more interesting. In my research, you work often during the night. Unfortunately, it is a very stressful situation, but also for long days, for example, eighteen hours in a day, or so. So, you get really, really close. And then they open: they tell you about their lives in their country, or some tradition. It is very fascinating actually, as you can get really close to a person.”

Much of the literature about international PhD students and their supervisors has mostly focused on the issues that may occur due to the different backgrounds (e.g. Winchester-Seeto, et al., 2014; Manathunga, 2014) and not on the benefits there can be supervising an international PhD student. Simona’s statement is an example of such benefits: it can enhance the working environment by adding new perspectives. The Internationalisation at Home approach I discussed in 4.2 has exactly this intention. For Simona, it is not only about research that can profit from having international PhD students; it can also be an enhancement on the personal level for the supervisors. Because they deal with international PhD students, they have the chance to adapt their habitus as well and acquire different forms of capital, being able to learn about different countries and learn different forms of communication, sometimes renegotiating things that were previously taken for granted.

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25 Titles are important in Germany, so, normally, one would write an email to a professor starting with Dear Prof. Dr. Maier and not just with Hej Paul.
Most of the other supervisors I talked to also thought that having international PhD students had many more advantages than disadvantages. They said that international PhD students sometimes have different strategies on how to approach a problem, hence seeing other possibilities regarding how to solve it. Also opening up the applicant pool to an international level increased the number of applicants to choose from, which, in return, often led to better PhD students.

Being the supervisor of an international PhD student can often be more difficult than for a Swedish PhD student, as some of the supervisors also acknowledged. International PhD students sometimes need help in areas that are taken for granted, or with things that seem banal to somebody who has been living in Sweden for longer. Nevertheless, there are potentially many ‘light nights’ which supervisors and PhD students can experience together, if they embark together on the PhD journey and also accept that people are different. If Simona would have expected her international PhD students to be like her, and become like her, or only accepted PhD students with a similar background than hers, she would not have been able to learn about the international PhD students’ home countries. Her long nights in her laboratory would not have been so ‘fascinating’. In this sense, only taking the easiest way might not always lead to the fastest or best solutions, and, quite often, it is possible to learn things outside of the curriculum, as the next story shows.

7.4 Julia’s Experiment

Julia and I met for the first time in a small café in Uppsala for lunch. While we ate, she told me her story. Throughout the time of my fieldwork, we would occasionally meet again. She is from a country in Central America and has been in Sweden since 2010. She is one of the scholarship grantees of ISP and Sida. When I asked her about what she knew about Sweden before she arrived here, she told me that she had not really any idea what to expect, but that the scholarship committee asked her some questions upon which she built her first impression of Sweden. “What would you do if you are in a dark corridor, because it is winter and it is very dark and very cold outside, and you come and say ‘hello’ to a colleague who is passing by and the colleague doesn’t answer you?” While she recalled this story from her interview prior to coming to Sweden, Julia chuckled. “Well, I would say hello again!” was her answer to the interviewers. She remembered the interviewers trying to prepare her for the differences Sweden has, compared to Latin America: “They put it very clear, like, ‘if you want to come here, you have to be aware that it is not going to be like Latin America’. So, when Julia arrived in Sweden, she was under the impression that all Swedes were “less warm”. Recalling
that, at the beginning, it was actually like that for her: Swedes were colder and people were not responding. However, she had recently undergone a “change of mindset” as she called it. She realised that the behaviour of some Swedes was not related to her own personality or her origin, but that “they just can’t help it”. Once she came to this conclusion, she decided to undertake a small experiment. While shopping in a supermarket, she took the initiative and started talking to somebody in Swedish. She told me, “and in the end, it was so funny, because he just continued talking, and talking, and talking.” She laughed, “Sometimes you just have to take the first step”.

During my interviews, I realised that the timespan somebody has been in Sweden makes a large difference in the views of the international PhD students. While people who recently had moved to Sweden were mostly positive about their stay, second- and third-year PhD students were a lot more critical toward the Swedish higher education system and the Swedish culture. Fourth- and fifth-year students, however, were more generous with Sweden again. Julia is one of the international PhD students I talked to who were the longest in Sweden. Also, she and some of her friends were among the few ones who could speak Swedish. Julia’s experiment was therefore possible due to two things: she had undergone a process of self-formation in which she modified her habitus, and she had acquired the necessary cultural capital to be able to communicate with the Swedish person in the supermarket.

Julia’s ‘change of mindset’, as she called it, had only happened over time. Yet, once she was aware of this change, she became conscious of her own behaviour and her surroundings. I would also argue that she was an active agent toward the change of her mindset because she wanted to adapt; she wanted to understand. Because it was so difficult for her to speak Swedish with Swedes, but she was determined to learn it, she started a language tandem with a German PhD student, and the two spoke Swedish to each other. Her conscious change of mindset happened because she wanted it to happen in combination with time and the acquisition of capital. Her habitus needed time to become modified, because only the acquisition of Swedish, as a form of embodied cultural capital would not have been enough, and yet, if she would not have been interested in modifying her habitus, this process would not have been possible.

Therefore, my suggestion is that it is indeed possible to have a partially conscious habitus, but only if the ‘space of possible’ has led to this creation. Not everyone is able to
have a partially conscious habitus (yet). Changing the field of doxa, for example, though the rapture of a move to another country, can accelerate and foster the creation of a partially conscious habitus, because one starts questioning the own origin. In cases like Julia’s I would argue that the hysteresis effect, which she had during the first time of her PhD, allowed Julia to acquire a partially conscious habitus with which she was able to navigate the social fields of Uppsala in a different way than before. The anthropologist Michael Jackson claimed, as well, that a disruption of the habitus, in his case related to an initiation ritual, “lays people open to possibilities of behaviour which they embodied but ordinarily are not inclined to express” (2014 [1983]:251). Hence, Julia was always able to undertake such an experiment, but the possibility had to be lain open to her via the hysteresis effect, through time and her acquisition of cultural capital.

Julia’s assets were time and her language acquisition. However, without the courage to go up to some random person in the supermarket and talk to him, her experiment would not have been possible. Therefore, many of Bourdieu’s different concepts were involved during Julia’s experiment: first, her habitus that she acquired in her home country. During the time she spent in Sweden, this habitus shifted gradually, adapting and understanding the Swedish culture. Her department provided her, further, with the structures to undertake her experiment in organising Swedish courses. Her agency was further enhanced through the characteristics of her personality (Marginson, 2014:17). In combination with the cultural capital she acquired in Sweden, namely proficiency in the Swedish language, along with her habitus, specifically her bravery to approach a random person, she was able to undertake her experiment. This combination of outside factors led to her experiment. As Marginson writes:

The self-formation of international students is open not only because agency freedom enables openness but because the institutional and cultural settings make demands that cannot be known until they have been lived, and to which the student must respond. Under new conditions people do new things. (Marginson, 2014:13)

Therefore if Julia would have stayed in her home country, she had probably never been able to undergo those changes because they were enabled through the settings in Uppsala.

Julia’s story is not over after the experiment, however. Rather, it starts here. Once she understood that it was not her own personality that explained why people were behaving the way they were, but rather their habitus, she could adapt to it and react. Her experiment gave her more insight and supported her thoughts. Only through her lived experience, which is also what Marginson said in the quote above, was she able to change her behaviour. Therefore,
when the scholarship committee tried figure out if Julia would be able to cope with life in Sweden, it was not clear if their well-meant question would expose the best candidate for living in Sweden.

Additionally, just because somebody knows how it is in theory does not necessarily mean that they can react to it. All international PhD students at Uppsala University are supposed to be given a ‘Welcome Folder’ at the beginning of their stay in Sweden. In it, one can read:

“Social life in Sweden

Some foreigners complain that it is difficult to meet Swedes socially. Swedes often take longer before inviting people home or going out with them in the evening. Since you will probably be here for a relatively short period of time, if you are anxious to make Swedish contacts, you might consider taking the initiative. Most of us are not asocial, just a bit shy” (‘Welcome Package’ distributed by IFSS, part of the sheet ‘Understanding the Swedes…’)

Julia did exactly what IFSS suggested: she took the initiative, but only after having lived in Sweden for multiple years. Oili, a PhD student from Thailand, commented on the Welcome Folder: “It’s like ‘you’re welcome’, but then you are on your own and you have to help yourself.” It is very difficult to act only on the suggestions of others, although the experiences of others can help to increase social and cultural capital and make the transition smoother, in many cases. Oili and Julia both possess agency; yet, only through time did Julia use her agency to interact and engage more with her Swedish host country. This is part of how Bourdieu said the habitus works. At the beginning of international PhD students’ stay, they are mostly busy with ‘adjusting’ to the host country. Over time, however, Julia had developed a ‘feeling for the game’, “produced by experience of the game, and therefore of the objective structures within which it is played out, the 'feel for the game' is what gives the game a subjective sense” (Bourdieu, 1990:66). Julia got this subjective sense.

Julia told me that she had many dark nights, many issues at the beginning, and that doing a PhD in Sweden was not always easy. By the time we met, she had overcome her darkest periods and started to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Julia had adapted her habitus toward Sweden in a way that helped her to experience her life here differently; yet, she also kept parts of her original habitus. She had learnt more than just her PhD; she had, in fact, learnt something about herself and about others.
7.5 Conclusion

There can be many ways for international PhD students to find a way to deal with their new surroundings in Uppsala. In this chapter, I have shown that international PhD students and their supervisors have the ability to learn from and with each other, if this is important to them and they have the ability within the ‘space of possible’. The habitus of international PhD students can enable them to interact with their new surrounding fields either actively or passively. Through the acquisition of different forms of capital, international PhD students can learn how to understand agents who were formed within different fields of doxa. Yet, just because somebody learns for example Swedish, it does not mean that the same mindset change will happen to that person. Nevertheless being confronted with different fields can enhance such a process.

The habitus of a person can become at least partially conscious, fostered through the rapture of moving from one country, with one field of doxa, to another country with a very different field of doxa. Nevertheless, not all people can decide to take this path, and while their habitus is still modified, it happens as the habitus normally works: unconsciously. Hence, I would say that Appadurai’s claim that because the world is in ‘flow’, the “glacial force of the habitus” (Appadurai, 1996:6) can become conscious, as he claimed, but only to a certain point and only for certain people, those who were lead there by their dispositions. Each person’s habitus is different and, hence, not everybody is capable of undergoing those processes.

In this chapter, I have shown how international PhD students are able to navigate the fields of their home country, Uppsala, and the field of science without having to prioritise one field over another extensively, at least not while they are in Uppsala. The modified habitus of the international PhD students combined with different forms of capital allows them to access fields based on different doxa similarly. Nevertheless, having a habitus that fits into multiple fields based on different doxa can be difficult when returning to the original fields (e.g. Zink, 2013). Yet, for the moment and while being in Uppsala, having revelations like Vihaan, Mei, Simona, or Julia can create light nights.
8 Final Conclusion

In this thesis, I have looked at the experiences that international PhD students can have during their education in Uppsala. While doing a PhD is, in itself, a challenge, there are other factors that influence the lives of international PhD students, which are based on the fact that they are in another country than the one where they grew up. Additionally, there are also differences in institutional cultures and education systems that can make the transition a challenge. Further, leaving family and friends behind can add to a very lonely experience in Uppsala. This is why international PhD students experience their education differently than their Swedish counterparts and are facing different problems in many ways. Nevertheless, although it might sometimes seem as if there are more challenges than benefits in doing a PhD abroad, there are, in fact, also many benefits; for example, the establishment of new friendships and new contacts that span all over the globe. Also, international PhD students bring in new ideas and perspectives, which is also a benefit for the people working with them. In many cases, doing a PhD abroad brings more opportunities than staying in one’s home country, although it might not look like it at first sight. Indeed, international PhD students are not in ‘deficit’, as the adjustment paradigm suggests, but rather already possess a lot of knowledge and experience.

The aim of this thesis was to understand how international PhD students experience and deal with the objective of doing a PhD, which, in itself, is a challenging experience, while at the same time being in a new country. While every international PhD student is different, they are all confronted with new fields in which they have to make sense of their own abilities and knowledge. The first research question asked: what happens to the habitus of international PhD students when they enter the new social fields in Uppsala? Based on the present study, I would say that they all have to modify their habitus in one way or the other, since they encounter fields based on different forms of doxa with different rules and principles. Some might even develop something Bourdieu has called a cleft habitus, a habitus that is objectively fitted for more than one environment and that can pick and choose the adequate practices required to enter and navigate the different fields. Even more important is that international PhD students modify their habitus toward an internationally recognised one as they encounter many different people from a lot of different nations. They become part of the international community of Uppsala and of the international field of science, which requires them to be able to communicate with different cultures, and not only with their host country culture or that of their home country. Relationships to other people in a similar
situation can ease this process and help international PhD students in their sense-making of the fields they encounter in Uppsala.

Yet, until their habitus has acquired the practices necessary for those new international fields, many international PhD students experience the hysteresis effect. During this time, things might seem very dark and difficult to understand. The darkness in Uppsala during the Swedish winter often adds to feelings of loneliness and isolation, in part because the darkness and the cold is something new for people from warmer parts of the world. Additionally, the separation from family and friends adds to those feelings, and even more as it is difficult to make friends with people in Sweden. With time, international PhD students develop strategies in overcoming the hysteresis effect. The second research question was: how and why do international PhD students experience and overcome the hysteresis effect? Most international PhD students overcame the hysteresis effect by either acquiring new forms of social capital, like making new friends, or by connecting to social networks they already had back home and bringing them virtually or physically to Sweden, and, of course, through the modification of their habitus. Overcoming the hysteresis effect can be an eye-opener and create a habitus that is partially conscious, aware of the need for different strategies and able to consciously use them.

This partially conscious habitus is, just as an internationally recognised habitus, not something that happens overnight, but is a gradual process stimulated by objective structures and other agents in the fields. It is influenced by the subjectivity of an agent, with the understanding that subjectivity is a “specifically cultural and historical consciousness” (Ortner, 2005:34). This consciousness fosters the agency of a person; and through this agency, a person can actively modify his or her habitus. However, this is only possible if the ‘space of possible’ has led to this; for example, through a rupture in the objectively fitted environments of a person that can occur when moving from one country to another. Through this, international PhD students can acquire a partially conscious habitus. Appadurai (1996:44) claimed that through the movement of people, the habitus has to become conscious, because people need to adapt faster to the changed environment. I would therefore say that this is true only to a limited extent and only within Bourdieu’s notion of the ‘space of possible’, sometimes enhanced by the hysteresis effect.

This process can further be stimulated through the accumulation of different forms of capital, which makes the navigation of the social fields in Uppsala easier and can grant
further access to the international field of science. The third research question asked: which forms of social, cultural and scientific capital do international PhD students acquire in order to navigate the new fields, and how do they acquire them? While scientific capital, as a form of symbolic capital, is mostly needed for the international field of science, cultural and social capital can be used in the other fields as well. Scientific capital is acquired through the connections to other members of the department, most importantly the supervisor, but also through the publication of articles, attendance at conferences, and ultimately the PhD degree. The institutionalised form of cultural capital, namely the PhD degree, is hence similar to scientific capital. Other forms of cultural capital, in the embodied state, include the acquisition of language skills such as Swedish or academic English, knowing how to organise fika, and knowing how to play a game or how to behave during the PhD Gasque.

Social capital is maybe the most important form of capital international that PhD students can accumulate. The supervisors of international PhD students hold a lot of scientific, cultural, and social capital. Through the connection to their supervisors, international PhD students can get access to this as well. Further, they have support mechanisms through different organisations like TNDR, SULF, or the scholarship programme, which can help them further and foster ‘spaces for dialogue’. Many international PhD students leave their social networks to pursue a PhD in Uppsala. Because of this, they often lack forms of support, especially mentally. To overcome those struggles, many international PhD students form new groups, communities with other people in a similar situation. Those groups can be fostered through various channels: through a mutual scholarship, through belonging to a department, etc. Those ‘communities of practice’ can help international PhD students deal with the new rules in Sweden and of the university. Within such a group, which is often a safe place to discuss things, international PhD students can negotiate and make sense of their new surroundings. International PhD students create their own spaces in which they organise themselves. Other people going through a similar situation can help in the process of acquiring a modified habitus, which can be a difficult process.

This brings me to the secondary research question: How do supervisors and international PhD students interact with each other despite that their habitus were usually formed in different fields of doxa? Most of the supervisors I talked to had been abroad themselves for some amount of time. Therefore, they could relate to some experiences of their international PhD students. Nevertheless, some forms of behaviour that international PhD students had was
difficult to understand. Especially the different ways to ask questions and how to deal with problems was seen as problematic by the supervisors. Therefore, they developed strategies on how to make sure their protégés would understand correctly. My research suggests that international PhD students and their supervisors tried from both sides to overcome the differences in their doxa and find a middle ground that worked for both sides. Yet, in some cases, an initial hysteresis effect could not be avoided. This friction between the different parties involved in international PhD education is possibly the most important, and also the most critical aspect for many.

Higher education and science is not a one-country thing. People move from one country to another, communicate via the internet in real time with people on other continents, and fly to conferences on the other side of the globe. Such an environment is different from many other workplaces, and doing a PhD abroad is nothing unusual. International PhD students in Uppsala enter an environment that is already prepared for them: there are fairs and workshops, housing organisations, and many more structures that are in place when they come to a new country. However, their experiences are not only subjected to such obvious infrastructures; it also depends on the people they work with and on their own habitus, a habitus that they must and will modify toward this international environment, in one way or the other, allowing them to become part of the international field of science, in Uppsala and elsewhere.

In this thesis, I have shown that the (Swedish) social fields in Uppsala are often an obstacle for many international PhD students. But, because there are obstacles, international PhD students can develop an international recognised habitus, which is, in some cases, even partially conscious. This new form of habitus allows international PhD students to access the social fields in Uppsala, but also the international field of science in different ways, eventually giving them the necessary power they need in the future. Through their experiences abroad, international PhD students are not only able to understand more about their host country, but also understand their own culture better. They become part of multiple social fields, and are often able to transfer knowledge from one to another, for the benefit of many. Often, it seems that the dark days dominate the experiences of international PhD students. However, it is important not to forget that the light of the light night shines even brighter after a dark winter. International PhD students in Uppsala navigate and deal with the new environments in Uppsala differently, and many of their experiences are somewhere between dark days and light nights.
Epilogue

Text: I want to graduate;  
Melody: I want it that way, Backstreet Boys

It is my fire, my one desire.  
Believe me when I say:  
I want to graduate.  
But we are two worlds apart, just six years from the start.  
It’s your fate:  
You’ll never graduate.

Tell me when…  
I’m begging my committee.  
Tell me when…  
Be in grad school till I’m fifty.  
Tell me when…  
You never wanna hear me say:  
I want to graduate

It will be so wrong, if this just goes on  
Please don’t come too late, cause I want to graduate.

Tell me when…  
All my friends are wearing polo  
Tell me when…

But I’m still dressing like a hobo.  
Tell me when…  
You never wanna hear me say:  
I want to graduate.  
Now I can see that you wanna depart  
But not if it’s up to me. Yeah.  
No matter your progress,  
I want you to know,  
There’s no way you’ll ever leave.

It is my fire, my one desire.  
PhD…PhD…PhD…PhD  
You never hear me!

I’m ready for my thesis.  
I could never do a defense.  
I never wanna hear you say:  
You’ll never graduate.  
Tell me when…  
This stipend ain’t a salary.  
Tell me when…  
I wanna get better pay.  
Tell me when…  
You never wanna hear me say:  
I want to graduate.  
Cause I want to graduate

All together and with fervour, although very loud and off key, the PhD students of all disciplines and origins sung the above song at the PhD Gasque. And even though, at certain parts, there was some stumbling followed by giggling, the faces in the big hall were beaming. In this moment, it did not matter what mother tongue a person had, if they were researching about lightning or children, or if they just ate meat or vegan: all that mattered was this song in this moment. All the awkwardness of the PhD Gasque had disappeared for a few minutes. This song sung during the occasion of the PhD Gasque was like a symbol for all the things I described in this thesis: it happened in the context of a Swedish Gasque, including all its rules; yet, those rules created spaces for dialogue. The song itself was about the struggles of being a PhD student, while, at the same time, it showed the connection to this work. All the participants were united by the task of doing a PhD. I had the feeling, when looking at the faces around me, that this song, in this precise moment, was what doing a PhD can mean, no matter the topic or the discipline or the country of origin: an often very confusing, but also very intense and rewarding, time in somebody’s life.
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