Learning to be a Guest in the Home of Another: Perceptions, Purpose and Positioning in Short Term Volunteerism

by
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Abstract

This study analyses the expectations and reflections of participants in the ‘Thailand Mission Awareness Tours’ program as they prepare for, take part in and return from their intercultural experience.

Sending organizations do not have the ability to influence how short term missions (STM) or volunteer tourists (VT) are received or viewed by long-term workers or nationals, but they are able to prepare them in how to better position themselves for the experience. Unfortunately volunteer travelers are often more focused on what they can accomplish at a location than on the relationships they could encounter, develop and build while being there.

They build houses rather than relationships (Reese, 2009, p. xviii) for the locals rather than with them (Armstrong, 2006; Schwartz, 2003). To work with someone there must be equality, togetherness, a two way relationship. Being Guest and Host, as part of the hospitality suggested by Derrida (2000), is a relationship that is reliant upon one and the Other. It requires a disposition which is significantly different.

Literature from within VT and STM, whilst philosophically different, is strikingly similar in content and emphasis. Most of this literature focuses on the positive profiling and experience of the travel participant and largely overlooks the experience of the host and host community. This focus has been criticised in the literature, but little has as yet been done to amend the situation (Gray & Campbell, 2007).

In this ethnographic study positionality, as experienced by participants in the Thailand Mission Awareness Tour (TMAT) program, is examined. The emphasis is on how they position themselves in relation to each other, their hosts and the host community.

Some findings were surprising and unexpected, particularly in relation to the participants’ responses to, and interaction with, expatriate hosts. Participants tended to compare themselves and their life situations with those of the expatriates, and often judged themselves quite harshly as a result.

The author concludes that pre-travel education for those going on a volunteer experience should situate them in a receptive frame in preparation for positioning themselves as Guest, thereby supporting mutuality, relationality and positive experience for all involved.
It is suggested that further research be undertaken into the efficacy of the type of education proposed in this thesis and how, or if, that education influences the positionality of participants. It is also suggested that research be undertaken into how this education and the resultant positionality is responded to by hosts and their communities.

There is much work that remains to be done in this space relating to improving intercultural communication. This thesis forms a small part of that work.
Declaration of Originality

This is to certify that:

(i) this thesis comprises only my original work;
(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all material used; and
(iii) the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, bibliographies and appendices.

Signature:

Tammy R Smith
Acknowledgements

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In addition, special thanks to my sons; Zack for his company at conferences and assistance with audio-visual equipment during interviews and focus groups, Jordan for helping Zack help me and Jazziah for providing comic relief.

Thanks also to my husband Graeme for introducing me to Thailand.

Trevor and Heather Smith, my parents-in-law, are the Leprosy Mission's longest serving international staff and I am in awe of their achievements and faithfulness.

[Their outstanding service has been recognised by the highest authority in Thailand—the King ... Trevor was ... awarded the prestigious "White Elephant" award from the King... In his speech to leprosy workers on 2nd June, 1997, His Majesty, King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand, concluded:

"Thus, I leave you with a dual mission and the understanding that your duty is not yet completed, and work must go on. If you are dedicated to your task, the people all over the country will be grateful to you and will appreciate your good action. Accordingly, may each of you be blessed with mental fortitude and good health, in order to be able to overcome any future obstacles or problems that may confront you. Thank you, once again for performing so well the duty that you have assigned to yourselves and may you succeed in all your duties. May you enjoy happiness, prosperity, good physical health and full mental strength" (Chand, 1997).

Lastly, and most importantly, I thank God for getting me through this process and showing me His purpose in it.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... i

Declaration of Originality ........................................................................................................... iii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................. iv

Table of Contents ..................................................................................................................... vi

List of Tables ........................................................................................................................... xi

List of Figures ............................................................................................................................... xi

List of Pictures ............................................................................................................................. xi

Chapter 1: Background ........................................................................................................... 1

1.1 Origin of the Thailand Mission Awareness Tour (TMAT) Program .................. 1

Chapter 2: Introduction .......................................................................................................... 4

2.1 Outline of Chapter ........................................................................................................... 4

2.2 The privilege of entering a home .................................................................................. 5

2.3 Position ............................................................................................................................. 6

2.4 Hofstede—The importance of dimensions, behaviours and difference ........ 8

2.4.1 Power Distance Index (PDI) ..................................................................................... 9

2.4.2 Individualism (IDV) [vs. Collectivism] ................................................................. 9

2.4.3 Masculinity (MAS) [vs. Femininity] ..................................................................... 9

2.4.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI) ................................................................. 9

2.4.5 Confucian Dynamism or Long Term Orientation (LTO) .................................. 9

2.5 Intercultural communication and sensitivity ................................................................. 11

2.6 Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) ................ 12

2.7 Derrida and Hospitality ................................................................................................... 16

2.8 Guest-Host relations ........................................................................................................ 19

2.8.1 What is a guest? ..................................................................................................... 21

2.8.2 Being a Guest – Outworking the position and the mindset underpinning it ........ 24

2.8.3 TMAT participants are guests in someone else’s space ...................................... 25

2.9 Summary ........................................................................................................................... 26

Chapter 3: Literature ............................................................................................................... 28

3.1 Outline of Chapter ........................................................................................................... 28

3.2 Voluntourism Origins ...................................................................................................... 28

3.3 Volunteer Tourism Literature ........................................................................................... 29

3.3.1 Who goes? ............................................................................................................. 29

3.3.2 Motivations for travel ............................................................................................ 30
3.4 Critique of Voluntourism .................................................................................. 32

3.4.1 Positive profiling of participants ............................................................... 32

3.4.2 Negative impacts ....................................................................................... 33

3.4.3 Dependency ............................................................................................... 34

3.5 Short Term Mission (STM) Origins ............................................................... 36

3.5.1 Who goes? ................................................................................................ 37

3.5.2 Motivations for travel .............................................................................. 38

3.5.3 Substance versus superficiality ................................................................... 38

3.6 Short Term Mission Literature .................................................................... 40

3.7 Critique of STM ............................................................................................ 41

3.7.1 Positive profiling of participants ............................................................... 41

3.7.2 Negative impacts ....................................................................................... 43

3.7.3 Change in focus ........................................................................................ 48

3.8 Same, same but different ............................................................................ 49

3.9 Mission, STM, VT and Preparation .............................................................. 51

3.10 Summary ....................................................................................................... 52

Chapter 4: Methodology ....................................................................................... 54

4.1 Outline of the chapter .................................................................................... 54

4.2 Approach ........................................................................................................ 54

4.3 Historical origins ........................................................................................... 56

4.4 What is Ethnography? ................................................................................... 59

4.4.1 Doing Ethnography ................................................................................... 62

4.4.2 Criticisms of methods ............................................................................. 63

4.4.3 Ethnography and colonialism .................................................................. 64

4.5 Insider- Outsider-In Between ....................................................................... 66

4.6 TMAT as a Research Field ............................................................................ 69

4.6.1 During what period of time was data gathering conducted? .................. 69

4.6.2 Time and timing ....................................................................................... 70

4.6.3 Participants ............................................................................................... 71

4.6.4 Preparation for Travel—การเตรียมการ ............................................... 75

4.7 Research Methods ......................................................................................... 79

4.7.1 Interviews ................................................................................................ 79

4.7.2 Focus group ............................................................................................. 83

4.7.3 Journals ................................................................................................... 85

4.7.4 Participant Observation ........................................................................... 87

4.7.5 Photography ............................................................................................. 89

4.8 Ethics ............................................................................................................. 90

4.9 Summary ....................................................................................................... 90
Chapter 5: Travelling in a context .................................................................91

5.1 Outline of the Chapter ...........................................................................91
5.2 The situation on previous TMAT trips ..................................................92
5.3 The significance of colour .....................................................................93
5.4 The situation as it changed ....................................................................94
5.5 Thai politics historically ........................................................................96
5.6 What led to the unrest? ..........................................................................99
5.7 The unrest continues .............................................................................100

5.7.1 How the politics impacted the project .............................................100
5.7.2 How the politics impacted the participants .....................................102
5.7.3 Those who elected not to travel .......................................................102
5.8 Summary ...............................................................................................103

Chapter 6: The Journey Begins—ทำวิจัย—ก้าวเท้าเข้าไป ................................104

6.1 Outline of the Chapter—ตัวอย่าง .........................................................104

6.1.1 The problem of presenting information- Mee Bun Hah Chao—ฉันมีปัญหาในการ ……………104

6.2 Pre-travel interviews—การ ทำkoln

6.2.1 Beginning the interviews—การตั้งค่า ........................................106
6.2.2 Participants and their reasons for going to Thailand—ผู้มีส่วนร่วม………………106
6.2.3 Louise—ลูอีซ ..........................................................107
6.2.4 Andrea—แอนเดรีย.................................108
6.2.5 Kym—คิม ........................................................................109
6.2.6 Sally—แซลลี่ .................................................................110
6.2.7 Hannah—ฮันน่า .........................................................110
6.2.8 Lisa—ลิซ่า ....................................................................111
6.2.9 Ellen—อีลิน ...............................................................111
6.2.10 Peta—ปีเตอร์ .............................................................112
6.2.11 Sue—ซู ..................................................................112
6.2.12 Wendy—เวนดี้ .......................................................113
6.2.13 Jo—โจ .....................................................................114
6.2.14 Before moving on—รออยู่ครู่หนึ่ง ........................................114

6.3 Anticipation and expectation — ความคาดหวัง ........................................115

6.3.1 Pre-travel reflections—“If this happened to me … but it happened to you” ………117

6.4 Similarity and Difference .....................................................................118

6.4.1 Sacrifice- Reflecting on others [not] like me—การบูชายันต์…………………118
6.4.2 Exploring Sacrifice—การบูชายันต์ ........................................119

6.5 Summary—ผลการวิจัย ........................................................................130
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand—ในประเทศไทย.............................................132
  7.1 Outline of the Chapter—เตรียมข้าม.................................................................132
  7.2 Chiang Mai arrivals—เดินทางในไทย..............................................................132
     7.2.1 Early arrivals...............................................................................................132
     7.2.2 Arrival of the main group...........................................................................133
  7.3 Liminality—ปรับเปลี่ยน.................................................................................137
  7.4 McKean Rehabilitation Center—formerly Chiang Mai Leper Asylum—
     โรงพยาบาลโรคพยาบาลโรค..........................................................141
  7.5 Complexity of the role of participants—ความต้องการ......................................148
  7.6 A young boy dies—มะเร็จ..............................................................................149
  7.7 Summary—ผลสรุป.........................................................................................152

Chapter 8: Engagement with Thailand—ความเข้าใจในประเทศไทย............................153
  8.1 Outline of the Chapter—เตรียมข้าม.................................................................153
  8.2 Politeness as a cultural behaviour—มารยาท......................................................154
  8.3 Safety and Security—ความปลอดภัย.................................................................156
  8.4 Servant leadership and trust.............................................................................159
  8.5 Journey from the outside in—เคลื่อนที่ข้างใน.............................................164
  8.6 Family—ครอบครัว.........................................................................................169
  8.7 Summary—ผลสรุป.........................................................................................172

Chapter 9: Participant reflections on their experience—การพิจารณา......................174
  9.1 Outline of the Chapter—เตรียมข้าม.................................................................174
  9.2 Upon Reflection.................................................................................................175
  9.3 Context and Comparison..................................................................................176
  9.4 Participant Reflections of ‘Positions’ in Thailand...............................................178
  9.5 Positions and Definitions..................................................................................187
  9.6 Circles of Position.............................................................................................193
  9.7 Summary—ผลสรุป.........................................................................................197

Chapter 10: In Conclusion- บริโภคสาร .................................................................199
  10.1 Reflections on the main themes discussed......................................................200
  10.2 Similarity and Difference.................................................................................201
  10.3 Liminality.........................................................................................................202
  10.4 Politeness: Not Compromise, but Hospitality- Washing Dishes.......................203
  10.5 McKean- Massage at Bua Dong Waterfall......................................................204
  10.6 Safety and Security -The Significance of Perception........................................205
  10.7 Positionality – Implications for Pre-Travel Education.......................................206
  10.8 Outline of the study..........................................................................................208
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sections</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.9 Areas for further research</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.10 In closing</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 11: References</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 2: Research Details and Plain Language Statement</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 3: Diary instructions</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 4: Post Trip Questions</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 5: TMAT meeting timetable</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Summary of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions for Thai and Australian societies ................................................................. 10
Table 2: TMAT Participants in the Tour ................................................................. 73
Table 3: TMAT Participants in the Study ................................................................. 74

List of Figures

Figure 1: Summary of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions for Thai and Australian societies ................................................................. 11
Figure 2: Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)......... 14
Figure 3: Beginnings of ethnography and fieldwork ........................................... 58
Figure 4: Views of the Other in ethnography ....................................................... 65
Figure 5: Interview Prompt Map ........................................................................ 82
Figure 6: The information above forms part of the pre-travel interview data from the study participants ......................................................... 107
Figure 7- Circles of position ............................................................................. 194
Figure 8: Alternate assemblage—circles of position ......................................... 196

List of Pictures

Picture 1- 'Yellow Shirt' Protesters (PAD) ............................................................. 93
Picture 2: 'Red Shirt' Protesters (UDD) ................................................................. 94
Picture 3- December 26th—Boxing Day arrivals – TMAT program begins .......... 134
Picture 4- Donated goods sorted for NGO pickup or delivery ............................... 134
Picture 5—First meal in Chiang Mai and diaries being explained ....................... 136
Picture 6- Chiang Mai’s night market street ......................................................... 141
Picture 7- McKean Rehabilitation Center ........................................................... 142
Picture 8: Old Huts still in use at McKean ............................................................. 144
Picture 9- TMAT working at McKean ................................................................. 145
Picture 10- Massage at Bua Dong Waterfall ....................................................... 146
Picture 11- Bua Dong waterfall ........................................................................ 154
Picture 12: Green Lodge guest house in Chiang Mai .......................................... 156
Picture 13: TMAT team shirt ........................................................................... 168
Picture 14: Relaxing at Bua Dong Waterfall picnic site .................................... 169
Picture 15: TMAT participants, NGO workers, missionaries and Thai Nationals ... 172
Chapter 1: Background

Since 1993 I have made the trip to Chiang Mai in Northern Thailand at least once a year. My husband, Graeme, was born in Australia and moved to Thailand with his parents at the age of nine months. He spent the next fourteen years growing up in Chiang Mai and becoming what is now known as a third culture kid (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001).

At that time, international schooling in Chiang Mai did not go beyond year eight, so at 14 years of age Graeme returned to Australia to complete his schooling—living with an uncle and aunt. He returned home to Chiang Mai each Christmas break. His younger brother and two sisters were born in Chiang Mai and consequently have Thai citizenship. His father, Trevor, is a doctor and medical director of McKean Rehabilitation Center (formerly McKean Leper Asylum) in Chiang Mai. Trevor has lived and worked at McKean for the past forty-two years. Graeme’s mother, Heather, initially trained as a teacher in Melbourne. Upon arrival in Chiang Mai she taught in the hospital school. This school was for the children of patients. Heather now works as Deputy Director of McKean Rehabilitation Center with particular responsibility for community based projects and programs for the disabled. Chiang Mai is Graeme’s home and has become a second home to my three sons and me. We spend at least two months each year in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

1.1 Origin of the Thailand Mission Awareness Tour (TMAT) Program

Christmas each year has been spent at the Smith family home in the McKean Rehabilitation Center grounds, where Graeme’s parents still live and work.

During Christmas visits to Chiang Mai, prior to the commencement of TMAT, Graeme and I were regularly being asked to assist Australian volunteer groups as they passed through the area. This assistance ranged from helping with general information about Chiang Mai to acting as tour guides whilst the group was in Chiang Mai.

Some of these groups arrived at McKean unannounced wanting to know if they could be of assistance in any way. Whilst assistance was always welcomed, the logistics surrounding the arrival of a foreign group needed to be addressed. Resources needed to be organized, available and supplied for most projects to be undertaken. Volunteers needed interpreters and other types of assistance, which could be problematic if required without prior notice.

When these groups arrived we would show them around the hospital grounds, the city and assist with advice on where to eat, places of interest to visit and so on. We would also suggest that once resources were available at McKean they may like to return and assist as they had initially offered to do. In this way, the members of the groups had seen something of Chiang
Mai, McKean and the people that they may otherwise have missed. They had also been given the opportunity to learn something of the culture of the people and the area.

Groups were often unprepared for what they would encounter and consequently succumbed to the effects of culture shock. Oberg introduced this term in 1954 loosely defining it as the feelings of disorientation, anxiety, even fear often experienced by an individual when confronted with a different or unfamiliar cultural environment (Zapf, 1991).

Visiting groups would have to deal with these effects which manifested in many ways; some being issues of home sickness, fear of the culture and the people, unrest and relationship issues within the groups. These problems tended to detract from the experience for those involved.

On several occasions the group leader had been unfamiliar with Thailand, Chiang Mai or in one instance unfamiliar with international travel generally.

Graeme and I were familiar with Thailand, the people, culture and language. Thailand Mission Awareness Tours (TMAT) began as a result of our experiences with the various groups we had met whilst in Chiang Mai. TMAT was begun as a volunteer program offering the opportunity to experience Thailand, engage with its people and learn about mission in a prepared and relatively controlled way in order to add to the experience and enjoyment of all those involved.

Preparation was seen as vital to the experience of the group firstly as a functional issue to educate participants on what they may encounter before they traveled. This would serve to lessen the shock of the unfamiliar once they arrived in Chiang Mai. This could be more effectively done in a familiar environment –Australia– where strange sights and sounds did not distract from the explanations and information being given. No amount of information can replace experience, but it can provide awareness.

Secondly, preparation was important from a personal viewpoint for each TMAT team member. If they were made aware of some of the sights, sounds and differences they may encounter the newness and strangeness could be exciting rather than daunting.

By providing information about the existence of, and measures to combat, reverse culture shock and the use of follow up debriefing (reunions) soon after return to Australia this form of shock could largely be reduced. Reverse culture shock can be experienced upon return to the country of origin (Australia) after having been exposed to new, different or challenging experiences. Feelings of frustration and isolation can be as confronting as in culture shock and far more difficult to come to terms with when experienced in response to a home culture.
Being unable to explain the feelings to friends and family members who did not share the experience often magnifies the frustration and difficulty for those returning home.

TMAT has been running since 1999. Initially it ran solely over the December-January period, as this is a longer school holiday period and is also Thailand’s cool season.

In 2005, numbers of those wanting to be involved increased beyond that which was manageable for December-January. A second trip was offered during the mid year timeslot. This was opened to year 10 students at a Victorian Christian School, rather than the general community and church based population. It is now also part of a school work-experience and mission program at the senior campus of this school.

In 2007 students from four different schools were involved in the mid-year tour. Multiple schools have continued to collaborate in taking part in the TMAT program since that time. The December-January TMAT program remains open to all ages from the general community, school and church based population.

This thesis is a study of participants in the December-January TMAT program. It is undertaken in the context of considering what kind of educational preparation, for the intercultural experience, is appropriate for such participants.

In this thesis I set out to study a group engaged in this volunteer program in Thailand with specific attention to ways in which they positioned themselves within a guest and host relationship. As part of the study I had access to the prior induction they did, I accompanied them on the trip and followed them up after their return to Australia.
Chapter 2: Introduction

2.1 Outline of Chapter

When this thesis began, although I was interested in the idea of being a guest in the home of another, I saw it as something that more generally set out to study what happened and what changes occurred within the course of the TMAT. In the process of doing the thesis I became much more specifically interested in the concept of guest as more than a set of practices that one performs. I became interested in it as a type of disposition through which one could learn to position oneself in relation to the Other. Consequently, in this chapter, I want to discuss this and some of the concepts that relate to it.

Studies of intercultural communication recognise that there are quite different levels of interactive sophistication seen among those participating in intercultural experiences. I have drawn upon Hofstede’s Cultural Dimensions and Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) to assist in illustrating this.

In terms of underpinning concepts there are several others that are particularly important to this thesis, namely servant leadership, sympathy and empathy. These are outlined fully in chapters six and eight where they are discussed in relation to particular fieldwork examples. My intent is to lead the reader along a continuum of broad cultural concepts which are important to appreciate before the introduction of more specific situational concepts i.e. servant leadership, sympathy and empathy. This continuum begins with difference as explained by Hofstede through his Cultural Dimensions. It then continues to outline a means of appreciating how these differences can be responded to and understood.

This is shown through Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Once these two concepts have been presented, the idea of taking up the position of Guest/Host, as presented in Derrida’s Absolute Hospitality, is explored and suggested as a mode of interaction with Others in a two-way relationship based on mutuality and reciprocity. Hofstede, Bennett and Derrida form the basis of a movement from a structural understanding that positions relationships in largely fixed and locked steps ways, towards a post-structural understanding that utilises those foundations to further conceptualise, build and put into practice interactive positioning.

This introductory chapter also outlines why I have worked with positioning in this process and, in particular, why I have chosen to work with Derrida’s notion of Guest as a specific type of position available to tour participants to take up while they are in Thailand. It is my
contention that TMAT might begin to assist tour participants to take up that position and stress the importance of knowing how to be a Guest.

In relation to the ethical and philosophical stance that I am interested in, I think that the Derridean concept of Absolute Hospitality (as it applies to both the guest and the host) is important to the discussion of volunteer tour participants entering an intercultural context. It is Absolute Hospitality that I wanted to explore in this thesis.

When living, moving and working interculturally short term mission (STM) teams and volunteer tourists leave the familiar milieu of their home culture, enter and take part, to varying degrees, in a new cultural environment and then return to their home culture to readjust to what was previously very familiar. Having watched this scenario repeat itself multiple times over more than ten years it had become apparent to me that the way in which these people approach and position themselves for their intercultural experience influenced the outcome for them, their fellow travelers and for the nationals and in-country workers with whom they interact.

Having seen this I sought to explore how participants in these short term intercultural experiences could best position themselves for the experience and how the experience could be positive and beneficial for all parties involved in the intercultural exchange.

The purpose of this study is to offer insights drawn from a specific case to inform the practice of short term volunteerism endeavours in intercultural interaction and engagement. There are a number of interwoven facets to this research story, all of which provide a particular perspective to assist in contextualising the story for the reader. The political history of Thailand and its influence on, and relationship to, what was happening over the course of the research period, and in the lives of participants, is important to the context of the story. This has been outlined in chapter five for this purpose. My own experiences are described on various occasions to compare or highlight aspects of the story. Through this combination of personal experience, political commentary, discussion of theoretical underpinnings and participant generated data, my purpose is to produce a coherent story that will, in turn, inform future education practice.

During the course of the study the experience and reflections of participants have been examined with reference to the underpinning concepts outlined in this chapter.

2.2 The privilege of entering a home
As an eighteen year old, (after the death of my mother) my brother aged ten, sister aged 14 and I were getting ready to move out of our family home. Two ladies from our church very
kindly offered to help us pack things up. One day while I was at college and my brother and sister were at school the ladies came to our home to continue packing some boxes. That night when we returned home they were waiting for us, both beaming and obviously pleased with the work they had been able to complete. My mother’s bedroom was empty. Even her bed had gone. Her clothes, her books, her smell were no more. My dolls and our toys were gone, donated to a local charity. Our childhood was gone. I asked about the fate of various knick-knacks and was told that ‘they were mostly junk’ and had been thrown out. As the ladies left I thanked them for their help and made sure I showed the appropriate level of gratitude for their day’s work, closed the door, turned to my brother and sister, hugged them and we cried. These ladies had been guests in our home, they had been welcome as had their offers of help, but they ‘knew better’ than us, we were ‘just kids’. Our home had become a shell of what it had been when we left it that morning. For that day our home was not our own, but the property of those who entered it to do with it what they willed. When it was returned to us we no longer recognised it and the things that had made it ‘our home’ had gone. The ladies were well intentioned seeking to lessen the pain of dealing with our mother’s belongings, but in doing so they removed the very things that linked us to her and were for us so special.

When we enter the home of another we do not know what makes that place ‘their home’, or what makes it special. Until we come to that knowledge, we cannot change a thing without their authority or request to do so. Until that place is our home we have no accurate insight that can stand as our reference point to work from in labeling it home. If one day that place becomes our home, the eyes will no longer be the only thing we see it with, unlike the first day we walked in. We will see it, with its cracks and imperfections, peeling paint and shoddy furniture and we will understand the memories that every crack and dent represents. The meaning assigned to every item, person and room will have changed from that first day when it was all foreign and not our own. I can describe a person across the street and tell you the clothes they are wearing, their height and approximate weight and other physical characteristics. The description is clinical, but if that person is my sister, the description changes. I need not even look at her to continue my description because I know her so well. But to you she means no more than any other person walking on the other side of the street, that is, until you catch sight of your own sister.

2.3 Position
This thesis examines the members of the TMAT, the way in which the TMAT induction education program positions participants and the way in which they position themselves in another culture. The TMAT induction education program stresses that relationships are
extremely important and the literature tells us that there have been shifts and changes in the focus of STM. When volunteer groups, such as TMAT, enter another culture they are entering the home of anOther. How and why they position themselves prior to, and, upon entry is of vital importance to me as a researcher and to the purpose of this study.

The way people think of themselves, see themselves, and express their role in a given context and the way they see this in others is referred to as positioning (Davies & Harré, 1990). This is of central importance to the discussion of how TMAT participants position or place themselves in relation to others during their travel experience.

Over the past several decades positioning and positioning theory have taken up much of the space once occupied by role in the development of a social psychology of selfhood. The main reason for this has been criticism of role as being a static, rigid and even traditional concept (Davies & Harré, 1990; Luberda, 2000). The idea of position is more fluid (Davies & Harré, 1990; Luberda, 2000). Positions may be taken up or abandoned with relative ease. Davies and Harré (1990) discuss positioning as

the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines. There can be interactive positioning in which one person positions another. And there can be reflexive positioning in which one person positions oneself (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48).

When a position has been taken up it can serve as a means of making sense of stories and storylines. According to Harre and van Langenhove:

[P]ositioning can be understood as the discursive construction of personal stories that [make] a person’s actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which members of the conversation have specific locations (Harré & Lagenhove, 2003, p. 16)

TMAT seeks to make sense of these stories as it aims to do things differently. This is expanded upon further in a discussion of the ethnographic story in Chapter Six. The importance of positioning oneself as a guest in an unfamiliar context is a central imperative to this thesis. This thesis examines the ways in which the members of the Thailand Mission Awareness Team (TMAT) exhibit and interpret their ability to position themselves in another cultural context and how, or if, they identify with a concept of guest in that context. I say ‘a’ concept of guest because the idea of guest can be interpreted differently according to the background, culture and experience of the one who interprets or enacts it.
Chapter 2: Introduction

It is also important to note here that participants in the TMAT program were not explicitly given education on positioning or the taking up of a particular position for their experience.

This study was undertaken with participants from varied backgrounds with differing degrees of exposure to intercultural communication and experience and differing levels of sophistication in their intercultural interactions. In this chapter I would firstly like to draw attention to cultural differences where confusion or conflict may occur, as identified by Hofstede. I would then like to highlight the way in which people have been observed to negotiate and respond to these differences by outlining Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). This model has been used by, and referred to in, studies of short term volunteer program participants. Further details regarding other studies are provided in Chapter Three.

2.4 Hofstede—The importance of dimensions, behaviours and difference

Geert Hofstede, Professor Emeritus in Organisational Anthropology and International Management devised a model offering an explanation for cultural differences. His model of cultural dimensions is based on five fundamental areas of human behaviour and outlines common issues in the cultural systems of more than 70 surveyed countries. It is provided in this thesis as a point of departure to the more complex concepts and ideas put forward by Bennett and Derrida.

By comparing how cultures value each of the five dimensions outlined in his model, predictions can be made as to where difficulties in intercultural relations may occur. Using these comparisons travelers can be better prepared for interaction with those from another culture. For functional and practical purposes within TMAT programs it is important that participants are made aware of cultural differences and the type of areas that may be affected by those differences.

Hofstede’s model is a simple and useful tool for comparison of cultural difference and preparation of travelers moving into another cultural context. This is not to say that the model is without its critics or flaws (McSweeney, 2002), but having considered criticisms of the model I concur with Jones (2007) that:

… a greater argument exists which supports Hofstede than exists which dispute his work. Although, not all of what Hofstede has said stands up to public enquiry, the majority of his findings, have weathered the storms of time, and will continue to guide multi-national practitioners into the ‘global’ future (Jones, 2007, p. 370)
Hofstede’s model does make generalisations by applying his research findings to whole countries, but it is understood that what is being suggested are tendencies in behaviour, not absolutes. Therefore, his model and ideas continue to be used by international organisations as a useful guide in approaching intercultural relations, including organisational culture, particularly in business and management.

Initially Hofstede identified the following four dimensions;

2.4.1 Power Distance Index (PDI)
Power Distance Index (PDI) concerns the level to which inequality is accepted by those in a given society. “Power distance is a measure of the interpersonal power or influence between B[oss] and S[ubordinate] as received by the less powerful of the two, S[ubordinate]” (Hofstede, 2003, p. 83). This influences the way those within a society relate to one another.

2.4.2 Individualism (IDV) [vs. Collectivism]
IDV focuses on the degree to which individual or collective achievements are reinforced by a society. A high IDV ranking indicates the privileging of individuality. A low IDV ranking indicates the privileging of collectivism by a society. This influences the way those within a society perceive the importance of the self or the collective group.

2.4.3 Masculinity (MAS) [vs. Femininity]
A high MAS ranking indicates a society’s preference for traditional markers of male achievement such as competition, assertiveness, control and power. Countries with high scores in this dimension include Japan (95) and Hungary (88). A low MAS ranking indicates a preference for cooperation and consensus. Scandinavian countries particularly Sweden (5) and Norway (8) scored very low on the MAS index.

2.4.4 Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)
UAI focuses on the degree to which a society is comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. Societies with a high UAI ranking hold to a rigid system of rules and codes of conduct.

After conducting further studies, developed with the aid of Chinese staff, Hofstede added a fifth dimension, Confucian Dynamism, which he described as the long-term orientation of a culture (LTO)

2.4.5 Confucian Dynamism or Long Term Orientation (LTO)
LTO focuses on the value a society places in the importance of the future. Persistence, flexibility, and thriftiness are emphasised in societies with high LTO. Examples of this include China (118), Japan (80) and South Korea (75).
Chapter 2: Introduction

Education towards awareness of how different cultures view these dimensions can assist initial intercultural communication and inform ongoing relationships. For example awareness of the PDI of a society can assist in avoiding what may be considered inappropriate behaviour in interactions with elders, superiors, parents or children.

Cultural practices differ across cultures. These are discussed later in the chapter as they associate with the laws of hospitality and in relation to how they are culturally assigned.

Awareness, acknowledgement and accommodation of the behaviours that may differ between cultures as a consequence of these laws is important. This is important in intercultural education, such as that undertaken by TMAT, for the position of guest to be taken up.

Based on Hofstede’s figures the following table and graph have been produced to indicate the cultural behaviour differences between Thailand and Australia.

Table 1: Summary of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions for Thai and Australian societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power Distance Index (PDI)</td>
<td>Medium – 64</td>
<td>Low—36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism (IDV)</td>
<td>Low – 20</td>
<td>High—90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity (MAS)</td>
<td>Low – 34</td>
<td>Medium—61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)</td>
<td>Medium – 64</td>
<td>Medium—51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Term Orientation (LTO) or Confucian dynamism</td>
<td>Medium – 56</td>
<td>Low – 31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When comparing the PDI ranking between Thailand (64) and Australia (36) considerable differences are apparent. This difference is even more the case with the IDV ranking, indicating considerable diversity of expectations in these dimensions. Prior to entering another culture, in this case Thailand, it is important that those traveling from outside be given education that promotes awareness of this and other differences as an initial step in intercultural communication. The diversity identified in PDI, IDV, MAS and LTO through this comparison of the cultures of Thailand and Australia highlights areas in which intercultural sensitivity and communication education would be advisable prior to moving from one culture to the other. This education could aid cultural transition, expectations, communication and relationships.

2.5 Intercultural communication and sensitivity

Current research studies and literature postulate a compelling case for the importance of the issue of intercultural sensitivity and high levels of intercultural communication skills for educational leaders, yet the literature reveals little in the way of a theoretical framework for understanding intercultural communication and sensitivity, and the few existing models lack conceptual specificity (Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova & DeJaeghere, 2003). The one exception is the work of Bennett (1993), who presented a complex model of intercultural development that has been used as a foundation for education and training activities designed to move beyond intercultural competency toward more sensitive stages of personal growth (Swartzentruber, 2008, p. 14).

The notion of good and positive intercultural interaction and communication is central to this study. Awareness of how communication and interaction is perceived by participants is pivotal to how they view their position in the travel experience and how and why they position themselves in particular ways.

In Bennett’s analysis he notes that one of the main difficulties in responding to culturally different behaviours and situations occurs due to the inevitability that people interpret them through their own ethnocentric lenses. He suggests that greater contextualization is necessary for more accurate interpretation of events to be possible.

Interculturalists generally consider that evaluations of culturally different behaviour are likely to be ethnocentric and that in any case they interfere with the communication necessary to become informed about the worldview context in which the behaviour must be interpreted. In the simplest terms, cultural relativity
is a commitment to understanding all events in cultural context, including how the event is likely to be evaluated in that context (Bennett, 1998a, p. 12).

This commitment to understanding events in context cannot be assumed for those about to enter an unfamiliar cultural context. However, carefully targeted educational programs can equip intercultural neophytes to position themselves for the experience.

Bennett produced the widely accepted, applied and referenced Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). He worked together with Hammer to develop the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) (1977, 1986, 1993, 2004) as a measurement for the DMIS. The DMIS has revolutionised the way intercultural communication is approached. It is simple yet opens up the approach to understanding of, and improvements in, not only communication and sensitivity but relationship building in a way that had not been described earlier. This model and developmental inventory have been particularly useful in “providing an objective assessment of new missionary candidates regarding their intercultural sensitivity” (Sheffield, 2007, p. 27).

In 1957 Sampson and Smith proposed measuring what they called world-mindedness (Sampson & Smith, 1957). However, until Hammer and Bennett’s DMIS nothing more had been done towards the development of a measure of intercultural sensitivity and a framework for the response to cultural difference (Blezien, 2004).

2.6 Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Bennett uses the terms ethnocentrism and ethnorelativism to denote two extremes of intercultural sensitivity. At the more closed and cautious end of intercultural encounter is ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the concept of seeing one’s own culture as the only relevant reality regardless of the existence of others. It may be that others are acknowledged as existing but their culture and worldview are not given the status of one’s own (Bennett, 1993; Choi, 2009; Swartzentruber, 2008).

Ethnorelativism is at the other extreme. As relativism can be viewed negatively given its association with tolerance, universality and the anything goes mentality, it is important to define what is meant by ethnorelativism. Perhaps ethnoadaptive, ethnonomadic or ethnochameleonism would have given a more positive perception of the concept. In this instance ethnorelativism means the ability to feel comfortable inside various cultural contexts to the extent where movement into and outside is effortless; as in the situation of a child born into a culture other than that of his parents. The child goes to school in one context in which he or she operates in a culturally appropriate way and then returns home and is able to adapt,
as necessary, to the cultural and familial expectation of home. The language, expectations and nuances may differ, but both are familiar and movement between the two requires little effort. People vary in their ability to move across contexts and the movement is not always seamless. Bennett points out that it is ‘not natural’, to do this as we all belong to particular cultural and societal groups, but as cross cultural interaction and globalization increases this movement will become more necessary. This is where the model can support an understanding of what is happening and how the movement can be assisted (Bennett, 1993; Swartzentruber, 2008). The more easily the movement occurs, the more ethnorelative the person has become. This does not mean that one must be a native or near native of a culture to be ethnorelative. Awareness of, and comfort with, difference may be apparent in a space that is not home. Every culture is not the same, there are very real differences and it is through our recognition of, rather than blind acceptance of, these differences that we can operate within and between cultures, finding culturally appropriate ways to be ourselves in another place (Bennett, 1993, 1998b; Bennett & Bennett, 2001; Choi, 2009 ; Hammer, Bennett & Wiseman, 2003). In terms of Hospitality, the further we move towards ethnorelativity the greater our ability to express the position of Guest becomes. A radically open engagement with difference helps to integrate intercultural sensitivity with Hospitality.

The DMIS breaks the movement from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism into six distinct experiential spaces. These spaces link with a Guest’s development and provide insight for those conducting induction and pre-travel education prior to travelling on volunteer tourism (VT) or STM experiences. This insight assists educators in enabling travelers to “transcend traditional ethnocentrism and to explore new relationships across cultural boundaries” (Bennett, 1993, p. 21). Below is a representation of Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. It illustrates this movement through ethnocentricism to ethnorelativism.
According to Bennett, the first three spaces; denial, defense/reversal and minimisation are ethnocentric in nature. The final three; acceptance, adaptation and integration, are considered ethnorelative. All of these spaces are looked at in relation to cultural difference. That is; denial of cultural difference, minimization of cultural difference, adaptation to cultural difference, and so on.

**Denial** – This is not denial of existence but denial of relevance. The mindset is that of, ‘if this does not impact my world then it is of no consequence to me. Reality is what surrounds me. Anything over there has limited relevance to, or influence on, my worldview and whilst I am not exposed to that over there my perceptions will not be challenged or even known’.

The second stage, **Defense**, acknowledges other cultures but rates one’s own as the only one of worth. This is the stage where we are superior and they are inferior. There is a high degree of cultural criticism as differences are seen as confronting and a source of suspicion. **Reversal** is a modification of defense in that the other culture is seen as the one of worth and the home culture is the subject of suspicion and criticism. Reversal can be the result of initial exposure to another culture (Wilkinson, 2007).
Minimization is a form of universalism in which differences are minimised and tolerated to the point of naivety. Similarities are expected at the expense of acknowledging difference (Bennett, 1993; Smith, 2008; Swartzentruber, 2008).

Acceptance is the first of the ethnorelative spaces and acknowledges the existence of any number of variant worldviews. Again the terminology can lead to confusion in that acceptance infers passivity and agreement. In Bennett’s model acceptance refers to the ability to operate within a cultural context without necessarily agreeing with everything that occurs in it. In our home culture there may be things, with which we disagree, but our preference to make this judgement does not stem from an ethnocentric base, rather it is an individual inclination. This is the case in acceptance. “People at Acceptance are curious about and respectful toward cultural difference” (Boyacigiller, Goodman & Phillips, 2003, p. 159).

Those in Adaptation exhibit a change in behaviour, becoming more culturally appropriate. It may include changes in body language and gesturing also. The individual’s worldview has been reconstructed to incorporate those of others. The effectiveness of intercultural communication is enhanced by people in this stage (Bennett, 1993; Choi, 2009; Smith, 2008; Swartzentruber, 2008).

Integration is the final space in which those who have grown up in a new culture often operate. Missionary kids and children of diplomats are two of the groups often referred to as third culture kids (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) and fit comfortably into the integration stage. They are exceedingly familiar with several cultures and can move between them with little effort. They function with equal effectiveness in a number of cultural contexts (Choi, 2009; Swartzentruber, 2008).

Research undertaken on intercultural sensitivity has led to a desire to assess and identify interculturally sensitive people (Hammer et al., 2003; Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi & Lassegard, 2002; Sheffield, 2007) in an effort to produce improved encounters not only in the mission and cultural fields but in the business world as well. The emphasis, time and money currently being put into the development of interculturally sensitive workers and businesses are an indicator of the vital nature of the endeavour and its far reaching applications. The DMIS and IDI have enabled this assessment and identification to become a simpler and more effective process (Paige et al., 2003).

Prior to this, various efforts had been made to create a system or tool to address and assess intercultural sensitivity. These included the Canadian Foreign Service Institute’s competencies to identify Interculturally Effective Persons (IEPs). The competencies
formulated a list of useful qualities but did not assist in the process of identification for the purposes of training or for future improvement (Sheffield, 2007).

Our community has become a global one and the field of intercultural communication has also become highly relevant to many disparate disciplines and proposes a global awareness of, and response to, cultural difference.

Knowledge of cultural difference, and of how people respond to this difference, is important in intercultural interaction. It is equally important to underpin this knowledge with an ethical and philosophical approach that allows these interactions to be enacted. Jacques Derrida, through his concept of Absolute Hospitality, provided a framework which I think can be extremely valuable when applied to these interactions.

2.7 Derrida and Hospitality

Philosopher Jacques Derrida reconceptualised hospitality through his application of the term globally, thereby moving away from the laws of hospitality (cultural rules and conditions) to the concept of Absolute Hospitality, as evidenced in what he termed the Law of Hospitality. This absolute or unconditional hospitality is a categorical imperative, a universal moral obligation of the order of that described in Kant’s fundamental principle of morality (Johnson, 2008). Whilst absolute hospitality, as explained here, appears a straightforward idea its complexity is contained in its enactment. It is not a safe or easy form of hospitality. It requires a kind of sacrifice and self-effacement on the part of the players if it is to be practiced. It is reminiscent of Abrahamic traditions of hospitality as practiced in the ancient Middle East in which the host accepts guests into his home, and provides hospitality to, whoever arrives without a thought to present safety or future reciprocity. Guests and hosts are equal players in this relationship of hospitality.

Throughout this chapter the terms guest and host are highlighted and defined. For practical purposes of identification and to avoid confusion, I would like to make a distinction here between the various forms of these terms as they are used within the text. They have been written with either a capital or lowercase first letter according to their intended meaning; i.e. Absolute Hospitality (as expressed in the Law of Hospitality) has been written as that which involves an uppercase Guest and Host. Those subject to the various cultural and social obligations and traditions (laws of hospitality) have been written as lowercase guest and host. The issue of making the distinction in their practical outworking in intercultural relationships is far less simple.
The discussion of hospitality is key to recognising the roles of those taking part in it, and as such it is appropriate to look at the context in which those contributing to the discussion approach it. I have paid particular attention to Derrida who wrote extensively on hospitality in the late 1990s and into the early 2000s.

Derrida’s background as a Jewish French Algerian was significant in the development of his ideas in relation to immigration, citizenship, language and hospitality. His family had been granted full French citizenship along with other indigenous Jews via the Crémieux Decree. He was Algerian by birth, French by decree, Jewish through tradition, yet he found himself as an outsider in a country he called home. This backdrop underpins his writings on, interest in, and even struggle with, notions of hospitality.

‘Absolute hospitality,’ as Jacques Derrida describes it, requires the commitment to unconditional accommodation of the ‘absolute, unknown, anonymous’ Other, it requires to accept the Other ‘at home’ (chez moi, chez nous), to donate, to ‘give him a place’ (donner lieu) without enquiring as to ‘identity, name, passport, capabilities or origins,’ (Friese, 2004, p. 72).

Derrida provided an insight into hospitality for the Host. This relationship, allows no expectation and requires no gratitude. It is a relationship that continues to give regardless of the nature of the reception (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000; Reynolds & Roffe, 2004). Derrida placed great responsibility on the Host and implies the extension of that to the Guest, by invoking wordplay with the use of the French word, hôte (meaning both guest and host simultaneously). He changed the understanding of guest from one who is invited and expected to one who requires no invitation to be given or accepted and no other condition associated with the position.

His hospitality, in not seeking to know a name, family affiliation or place of origin, is reminiscent of that practiced in ancient times and as such reflects his Jewish heritage;

   Upon their guests’ arrival, meritorious hosts fed strangers an initial meal and at times provided them with lodging without asking their guests questions about their identity or place of origin. In addition hosts would often provide them with water for cleaning their feet and with new clothes if they needed them. Then, after the guests had finished the meal, hosts finally were free to inquire about their guests’ identity, home region, and travels (Artebury, 2007, p. 21).

His notion of hospitality challenged the practice of obligations, rules, rights and duties associated with current cultural practice. He theorized about a Host who welcomes all (both
the one who is invited and the one who arrives, unknown, without name or patronage) without judgment or discrimination. This transcendent hospitality is the umbrella under which all other hospitalities shelter and without it there is no reference point for hospitality of any kind (Borradori, 2003).

Derrida was concerned with the outworking of hospitality and the role of the Host-Guest (hôte). His underlying assumption was that where there is a Host, the other is a Guest. This Host allows entry to all and exclusion of none. Derrida saw these positions as part of the categorical imperative found in the Law of Hospitality that “transgresses the laws” and conditions applied to hospitality by culture and tradition (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, pp. 75-77).

Derrida himself acknowledged the difficulty of holding fast to the Law. “An unconditional hospitality is, to be sure, practically impossible to live; one cannot in any case, and by definition organize it” (Borradori, 2003, p. 129). This is not to say that it is impossible to attain but that it cannot be organised or orchestrated. It must be allowed rather than contrived if it is to be. However, it is possible to develop a propensity for this gesture, this positioning. And this propensity can be enhanced through careful education.

The volunteer tourist or short term missioner who enters their guest experience with the idea of giving back out of duty, obligation or altruistic intent does not engage with the unconditional.

For if I practice hospitality ‘out of duty’ (and not only ‘in conformation with duty’), this hospitality of paying up is no longer an absolute hospitality, it is no longer graciously offered beyond debt and economy (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 83).

The idea that because we have so much we should give back, rather than we are therefore we respond renders unconditional hospitality impossible. In this instance our hospitality becomes conditional as it is determined by whether or not we have wealth to allow ease of giving. We then give out of our surplus as opposed to giving regardless of the cost to ourselves. We have made our wealth a condition of our hospitality.

The unconditional would dictate that we give because there is a need, not because we are in a comfortable position to do so or because we feel pity or any other emotion towards the recipient. This thesis looks at some of the reasons participants travel and why they chose to give their time and efforts. Did they give out of their surplus or because there was a need? Was their hospitality conditional or based in an ethic of unconditionality?
Because of political issues in Thailand immediately prior to departure, this choice between comfort and need, conditions and the conditionless, was faced by members of the TMAT team prior to travelling to Thailand. At that point they had to make a decision whether or not to continue as part of the team and make the trip to Thailand. This is contextualised further in Chapters Four and Five.

In hospitality our culture and socialization is so very deep within us that identifying it in order to see it and set it aside, in order to practice a form of Absolute Hospitality, can become near impossible. Therefore, it is important in intercultural terms to acknowledge our cultural biases, conditioning and consequent fallibility. Once we do this and recognise our cultural positioning, we can more easily see what cultural expectations we have in relation to hospitality and the position of guest.

Absolute Hospitality goes beyond the idea of the Golden Rule or Ethic of Reciprocity. It requires one to move outside their own experience and needs, and to attend to the needs of another. It does not do unto others as I would have them do unto me, but does unto others as they would have me do unto them. This is discussed further in Chapter Six.

Those who are in another cultural context as Guest/guest or Host/host belong to various cultures and have preferences as to how they interact with others. Our humanity enables fallibility, therefore flawless practice of the position of Guest and Host is exceedingly difficult, but nonetheless important to strive for. In later chapters I use the grammatically appropriate written forms of the terms when they occur in the text, rather than changing case. My purpose in this chapter is to distinguish terms. This is done to define and illustrate positions that it is hoped can become attainable in some form within intercultural experience and volunteer travel interactions.

2.8 Guest-Host relations

Derrida focused on the Host in the relationship marked by unconditional hospitality. He acknowledged the guest as Other to the Host and necessary for the Host’s existence. It could be argued that his inference in using hôte is that both parties to the relationship share the unconditionality. However, as Derrida’s hôte is most often translated into English as host and his discussion of expectations for the relationship remained primarily with the Host/host, obligations of the Guest/guest were left largely unexamined. I wish to ease the burden of responsibility, so to speak, and emphasise the position of Guest/guest in contrast to Derrida’s emphasis on Host/host. I place the Guest in a space where there is unconditional acceptance of the host as either host or Host and no expectation placed upon the host to engage in
cultural practices that are familiar to the one who is guest. This is in contrast to Derrida’s Host focus, but is doing a similar thing. Derrida expressed it in terms of the Host exhibiting unconditional acceptance and placing no expectation upon the guest’s obligation to participate in this hospitality on terms that are equally unconditional. In doing so, I privilege the Guest and apply the obligations of the Law of Hospitality to that position as well.

In such a scenario, the Guest accepts the host as he or she is without judgement or criticism. Likewise, in this reversed scenario the Guest may serve the host. The idea of serving is central to the life of many of those involved in the TMAT and takes on a particular connotation when used by, and in regard to, Christians. Serving in these instances means actively and willingly doing something to please God. For example, this could include willingly giving time and/or resources to aid others or to evangelise. Christian service is intended to emulate the life of Jesus Christ by attempting to live according to His example.

This is something which goes beyond understandings of The Golden Rule, discussed further in Chapter Six. It attends to the needs of the Other, not the needs of the self when projected on to the Other. It is a means of serving as Guest or Host/Guest and Host without placing conditions or constraints on the Other.

The late Mother Theresa was an example of one who served. She was both unconditional Guest and unconditional Host. She Hosted those of whom she had no expectation and continued doing so regardless of the situation, whilst being a Guest in India. She did unto others as they would have her do. She was both Guest and Host, perhaps a true hôte. Perhaps this interchangeability and undecidability of position is what Derrida intended the practice of absolute hospitality to be. It is also reflected in the lives of some of those with whom TMAT participants came into contact in Thailand. This is elaborated upon in Chapters Six and Seven.

In this chapter I have introduced the idea of taking up a position as a particular form of guest. This form of guest reflects the qualities of Derridean absolute hospitality. Yet for the practice of this position to be possible and effective it is important that those taking it up understand, or at least have an awareness of, the dimensions that affect their cultural and intercultural behaviour. The dimensions and behaviours have been identified, and a theoretical framework for understanding intercultural sensitivity was discussed earlier in this chapter. Both of these things are important to underpinning the uptake of the position of guest.

The guest as a concept exists in numerous forms throughout the world. Speaking from a culturally familiar standpoint would simplify definition of the concept. This would enable
specific expectations to identify boundaries and be applied. However, this would confine the discussion to a particular set of normative laws of hospitality and the Guest I am interested in crosses cultural boundaries and moves between cultures. This guest position can be consciously taken up by those on intercultural travel experiences. The position must be clearly understood for this to be possible.

2.8.1 What is a guest?
When asking participants to take up a position it is necessary, for those involved, to have a consistent and agreed concept of what that position is, and of what it is to be in that position. The guest, whilst a common idea is not universally defined and the practices of the position associated with it are diverse. Consequently, my understanding of what it is to be a guest in the Australian context differs markedly from that of someone who is, for example, living in Russia, Bolivia or Saudi Arabia. Similarly, there is no single form of hospitality or associated way of being a host and a guest in Australia. That is, there are multiple forms in any context. One can understand the term guest (expressed in a familiar language and according to a familiar culture) but the understanding differs according to the meaning constructed around the term. Meaning and how we come to assign it is at the heart of how and why we understand what and why things are.

The main point is that meaning does not inhere in things, in the world. It is constructed, produced. It is the result of a signifying practice—a practice that produces meaning that makes things mean (Hall, 1997, p. 24).

The guest exists as a common concept but its meaning and set of practices are largely assigned by cultural imperatives

…the question of meaning arises in relation to all the different moments or practices in our ‘cultural circuit’- in the construction of identity and the marking of difference…Meaning is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange (Hall, 1997, p. 4)

This unequal exchange is evident in the multitude of ways the guest and the role of guest is expressed, experienced and understood across the globe. We understand concepts through accepted meanings in language.

“Language is the conveyor of culture. Through culture, we add meaning to things based on symbols” (Herbert, 2009). Whilst these added meanings may be relatively consistent in a given family, social or cultural group they can differ greatly when used more widely. For any given concept, symbol, or idea there is diversity in interpretation, representation and meaning
often to the point where the same concept may be barely recognizable by someone who is outside the group identifying with it (Derrida, Allison & Garver, 1996; Derrida & Mensah, 1998; Hall, 1997).

The guest, as a concept, is no exception and takes on many forms. The term now applies to both human and Computer Science roles. A guest can be;

- A visitor to whom hospitality is extended
- A customer of a hotel or restaurant…
- A recipient of hospitality, specifically someone staying by invitation at the house of another; a patron or customer in a hotel etc; an invited visitor or performer… (en.wiktionary.org/wiki/guest accessed 10-3-10)
- The word, in its more ample signification in the Greek, denoted a stranger, but properly implies one who receives another, or is himself received at an entertainment. (www.prometheustrust.co.uk/Glossary/glossary.html accessed 10-3-10)

In Computer Science a guest includes;

- another way to represent the anonymous user (alt.pluralsight.com/wiki/default.aspx/Keith.Guidebook/WhatIsAGuestLogon.html last accessed 10-3-10)
- Node: (computer science) any computer that is hooked up to a computer network (wordnetmeb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn accessed 10-3-10)

This type of Computer Science guest (anonymous user) is yet to make a commitment to the host. This guest is testing what the host has to offer before moving further, assessing the usefulness of the host to its purposes, purely a receiver. Therefore the guest is different in different circumstances and as perceived by different groups of people or schools of thought (i.e. computer sciences). However, one common theme associated with the position of guest is transience. A guest is always:

One that is transient, especially a hotel guest or boarder who stays for only a brief time (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/transient, accessed 8-4-10)

It may be an uncommitted role, a transient, a receiver and have degrees of anonymity, particularly when considering a computer related guest-host relationship. The temporary nature of the guest is a consistent feature when speaking interculturally, interpersonally and
in relation to computer science. Being a guest, or the outworking of the role of guest, is not intended to last forever, but is part of a finite time frame, location, situation and purpose. The guest position is intended to have a beginning and an end.

A particularly insightful and valuable reflection on being an intercultural guest, although in a professional context, was given by Judy Oakden (2010). Her experience as a non Maori (Pākehā) evaluator on Maori projects in New Zealand gave her first hand insight into guesthood in Maori culture. This process, in Maori culture, is complex and formal (Harvey, 2003; Oakden, 2010). Oakden spoke of guesthood as a way for those Other than from the home culture, (in her case, Pākehā) to think of working in the home culture. …My understanding of guests generally is that they have good manners; they don’t barge in, take over, impose their views or flaunt their knowledge, they are respectful, and they contribute as appropriate. Guests differ from visitors who I see as being more passive, almost sight-seers… Translating this to a Māori focused evaluation space; guests are part of a wider Māori-lead team carrying out a range of roles in a manner that are appropriate as a guest. In being a guest you are serious about the responsibilities you take on when you are invited into the space. It’s about building good relationships, listening carefully, suspending your own world view and really trying to better understand what your hosts are telling or showing you – and offering your skills as appropriate. It’s also important there is genuine reciprocity in the relationship… Another way of thinking about guesthood is looking at what it is not. It’s certainly not being a gatecrasher! …the two prevailing attitudes that contribute to gatecrashing are; those non-Māori who come to ‘save Māori from themselves’, and/or those non-Māori who believe there are so few Māori working in the evaluation space that it is ‘their obligation to do the work for Māori even without Māori involvement or with very token Maori involvement’. We would contend that both attitudes do not genuinely meet the needs of Māori, and can lead to projects which are at best unsafe and at worst very damaging to communities (and also to the evaluators) (Oakden, 2010).

The concept of gatecrasher, introduced by Oakden, and the attitudes contributing to it, is something that can be evident in short term missioners, professionals and volunteer tourists alike. Although coming from a well-intentioned yearning “to give back and reach out to the less privileged” (Brown & Lehto, 2005, p. 488), this altruism can do more harm than good (Gonsalves, 2004; Oakden, 2010; Schwartz, 2003; Sichel, 2006; Slimbach, 2000), according to the way in which these people have positioned themselves.
The concern of TMAT is that participants do not perform as gatecrashers during their time in Thailand, although this is not overtly stated in their written material or pre-travel meetings. This study is concerned with the position participants choose to take up. As a researcher, I am concerned with the taking up of a particular position, and a particular type of that position, a guest or traveler. One who is hosted for at least two weeks and whose purpose is to contribute rather than holiday. In particular this applies to the traveler who is part of a short term mission or volunteer tourism experience.

The outworking of this will vary according to the context, organization, or tour with which they are associated. In the context of the TMAT participants, it will be through interaction with Thai nationals at non-government organisations (NGOs), local markets and events and the guest house in which they stay. The interaction is for a three week period with informal postal contact with Thai people prior to travel.

As has already been stated, the guest is culturally defined and therefore the outworking of the position is subject to the cultural rules with which that guest is familiar—the laws of hospitality (Rosello, 2001) as experienced by the one outworking the position. Introducing this to participants, and discussing it with them, is important as a means of enabling participants to express the position of guest in intercultural interactions.

2.8.2 Being a Guest – Outworking the position and the mindset underpinning it.

According to Kant “imperatives of etiquette apply to us simply because prevailing customs single us out as appropriate objects of appraisal by standards of politeness, whether we accept those standards or not” (Johnson, 2008). The importance of adhering to rules of being a guest, in any given space, is also culturally assigned. Hospitality or the perceived lack of it can likewise often be linked back to cultural origins and expectations of the guest-host roles it encompasses. Therefore a single definition of guest that can be universally accepted would be extremely difficult to put into practice across multiple cultures. Within these definitions and ideals, built through years of enculturation, socialisation and experience, there are attributes that lead to an understanding and outworking of the guest position causing it to metamorphose as it crosses personal and cultural markers. These markers may pertain to specific cultural practices, gender, religion, age or personal likes and dislikes. Awareness of this can assist one to identify these markers as, and when, they transpire in intercultural encounters.

Being a guest is a way of thinking that places the self in a receptive state ready to accept the rules of the house and abide by them for the duration of the guest-host relationship. Whether
or not the rules differ from those at home, for the guest, is immaterial. They are part of the host’s hospitality and are therefore observed. Being a guest is readiness to assist and support when and where needed in an unobtrusive way. For those who undertake to go into another cultural context for a short period and make themselves available as a volunteer, this involves actively standing back until the host, often someone for whom they are volunteering their labour, time or self, is ready to be engaged. Being a guest, in this context, is not a matter of imposing one’s views on how a task should be done, taking over the project or passing judgement (Oakden, 2010). It is a matter of standing back and surrendering control of the situation to the one who will remain in this situation long after the guest has returned home. It is remembering, in the outworking of mission or volunteer efforts, that the safety and control we experience and expect in our own home is no less valid for others out there. Not acknowledging that safety, control and, to a degree, that sense of ownership, serves to devalue the will and personage of the one to whom the mission or volunteer effort is directed. Being a guest in the home of another, whether invited or not, is a privilege. Displaying the associated attributes of a guest acknowledges awareness of that privilege.

The attitude that is evident through being a guest, is dependent on the will of the non-host, the one who arrives in the presence of the host (whether or not they have as yet become a guest). This being is a necessary precursor to any kind of guesthood or host-guest relationship to be successful in practice.

2.8.3 TMAT participants are guests in someone else’s space

This study focuses on the TMAT participants as guests in someone else’s space. As was previously stated in Chapter One participants in the end of year tour come from the general community, school and church based population. These people ranged in age from six to 60. Participants in the study range in age from 16-60. They are described further in Chapters Four and Six.

They are from what is frequently called the first world and they enter the third world also known as the majority world. This poses problems for positioning as will be discussed in greater depth in later chapters. One of my main concerns is that of condescending benevolence and the resultant creation of dependency, discussed further in the next chapter. “The challenge is to avoid the ‘great white outsider’ syndrome”(Schwartz, 2003, p. 28; 2007, p. 239).

This same challenge has been evident in an Australian context in the history of white Australia’s relationship with Aboriginal people. Writing on the Yolngu in Arnhem Land,
Richard Trudgen noted that with increased outsider intervention the Yolngu people lost more and more control over their own lives and became increasingly dependent on welfare for survival. Intervention, almost always driven by good intentions, had taken away their sense of purpose, roles and mastery leaving them with a sense of hopelessness (Trudgen, 2004).

Many who had been living healthy lives on their traditional homelands were now dwellers in one of the central communities, usually unemployed and in very poor health. Many of their children were suffering from malnutrition (Trudgen, 2004, pp. 6-7).

The issue of well-meaning benevolence consequently creating dependency and a loss of hope is a very complex and difficult problem. It can stem from a misunderstanding of hospitality and unequal perception of relationships. In relation to programs such as the TMAT tour, participants from the first world may hold perceptions of themselves that conflict with being a guest. Do they travel to teach or be taught, to serve or be served? There is a real possibility that they may be functioning from within a colonial binary that already positions them as saviours and teachers creating a hierarchical relationship thereby making the position of guest, or the practice of being a guest, impossible.

2.9 Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the importance of intercultural communication and sensitivity for those who enter into other cultural contexts, particularly for those undertaking mission activities that are marked by concern for the Other. I outlined some of the dangers of not attending to the lived experiences of those who mission participants seek to ‘help’ and proposed a reconsideration of what it means to be a Guest as a way of re-envisioning the relationship between TMAT participants and the people they encounter in Thailand. Following Derrida I argued that it is necessary to go beyond an understanding of guest as a set of cultural practices. Instead, it is necessary to begin to engage with the position of Guest as a categorical imperative that is founded in obligations devoid of notions of reciprocity or entitlement. In the context proposed in this chapter, the practice of absolute hospitality is enacted with the knowledge of the positions involved. It would involve the acknowledgment that cultural differences exist and further, it would involve the accommodation of those differences when in a new culture. Cultural groups are different from each other, yet in intercultural interactions those differences are often minimised and similarity is assumed (Bennett, 1998).
Derrida’s concept of Absolute Hospitality provides a framework for understanding a relationship, and the position of Guest, that could be utilized in the intercultural encounters that occur in short term mission and volunteer tourism that do not minimise those differences but rather actively seek to participate in them.
Chapter 3: Literature

3.1 Outline of Chapter

Travel experience literature has divided approaches to humanitarian aid and relief travel into two broad categories, both of which are relatively recent additions to the travel literature: (1) Short Term Mission (STM), associated with a European Protestant Christian tradition and largely initiated by churches and Christian organizations. They are undertaken for reasons ranging from the support of long-term missionaries to promotion of personal development, and (2) Volunteer Tourism (VT) also known as voluntourism, an emerging phenomenon concentrating on the humanitarian aspects of volunteer work and arising out of Ecotourism.

STM studies have largely involved American participants. The VT studies have been more varied. There is a lot of literature in these areas, but it is often on aspects of the traveler’s experience and on reflections of this. In this study I am not so much interested in the concepts of mission or of volunteering in their own right but more in relation to how participants position themselves when they enter into the culture of anOther. In my search of the literature I did not find a study of this type involving STM participants in Australia or using Australian participants. Neither did I find a study of this type in STM or VT in which the positioning of participants was the focus.

This chapter begins with the origins of Volunteer Tourism. This is explored with reference to those who take up this form of travel, their motivation and reasons for going. A critique of the literature, according to its outcomes, is then offered. STM is then explored along similar lines. A synopsis of the position of STM within mission is given with discussion of the literature. Conclusions are drawn with regard to how travelers, in both genres, are positioned within the literature.

This chapter concludes with exploration of key concepts from the field of intercultural communication and the importance of inclusion of these in induction education programs prior to travel. Organising bodies cannot influence the motivation or the experience, but can influence the education.

3.2 Voluntourism Origins

In 1958 the international development charity Volunteer Service Overseas was founded in London by Alec Dickson. Around the same time, 1961, the US Peace Corps was established in response to a challenge John F Kennedy put to students at the University of Michigan asking them to serve their country by promoting peace through living and working in developing countries. Service Learning through college work-study programs was also
established around this time and by the 1970s study abroad programs had gained momentum. The 1980s brought about the growth of ecotourism and in the 1990s volunteer vacations became more prevalent, having begun through Earthwatch in the early 1970s. Since the 1990s, the gap year has become a phenomenon worldwide, for school leavers, and volunteer tourism has formulated its own branch of research (McGehee & Clemmons, 2010, p. 10) and become known as voluntourism.

Preparation of those involved in voluntourism, in the form of orientation and training prior to travel is offered in some voluntourist experiences. This is often related to education about environmental concerns (Aabo, 2008) rather than concerns related to intercultural issues or interaction.

Interestingly voluntourism as a term was first used by the Nevada Board of Tourism (NBT) in 1998 (McGehee & Clemmons, 2010). It was not a term defining a mix of overseas travel and volunteer efforts but was used to describe local residents who volunteered in remote Nevada locations in support of rural tourism development (McGehee & Clemmons, 2010). The term has since been borrowed and rebranded, in a sense, to move from local roots to expatriate frontiers.

3.3 Volunteer Tourism Literature

3.3.1 Who goes?

Those travelers choosing a break that includes a volunteer experience have a different mindset in their travel purpose from those who choose to travel exclusively for a vacation (Cheung, Michel & Miller, 2010; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). Whether their emphasis is mainly volunteering or leisure, the fact that they are volunteering at all distinguishes them from the vacationing tourist. Benson (2010) distinguishes between travel that is mainly volunteering or mainly for leisure by referring to travelers as VOLUNtourist or volunTOURIST (Benson, 2010). A VOLUNtourist is one whose purpose or emphasis in travel is more heavily weighted towards volunteering and conversely a volunTOURIST is one whose purpose is more heavily weighted towards tourism. For the purposes of this chapter I will continue to use the term voluntourist to refer to those undertaking voluntourism experiences regardless of whether the volunteering or tourism portion of their travel is greater in proportion.

Voluntourists wish to give back for some reason, whether that be altruism, faith commitment, guilt, curiosity or something not even known to themselves (Cheung et al., 2010; Rogers, 2007). Their rationale, mindset and their purpose is what sets them apart from the holiday
maker (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Rattan, 2009; Rogers, 2007; Tomazos & Butler, 2008). Backgrounds and rationales differ but, the ethos behind the travel, the reason for going, can ultimately be the deciding factor in whether a person physically gets on the plane or reconsiders travelling at all (Brown & Morrison, 2003; Rattan, 2009; Tomazos & Butler, 2008). Those taking part in voluntourism have a large degree of choice as to where they go, how long they go for, what they do and how high the ratio of volunteering to vacationing is (Cheung et al., 2010).

3.3.2 Motivations for travel

Researchers are divided as to how to categorize voluntourists in relation to their motivations for travelling (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Brown & Morrison, 2003; Cheung et al., 2010; Mustonen, 2007), but most agree that altruistic and egocentric intents are at opposing ends of the motivation continuum. Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) refer to these extremes in terms of the organizations that facilitate voluntourist travel.

At one extreme are certain organizations which are altruistic in their orientation and have emerged in response to a direct need for assistance in a particular developing world context. At the other pole are organizations that “are simply travel agencies with a conscience…” (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 113; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004, p. 313)

As the majority of studies on voluntourism are qualitative there is a great deal of rich data dealing with why people go (or why people say they go). Hence perceived motivation is not difficult to determine. How and why they position themselves for the journey is less known or investigated. Researchers have found that motivations for taking part in these experiences have consistently included more than a propensity for altruism (Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Söderman & Snead, 2008). Popular culture tells us that voluntourism is ethical travel and travel with a conscience, however, motives including personal growth, adventure, travel and education have featured amongst an array of motivations outside altruism (Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Cheung et al., 2010; Coghan, 2008; Galley & Clifton, 2004; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Söderman & Snead, 2008; Wearing, 2001).

The theme of personal gratification or gain as motivation for involvement was shown by Sin (2009) in his recent study. He reviewed volunteer tourist experiences through interviews and participant observation regarding their experience of volunteering in South Africa. He critically evaluated motivations for participation and suggested that the main reason for involvement in volunteer efforts was personal gain. He also explored “the tensions and
paradoxes surrounding volunteer tourism” (Sin, 2009, p. 480) in the light of the reality that whilst critics in the public media have expressed concerns about the real value of volunteer tourism “academic work has not yet critiqued volunteer tourism in the same manner” (Sin, 2009, p. 480). Sin (2009) suggests further research be done in this area.

Scholars have researched the motivations of volunteer tourists (Broad & Jenkins, 2008; Galley & Clifton, 2004; Söderman & Snead, 2008). Their motivations have consistently been documented as other than a tendency for altruism. Motivations have been to gain something for the self.

This travelling to gain something for the self is difficult to reconcile with an understanding of what it means to be a guest or of the process of becoming a guest. It detracts from the practical outworking of a two-way host/guest relationship. The two-way relationship and the understanding of what that entails are more easily reconciled with those claiming altruistic intentions whereby they are travelling to give. The way travelers are positioned or motivated to position themselves prior to travelling can be a powerful enabling or disabling factor in the holistic outcome of travel for all of those involved in the experience.

Upon surveying former volunteer tourists as part of their study of volunteer tourists and their experiences in the activities of Habitat for Humanity in South Africa, Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) found that of 123 respondents, less than half listed helping, of some sort, as the reason for involvement in the project. When asked their reason for choosing South Africa as a volunteer destination 48 listed helping, of some sort, as their motivation. Adventure and visiting Africa were the two most frequently given reasons for choosing to volunteer in South Africa.

Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) noted that,

Without exception, all respondents in the survey indicated that they had enjoyed their volunteer work experience in South Africa. Indeed, the fact that volunteers offered so few negative comments of any kind underscores how personal needs were met by their South African experience (Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004, p. 317).

The personal needs of the voluntourist were met, which is an important objective for those marketing the voluntourist endeavour (Coghlan, 2008). Unfortunately in many of the studies in voluntourism, including Stoddart and Rogerson’s study (2004), there are no surveys or evaluations of how the host community’s needs were met or how they perceived the ‘help’ that was offered. This is reasonable given the emphasis of voluntourism on marketing and product provision. The market dollar coming from voluntourists allows them to stipulate the
experience, the location, the activity and the input they are prepared to have, and give (Cheung et al., 2010; Van Engen, 2000). Scheyvens and Storey (2002) comment, in relation to this stipulation, that tour costs cover

subsistence expenses with accommodation standards varying from basic to luxury depending on the particular tour they choose, plus a contribution to the conservation [or development] work of the organization involved (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003, p. 108)

This is influencing what has become a major industry regardless of the burden or impact it places on the host (Ellis, 2003; Raymond & Hall, 2008; Van Engen, 2000).

From a more holistic perspective, however, an analysis or interpretation of the success of a project itself cannot be made based on the limits of data presented (perceptions of voluntourists responding to their experiences in hindsight). Hence incomplete scrutiny of the success of projects remains. This remains a gap in the literature that is paralleled, in many ways, by the gap in STM literature.

3.4 Critique of Voluntourism

3.4.1 Positive profiling of participants

The bulk of existing literature regarding volunteer tourism conveys the positive profiling of participants and the positive effects they experience as a result of volunteering (Guttentag, 2009).

As part of the volunteer tourism experience, interactions occur and the self is enlarged or expanded, challenged renewed or reinforced (Wearing, 2001, p. 3).

Research design assists volunteer tourism progress in the tourism market by highlighting the positive aspects whilst not examining the more negative facets of the phenomenon. These negatives are often experienced by the host community rather than the voluntourists themselves and hence are of less interest or relevance to marketers.

There is another body of research and scholarly writing that has increasing evidence to suggest that the positive effect felt by participants in voluntourism is not always equally felt by hosts and host communities (Callanan, Thomas & Marina, 2005; Guttentag, 2009; Matthews, 2008; McGehee & Andereck, 2008). This is a small, but expanding, section of the volunteer tourism literature that questions the repeated positive message and speculates as to its value beyond that of a marketing tool (Guttentag, 2009).
This disparity between participants and hosts has been a source of contention between long-term missionaries, mission organisations and those sending out STM teams for a number of years. The disparity is becoming a source of equal concern for the volunteer tourism industry (Guttentag, 2009; Lepp, 2008a; McGehee & Andereck, 2008).

### 3.4.2 Negative impacts

Academic interest in researching the negative impact of volunteer tourism has been scant as recognized by Gray and Campbell (2008) who also note that the existing literature is “focused primarily on the identities, behaviours, values, motives and personal development of the volunteers” (Gray & Campbell, 2007, p. 464). They also point out that whilst this is interesting and “it is important to understand the volunteers, they represent only one half of the story” (Gray & Campbell, 2007, p. 464).

The lack of material outlining negative impacts of volunteer tourism is understandable given the rationale for undertaking this type of research to begin with;

> …the repeated focus on profiling volunteer tourists and their motivations frequently seems to derive from a marketing-type goal of better understanding volunteer tourists so that their desires can be better met (Guttentag, 2009, p. 537).

Volunteers are not only attracted by the marketing they see, they are produced by it. Many do not come with a position assigned but rather, they adopt an identity or position because they see it advertised in travel magazines and in promotional posters and brochures. The notion of assigning a position or taking up a position for a given role or experience is not formally addressed but is informally projected through marketing.

The existence of negative impact on hosts and their communities is not surprising when looked at in light of the factors that motivate people to take part in voluntourist experiences. The neglect of host communities in favour of profit for the volunteer tourist market (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Wearing, 2001) is a product of the prevalence of these personal development focused and inward looking motivational factors. If this is the case then the altruistic priority of serving the needy or helping the poor has been forgone before the voluntourist arrives on site. If voluntourists continue to take part in this travel for reasons of personal gain, it follows that the interests of the self rather than the Other will be given priority (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Wearing, 2001) and the negative impacts currently experienced by host communities and long-term workers will only continue. “Despite such criticism there has been little attempt to examine what can be done to ensure that volunteer tourism does benefit all those involved” (Raymond, 2008, p. 49).
3.4.3 Dependency

The negative impacts have given rise to the possibility of dependency creation in host communities.

Dependence is the unhealthy reliance on foreign resources for funding, decisions, ideas, and personnel. It is waiting for someone else to do for you what you could be doing for yourself (Reese, 2011).

Reese (2009) also states that dependency is something “which stifles local initiative” (Reese, 2009). Dependency has been promoted through a lack of community engagement in project planning, lack of distribution of finances and lack of selection of appropriate jobs for volunteers (Gray & Campbell, 2007; Lepp, 2008b; Wearing, 2001). These factors remove ownership, work and dignity from the local community.

McGehee and Andereck (2008) conducted a study to examine the volunteer tourism experience from the perspective of the voluntoured (those to whom the tours go, the hosts, locals, etc.). One issue highlighted was that of voluntourists promoting dependency as a result of their lack of knowledge of the local situation. They gave the example of a truckload of secondhand clothing being donated to a mission for direct distribution to the local people. When the mission staff explained that they did not support the handout of free items but would gladly put the items in their opportunity shop at a low cost where the people could buy them thereby preserving their dignity, the response from the volunteers was indignant. They said that they would set up a table and “personally hand the clothing to the needy folks” (McGehee & Andereck, 2008, p. 18).

The lack of understanding of the local situation or respect for the long-term workers is a concern. This is a thread that runs through many studies. This is not to say that the long-term workers are faultless, there are situations in which they too have difficulty (Sheffield, 2007), but that is not the focus of this study.

McGehee and Andereck (2008) relate the story of volunteer tourists attempting to overrule the no handouts policy of a long-term worker as they assert their own agenda. Guttentag (2009) refers to this blatant disregard for local authority also;

In other words, volunteer tourists wanted to perform work solely based on their own opinions of what was best for the host community, and dissenting opinions voiced by key members of the host community were deemed insignificant (Guttentag, 2009, p. 543).
In this instance the volunteers have taken up a position in the situation that places them at odds with the nationals.

Spurr (1993) uses the term surveillance to name how this positioning of volunteers leads to their overlooking a scene from a superior vantage point. This vantage point is a place of paternalism. It is how the culture, experience and situation looks in relation to the self, the home culture, but not on its own terms. This view is an important aspect for consideration when dealing with positioning and perception of, and by, those moving between cultures. What we see determines how we respond (Treisman, 2006).

The issue of ignorance and dependency creation is one that is related and repeated by a number of researchers (Armstrong, 2006; Lepp, 2008b; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Reese, 2005; Sachs, 2006). Schroeder et al (2009) were also concerned about dependency and looked into whether “student visits contribute to economies of dependency” (Schroeder, Wood, Galiardi & Koehn, 2009, p. 142) in an exploration of short term study abroad and its implications for impacting communities negatively. She also noted the limited data available regarding the impact groups have on host communities and advocated substantial planning, group facilitation and debriefing not only for group members but also for members of the host community if damage was to be avoided (Schroeder et al., 2009). The relationality of including all of those involved in the intercultural experience (Gray & Campbell, 2007; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Schroeder et al., 2009) is what researchers are moving towards.

So much of the literature has discussed the problems of ignorance, dependency and one-sidedness in the positioning of the volunteer, and, implicitly, provides some justification for the framework/perspective from which this thesis proceeds, the issue of mutuality of guest and host. Whilst positioning travelers as guests also focuses on the travel participants (one side of the story) it promotes relationality. There is no guest without a host and when both are present there is relationship in the hospitality. The guest is only one half and is incomplete without the host and vice versa. Neither can exist without the other and because of this each is equally vital to the relationship. The intercultural exchange becomes one of mutuality and negotiation, a relationship between two pivotal players – the guest and the host.

In the Voluntourism programs and literature the emphasis has been on self-fulfillment and self-gratification, at times with an altruistic overlay. The literature on Short Term Mission discusses a different form of program and motivation, one derived from Christianity and a faith in God. But here too the emphasis has shifted to what will be gained by the participant, and what will be brought to, or done to the host, rather than on some mutuality of relationship.
Chapter 3: Literature

The section to follow outlines Short Term Mission origins and examines literature as it pertains to this form of travel experience.

3.5 Short Term Mission (STM) Origins

The term mission comes from the Latin mitto meaning to send. In terms of Christian mission it is to send messengers out into the world with the good news that God has provided a way to reconcile it to Himself. From this standpoint mission is God’s domain and the church exists because of it, not the other way around (Koopman, 2008; Sanders, 2006). Mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church" (Moltmann, 1977, p. 100).

In order to understand this it is necessary to include the concept of the Missio Dei – the Mission of God. Missiologist David Bosch (1991) defines it as “God’s self-revelation as the One who loves the world, God’s involvement in and with the world, the nature and activity of God, which embraces both the church and the world, and in which the church is privileged to participate” (Bosch, 1991, p. 10).

STM is participation in the Missio Dei over a short period of time. Peterson (2003) defines STM as the “God-commanded, repetitive deployment of swift, temporary, non professional missionaries” (Park, 2007, p. 5). Therefore the STM can be seen as the regular deployment of lay [not missionary trained] Christians as a result of the belief that their actions are in response to Divine command.

The short-term mission movement itself was built upon a sense of urgency…George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization, was frustrated by the time it took to mobilize adults from the West to the mission field…it seemed the people with the most availability were college students on summer vacation. So he came up with a plan to forgo using traditional missionaries and instead mobilize college students to get at the job. In his mind this was a lot more effective than looking for someone who would have to be uprooted from a job and a house. The short-term mission movement has grown astronomically since then (Livermore, 2006, pp. 62-63).

Researchers have determined that the term of deployment for these STMs ranges between one week and two years (Blezien, 2004; Choi, 2009; Kehl, 2006; Linhart, 2005; Raines, 2008; Swartzentruber, 2008) with long-term being greater than four years. Although STM is considered a “subset of the larger missionary effort” (Friesen, 2005, p. 18) it is usually
undertaken by lay people rather than career missionaries. These people have limited training, in mission, theology and intercultural issues prior to embarking on the experience. They are sent from a variety of institutions, with differing ministry philosophies, styles and expectations of leadership. In this context and from a Christian perspective to be sent means to be affirmed, supported or commissioned into missionary service. This commissioning is done by a church or Christian organisation after the traveler makes the decision to take part in any form of mission.

During their STM experience they work in diverse locations and are involved in a variety of differing activities (Blezien, 2004; Raines, 2008). These activities have been the basis for division of STMs into four main categories. The four categories are:

- Evangelism (eg. church planting, spiritual warfare, and Bible translation),
- Witnessing (eg. social ministry, the arts, sports outreach),
- Discipling (eg. teaching, and learning), and
- Helps (eg. building, physical labour, professional support services, and hospitality) (Peterson et al., 2003).

The term short term mission therefore refers to a plethora of subtypes within this “subset of the larger missionary effort” (Friesen, 2005, p. 18).

The fundamental differences in participants, their backgrounds and the variance in the type of missions embarked upon all have implications for the way STM participants position themselves in relation to their experience, each other, their hosts and their host communities.

### 3.5.1 Who goes?

According to the literature those taking part in STM are largely from Christian organisations such as churches, schools, universities and youth ministries. They travel in response to claims that STM is Biblical, an adventure, life changing for the traveler and for those to whom they travel.

The claim that STM is Biblical is rooted in the belief that it allows the Great commission to be fulfilled (Peterson et al., 2003). The Great commission is Jesus Christ’s directive to His followers to “go and make disciples of all nations...” and is recorded in Matthew 28:16-20. STM is said to fulfill this directive by way of the participants going out to undertake a form of mission. Whether or not short term missions, in their current form, fulfill this commission is contentious (Armstrong, 2006; Livermore, 2006), but widely touted.
3.5.2 Motivations for travel

STM is also said to be, and promoted as, an adventure. It allows participants to experience another culture, country and environment. Sights, sounds and smells differ from the norm and challenges of adaptation are encountered. This claim of adventure is supported in terms of participant comments upon return (Cheung et al., 2010), but, according to a number of commentators, the inward looking base contradicts the outward looking service purpose of mission (Baar, 2003; Palmatier, 2002; Schwartz, 2003, 2004, 2009).

It is also claimed that the experience will change the participant’s life. This is a reasonable reflection of information collated from returning participants after the excitement of a STM trip and the resultant change in perspective or worldview (Fitzgerald, 2005; Tuttle, 1998). Unfortunately the literature reports that this change has not been shown to be of lasting effect unless repeated multiple times.

A year after participants returned home from their mission assignments, many of them had regressed in virtually all aspects of the positive changes they had made, in some cases to below their pre-trip level (Friesen, 2005, p. 227).

Likewise, it is claimed that STMs, like their long-term counterparts, will change the lives of those to whom they go. This is a logical conclusion given the stated purposes of many sending organisations and churches, but is unsupported in the literature except in a negative sense (Baar, 2003; Raines, 2008; Schwartz, 2003; Ver Beek, 2006).

3.5.3 Substance versus superficiality

Armstrong (2006) wrote about substance versus superficiality in what is offered to participants of STM by mission organisations and long-term missionaries. He concluded that there were two realities contributing to what was offered.

First, as Nicholas Shepherd asserts, superficiality is subconsciously what many short-termers actually want in the first place (Shepherd, 2004). Many of us deep down do not want our lives to drastically change as a result of a mission trip… The second reason we opt for superficial options over substance is because we know deep-down that, in many cases, these groups are not needed to do ministry effectively on the mission field (Armstrong, 2006, pp. 9-10).

Along with others Shepherd (2005) believes short termers want superficiality in a foreign land. It is less confronting and lasting than “true transformation in the nitty gritty details of our life [which] is...viewed as radical and even overly fanatical by...peers” (Armstrong, 2006,
Neither does the foreign experience require the commitment that involvement in local mission would (Armstrong, 2006).

The experience is usually positive, fun (Armstrong, 2006; Blezien, 2004; Chirino, 2001; Cook & Van Hoogen, 2007; Friesen, 2005) and a great addition to the curriculum vitae (Armstrong, 2006). This superficiality keeps the short termers safe and happy but is not necessarily assisting the hosts or the host communities. As a consequence of this the short termers then position themselves according to the role they have been given, one of superficiality and superfluity.

Organising bodies and long-termers know the limited value and effectiveness of STM in the mission field. Armstrong (2006) cites VerBeek’s (2006) “case study of house construction in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch” as evidence of this and the lack of lasting impact “either positive or negative” on the visited communities.

After years of research and dialogue with visiting and host participants, Ver Beek determined, “The North American work teams seemed to have little or no lasting impact on the communities—either positive or negative” (Ver Beek, 2006). This unsettling conclusion calls into question the millions of hours and dollars spent by short-termers, their churches, and mission agencies in order to assist a community in desperate need (Armstrong, 2006, p. 10).

Ver Beek (2008) also noted that the focus of STM studies, as with voluntourism, was predominantly on participants rather than hosts and/or host communities.

My review of STM research found another thirteen quantitative studies of STM which used some sort of independent measure to corroborate the changes in the participants’ lives. The review of these studies... demonstrates that eleven of the thirteen...found little or no significant positive impact from the STM trip in the lives of the participants. And despite the fact that the principal beneficiary of these trips is ostensibly to be the “recipients” of the STM, of the fourteen studies only mine looked at the impact of the trip on the recipient churches and communities. Given the millions of short term missionaries, and the billions being spent, these results are disconcerting (Ver Beek, 2008, p. 476).

The focus of these studies and the identified emphasis of the STMs is cause for concern and re-evaluation (Armstrong, 2006; Ver Beek, 2006, 2008).
If in the past the needs and desires of STM groups have come before the needs and desires of the national church, a re-evaluation needs to occur (Armstrong, 2006, p. 12).

The gap between perception and reality in relation to what participants think they do and what actually occurs is wide. They are catered to by those in the field often because of the financial support they promise (Van Engen, 2000). They often bring willing hands and hearts that could be put to better use with improved preparation, contact with the in-country workers and insight into the cultural, political and social situation prior to leaving home (Armstrong, 2006; Raines, 2008; Reese, 2005). Conversely, they can be demanding and a burden to long-termers. Raines (2008) tells the story of a missionary from Africa who had received a letter from a short term group regarding an upcoming trip, requesting a hotel with air conditioning, a swimming pool, color television, and ‘American’ food. Their bus should also be air conditioned. The ‘missionary team’ wanted to avoid manual labour, long worship services, and churches that did not have chairs for team members. The missionary exclaimed, ‘sometimes I wonder if I am a missionary or a tour guide’ (Raines, 2008, p. 25).

The way these short-term team members had positioned themselves in relation to their travel and their missionary host in Africa was not in the spirit of the participating in the relationship as guests. It was in line with being tourists or paying customers and consequently that is the position that had been taken up and fulfilled by the members of the teams. Interestingly, this is in contrast to the original attraction of STM, that being an intrepid experience that allows the traveler to identify with the ruggedness of the explorer and missionary pioneers rather than the perceived frivolity of the tourist.

3.6 Short Term Mission Literature

Short term mission literature sits within missiology research which has been the domain of missiologists and missionaries having come out of theological colleges and affiliated universities. Missiology is an established and highly academic field (Pachuau, 2000). STM, in its current form, is a relatively recent addition to this field, and in contrast to missiology academically, is in its infancy.

However, there is a diversity of literature relating to STM streaming from different fields and perspectives of STM and its engagement with, and effect on, missions. They range from academic writings to handbooks and guidebooks for use in preparation of STM teams. Three aspects of STM related literature were considered of particular relevance to this study.
3.7 Critique of STM

3.7.1 Positive profiling of participants

The first and most prolific is that which focuses on STM participants and the impact the experience has on them in relation to their personal faith journey and/or personal growth in areas such as intercultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, spiritual well-being, self-concept or perspectives and worldview (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen & Hubbard, 2006; Beers, 1999; Blezien, 2004; Chirino, 2001; Choi, 2009; Friesen, 2005; Hull, 2004; Kim, 2001; Manitsas, 2000; Swartzentruber, 2008). The bulk of existing STM literature written from within STM is based on the positive profiling of participants and of the positive effects they experience as a result of taking part in STM (Blezien, 2004; Chirino, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2005; Friesen, 2005).

This literature often takes the form of PhD, DMin and DEd dissertations particularly in the areas of theology, behavioural science and education. The studies report on STM participants from the participants’ perspective and reflects their experiences, their growth, often as ascribed through pre and post testing for comparative data analysis (Manitsas, 2000; Tuttle, 1998), and the impact these experiences have on participant perceptions of themselves or their worldview. The self-ascribed position and perspective of participants in relation to their experience becomes apparent in their responses to inquiry and reporting of activities. The response is overwhelmingly positive. In the main their message has been one of positive personal growth, positive change and inter-group or intercultural interactions, and of benefit for those taking part in the experience.

There is however a gap in the literature when it comes to reporting the experiences of hosts and host communities. Whether the experiences are equally positive for those hosting is not addressed adequately in this branch of the literature (Friesen, 2005; Raines, 2008). This has been noted and addressed in part by researchers such as Raines (2008), Baar (2003) and Choi (2009). “The most difficult voice to hear regarding STMs is that of receivers. Very few efforts have been made in this direction” (Raines, 2008, p. 31).

The concept of taking up a position within a relationship defined through notions of mutuality and hospitality where one is a guest and the other a host is not explored in this branch of the literature. The positionality of those Other to participants is also largely untapped in this literature.

The second source of literature, a far smaller but expanding one, deals with studies conducted on, or in some way including, the impact of STM on those at the site of mission, be they
long-term missionaries or nationals to whom the participants go. This area has been noted as neglected in the past (Baar, 2003; Choi, 2009; Friesen, 2005; Raines, 2008) but this is changing as researchers focus on the impact STM has on those in-country (Kim, 2001; Livermore, 2006; Zehner, 2006) or recommend that future researchers do so (Friesen, 2005; Raines, 2008). Previously this has been an area of criticism from long-term missionaries, NGOs or missiologists (Corwin, 2000; Schwartz, 2009; Winter, 1998).

Raines (2008) and Baar (2003) are two who did examine STM from the perspective of nationals and ‘receivers’ (those to whom the missions go, either long-term workers or nationals).

Baar (2003) compared the stated aims of five sending organizations (Youth for Christ, Pioneers, Child Evangelism Fellowship, The Navigators, and Taylor University's Lighthouse program) with perceptions long-term missionaries and nationals had of the short termers’ time in Ghana and Rwanda. Through information gathered in interviews with organization representatives and in-country workers and nationals she notes both positive and negative reflections regarding the experiences.

Positives for participants included an increased exposure of local ministries, encouragement of local workers through the example of sacrifice shown by the students (in giving up their leisure time to work) and the formation of some ongoing relationships between team members and nationals.

The program negatives included limited time to address needs due to the very nature of STMs being short, (Raines, 2008; Reese, 2009), various cultural issues and inappropriateness, inward looking relationships in preference to relating with nationals (relational disconnection) and insistence by some teams on using their own programs rather than working with existing programs and ministries.

Baar (2003) included comments from Ghanaian nationals to illustrate the impression left on them by visiting STM teams;

He [national] felt that when he was around them [short term missioners] … they were mostly interested in themselves and failed to speak with him or other Ghanaians. He felt like a nuisance or disturbance as he tried to speak with them and learn more about them. They offered short responses to his questions, making him feel that they were not interested in talking with him and as though he was wasting their time (Baar, 2003, p. 64).
Comments such as this convey how in-country workers and nationals can respond to an inward focusing group. Whether that focus is due to immaturity, shyness, cultural awkwardness or something else does not change the way it is received and therefore assisting participants to position themselves in a receptive frame from the outset is extremely important in avoiding this type of legacy. As previously stated, sending organizations do not have the ability to influence how short termers are received or viewed by long-termers or nationals, but they are able to prepare short termers in how to better position themselves for the experience. Appropriate cultural training (Baar, 2003; Raines, 2008) also enables avoidance of much of the cultural and communicational misunderstanding that could otherwise lead to situations similar to those referred to by Baar (2003).

Baar (2003) also wrote of a Ghanaian team host who no longer wished to assist in hosting teams and preferred to be uninvolved with future STMs. Baar uses the term host in relation to this woman. Where there is a host, there must also be a guest, and in this instance the hosting experience had been negative, such that she would not extend the same hospitality to future groups. Given the aims of the programs Baar (2003) was investigating, this refusal of future hospitality was an unintended outcome of the interaction. Upon reflection she recommended equipping students (short term missioners) as learners through a pre-travel training program. Although she did not carry it further, this equipping or positioning as learners places those going (short-term missioners) in a receptive frame in preparation for positioning themselves as guest, thus allowing a two way guest/host relationship to occur.

3.7.2 Negative impacts

Raines (2008) also discussed the responses of nationals and long-term workers in his ethnographic study of receivers of STM trips. Like Baar (2003) he found that issues of cultural misunderstanding, absence of meaningful engagement and preparation along with the desire to implement programs of their own making, rather than support those already in operation, were commonly expressed as negatives by the receivers he interviewed. One of the main points emphasised in his research was that of mutuality, the idea that team members and receivers have a contribution to make to the relationship. The contribution may be different in different cultures and contexts, but nevertheless the contribution was there. How it is perceived by those in-country and those sending may differ and require adjustment to enable more positive and productive relationships. However, when mutuality existed, relationships were more positive and the sense of obligation was lessened.
Mutuality may take many forms depending on the environment, context and resources available to those involved. Raines (2008) related the experience of the following successful example:

One African leader insisted on local believers supporting some of the in-country expenses of the team. ‘In terms of where they will stay, you know we will lodge them, feed them, and take them from place to place…So rather than they pay for housing, transportation, feeding, we provide that’ (Raines, 2008, p. 61).

An excerpt from one of Raines’ (2008) interviews described this mutuality “as a means of protecting against dependency” (Raines, 2008, p. 61) and acknowledged the value of both parties in the relationship. The possibility of dependency creation was greatly reduced, dignity was maintained and relationship was enhanced as each party (guest and host) provided service and hospitality to the other. Raines’ descriptions provided an image of the Derridean concepts of hospitality, written of in the previous chapter, to be enacted in the mission context. The Christian mission perspective is in harmony with that image.

The third branch of literature relating to STM, often coming from the missiology sector, discusses the value or lack of value, of STM in the mission context (May, 2000; Reichenbach, 1982; Schwartz, 1999, 2003, 2004; Terry, 2004; Winter, 1998). This literature changes lenses and comes from a perspective outside STM. It looks at whether STM as an entity is a useful or worthwhile endeavour and compares and contrasts the positives and negatives as seen, in the main, through the eyes of long-term missionaries, missiologists and nationals. Winter (1998) summarised the feelings of a number of his peers when he referred to short term mission as “amatueurism in missions” and “drive by missions” (Winter, 1998, p. 4). Corwin (2000) was more pragmatic believing that STMs were here to stay and that they should be worked with rather than complained about. However, he echoed Winters (1998) words and continued that

it [short term mission] is despised by many ‘lifers’, tolerated by many agency planners and recruiters, and loved by the people in the pews who actually do it. It has been around for decades, though the time frames have clearly been getting shorter. Where the definition used to be reserved for those going out for a year or two, it is more likely today to refer to someone going out for a week or two (Corwin, 2000, p. 422).
Corwin’s concern here was with the difficulties he attributed to the current form of short-
term missions/ers. These difficulties affect those hosting them, long-term missionaries and
nationals alike.

There is a further branch of literature coming from the STM practitioners themselves. It
provides insight into assumptions built into the STM programs and includes how to type
handbooks and advisory guides (Dearborn, 2003; Forward, 1998; Livermore, 2006; Stiles &
Stiles, 2000). It is something that can be looked at to begin testing the claims being made in
the previously mentioned categories of literature; rather than just another type of focus in the
literature. However, the academic rigour of the kind found in missiology is lacking (Raines,
2008). Much of the more academically focused literature dismisses this branch or affords it
only cursory mention. It is however an important part of STM preparatory material for those
contemplating travel and sits at the interface between theory and practice. Therefore it
provides an important window into how or if participants are positioned for their intercultural
experiences.

Raines (2008) stated that there was a lack of academic rigour in this branch of STM literature
and, quite rightly observed, that this literature is comprised largely of guidebooks and the
like. These guidebooks, however, are not intended for an academic audience. They are for
practical use with tour teams and church groups and therefore engage with this audience.
They are produced mainly by US authors for US short-term missions and thus come from a
US perspective. Short term mission trips continue to function as a means of providing cross
cultural interaction, humanitarian aid and spiritual enrichment. In the case of the US they
have become almost a rite of passage (Faulds, 2008; Ramachandra, 2010) for students and
youth groups.

These guidebooks are a means for leaders and teams to gain some insight into what awaits
them on mission and how best to prepare for their experience. They are perfectly placed to
make participants aware of the need to position themselves for their travel purpose. However,
there is a large variance in the standard and type of advice given and this contributes to, and
informs, the position participants ultimately take up.

Forward (1998) provides a practical guide on how to get from the US and back again without
misplacing passports or losing luggage. In this sense it is useful but fails to encompass the
cross-cultural issues that will be met on mission and the non-American environment that will
be encountered. He does write of cultural differences and a respect of culture and history, but
sadly this is contradicted and lost when he suggests using US citizenship as a power base
from which to work. Unfortunately this type of approach reinforces the ugly American
Chapter 3: Literature

stereotype and counteracts the building of good relationships. He proposes taking up a position of superiority and power, for example, in order to ensure clearance of customs with medical supplies. His stance in the following example contradicts the chapter devoted to cultural sensitivity. He states,

...my experience has been that when I took a polite but proactive stand, producing two or three documents, some of which have a very impressive gold seal “United States Senate” at the top, no bureaucrat I have ever encountered has refused to let us pass, nor confiscated anything nor charged any duty (Forward, 1998, p. 104).

This passage could be interpreted in several ways, the first of which is that Forward has failed to recognise that the “United States Senate” has no jurisdiction outside the US and presentation of documents from same for any reason, other than to clarify that the medical supplies have been donated, is either useless or provocative. The passage could also be interpreted that he recognizes that the presentation of documents is not legally authoritative, but is recommending using it because it is effective pragmatically. If this is the case then he in fact reinforces the colonialist authority. It could also be interpreted that it shows a lack of preparation on the part of a STM group not to be aware of what medical supplies are acceptable by law in the land to which they are travelling. At the end of Forward’s encounter with the customs officer the impression of STM, Americans and Christians in general may have been damaged.

From Chapter 2 entitled “Why run short term mission trips?” comes the following;

...go into all the world and tend the spiritual and physical needs of the impoverished and poor in spirit. A short term mission trip is a practical and quick way to do that (Forward, 1998, p. 31).

This seems to imply that STM is a way of quickly fulfilling what is seen as an obligation before returning to everyday western life. It does not promote a relationship of hospitality involving a guest and host, and illustrates US cultural priorities. The emphasis is on arriving, doing a job and going home in contrast to arriving, getting to know the hosts, building relationships and being informed of priorities and needs, working together with hosts to address their priorities and going home yet keeping in contact and/or returning at a later date.

The US, and a number of other western countries, prize doing as part of a set of cultural values. Many other countries, including the majority of those to which regular STM trips go, prize being as part of their cultural value set. In these countries who you are and how you are is of more value and importance than what you do. As Schwartz (2003) states in relation to
American worldview, ‘“Doing” (what we accomplish) is often in conflict with “being” (who we are)’ (Schwartz, 2003, p. 29). The way in which participants position themselves differs according to the doing or being emphasis of a mission or tour and any pre-travel education.

Dearborn (2003), in his book, took a different approach to preparing STM groups when he introduced concepts such as “God’s world and God’s mission”. These are addressed as the Missio Dei in missiology literature. He also included information on “learning to delight in differences”, which is a theme addressed in the intercultural communication literature.

Livermore (2006) provided the most effective offering to this form of literature and explained Hofstede’s cultural dimensions in a discussion of difference. Anecdotal tales are interspersed with useful and well-founded suggestions for carrying out a culturally intelligent STM. The demographic this book, and others of its genre, target is that of high school students, families and others from various non-academic walks of life. An academic work would not engage and achieve results in the same way that this type of book does. However, for the purpose of this literature chapter, the shortage of academically based or oriented work dealing with preparation for, and of, STM teams and leaders is noted.

There is another body of research and scholarly writing that highlights a growing body of evidence to suggest that the positive effect felt by participants in STM is not always equally felt by their hosts, whether they be long-term missionaries, NGOs or local people. There are a number of reports and papers that question the usefulness of STM to host communities at all (Armstrong, 2006; Bonk, 2008; Reese, 2005; Sachs, 2006).

As was stated earlier in relation to voluntourism, this disparity between participants and hosts has been a source of contention between long-term missionaries, mission organisations and those sending out STM teams for a number of years.

Livermore (2006) cites examples from his study data outlining responses from majority world (those areas to which most STM s go) church members to STM efforts;

- You too quickly get into the action without thinking through the implications on our churches long after you go home.
- You come here for two weeks. We’re here forever. We’re not as panicked about finishing all the projects as soon as you are.
- You assume we aren’t focused because we haven’t written up our mission, vision and values like you have. But we are very clear about what God is doing in our midst (Livermore, 2006, p. 63)
Over zealous evangelism coupled with ignorance of culture and language have produced negatives (Livermore, 2006). Better preparation including cross-cultural training is required (Armstrong, 2006; Baar, 2003; Burnett, 2002; Johnstone & Mandryk, 2001; Livermore, 2006; Reese, 2005). It is also unrealistic to expect that short term missioners can function in the same way as long-term missionaries given the constraints on STM in terms of time, lack of relationship with missionaries or nationals and cultural ineptitude (Baar, 2003; Johnstone, 1995; Schwartz, 2003, 2009).

3.7.3 Change in focus

A common criticism voiced in this literature is the apparent divergence from past mission paradigm (Friesen, 2005) by moving the focus from the one to whom the mission goes, to the one who is going, thereby becoming focused on the experience of the travelling individual (Armstrong, 2006; Corwin, 2000, 2004; Manitsas, 2000; Winter, 1998). Robert Bland, director of Teen Mission International typifies this change of focus as he blurs the boundaries between discipling (building kids or teaching and supporting them as they learn and grow both physically and in their Christian faith) and mission (supporting those people to whom the kids go). Consequently he verbalises the divergence from past mission purpose in this statement;

> We tell our people who are leading our teams that we’re building kids, not buildings. The purpose isn’t just what we’ll do for these people, but what these people will do for us… there is not a single purpose in missionary work, but to us this is the first purpose (Friesen, 2005, p. 21).

Here Bland has moved the focus of mission from the missioned to the missioners. For Bland mission must be more of a field trip in order to teach those undertaking the journey in contrast to the traditional journey of sacrifice for the benefit of those at the destination.

Missiologist Sherwood Lingenfelter views this first purpose as self-serving and an expression of the therapeutic culture inherent in some western countries (Allen, 2001). He believes it distracts the Church from its evangelistic purpose (Friesen, 2005).

This sector of the literature reflects a sense that, what has been termed, egocentric purpose is believed to be the driving force for many of those undertaking or promoting STM and by implication this is seen as the root of problems such as disregard for local input and culture (Livermore, 2006), and the creation of dependency (Armstrong, 2006; Reese, 2005; Sachs, 2006; Schwartz, 2003) that can occur. Consequently, this has dominated the conclusions and critique in much of this branch of literature (Armstrong, 2006; Bonk, 2008; Reese, 2005;
Chapter 3: Literature

Schwartz, 1999, 2003; Slimbach, 2000; Van Engen, 2000; Winter, 1998). This can be a cause for concern when, for example, this purpose becomes a form of “benevolent paternalism” (Slimbach, 2000).

There has been a realisation of the need to return to the tradition of mission and service rather than promoting an experience for the participant (Cocannouer, 1998; Ogden, 2007; Smith, 2008; Terry, 2004). This change is slowly being reflected in practice through the increase in programs, books and missions advocating greater preparation of potential STM participants and of the advocacy of a relationship of mutuality between short-term teams and their hosts (Burnett, 2002; Livermore, 2006; Morgan, 2005; Williams, 2005).

3.8 Same, same but different

The terms, guest and host, are not new and they are often used in the voluntourism literature (Uriely, Reichel & Ron, 2003) but they are used in a particular way. The very relationality of the terms is never engaged with in the literature. So interaction with the Other becomes a series of cultural practices rather than a categorical imperative as suggested in Derrida’s relationship of hospitality. Neither STM nor voluntourism literature talks about, or imparts an understanding of guest as cultural practice and/or Guest as negotiation to travel participants. Participants are not prepared in a way that positions them as the Guest thereby changing the response of the host, promoting the rise of dependency and the misconceptions of the Other.

The Guest is a philosophical position that has potential to translate into practice and engage each with the Other to form and build true relationship that transcends a physical journey.

In both STM and voluntourism participants become altered in some way, whether that is personal or spiritual. The change in the Other is seen as being in a material way, a building constructed or a field ploughed. However the actual impact goes beyond materiality to personal responses. There is a distance in purpose and outcome for the volunteer and the volunoured. The shift in emphasis to the importance of the participant/volunteer is where traditional lines have become blurred in terms of missionary and altruistic roots. The focus has moved from the Other to the Self.

STM and VT no longer prioritise opportunities to serve and support the Other, more highly than experiences to serve and support needs and development of the Self or the promotion of future ventures. The priorities have reversed to favour the Self over the Other. STM has become a form of short-term personal development.

Both STM and voluntourism see the benefit for the Other as being material and the benefit for the participants as being spiritual or personal. The hosts have something physically
constructed to remember the group by and the missioners and voluntourists have changed or grown in some deep and spiritual way. They have photographs as evidence of their hard work, and the contribution they have made to the community visited, to show once they return home. They return home and tell friends and family of their experience, whilst their hosts do the same.

Even with the limited literature available regarding host impact, the stories told by participants and hosts are very different and perhaps unrecognisable as accounts of the same place and moment in time (Guttentag, 2009; Livermore, 2006; Raines, 2008; Reese, 2005; Van Engen, 2000).

“Included in the need for better cross cultural communication is the fundamental principle of putting human relationships ahead of tasks” (Reese, 2009).

Unfortunately both short term missioners and voluntourists are often more focused on what they can accomplish at a location rather than on the relationships they could encounter, develop and build while being there. They build houses rather than relationships (Reese, 2009). They build for the locals rather than with them (Armstrong, 2006; Schwartz, 2003).

The position taken up is one of parent or teacher; a position of power and strength, yet protection above a seemingly less able Other. This type of positionality needs adjustment in both forms of experience (STM and VT) to acknowledge and work positively with difference. Whilst holding a position of power an imbalance exists in the relationship. When difference is used as a means of assigning position, relationships become unequal and strength emerges for one party over the other (Etherington, 2007). To work with others there must be a recognition of what each party has to offer the encounter. There needs to be a sense of equivalence in a two-way relationship. According to the literature, many current positions are based on binaries. They are based on particular forms of privilege and disadvantage in an unequal hierarchical relationship (Spurr, 1993). However, being guest and host is a relationship that is reliant upon one and the other. It requires a disposition which is significantly different from the colonial position of privilege and disadvantage that Westerners normally take up (Spurr, 1993).

Short-term missioners and voluntourists have a strong response to issues such as poverty, yet both have a distorted or incomplete understanding of the complexities surrounding poverty, its causes and ways to address it (Johnstone & Mandryk, 2001; Lepp, 2008b; Reese, 2005, 2009; Schwartz, 2003). The response is often a form of idealisation seen through western ethnocentric lenses (Spurr, 1993). The response is informed by inaccurate rationalisations of
what was initially perceived. What is perceived, surrounding poverty, when compared with what is actual is so different, foreign or even confronting that the response can become distorted.

These responses and perceptions can be assisted through education that attends to the differences found in intercultural interaction (Baar, 2003) and enactment of relationships of mutuality (Reese, 2009) through Absolute hospitality. This applies to mission, STM and VT.

**3.9 Mission, STM, VT and Preparation**

Mission, STM and VT appeal and apply to different groups of people. All reach out for an experience but readiness and permanency of that experience differ markedly between the groups. The selection of participants in any of these contingents therefore takes on a disparate nature. My focus in this chapter has been on STM and VT groups, but I am including long-term missioners at this point in response to Sheffield’s (2007) experience with a “whole group of missionary colleagues” and to acknowledge that motivation and intent are no substitute for preparatory education prior to entering the field. Those intending to embark on long-term mission have a greater urgency and expectation to be interculturally sensitive to be effective and welcome members of their new community. Interestingly, this is not always evident in practice;

I have come across numerous workers with years of experience who are sensitive with members of other cultures, understanding of cultural nuances, and respected by national friends and colleagues. I have likewise come across another whole group of missionary colleagues – with the same years of experience – who are insensitive to people in their culture of ministry, lack cultural knowledge and are barely tolerated by national friends and colleagues (Sheffield, 2007, p. 22).

Given Sheffield’s experience, the importance of education and training in intercultural communication that promotes sensitivity prior to entering an unfamiliar cultural context, is made clearer. The promotion of a relationship of mutuality has also been shown through the literature to be advantageous. Education in hospitality and mutuality is most likely to be received positively and accepted by STMs who are already further along Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity. According to Sheffield

We can normally assume that people who actually apply for cross-cultural ministry are past the Denial and Defence stages on the continuum. These would be persons considered not appropriate for cross-cultural ministry, at this time. (Sheffield, 2007)
Chapter 3: Literature

This assumption is unusual given that Sheffield’s encounters with long-term mission staff have indicated insensitivity in a “whole group of missionary colleagues” (Sheffield, 2007). STM and VT groups, unlike long-term missioners, are quite likely to contain a number of people who are not yet “past the Denial and Defense stages on the continuum”. This is due to the very nature of the groups and their short term volunteering rather than career orientation (Raines, 2008; Reese, 2009). Sending organisations could learn from the insights that Sheffield, and others bring. This suggests that in some cases intercultural sensitivity does not occur by exposure alone and adds strength to the argument that pre-travel education and preparation in this area are of great benefit and importance.

What does the image of a person shaking fruit off a fruit tree only to leave them on the ground to rot, remind you of? For many it represents the long-term effectiveness of many short-term mission projects (Cook & Van Hoogen, 2007, p. 48).

Short term projects provide a short burst of enthusiastic contact which may produce little if conducted in isolation with little or no continuity or follow up. Effective follow up and continuity of a program is vital for ongoing positive effects and to stop the “rot” (Cook & Van Hoogen, 2007, p. 48). The literature affirms Bennett’s DMIS model as providing a firm basis upon which to build positive and effective intercultural communication between travelers and those living and/or working in another cultural context.

Education programs that include intercultural communication in their preparation of VT and STM participants prior to travel offer their participants an added dimension to positioning themselves for the experience. Studies have suggested that it is important to use these concepts to aid, educate and inform the positioning of those intending to travel (Bennett & Bennett, 2001; Choi, 2009; Paige et al., 2003; Sheffield, 2007) on mission, STM and VT tours.

3.10 Summary

The discussion in this chapter highlighted the way in which much of the literature on short term mission (STM) and voluntourism (VT) has become strikingly similar in content and focus while remaining philosophically different. That is, the literature is largely grounded in assumptions about the importance of the travel participant and their experience and less concerned with the importance or experience of the missioned/voluntoured. This has been noted and criticised in the literature, but beyond that little has as yet occurred to address the situation (Gray & Campbell, 2007).
Both forms of literature engage with the positivity of participant profiling and note the lack of research conducted relating to the impact programs have on hosts and their communities. Both forms of literature agree that more needs to be done to enable mutual benefit for both travelers and the hosts and their communities. Pre-travel preparation has been highlighted as a means to improve the outcomes that currently occur in intercultural interactions through VT and STM programs.

Issues of dependency have been noted as negative outcomes in both VT and STM programs. Mutuality and relationship building as per Derridean Absolute hospitality is a perspective I think can be presented as a way of addressing problems that the literature has assessed as inadequacies in STM and VT programs.
Chapter 4: Methodology

“It all depends on how we look at things, and not on how things are in themselves. The least of things with a meaning is worth more in life than the greatest of things without it.” Carl Jung

4.1 Outline of the chapter
The discussion in the preceding chapter highlighted the way in which much of the literature on short term mission (STM) and voluntourism (VT) has become strikingly similar in content and focus while remaining philosophically different.

This chapter outlines ethnography as the methodology chosen and considered most appropriate to this study in which positioning of participants is the focus. It discusses the methodology, outlines what it is, where it originated and how it was utilized. The methods used within the study and the importance of considerations related to timing and researcher positioning are also outlined.

This chapter continues towards the purpose of this thesis which is to offer insights learned from a specific case to inform the practice of short term volunteerism in intercultural interaction and engagement. The chapter adds to literature informing the practice of short term volunteerism endeavours in their intercultural interaction and engagement. What is of pivotal importance to this thesis is the exploration of how participants in these short term intercultural experiences can best position themselves for the experience and how that experience can be positive and beneficial for guest and host in the intercultural exchange.

Examination of the experience and reflections of participants in this study is undertaken to better understand what/how positionings occurred within the TMAT group and how that can inform future theory and practice.

4.2 Approach
Whilst acknowledging that there are a range of methodological options that could have been used in this study, I chose an ethnographic approach, specifically micro-ethnography.

In this study ethnography was utilised as it enabled research findings to be expressed as stories. The journey and intercultural experience in this study was chronicled and reflected upon by, and with, participants and the research journey conveyed in the words of the participants through the researcher's interpretive gaze.

The ethnographic approach was flexible, allowing questions to metamorphose in line with changes in the project. This became even more important in this study when the political
circumstances in Thailand changed prior to TMAT participants leaving Australia. This change necessitated flexibility. The situation is outlined fully and put into context in Chapter Five.

The flexibility available through ethnography is vital when dealing with people rather than things. As ethnography deals with people in a social research sense ethnographers conduct research among others rather than on them in an environment of mutual learning (Wolcott, 2001). Whilst some ethnographies and ethnographers have been criticized in the past for doing the opposite, as discussed later in this chapter, contemporary approaches emphasize mutual learning and benefit. This was the approach I undertook. This mutuality was important in this research context, and reflective of it, as the literature reviewed for this study suggested that mutuality and collaboration between parties should be a marker of intercultural interactions (Bennett, 1998a; Raines, 2008; Schwartz, 2003, 2006). Ethnography enabled this.

It was a means of writing culture, of meeting with people in their experience and having the privilege of journeying alongside them. It incorporated the anthropological foundations and the intercultural perspective. Ethnography provided a unique proximity to participants for close observation, documentation and interpretation. It also provided a means to gain insight into the context of behaviour, communication and interactions in the lives of those I was studying.

I am interested in many of the aspects of interaction and behaviour that are core to anthropological study but also in how to enhance relationships and then to play a part in realising that enhancement. I am not content to study people, culture, behaviour or anything else simply to know more of it. I intend to use that knowledge to influence those people, cultures and behaviours in a way that improves and enhances relationships across cultural boundaries. It is a matter of intercultural communication, and further it is a particular school of thought in intercultural communication that engenders what I am working towards.

Bennett (1998) makes the distinction between the two main schools of thought in intercultural communication,

1. theory and research

2. theory into practice,

and places himself in the second explicating “the practical aspects of intercultural relations” using theory and knowledge for the purpose of “improving intercultural communication and skills through education and training” (Bennett, 1998a). This is the approach I have chosen to
follow in this study and this can be achieved through the utilization of contemporary ethnography.

Anthropology had traditionally been the home of ethnography and fieldwork, but in the practical outworking of ethnography in this study I have chosen to work from an interculturalist perspective.

Good practice in facilitating intercultural relations must be accompanied by conceptual sophistication, and...good intercultural theory is that which can be applied pragmatically (Bennett, 1998a).

I wanted to utilise a methodology that enabled storytelling and relationship building as part of the research process. As a study about the thoughts, feelings and responses of a group of people who travel from one culture to another, an ethnographic approach was highly appropriate. Qualitative questions regarding the positions participants took up throughout their intercultural experience were the focus of this study. Ethnography provided a range of methods that were flexible enough to be used in multiple locations, with a small group of people (TMAT participants) to investigate these questions.

Ethnography is very well suited to any study about culture due to its emphasis on culture and its roots within anthropology. Ethnography has evolved in practice and in its view of the Other since its introduction as an anthropological fieldwork tool by Malinowski in 1915. This evolution provided a sound basis for the incorporation of ethnography and ethnographic methods in the conduct of this study.

4.3 Historical origins

From its first inception, ethnographic tradition evoked images of the romantic and exotic, of far off lands, jungles, sun tans and sand. Early anthropologists wrote of the experiences of others, recreating their journeys in print, but seldom making the journeys themselves (Anderson, 1997; Kameniar, 2005).

Historically, ethnography was an anthropological pursuit that took place in wild and exotic locations in an attempt to uncover the secrets or meaning of various customs, rituals, practices and groups from the perspective of the ethnographer, onlooker, uninvited guest or presence. It was observation of, or reporting on, foreignness by ones who neither spoke the language nor understood the culture of their foreign subjects; as a lawyer commenting on a field of medicine or a salesman writing commentary on philosophy. The perspective from which the observer came held little or no insight into the life and/or living of the observed. It
was a documentation of events from personal, ‘objective’ observations. It was early pioneering and formational work.

In 1915 Bronislaw Malinowski founded the modern form of ‘fieldwork’.

Until that time, ethnology and anthropology were largely the preserve of somewhat eccentric, classically trained and library bound academics with a taste for exotic reading (Anderson, 1997).

Around this time changes were happening in Europe (largely Britain and France) and North America in regard to the way ethnography and fieldwork was conceived.
Figure 3: Beginnings of ethnography and fieldwork

Information for the construction of this flowchart was sourced from (Anderson, 1997; Suchman, 1994)

The language the Europeans used in their work was often impersonal and detached reflecting the objective, scientific bent of its practitioners. Their view of the ‘Other’, by today’s sensibilities ranged from arrogant to comical.
“I wondered how such turbulent human material could ever be induced to submit to scientific study…” (Firth, 1936)

A distance existed between ethnographer and Other, a line that was not crossed, an auto bestowal of superiority and inferiority, of lord and peasant, privilege and disadvantage (Spurr, 1993). Yet whilst the researcher expects that status to be observed as reciprocal acceptance of the roles, this was not necessarily evident in resultant writing and records of events, as shown in the following 1940 account by Evans-Pritchard.

On the following morning I set out for the neighbouring village of Pakur, where my carriers dropped tent and stores in the centre of a treeless plain…and refused to bear them to the shade about half a mile further. Next day was devoted to erecting my tent and trying to persuade the Nuer… to remove my abode to the vicinity of shade and water, which they refused to do (Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

4.4 What is Ethnography?

For Clifford and Marcus (1986) ethnography is “writing culture”. In this study the effect the participants’ own culture has on them and their positioning, when they encounter the unfamiliar in an unfamiliar environment, is explored.

Anderson (1997) expresses the distinctive difference in an ethnographer’s knowledge that comes from the integration of data and personal experience.

This, then, is a cardinal thing about ethnography. Its practice is a particular form of legitimation. Ethnographers ‘know’ in ways others don’t and can’t. And what they know derives in part from personal experience (Anderson, 1997).

I wanted to utilize this rounded mix of method and honest acknowledgement of the role researcher experience brings to, and plays, in a study. For me, this acknowledgement mimics the importance of positionality that underlies this whole study.

Personal experience comes from involvement in the research project often through living within the participant group and through participant observation. Integration within the field and this form of observation is synonymous with ethnography. Since the 1980s participant observation has been made highly problematic through questions about its reliability, validity and the difficulty of navigating the relationship between observing and participating (Dey, 2002). This meant that researchers were less likely to talk about participant observation fearing ridicule. However experience is still key to ethnography (Marcus, 2007).
Ethnography is a thought out and highly deliberate process and, as with any successful project, ethnography requires careful planning prior to launching into a project or study. Yet planning may be as much about problem setting as problem solving – looking for the right question to ask before investigating anything (Wolcott, 2001). This is not the same as aimlessly wondering or hoping to trip over a problem. As Wolcott so aptly phrases it, “Empty headedness is not the same as open-mindedness” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 30).

There are a range of approaches in ethnography. Some are highly structured where particular cultural practices and rituals are explored and the ethnographer may already have a set of ideas as to what these practices look like. Other ethnographies are very open ended where the ethnographer’s participation leads to discovery of new practices or knowledge of the Other. Wolcott (2001) argues that ethnography should be ‘open minded’ but also organised.

Ethnography is prosaic, descriptive and interpretive and as such is highly qualitative (Anderson, 1997; Sim, 1999) requiring thought and discernment rather than a simple recording of facts for later regurgitation.

For Tyler (1986) ethnography is about story telling, an attractive idea and productive process to be part of. It is about relationship and communication in preference to the solitary researcher standing outside whilst attempting to make sense of the Other inside. Tyler advocated what he called post-modern ethnography where he contends that relationship and collaboration come to the fore.

Because post-modern ethnography privileges “discourse” over “text,” it foregrounds dialogue as opposed to monologue, and emphasizes the cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation in contrast to the ideology of the transcendental observer. In fact, it rejects the ideology of “observer-observed,” there being nothing observed and no one who is observer. There is instead the mutual dialogical production of a discourse, of a story of sorts (Tyler, 1986, p. 126).

For Tyler (1986), the very nature of ethnography is the production of discourse in the spirit of mutuality. Fetterman (1998) also sees this as the ethnographer becomes the facilitator and teller of stories.

The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native’s point of view, the better the story and the better the science (Fetterman, 1998, p. 2).
Ethnography is collaboration. This is the crux. It is not about the ethnographer, not about the native, but about the lived experience. It is neither one nor the other, not solitary but relational. Ethnography was the appropriate choice for this study as it was chronicling the lived experience of participants from the TMAT program and telling the story of their experience using their words. As such,

The hermeneutic process is not restricted to the reader’s relationship to the text, but includes as well the interpretive practices of the parties to the originating dialogue (Tyler, 1986, p. 127).

Tyler (1986) further characterises post-modern ethnography as requiring relationship when he writes of its written form emerging out of partnership between the ethnographer and native.

The point is that questions of form are not prior, the form itself should emerge out of the joint work of ethnographer and his native partners. The emphasis is on the emergent character of textualization...In this respect, the model of post-modern ethnography is not the newspaper but that original ethnography – the Bible (Tyler, 1986, p. 127).

As with the Bible, this concept of the text “indexes a different ideological attitude toward the...other” (Tyler, 1986, p. 127). Likewise it suggests a change in positioning, a movement away from observer to become negotiated partner and collaborator in a joint ethnographic venture.

Ethnography has been defined by Hammersley and Atkinson as “a particular method or set of methods” (1995, p. 1) that involve the ethnographer participating in the lives of others, often for an extended period of time, whilst listening, questioning and observing in an attempt to discover something new or add to what is already known (Pink, 2007).

Such descriptions are limited on two counts. First, they restrict the range of things ethnographers may actually do. Secondly, the representation of ethnography as just another method or set of methods of data collection wrongly assumes that ethnography entails a simple process of going... somewhere, staying there for a while, collecting pieces of information and knowledge and then taking them home intact (Pink, 2007, p. 22).

Those describing and defining traditional research methods tend to represent ethnography as a mixture of participant observation and interviewing (Pink, 2007). Pink asserts that “Rather than a method for the collection of data, ethnography is a process of creating and representing knowledge…” (Pink, 2007, p. 22)
Pink (2007) suggests that ethnography is more than written notes, documents and texts. It also includes the less tangible elements of sensation, objects and images taken from “human experience and knowledge” (Pink, 2007, p. 22).

Finally, it should engage with issues of representation that question the right of the researcher to represent other people, recognize the impossibility of 'knowing other minds' (Fernandez 1995: 25) and acknowledge that the sense we make of informants' words and actions is 'an expression of our own consciousness' (Cohen and Rapport 1995, p 12 cited in (Pink, 2007, p. 22)

In this explanation Pink (2007) introduces the importance of representation and meaning and the problems associated with interpreting the words of others or “knowing others’ minds”.

Tools such as photography can assist ethnographers in introducing readers to the situation in which the ethnographer lived. These tools can be an effective information transfer media. This may assist in managing some of the difficulties arising from questions of representation. This is not to suggest that questions arising or problems faced are removed by these media. They may be lessened but in some instances the media may become the catalyst for further questioning.

4.4.1 Doing Ethnography

According to Hall (1997), we all bring our own perspectives to research and it is not possible to be truly objective. We vary our views according to our positioning and prior experiences, whether these experiences occur within a group, a specific situation or are related to our own ideals.

Ethnography is an interpretive endeavour undertaken…with multiple and varied commitments which can and do affect how the research is done and reported. We all have backgrounds, biographies, and identities, which affect what questions we ask, and what we learn in the field, how our informants let us into their lives, and how our own interpretive lenses work. (Hall, 2006)

As ethnographers study people who come and go in dynamic and unpredictable environments, ethnographic studies can never be controlled in the same way that laboratory studies might. Therefore repeatability, in the same fashion as in a laboratory, is not possible in ethnography. As Connolly notes

[People] are not inanimate objects that respond to a particular event in the same way time after time but are thinking, reflexive beings who can interpret events in
very different ways and respond to them in an equally diverse manner (Connolly, 1998, p. 130).

Ethnography does not deal in absolutes but recognises the influence of context, position and meaning, acknowledging that the experience, background and identity we bring to a study will effect interpretations of what has been learnt (Hall, 2006; Hall, 1997).

The background chapter of this thesis indicates my involvement in the formulation and ongoing program of TMAT. It was written to give context and show the perspective I bring to the study. This is particularly to provide readers with insight into how what was done was influenced by what I brought to it. It shows my positioning in relation to the study highlighting how my background and positioning have had an effect on what I see, hear, notice, understand and perceive of reality (Anderson, 1997).

Ethnographers are expected to be "reflexive" in their work, which means that we should provide our readers with a brief, clear picture of how the research we have done has been or could have been affected by what we bring to it (Hall, 2006).

Familiarity with the field, or lack of it, is also something that affects our position. One of the challenges of ethnography is that these studies often take place in a foreign or unfamiliar environment. In the case of TMAT, I was very familiar with TMAT and the city of Chiang Mai where much of the focus was. However, I am not a native of Thailand, but am native to the Tour groups. None of the environments in which I worked were foreign to me. They were, however, foreign to many of the participants. In discussing the different relationships ethnographers have with the field Hall notes

Not all fieldsites are "foreign" for ethnographers in the same way. Some ethnographers are native to the communities in which they study, whereas some enter as complete strangers with no obvious common ground. Even though they may learn somewhat different things, both kinds of researchers are legitimately able to undertake ethnographic research. (Hall, 2006)

4.4.2 Criticisms of methods

Once in the field ethnographers, whether foreign or not, have a choice of which methods they will utilise. Ethnographic methods, being highly qualitative differ from those used by quantitative (natural science) practitioners. Validity, reliability and generalisability are also difficult to attain in a way comparable to that of the natural sciences (Dey, 2002). Some ethnographers seek to address this by triangulating findings through the use of multiple sources (interviews, site documents, focus groups, participant observation, audio/visual
Chapter 4: Methodology

media, photography etc.) which work together to enable a clearer picture of events (Hall, 2006; Sanjek, 1990).

Typically, the ethnographer compares information sources to test the quality of the information…to understand more completely the part an actor plays in the social drama, and ultimately to put the whole situation into perspective (Fetterman, 1998, p. 93).

Putting “the whole situation into perspective” through the use of multiple sources is important to this research. Therefore the multiple viewpoints are welcome inclusions. This is often touted as one of the main strengths of fieldwork (Wolcott, 2001). Multiple sources allow viewing of data in the light of tool diversification. Wolcott (2001) suggests that it may become problematic if participants interpret this as checking up on them or, by inference, not trusting them. This is a reasonable concern if indeed the researcher interprets such a practice as a policing mechanism. However, I have approached the use of multiple methods not as a lie detection or triangulation device but as a means of identifying participant positioning and providing a richer, more credible data set.

I sought to ensure trustworthiness by working closely with participants and seeking their responses to interpretation and findings throughout the process. My field notebook remained available to participants at each stage of data collection. Data was checked and reviewed by participants and findings were clarified with participants before finalisation. My aim was to elicit stories about experiences not to find the truth. As already noted we all, researcher and participant alike, bring our own biases, perspectives, experiences and past to the field. In intercultural studies and studies of culture, diversity and the existence of multiple perceptions of the same reality are accepted as inevitable (Barna, 1998; Bennett, 1998b; Ramsey, 2007; Stewart, Danielian & Foster, 2007). Likewise in ethnography, by embracing diverse methods and looking at the same data from multiple vantage points, data becomes three dimensional.

4.4.3 Ethnography and colonialism

Ethnography has been criticised by a number of disciplines. Some critics (Barfield, 2001; Said, 1994; Spurr, 1993; Visweswaran, 1994) have expressed concern at the colonialist approach taken by authors when writing about their subjects. This is not the approach I have taken in this study. The approach I undertook was based on the view of the Other which has evolved since the inception of ethnography and has moved away from investigation of the Other as a scientific subject to the position where the Other can be viewed as co-writer of the text (Tyler, 1986).
Other criticisms of the methodology also originated in concerns arising from colonialist roots. Derrida decrying the ethnographic use of the text in his opposition to the “logocentric representation to ‘écriture’” (Clifford & Marcus, 1986, p. 117). Derrida (1998) further questions the critique of ethnocentrism he perceives in the ethnographic writing of Levi-Strauss. His point focuses on seeing

the other as a model of original and natural goodness, [and] of accusing and humiliating one-self, of exhibiting its being-unacceptable in an anti-ethnocentric mirror (Derrida, 1998).

This is a return of the Utopian view symbolic of 18th century anthropology’s noble savage and reflects reversal (part of the second space on Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)) which is, in itself, ethnocentric in nature and unfortunate when evident in anthropological writing. This is also indicative of the attitude of benevolence.

**Figure 4: Views of the Other in ethnography**

Information sourced from Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Marcus, 1998; Tyler, 1986.
that is problematic in VT and STM travel (Manitsas, 2000; McGehee & Andereck, 2008; Raines, 2008; Schwartz, 2003, 2006)

The issues of colonialism are being worked through as ethnographers seek to self-regulate in pursuit of high research standards that seek to respect and sometimes privilege the voices of those whose stories they endeavour to tell. One approach to this is a different form of ethnographic writing. Clifford (1986) suggests a form of ethnographic writing that takes into account and overcomes its colonial history. Thereby reclaiming

…the lost voices, the silences of the imperial record, of the struggles and resistances of subaltern groups…[and recognizing] the reclamation of such subalterity is to throw colonial hegemony into a different light. Colonialism can be refigured and replaced by an awareness and sensitivity to local cultures as sites of struggle within these systems. In a postcolonial view of anthropology, one can promote the ‘colonial others’ in a larger story of European domination. Ethnography and anthropology are also now moving towards a reassessment of the discipline by looking at the culture closer at hand now. Up until fairly recently the main distinction between sociology and anthropology was that the former dealt with ‘us' and the latter through ethnographies dealt with ‘them'(Litvack, 2006).

In this interculturalist form of post-colonial ethnography us includes them. This is the form I have chosen to utilize in this study.

4.5 Insider-Outsider-In Between

This study places me in an ambiguous role. I regarded and observed the TMAT program participants in a situation with which I was very familiar, yet I concurrently began a journey into the unfamiliar and evolving world of ethnography.

My place in this study is somewhere in between as well as being both inside and outside the research. This position is similar to that described by Trinh. One who moves between spaces inside and outside, equally comfortable in both places yet somewhat of a paradox of positioning by having no apparent home or definite identity; team member, yet researcher, both.

The moment the insider steps out from the inside she’s no longer a mere insider. She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Not quite the same, not quite the other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside
opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both not quite an insider and not quite an outsider. She is, in her words, this inappropriate other or same who moves about with always at least two gestures: that of affirming ‘I am like you’ while persisting in her difference and that of reminding ‘I am different’ while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at (Trinh, 1998).

Whilst trying to make the foreign accessible and familiar it is all too easy to slip into the colonialist idealization Spurr (1993) speaks of. Making something familiar is done quite simply and successfully by means of idealization. Unfortunately this idealisation produces oversimplification of concepts that do not require those hearing it to modify their worldview or challenge their current perceptions in order to process and give meaning to it. The simplification provides familiarity but does not necessarily provide equality of meaning in concept translation.

The ethnographer aims at a solution to the problem of foreignness, and like the translator... he must also communicate the very foreignness that interpretations deny, at least in their claim to universality. He must render the foreign familiar and preserve its foreignness at one and the same time. The translator accomplishes this through his style, the ethnographer through the coupling of a presentation that asserts the foreign and an interpretation that makes it all familiar (Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

This familiarity and foreignness and its translation also relates to the insider/outsider positioning I hold in this study. I am working with people who come from a similar cultural background to me yet am in a situation that for them is unfamiliar whilst being familiar to me. I am an insider of sorts in both places yet also an outsider in both. Both guest and host in two worlds.

As I was very familiar with the context the participants were entering and the experience and journey upon which they would embark, this study was to be ethnography of a different kind. It could be termed a reverse ethnography – not in terms of Fusco’s (1994) caged performance but in the sense that the Other is not being studied. Coco Fusco performed as a native in her reverse ethnography to highlight how white people behave at exhibits of native people in a place that is native to the whites. She, Fusco, was the object of the whites’ gaze whilst they were the subjects of her observation (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Taylor, 1998).

Unlike Fusco, this reversal is one in which the visitors, moving into an unfamiliar context, rather than the whites living in their own context, are being studied. The interest of this study
is the culture of specific travelers and how members of the TMAT group position themselves in relation to each other and in relation to the Other. I sought to study the visitors as they mingled with the natives, not to be a visitor investigating the natives. This was done from a perspective which was outside that of native and visitor, a third space. This space, the change, the research idea formulation and the conception of the project itself, what Marcus called the imaginary (Marcus, 1998) offered an exciting prospect and promised the discovery of new and different intercultural expressions and perspectives. I was to be insider, outsider and in between, part of the group yet not, part of the experience yet strangely orchestrating it through my requests for input, yet not, by accepting responses, or non-responses, in a myriad of forms. My vantage points were multiple. This was an exciting but extremely challenging prospect. Working as insider, outsider and in between posed unique challenges as Trinh (1998) outlined.

In the field the insider, outsider experience did not pose difficulties. Participants treated me as part of the team and viewed me in that way unless we were in a specific research context such as the focus group. At these times they took part and interacted with me and each other without concern or change in demeanour. I was insider, outsider and in between yet this did not perceptibly affect the way I was treated or interacted with. For participants, I was just Tammy who had various tasks to perform.

For the duration of this project I was the sole researcher, recruiting participants by asking for volunteers during TMAT meetings, explaining what was involved (including time commitment and methods that would be used), and gaining consent. Conducting interviews prior to and post travel, conducting a focus group whilst in Thailand, constructing and outlining the journal process and journals, debriefing and interviewing when back in Australia. Writing, organising, distributing and following up participants with review questions to consolidate ideas noted in earlier parts of the study. My involvement continued as transcription typist of interviews and journals in Microsoft Word for later inclusion in Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS, specifically NVivo8). This was utilised to more easily manage and navigate the large amount of data involved. Whilst I had initially hoped that CAQDAS would simplify the data management process this was not the case in practice. I encountered difficulties in using the software, particularly in Thailand. These problems had not occurred in Australia. This may have been due to lack of internet access at my field-sites but the reason could not definitively be established. The result, however, was that I could not use the program whilst in Thailand. I had planned to enter data from my notes each night, but inability to launch or open the program made this
impossible. Consequently, much of the analysis was completed manually. I listened to interviews and the focus group countless times to re-familiarise myself with their content and to revisit the context of each conversation prior to working with the transcripts. I read and re-read journals and began to look for themes within the text. I began the process of thematic analysis by identifying implicit and explicit ideas within the data (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2011) such as the various comments and writing around travel safety. From this I developed codes that represented each of these themes or ideas. Later I looked at where and when these coded ideas occurred, how frequently and whether they were evidenced in one, many or all participants’ data. I also noted any relationships that existed between the codes. An example of this is the relationship between safety related data and material regarding proximity to perceived dangers or to feeling secure in the group.

4.6 TMAT as a Research Field

Individual short term mission teams or voluntourism groups, like other interactional forums, are rich environments for research. They are unique, diverse, ever changing entities (Kameniar, 2005; Reynolds & Skilbeck, 1976) that can be understood as cultural fields in which diversity may flourish. No two groups are ever the same, nor are their circumstances or contexts. My experience as a tour group leader led me to believe that a complete picture of what happens within a group cannot be captured by a researcher. The logistics of time, space and geographic dispersal of group members on projects and activities alone preclude this. If all were in one place for the entirety of the trip the complexity of the group and its many relationships and dynamics still could not be captured even by a team of researchers. Marcus explicates this idea of capturing entirety as “the fiction of the whole” (Marcus, 1998, p. 45).

4.6.1 During what period of time was data gathering conducted?

Fieldwork was conducted over the period from August 2008 to May 2010. This included initial contact, provision of participant information and consent through to debriefing upon return to Australia.

Whilst in Thailand I lived in the guest house with the TMAT group as researcher and team member working with them on building and painting projects, visiting various NGOs and attending cultural events such as a khantoke dinner (traditional northern Thai dining experience) and visiting an elephant camp.
Chapter 4: Methodology

4.6.2 Time and timing

Ethnography is traditionally a lengthy endeavour with anthropologists spending years in the field (Hammersley, 2006) learning the language and customs of those they are studying and then returning home to report their experience.

The longer the individual stays in a community, building rapport, and the deeper the probe into individual lives, the greater the probability of his or her learning about the sacred subtle elements of the culture: how they feel about each other, and how they reinforce their own cultural practices to maintain the integrity of their system. Interestingly, living and working in another culture helps one to objectify the behaviours and beliefs not only of people in a foreign culture but also of individuals in one’s native culture (Fetterman, 1998).

Time has been a contested aspect of ethnography (Fetterman, 1998; Hammersley, 2006; Skeggs, 1999) with two years often being considered a minimum requirement for work to be called ethnographic.

Modern ethnography explores new field sites, many of which do not need language and culture orientation thereby reducing the need for extended stays in the environment (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004; Kameniar, 2005). My field sites were such places as my research was conducted in English, with native English speakers. The culture into which they traveled was foreign to them, but the culture was not under study. Their positioning and response to the experience were of primary concern and there was no need or facility for extended stay in order to gain that data.

Recruitment and interviews in Australia were undertaken in Melbourne. Fieldwork in Thailand was undertaken in Chiang Mai with audio/visual recording of the focus group occurring at Green Lodge guest house. Journals were written by participants mainly in their guest house rooms whilst in Chiang Mai.

Another aspect of timing that became very apparent in this study was that of history. As is explained in more detail in the next chapter, the in-country phase of this study took place in the aftermath of anti-government demonstrations in Bangkok. On Tuesday, November 25th 2008 the international airports in Bangkok were taken over by anti-government protesters (yellow shirted supporters of the People's Alliance for Democracy - PAD) hoping to unseat Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat’s government. They were successful when a decision of the Thai constitutional court removed the Wongsawat government from power. The protests and media coverage of it shown on Australian television were the impetus for one school to
withdraw their students and staff from the TMAT program and for one family from another
school to withdraw their daughter. This was understandable given the concern they had based
on what they had seen. Of 11 participants who were interviewed prior to travel eight made
the trip to Thailand as part of the TMAT program. The protests took place in Bangkok
between November 25th and December 3rd 2008 and had ceased. The study was undertaken in
Chiang Mai, 1000 kilometres away from Bangkok.

4.6.3 Participants
In accordance with the original research proposal, I invited participants in the program to take
part in the study during a general program information session. The project was outlined and
opportunity given for those who were interested in taking part in the study to ask questions at
that time or after the meeting. All were informed that those under 18 years of age would also
need to have consent given by a parent or guardian and all were informed that participation
was on a voluntary basis. This was reinforced by what was contained in the participant
information (Appendix 2).

The opportunity to take part was offered to everyone, but it was also stated that there was no
need to feel obliged to take part. Numbers in the study were to be a representative group of
those taking part not an exhaustive one.

As part of the study an outline of the expectations of participants were provided so that all
were aware of the commitment involved if they chose to take part. This information was also
included in written material (Appendix 2).

As my involvement with the groups had been one of leadership (as explained in the
background section), it was also important to assure group members that election to take part
or not, had no bearing whatsoever on their participation in the tour. I did not envisage any
issues of concern given the type of leadership (support and organisational) undertaken within
the group, but wanted to assure everyone of this in the event of any queries or concerns.

Once participants had made the decision to take part in the study the diversity contained
within the group became apparent. Three participants had traveled extensively in Australia
and overseas, five had limited travel experience. Some had interacted greatly with cultures
other than their own and some had not.

Ages ranged from 16 to over 60. Male and female were represented among students, teachers,
trades people, and professionals, as were a vast array of ideas, experiences and backgrounds.
I anticipated a great variety of responses and perspectives from the eight participants.
Chapter 4: Methodology

My interaction with the participants during the pre, peri and post travel period was informal. My focus was on building relationship with participants and this was in keeping with the purpose of the TMAT group and the research. Participants were interested in what was being researched and would ask questions about how I became interested in the area, why I was putting myself through more study and what I hoped to achieve. On the whole, participants seemed to find my interest in their experience amusing, commenting that they could not understand why someone would choose to do more study voluntarily.

In terms of being able to gain an insight into ideas, perceptions and experiences of participants I considered it necessary to use the participants’ own words, their voices and to work in partnership with them (Wolcott, 2001). I did not want to take control or lead them to a predetermined destination, but did want to open the way for them to show me what they were experiencing within a particular frame of reference and set of circumstances.

The total number of those initially planning to travel as part of the TMAT group was 42. Those actually making the trip numbered 32. Those who did participate came from a variety of backgrounds.
Table 2: TMAT Participants in the Tour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>TMAT participants in tour (n=42)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradesperson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel and short term mission experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never traveled O/S</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous O/S travel</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never part of STM</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous STM travel</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel for 2008-09 TMAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveled to Thailand as part of this tour</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t travel to Thailand as part of this tour</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was also a mix of experiences among those on the TMAT who volunteered to take part in this study, as shown on the table below.
### Table 3: TMAT Participants in the Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>TMAT participants in study (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradesperson</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel and short term mission experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never traveled O/S</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous O/S travel</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never part of STM</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous STM travel</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Travel for 2008-09 TMAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traveled to Thailand as part of this tour</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn’t travel to Thailand as part of this tour</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for not travelling was concern about political unrest in Bangkok prior to travel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 11 people who were initially part of the study and were interviewed prior to travel, eight made the trip to Thailand. The interviews of those who did not travel were retained as part of the data and drawn upon when analysing findings. These interviews were all completed prior to my leaving Australia, before the unrest in Bangkok and prior to anyone making a decision not to travel. Therefore at the time of the interviews the intent of all
participants was to travel with the TMAT tour. The information covered in all pre-travel interviews was therefore the same.

Two of the three study participants who did not travel had previously been part of a TMAT trip and consequently their interviews included reflection on previous experiences. The third had traveled widely and been involved in volunteering abroad yet she had not been part of a TMAT program previously. As with others who had not been part of a prior TMAT program her responses in regard to this tour were anticipatory.

Two of the eight final study participants had not been part of a TMAT program before. Seven of the eight had traveled outside Australia previously. Of the seven who had previously traveled outside Australia six had taken part in the TMAT program on at least one occasion. Three had taken part in a TMAT program on three or more occasions. Three of the eight participants were high school students who had just completed year 11 or year 12. The other five participants were over 18 years of age and worked in the fields of plumbing, specialist nursing, teaching or educational support.

4.6.4 Preparation for Travel—การเตรียมการ

In the preparatory period before leaving Australia TMAT participants took part in monthly meetings designed to introduce them to the tour, its format, the places they would go and to give information about some of the people they would meet. During this time my role within the TMAT structure was to provide information and advice with regard to health aspects of the tour, specifically information on vaccinations and to address general participant health concerns and queries.

During the TMAT meetings and induction education program Graeme (TMAT leader) highlighted a range of things that included;

- The transience of the visit
- The importance of the image the TMAT leaves behind in Thailand
- Basic language acquisition
- The attitude with which to approach the trip (whilst brief education towards being unobtrusive is given, TMAT does not explicitly introduce the concept or position of Guest)
- The importance of teamwork.
Chapter 4: Methodology

The degree to which participants succeeded in engaging with each of these ideas varied according to their motivation for travel, their understanding of what their position was as part of a short term mission tour to another country, and according to how they chose to position themselves for the experience.

Participants were introduced to basic Thai language which included greetings, numbers, simple phrases and directions. Cultural considerations such as learning how to wai (ไหว้—the hands placed together in front of the face when greeting others, apologising etc.) were also taught. The wai was emphasised as an important part of communication. Participants who had not been part of TMAT before questioned whether they, as westerners, would be expected to wai. In answer to this the wai was likened to a western handshake in relation to the implications of not returning it, or in treating it as optional i.e. in Australia when a hand is extended to initiate a handshake it is considered rude not to extend a hand in response. Similarly, it was explained, a wai should be returned. It was also explained that in Thailand the younger or more junior person present would be expected to initiate the wai as a sign of respect.

Other cultural information included the importance of not touching a person’s head, of not pointing feet at people or objects and of showing respect for monks. In each of these cases explanations and examples were given by Graeme. He would, on occasion, ask those who had traveled on the TMAT previously to share stories of what, and who they had encountered on those trips, or of what they were looking forward to on the next trip. There was no direct education as to how participants should position themselves beyond the guidelines given in the team booklet (see below).

These meetings also introduced participants to each other and in so doing assisted in forming a team. The objective was to leave Australia with each person feeling part of the group and supported when entering a new experience and environment.

Much of the information received by participants was contained in the team booklet which was given to them at the first team meeting. Some information contained in it was elaborated upon in meetings and some, including the following was left for participants to read themselves.

- Foreigners generally stand out. Let's stand out humbly and positively.
- A low profile is desirable when travelling.
Chapter 4: Methodology

- Crude and vulgar language is out. You may be surprised at who can understand English. 'A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger'.

- Keep remarks about what you see, hear smell etc confined to your guest house and to other team members.

- If you don't like the look of food offered to you, nibble away slowly, but don't refuse it.

- Remember we are overseas to gain insight into the Thai culture, NOT to brag about our own.

- Be especially sensitive and appreciative with local people and missionaries. *Everything they do for us is voluntary* (Smith & Smith, 2008, p. 3).

These statements, whilst written to assist functional relationships, serve also to position TMAT participants in a way that suggests that they express gratitude and humility in dealings with their hosts. The voluntary nature of help given by local people and missionaries is highly valued and necessary to the success of the TMAT. This importance is highlighted by the TMAT with the use of bold, italicised type.

During the pre-travel period various fundraising efforts were also undertaken. Proceeds from these were used to assist students with airfares and to provide funds for work projects and donations whilst in Thailand. Many of these were catering activities and were also a means of introducing participants to working together on a given task.

The group of participants on this trip included some who had not traveled overseas before or been part of STMs, some who had been on previous STMs, and some who had been on previous TMATs. Of those who had been on previous TMATs there was a mix of those who had been on midyear or end of year trips. As noted in the first chapter, mid-year trips were run for Year 10 students and end of year trips were multi age and open to those from outside the various schools that took part in the mid-year program. The mid-year trips ran during the hot season and end of year programs were in the Thai winter.

Unlike previous TMATs (see meeting timetable – Appendix 5), this team’s November meeting – which was the last meeting prior to travel – was held during a time when political unrest in Bangkok had entered the world news media headlines. Some team members, parents and others interested in the tour were concerned about the implications for travel.

During this meeting time was devoted, by leaders, to briefly explain;
Chapter 4: Methodology

- Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) travel warning levels,
- the situation of unrest in Bangkok and its background,
- the situation in previous instances of unrest, with particular reference to the role the king had played in these
- that it was highly likely any unrest would be resolved prior to the King’s birthday (December 5th)
- the proximity of Chiang Mai to Bangkok (one hour flight by commercial airlines).

Those present discussed each point as it arose. The main point of concern was with the events in Bangkok and therefore the explanation of where Chiang Mai was located geographically in relation to the unrest appeared to allay some anxiety. Participants who had traveled on TMAT previously also contributed to the discussion. They particularly made the point that considerable distance separated Bangkok from Chiang Mai.

I spoke to several people during and after the meeting. One girl’s mother was quite concerned by what she had seen on television news broadcasts and still felt uncomfortable with the thought of her daughter travelling. We discussed this and implications for travel. Several weeks later we became aware that this girl would not be travelling to Thailand with TMAT.

As explained in Chapter Five, my family and I left Australia for Thailand on December 5th (the Thai king’s birthday) after the Wongsawat government had been removed from power by the Thai high court. At that time all participants in the TMAT program intended to travel.

On December 11th a teacher from one of the schools joining the tour rang me in Thailand to say that her principal had withdrawn their students and staff (nine people) from the tour due to concerns over safety. The principal had told her that she did not want to ‘take responsibility’ should anything go wrong. Later Graeme received a phone call from the travel agent, who had arranged the TMAT flights asking why he had been contacted to cancel a number of tickets.

None of those participating from that school traveled to Thailand.

As previously stated those who did participate came from a variety of backgrounds. The total number of those initially planning to travel as part of the TMAT group was 42. Those actually making the trip numbered 32.
What these people said, how and when they said these things and what that revealed about how they positioned themselves in relation to Thailand and to Thai people varied between participants.

All participants have been assigned pseudonyms in the material presented in this chapter as have Thai nationals. In cases where NGO workers names were mentioned by participants these have been removed. The only exceptions to this are those of Heather and Trevor Smith, missionaries from McKean Rehabilitation Center. The names of children from the orphanage and the name of the orphanage itself have been removed.

4.7 Research Methods

Within the approach I used a number of methods. There were two lots of semi structured interviews involving each person, one conducted prior to leaving Australia and one conducted after return to Australia. They were not used during the in-country portion of the TMAT program so as to avoid unnecessary interruption to the program. A focus group was held during the time in Chiang Mai, Thailand. This provided a forum for participants to speak about their thoughts and experiences and minimised the time taken out of a very busy TMAT program. Diaries/journals were kept by participants throughout the in-country time and for one week post return to Australia. Photography was utilised and participant observation was also undertaken whilst in Thailand. Ten months after returning to Australia a follow-up questionnaire was sent to each participant. These methods are explained more fully below.

4.7.1 Interviews

Interviews are an accepted and expected method in ethnography. As such I will focus my discussion around the various forms they take, the challenges and the ethics involved in undertaking interviews. In this study I used semi structured interviews that utilized an interview prompt map (Figure 5) as a catalyst for exploring of ideas, expectations, anticipations, concerns and positioning. All participants made use of the interview map in the pre-travel interviews. The map was available for use in the post travel interviews, but not all participants made use of it then. Whilst stating that semi structured interviews were used, I am cognisant that interview types (informal, semi structured, structured or retrospective) overlap within a single interview and may “overlap and blend” (Fetterman, 1998, pp. 37-38).

The interview in this research context was a means of data gathering and it was important to establish relationship and trust between researcher and participants. This was doubly important in this situation, firstly for the research progression and secondly to facilitate the smooth progression of the TMAT experience i.e. to ensure that the research did not hinder the
Chapter 4: Methodology

TMAT program. For the participants the research was to run alongside the program not to become a focus of it. My interest was in how participants position themselves in their TMAT experience not in how they position themselves in relation to the study and therefore the research had to be as unobtrusive as possible.

Interviews were conducted prior to travelling to Thailand and after returning to Australia. The pre-travel interviews were done to provide data as to how participants positioned themselves prior to the TMAT experience and as such became a reference point against which future data was compared. The post travel interviews provided data that included reflection and evidence, for example, any move away from the original perceptions and positioning.

In all research situations the relationship between the researcher and participant is present. How this relationship is instigated and managed is the subject of discussion (Fetterman, 2009; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Ramirez, 2003). This relationship is a meeting of two cultures, that of research and that of participation. In this sense it is intercultural and as such should be approached as any relationship of that type. As has been stated previously, this association must be of mutual benefit with mutual contribution so as to avoid an unbalanced or hierarchical relationship occurring (Raines, 2008; Schwartz, 2006; Swartzentruber, 2008). In this relationship the question of what to disclose to participants can be problematic in some studies, i.e. the issue of deception (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Researchers who do not share their purpose with participants, as a measure of avoiding project contamination, risk losing participant trust. This can leave participants with a negative impression of the study and of research in general and can, in some instances, lead participants to sabotage results (Fetterman, 1998).

I found myself routinely trying to figure out what reactions they were looking for – and then giving the opposite response. The researchers feared contaminating their study by sharing its purpose with me. As a result, I and probably many other students with similar responses deliberately contaminated several studies (Fetterman, 2009, p. 144).

Some researchers have argued that putting participants at ease, building trust and rapport is in itself an exercise in deception as it seeks to serve the researcher's purposes, in extracting information, rather than the purposes of the participant, through their involvement (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Kameniar, 2005; Ramirez, 2003). However, this fails to consider the cultural aspect of hospitality that is conform to in social engagement between two people. The interview is not simply participant and researcher who engage in dialogue and social interaction for the sole purpose of research. It is two people who interact with each another
regardless of the agenda of either party. This research evokes the importance of the relationship of hospitality and as such this relationship had to be attended to in the outworking of methods also. Further, the premise of researcher deception also fails to acknowledge that the participant may have his or her own agenda or reason for being involved in the study (Fetterman, 2009) and is therefore equally able to deceive. This is no less significant in terms of the research relationship and outcomes than is the purpose of the researcher.

Therefore the relationship built between researcher and participant must seek to be mutually beneficial and established on trust (Fetterman, 2009). Without this the relationship becomes unbalanced. In deception, withholding of information or purpose, on the part of either party, the balance is skewed. Deception promotes the hierarchy and threatens trust.

Ethnographers recognise this problem. They depend on the assistance of participants throughout their study...deceptive tactics...are not useful in the long-term relationships that fieldwork requires. In addition ethnographers are interested in how people think and behave in natural situations. Like any other researcher, anthropologists worry that participants are trying to tell them what they want to hear or are trying to second-guess the research agenda. Deceptive approaches reinforce this participant strategy and undermine the trust essential to any ethnographic effort (Fetterman, 2009, pp. 144-145).

A recent literature review on ethical interviewing (Allmark et al., 2009) identifies five themes or issues that can be problematic if not guarded against in interviewing. They were;

- **Privacy and confidentiality** e.g. delving into unanticipated areas or using sensational material preferentially
- **Informed consent** e.g. difficulty in continuing this in a lengthy project
- **Harm** e.g. emotional intensity or research among vulnerable groups
- **Dual roles and over involvement** e.g. researcher who is also therapist
- **Politics and power** e.g. participant feels obligated to take part

These issues were addressed during the ethics application process and were dealt with where necessary in preparation prior to fieldwork commencing. They have been considered throughout the research process and have been commented upon at various points in this chapter.
Chapter 4: Methodology

Interviews constitute approximately 50% of the data and would have taken the greatest proportion of my time given that most of them were conducted on a one to one basis. Times varied, but averaged around 25 minutes. More specific information regarding the physical locations in which interviews took place and how they were approached is contained in Chapter Six and Chapter Eight.

Figure 5: Interview Prompt Map

The pre-travel interviews took the form of a one on one conversation between the participant and researcher using an interview map (see above) as a catalyst for expression of ideas, expectations, anticipations, concerns and positioning. The interview map has as its centre the word “Me”. This word relates to the participant and signifies the personal nature of the response. It is something that comes from them. It is a prompt to gather their responses at a given point in the tour experience.

The interview map utilised various words as prompts denoting possible topics which may elicit a response. Pictures were not used as they may have promoted a stereotype or particular line of thinking. The visual prompt allowed participants to take control of the session and respond according to their own thoughts and ideas rather than be confined to answering a given line of questioning. It allowed a free flow of ideas and responses. It also allowed participants to interpret terminology as they wished, for example “religion” could be interpreted as the religion they might see displayed in Thailand, their own understanding of what they have seen or may see on the tour, it may be their personal experience and faith, it may be their interpretation of events and experiences based on their Christian experience or a combination of these.
Participants were able to roam the map in whatever order they wished and were also able to add any thoughts or comments they felt inclined to. For instance several either commented on food as being a very important aspect of their return to Thailand or an apprehension if on their first trip even though this was not included as a prompt on the map. In a formal interview this may not have been mentioned. Some participants initially said that they preferred the structure of being asked questions formally but when interviewed chose to follow the map.

During the trip interviews were not held. On several occasions prior to travel interviews were held at the home of a participant for their convenience.

Pre-travel interviews were audio taped and then transcribed. Individual and group interviews were held post return to Australia. The interview prompt map was available but not utilised for these as participants were eager to share experiences.

Post travel interviews were recorded on digital video as on several occasions there were multiple interviewees and digital video made identification of participants, for the purpose of transcription, easier than relying on voice (audio tape) alone.

Interviews, journals, focus group, participant observation, photography, and finally a questionnaire were utilised. Responses came from various vantage points in both public (focus group, and participant observation) and private (interviews, questionnaire and journals) forums in order to gain a multi-dimensional picture of the situation that existed and its evolution.

A questionnaire (Appendix 4) was utilised as the final means of data gathering in order to elucidate some of the ideas and thoughts that had been raised in journals and interviews throughout the study. This was given to participants at least ten months post their return to Australia.

4.7.2 Focus group

A focus group was utilised in Chiang Mai as a means of data gathering. Focus groups are a discrete method. These groups have “a distinct identity of their own” (Morgan, 1997, p. 8) in comparison with other methods, but unfortunately, as Frey and Fontana (1991) highlight ethnographers, in particular, have often ignored the focus group. I chose to use this method to assist those who were less comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts in a one on one context, i.e. those who may have felt that their contribution was unimportant (Kitzinger, 1995). The group dynamic allowed anyone who felt this way to listen to others sharing
opinions and thoughts that may be similar to their own thus providing a form of validation and encouragement to make their own contribution.

Although group interviews are often used simply as a quick and convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, focus groups explicitly use group interaction as part of the method… instead of the researcher asking each person to respond to a question in turn, people are encouraged to talk to one another: asking questions, exchanging anecdotes and commenting on each other's experiences and points of view. The method is particularly useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way (Kitzinger, 1995).

In focus groups the researcher or moderator actively encourages group interaction to generate discussion and information transfer (Kitzinger, 1995; Linhorst, 2002). This type of discussion generating interaction appeared to flow naturally among TMAT members in their day to day routine and as such was an effective mechanism in enabling participants to share and compare ideas and experiences in a research context.

Eight participants were in Thailand taking part in the study and this number proved to be optimal for the focus group. Literature on focus groups typically suggests between six and ten (Kitzinger, 1995; Linhorst, 2002; Morgan, 1997). This reflected well in practice.

When group dynamics work well the participants work alongside the researcher, taking the research in new and often unexpected directions (Kitzinger, 1995, p. 299).

The group dynamics worked well in the Chiang Mai focus group with participants commenting on the anecdotes and experiences of others. New themes emerged that were able to be explored by the researcher and by participants during the course of the focus group.

The focus group was held in Chiang Mai and continued for 50 minutes. It was held at a time that did not conflict with other activities or cause participants to choose between the focus group and a team activity. The interview map was available but not used in this context. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on the trip up to that point, their journaling, and any concerns they had in light of the political unrest in Bangkok prior to their leaving Australia. They were also asked to discuss anything else they felt relevant to mention. They were eager to share experiences and therefore the ideas and comments of others served adequately as a springboard for discussion.
4.7.3 Journals

As my interest was in the thoughts, experiences and reflections of the participants as they positioned themselves for and in their experiences, journals provided a unique opportunity for insight into these as they were not composed in the presence of the researcher and therefore the expectation to provide answers on the spot—as with an interview—did not exist.

Journals or diaries enable a unique opportunity for both researcher and participant.

According to Bennett, “A writer does not always know what he or she knows, and writing is a way of finding out” (Bennett, A. 1998, cited in Alaszewski, 2006 p.vi). Interviewing relies on memory, and observation can be an intrusion (Alaszewski, 2006). Diaries are a different opportunity for data collection. They are written by the participant in their own company and time frame.

Ethnographers can use diaries to gain privileged access to the lives of the individuals and communities they are studying and their own journals or field notes can provide important insight into the ways in which their understanding and relationships developed (Alaszewski, 2006, p. 26).

This is an opportunity for participants to use their experience and reflection as they choose to record, erase, rewrite and chronicle their story on their terms outside the confines of an interview and without the observer’s gaze.

While literature on the use of diaries for social research is growing, it does not match that on other commonly used social research methodologies...Diaries seem to be a neglected source even in areas where one would anticipate they would be a key resource (Alaszewski, 2006, p. vii).

I chose to use journals with participants to gain access to a perspective not expressed in interviews, focus groups or identified through participant observation. This added another dimension to the data and journals complimented the other methods.

Participants were asked to keep a journal for the entirety of their stay in Thailand and for one week post their return to Australia. They were informed that any journaling they wished to keep private would remain private and not be collected or used. No one chose to keep any of their journal entries private or out of the data gathered. All journals were photocopied and photocopies returned to participants so that they had a record of their experience.

Written journals were in the form of a spiral bound A4 sized notebook. In the front page an explanatory note and added information was entered (Appendix 3).
I felt it was important to provide guidelines as to what was expected, what to include, when and how to journal so that participants felt comfortable taking part and were not anxious about getting it wrong. When participants arrived in Thailand with the TMAT group I explained the journaling process to them and made myself available to answer queries or provide further clarification where necessary. This was an important part of encouraging participants to be diligent in the process (Alaszewski, 2006). In the first few days I was asked several times by different people if I would look over what had been written to “check that it makes sense”. This was in the context of some participants needing reassurance having not been involved in a research project before. I directed them back to the information provided at the front of the journal (appendix 3) and went through it with them where necessary to explain anything that they found difficult to understand. I also kept a journal. Reflective writing proved to be more difficult than anticipated as there was a tendency to record an order of events. We talked about this and participants were free to experiment with approaches as they saw fit. Discussions about this were a really useful and productive exercise in terms of writing but more so in terms of developing trust and relationship between me and those involved in the study.

The option of a video journal/diary was offered. This would have taken the form of a reality TV diary (with which all participants were already familiar). A private area was set up with a video camera focused on a chair enabling the group member to come in, turn the camera on, sit in the chair and record their expectations, anticipations, anxieties, insights, reflections or anything else they wished. During the recording session there would be a sign on the door indicating that the area was in use so as to avoid interruption. They were directed to keep the session to three minutes or less and made aware that the contents of the recording was confidential and would not be shown. However, the content of what was said may be used in the writing up of the study or a publication.

I expected that this option would be popular as it took less time than writing and because of participant familiarity with the medium. However, this option was not taken up by any participants. They preferred sitting down, debriefing and then writing about their experiences in their own rooms. I offered the video diary several times but preference was for the written form. This was certainly unexpected and very surprising to me given the familiarity of the concept. Perhaps it was the anonymity of writing over video or the relaxed process of writing at leisure in the privacy of a guest house room that made a written journal more appealing. When asked the responses varied between, “it’s easier to sit down and write” and “too shy,
I’d be embarrassed”. However, the use of video recording for post-travel interviews was readily agreed to.

Participants discussed daily entries in journals and shared the difficulties involved that ranged from finding time to tiredness. Several times participants commented on where they were up to with their daily journal entries and when they were falling behind. It became almost competitive to stay up to date. During the focus group held in Chiang Mai we discussed journal progress and all agreed that despite the time taken it was a worthwhile exercise not only for the study but as a reflection to look back on events and experiences once the trip was over. I had been concerned prior to the study that there would be difficulties in maintaining momentum with journal keeping and other formal data collection methods, but because the participants saw benefits beyond the study, this was not a problem at all.

4.7.4 Participant Observation

I have no quickness of apprehension or wit… my power to follow a long and purely abstract train of thought is very limited…(but) I am superior to the common run of men in noticing things which easily escape attention, and in observing them carefully (Darwin, 2002, p. xviii).

Participant observation is a matter of careful observation from inside the situation under study. The researcher lives and works inside with her subjects watching, observing in order to learn about their beliefs, motivations and behaviours.

You may tell others you are just observing...but do not believe for a minute that there is any such thing as just observing. A lens can have a focus and a periphery, but it must be pointed somewhere; it cannot see everywhere at once...A way of seeing is also a way of not seeing (Wolcott, 2005, p. 96)

As Wolcott points out some will be seen and some remain unseen. The art is in directing the lens and the choices ethnographers must make in directing the lens of their gaze in the field. With every choice to direct in one way is the inverse choice not to direct in another. Making these choices can be assisted by the relationship the researcher has built with participants and the consequent knowledge she has of them. This is something upon which I relied at times, but whilst helpful it was not infallible. Participant observation has traditionally been considered the most significant tool in anthropology and social research. Through the evolution of ethnography to include multi-sited studies, participant observation has likewise evolved in both appearance and implementation.
Participant observation is useful in travel research because it requires immersion in the experience to a different level than that of other tools. It can also be difficult in this environment because of the variety of settings and locations to be observed and the multitude of contexts in which the researcher and her subjects find themselves. For example participant observation in the Chiang Mai guest house can be quite simple in the communal areas, but within the various rooms a plethora of varied interactions, behaviours and so on can be occurring yet not viewed and therefore not included in the participant observation. When working on projects with a team, there are many situations in which the team divides into smaller groups to undertake tasks (often distances apart) and therefore the researcher can only join one group at a time. Depending on the task at hand, the researcher may also have limited access to these team members or be participating in the task to such a degree that notes can only be made in retrospect. This highlighted for me the impossibility of capturing the whole.

Some of the other difficulties often associated with participant observation in the field, however, were not a concern in this study. For instance, Gamradt (1998) laments the loss of identity that has been her experience, “When attempting to become a part of such groups, the fieldworker can no longer rely on his or her own identity, and must somehow establish a new one” (Gamradt, 1998, p. 70). This was not a concern for me as participation in the group was something very familiar and interaction with new group members was also a familiar experience. I retained my own identity and this genuineness, I believe, enabled natural, relaxed relationships with participants.

I was part of the TMAT group for the entire in-Thailand experience and attended projects, activities and excursions with them. I recorded field notes of my time with them initially in two separate notebooks, (as per deMunck’s example in Alaszewski, 2006). One was to be official with formal records etc. That is, a work log and the other unofficial containing personal reflections, musings, questions and comments.

I began with two notebooks and ended with one. The overlap between information made it cumbersome to move across two notebooks and remember what was written where and in what context. The end product was the notebook which had been the unofficial originally. Input was a mixture of work log and journal style entries. My notebook was available should anyone want to have a look at it, but no one asked to do so.

In terms of ethics, I gave participants an undertaking that they would not be identified by name in this study. This has had implications for the descriptions I was able to provide about participants and particularly their age and gender. This inability to describe participants fully does not detract from the thickness of description of conversations, events or other forms of
interaction. *Thick description* (Geertz, 1973) enables insight into specific moments in time and situations in a space. As the moment, interaction or situation is the focus, not the identity of the one taking part in it, the thinner description of participants was not a concern.

### 4.7.5 Photography

I saw great flexibility and practicality in visual ethnography. As with Collier and McGill’s fieldworkers and fisherman through visual recording I hoped “to evoke responses that would give an inside look into” the positioning of TMAT participants (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 101).

Given the number of participants involved in the study – in proportion to the number taking part in the TMAT tour—and the breadth of their interaction and travel experiences I thought visual media was an extremely effective data collection and reporting tool throughout the research process. It was also useful in the presentation and contextualisation of reporting materials. Photography is highly adaptable and interpretive, as is ethnography, and can be used in conjunction with other methods, such as interview, observations, and journaling, or as a stand-alone technique. I used photography to record events and moments in the day to day experiences of the study participants. I did not use it as comprehensively as did Collier and McGill (cited in Collier & Collier, 1986) who have conducted a number of studies in which they compile, among other things, what are known as, photographic essays. These were often born out of a difficulty in obtaining adequate information in interviews, as was the case with Acadian fieldworkers and fisherman where memory beyond a certain time frame became a stumbling block. To overcome this

…a projective photo-interview study was considered. When we … began assembling the interview material the character of the photographic research changed. We were no longer just making a survey involving precise selection and documentation. Instead, we became involved in photographic essays, shooting and selecting elements to produce a comprehensive overlook in a limited number of enlarged 8 by 10 in. prints. Through the use of these prints we hoped to evoke responses that would give an inside look into contemporary Acadian cultural issues. (Collier & Collier, 1986, pp. 100-101)

I saw great flexibility and practicality in visual ethnography. This became a useful adjunct to other methods particularly as a contextualisation device.
4.8 Ethics
Ethics approval was obtained through the Melbourne University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) prior to commencement of the study. The study was deemed to be a low risk project. Contingency plans were in place should any difficulties occur in the field. The main one, in terms of research, was that Professor Esther Wakeman of Payap University in Chiang Mai was available as a mentor and advisor as needed.

In terms of physical safety and risk management, travel insurance had been taken out and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) advice consulted regularly. I had also registered travel information with DFAT in the event of any concerns arising. All stipulations of the University of Melbourne HREC were adhered to throughout the life of the study.

4.9 Summary
Throughout the course of this chapter I have outlined the approach used in this study, discussed the approach in general terms including some of its strengths and weaknesses. I suggest that this study is best understood through an ethnographic lens due to the nature of the data that has been gathered and the unique circumstances that occurred in Thailand prior to and during the fieldwork. I outlined some of the difficulties faced by me as a researcher. Most particularly I acknowledged the difficulties that may arise when a researcher is both inside and outside a study, group and field site. I also outlined the key ethnographic techniques I used in this study.

In the next chapter I will give further context to the study by briefly outlining the political history of Thailand and more importantly the situation as it changed prior to traveling to Thailand for in-country fieldwork during the period of December 2008 and January 2009. This change had implications for the study, the relationship of hospitality, the researcher and participants (as guests during this period) and most significantly, the Kingdom of Thailand and its people (as hosts).
Chapter 5: Travelling in a context

The Road Not Taken
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost (1915)

5.1 Outline of the Chapter
This chapter brings the context surrounding the Thai political situation, over the research period, into focus. Whilst some of the situation, outlined in this chapter, went on in the background during previous TMAT visits to Thailand, it was not until the situation affected travel and travelers directly that the interest or concern of TMAT participants increased to a level where further probing into the political state of affairs was prompted.

The situation over the period of this study differed from previous trips in that the political situation was prominent in both national and international media, spoken about in the streets and affected the travel to, from and within Thailand. In this chapter, this is discussed followed by a brief overview of political history from the beginning of the Chakri dynasty and absolute monarchy up to the constitutional monarchy and labile democracy of the present day. Through this, a brief insight into the lead up to the November-December 2008 unrest and protests is given. The unrest, consequent protests and media coverage given to it was an
important factor in the decision of some TMAT participants not to travel to Thailand. For those who did travel to Thailand, it was a source of concern for families and friends who remained in Australia. The purpose of this chapter is to give context and background to the situation the researcher and participants found themselves in whilst in Thailand. Finally the influence this had on the project and the participants is presented.

5.2 The situation on previous TMAT trips
Politics has never been a major focus of TMAT time in Thailand, whereas culture and lifestyle have. On previous TMAT tours election posters and billboards were often in prominent view. Each visit seemed to coincide with yet another election, whether local or national. Understanding of the Thai system of government increased during the new form of politics introduced by popular Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra—์กษิณ ชินวัตร. Thaksin came from Chiang Mai and enjoyed much support in that region. The TMAT tours operate in and around Chiang Mai.

Discussions with Thai friends in northern Thailand had opened my eyes to the popularity of the Thai Ruk Thai (TRT) party and its leader Thaksin Shinawatra. Some spoke very favourably of him and his policies. One policy of particular popularity was the 30 baht scheme. It gave assistance to the poor enabling them to access many healthcare services, very cheaply.

Others, some who were involved in the provision of healthcare, saw the pitfalls of this scheme. Consequently they spoke less enthusiastically about the policies.

Both groups spoke very openly and with much animation. This was something that I either had not noticed before or had previously not been the case.

I understand the importance of the King and this knowledge had always seemed more significant than anything regarding the transient governments. In an interview for BBC News Suchit Bunbongkarn, professor of political science at Bangkok’s Chulalongkorn University, explained the position of the King.

"If the country were in good shape politically, then the role of the constitutional monarch is not very difficult … But in the case of Thailand it is not easy because our political system has been unstable all the time. So whenever there is a political crisis people expect the king to solve the problem" (Clift, 2001).
Former Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun echoed Suchit’s sentiments when he described the king’s influence as "reserve power that, because it has been used judiciously and sparingly, has been decisive in maintaining the country's stability" (Clift, 2001).

Something that both Bunbongkarn and Panyarachun agree upon is that this power is not something that can be inherited or passed on. It comes from the respect built up through a lifetime of service to the Thai people.

5.3 The significance of colour

The pro and anti-government movements donned coloured shirts to signify where their allegiances lay. Colour is of particular significance in Thailand. The particular colours relate back to the days of the week. In Thailand each day of the week is denoted by a specific colour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Purple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The practice of wearing coloured shirts at specific times and for specific reasons is also familiar in Thailand. The King of Thailand was born on a Monday (yellow), and the practice of wearing yellow shirts on Monday is common. This is done out of respect for the King.

Yellow, was the colour chosen by the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) as their symbol. Red, was the colour chosen by the United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship (UDD).

\[Picture 1\] 'Yellow Shirt' Protesters (PAD).

Sourced from: [http://www.english.rfi.fr/node/83066](http://www.english.rfi.fr/node/83066)
Chapter 5: Travelling in a context

5.4 The situation as it changed

When I began the process of writing the research proposal and applying for ethics approval to undertake this study the political climate in Thailand was stable, at least, to the outsider.

After Thaksin and the TRT party had been removed from power in September 2006 there had been ongoing concern about the possibility of political influence being exerted by them on the new Wongsawat government.

The yellow shirted PAD had continued to run a campaign to destabilize the government, believing that the new government led by Somchai Wongsawat was too close to the previous administration – Wongsawat, was husband of Yaowapa Wongsawat, Thaksin Shinawatra’s youngest sister.

Needless to say, an ethnographic study that involved following the experiences of a group of Australian volunteers traveling to Thailand over the December 2008- January 2009 period would not ordinarily require a deep inquiry into the political state of the Thai kingdom or more than a general explanation of it. My focus was to be on participant positioning, not on the history and politics of a South East Asian nation.

In late November 2008 that changed.

After anti-government protests that had gone on spasmodically for about three years, many Thai people had grown frustrated with what Avudh Panananda, columnist for The Nation newspaper, called a "never-ending saga that is futile and a drain on society" (Poynting, Noble, Tabar & Collins, 2004). The Thai print media, had been “generally critical of the
government and supportive of the protests, [and ran] articles skeptical of the daily street demonstrations” (Stanko, 1995).

On Monday, November 24th yellow shirted (PAD) protesters forced the abandonment of a session of Parliament. Red shirted (UDD) pro-government protesters retaliated.

Thai anti-government protesters from the PAD (yellow shirts) opened fire on government supporters (UDD – red shirts) during clashes in Bangkok. This, according to official reports, left at least 11 people injured. The incident came after the PAD (yellow shirts) protesters blocked the road to Don Muang airport in a renewed attempt to unseat the government. Meanwhile, they also stormed Bangkok's international airports (Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang), causing suspension of flights.

Hundreds of yellow-shirted members of the group (PAD) managed to break through police lines and enter the main terminal of the airport… (Whitzman, 2007).

Australian commercial news reports began to show images of gun wielding protesters running through the streets. This was coupled with the paradoxical footage of yellow clad mothers and grandmas waving hand clappers. Initially it seemed that the protest was to thwart Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat’s return to Thailand after attending the APEC summit in Peru. It then became clear that the PAD (yellow shirts) wanted, and would settle for nothing less, than his resignation and an end to his government.

On November 26th unrest also hit multiple sites in Mumbai. This unrest took the form of a terror attack lasting three days. Bombs and gunfire killed 179 people, of which at least 22 were foreigners and more than 300 were injured (Ho, 2007).

The timing of these attacks caused families of TMAT members to be understandably uneasy about travel outside Australia. Not only had Bangkok become a questionable destination in their minds, but within a day, terrorism had hit Mumbai and travel to and from that city had also become undesirable, if not impossible.

Members of the TMAT began to feel anxious about traveling into Asia in this climate. I reassured them and waited patiently knowing that with the King’s birthday only days away (December 5th) the likelihood of a speedy conclusion to the protest was high. The King holds a uniquely revered position in Thailand, something no other living monarch enjoys. This is discussed below. A week passed and the Thai tourist and export industries were negatively affected, but after a decision by the Thai constitutional court removed the Wongsawat government from power, the airports were reopened. My husband, three sons and I left
Tullamarine airport on one of the first flights able to enter Bangkok’s Suvarnabhumi airport. The date was December 5th, the King’s birthday.

5.5 Thai politics historically

Today’s King, Bhumibol Adulyadej (pronounced Boomibon Adoonyadet) is part of the Chakri dynasty which began in 1782 with King Phraphutthayotfa Chulalok (Rama I). Rule was via an absolute monarchy with the king referred to as the father of his people. The concept of the king being viewed as a patriarchal ruler predates the Chakri dynasty. It began with Rama Khamhaeng, 1239-1299, (king of Sukhothai) who remains the Thai model of fatherly rule. The oldest known inscription in the Thai language, written in 1292, portrays him as a fatherly protector and governor.

The Chakri dynasty continued as an absolute monarchy until 1932 at which time a constitutional monarchy was established.

After the end of the First World War there had been increasing concern with, and criticism of, the absolutist government. The economy was in decline as with the rest of the post-war world and King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) found the situation increasingly difficult to manage (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007).

In response to business petitions for government to aid the economy, Prajadhipok wondered sarcastically if they ‘wanted the government to make a Five-Year Plan like Soviet Russia.’ In 1927, his government had made the teaching of economics a criminal offence...Resentment spread to senior levels of the bureaucracy...coffee houses hummed with rumours of a political coup (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007, p. 118)

Reform of the economy did not occur at this time and in the late 1920s the press began making proposals for absolutism’s replacement (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007).

On 5 February 1927, seven men met in Paris and over the next five days plotted a revolution in Siam... They called themselves the Khana Ratsadon or People’s Party... (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007, p. 116)

They had two main aims, the first being the conversion of the monarchy from absolute to constitutional. The second was to achieve economic and social reform. Over the next few years they recruited other students in Europe and later back in Siam. By 1932 their ranks had grown and their policies enjoyed popular support. (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007)
Chapter 5: Travelling in a context

By June 1932, the People’s Party had around a hundred members, just over half in the military. In the space of three hours on the morning of 24 June 1932, this small group of conspirators captured the commander of the royal guard, arrested about forty members of the royal family and their aides, and announced that the absolute monarchy had been overthrown. The extent of resentment against absolutism ensured the coup’s success (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007, p. 118).

As the People’s Party government began its rule the need to deliver changes hoped for became a driving force. The ideals of the two new leaders, (Pridi Banomyong and Plaek Phibunsongkhram) however, were not united. Pridi Banomyong was a civilian who espoused the values of his educational roots, French liberalism coupled with European socialism. He wished to change the system. Plaek Phibunsongkhram (Phibun) led the military group and saw the State “as an expression of the popular will, with the duty to change the individual by education, legal enactments, and cultural management” (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007, p. 122). Phibun, therefore, wished to change the individual.

The 1932 coup made Prajadhipok, King Rama VII, Thailand’s first constitutional monarch. He left Thailand in self imposed exile, and after protesting at his powers being further eroded, abdicated on 2 March 1935. His successor was his ten year old nephew, Ananda Mahidol who was living, at that time, in Switzerland with his mother, sister and brother.

By this time Phibun had become field marshal by his own decree, a rank previously only held by a monarch. Many of his actions attracted criticism and there were suggestions that he modelled himself on Mussolini, and introduced political innovations inspired by Hitler (Schwartz, 2007).

In 1945, there was widening civil unrest in response to the post war shortness of supply of everyday goods. Workers were striking and due to the disarming of the occupying Japanese firearms were plentiful. The King remained in Switzerland.

According to Thai tradition the King assumes his full duties on his twentieth birthday. King Ananda’s twentieth birthday was on September 21, 1945. In anticipation of this, Pridi contacted the King in Switzerland and suggested that he return to Thailand as soon as he was able (Schwartz, 2007). In December 1945 he returned to Thailand.

On June 9th 1946 twenty year old King Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII) was found dead in the palace. The circumstances remain a mystery (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007; Schwartz, 2007; Semple, 2003; Welter, 1978).
Many blamed Pridi and the investigation followed along that line although it was later found that witnesses had been bribed to implicate him. He was not arrested (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007).

Ananda’s younger brother, Bhumibol Adulyadej (ภูมิพลอดุลยเดช), became King Rama IX in 1946. He did not remain in Thailand but returned to Switzerland to complete his education. He returned to Thailand as constitutional monarch in 1951.

The first of many political coups occurred on November 8th 1947 as the military seized power. Over the years from 1932 to the present there have been no less than 16 constitutions, 17 coups and 27 prime ministers.

The one constant since 1946 has been King Bhumibol Adulyadej. Over the course of his reign he has brought the monarchy back into a position of honour and respect. Since becoming king in 1946 he has become, what Lamb calls, “the glue that holds society together, a status he earned – and not just taken by birthright – by never losing touch with his 60 million subjects” (Lamb, 1997). This sentiment was significantly different from the situation that had existed in 1932 to allow the Khana Ratsadon to overthrow the monarchy.

If we look at our national history, we can see very well that this country works better and prospers under an authority, not a tyrannical authority, but a unifying authority around which all elements of the nation can rally (Chaloemtiarana, 2007, p. 100).

The influence of, and respect for, King Bhumibol (Rama IX) came to the fore over a number of conflicts and uprisings over the ensuing years. One such occasion was in 1991-92 when the introduction of a new and contentious constitution, political crisis, conflict and widespread protests ended in violence. The heavy handed response by the military brought condemnation and consequently on May 20th, the King intervened by summoning the Prime Minister, Suchinda Krapayon and the protest leader, Bangkok mayor Chamlong Srimuang, to the palace. He ordered them to put a stop to the violence. The government resigned. The status and reputation of the military was damaged such that its political era seemed to be over. The influence of the monarchy was pivotal in resolving the protest.

The military’s forced retreat from the political frontline opened up new political space which businessmen and activists hoped to fill. The fear that investors and tourists would flee Thailand in 1992 convinced businessmen that the globalised economy could no longer be entrusted to generals with outdated agendas. (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2007, p. 251)
Waiting to fill the void was a successful telecommunications businessman, Thaksin Shinawatra. In 1998, after the Asian financial crisis, he formed the Thai Ruk Thai (Thais love Thais) political party and heralded a new era of populist politics, something never before seen in Thailand.

According to Connors (2007), having the finances to support himself meant that he was not beholden to the old political system of jaopoh (system of god father style provincial bosses). He could set his own path (Connors, 2007; McCargo & Pathmanand, 2005) through his CEO style of leadership and a policy based system of economics that would come to be known as Thaksinomics (Feng, 2009; Intarakumnerd, 2005; Lundvall, Intarakumnerd & Vang-Lauridsen, 2006; Phongpaichit, 2004; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2005).

5.6 What led to the unrest?

In February 2001 Thai Ruk Thai (TRT) won 248 of the 500 parliamentary seats and then absorbed smaller parties Seritham, New Aspiration Party and Chart Patthana to form a majority government. Thaksin became the Prime Minister (Funston, 2009). He sought to govern after the style of his political heroes and mentors, particularly Chatichai Choonhaven, Prida Patthanathabut and Kukrit Pramoj whilst avoiding the mistakes that led to their respective downfalls (McCargo & Pathmanand, 2005; Phongpaichit & Baker, 2005).

In March 2004 Thaksin became the first Prime Minister to be returned to power in an election. This return was not the result of vote buying or money politics but simply that he had delivered on policy promises. “He promised the 30 baht healthcare scheme” and he delivered (Funston, 2009, p. 93). Not all of Thaksin’s policies had positive outcomes but these were often overlooked by those who benefited from the positives.

Rural people do not disregard political ethics or corruption, but weigh these against what politicians do for them – and in the past many promises were not kept. Some … say openly that although there are many more good people, many more honest people contesting the election, they still prefer to vote for Thaksin, because he has helped the rural poor (Funston, 2009, p. 93).

In 2005 TRT won a landslide majority at election, but from early 2006 there were increasing protests against the government culminating in a military coup which removed them from government on September 19th 2006. Unfortunately the replacement government, led by Thaksin’s brother-in-law (Somchai Wongsawat) was weak and unable to lead the country through violence in the Southern provinces, New Year’s Eve bombings, a rapidly declining
GDP and tourist exodus. This government was also criticized by anti Thaksin quarters as being too close to the previous TRT administration.

Moving forward to the protest of November-December 2008, the protests at Suvarnabhumi and Don Muang international airports were the culmination of this criticism. As a result of the protests and political pressure applied by the PAD (yellow shirts) the government was dissolved by the Thai constitutional court and Abhisit Vejjajiva instituted as Prime Minister in what the UDD (red shirts) saw as an illegitimate, unelected government. The repercussions of removing Thaksin’s government from power are still being felt and the ongoing protests from the UDD (red shirts) are driven by a motivation to reinstate Thaksin, the elected leader, to office. The rural poor, particularly from the north and north east, Thaksin’s homeland, continue to call for an end to the current court installed government. Prime Minister Abhisit maintains a tenuous hold on power. The situation remains unstable.

5.7 The unrest continues

As I write this the unrest continues. The red shirted UDD supporters of Thaksin Shinawatra continue to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva claiming that he is illegally in his position. The ASEAN summit in Pattaya (April 2009) was aborted after red shirted UDD protestors stormed the resort where meetings were being held. Visiting dignitaries had to be airlifted to safety from the resort’s roof. Thailand’s international reputation once again took a beating. During 2009-10 video links and phone-ins from Thaksin continued to call on supporters to overthrow what they deemed to be an illegal government.

5.7.1 How the politics impacted the project

The unrest was a catalyst for looking into the background of what was unfolding immediately prior to and during the course of travel. As such, it prompted a deeper inquiry into the situation and a deeper search for understanding of, and empathy for, the situation the Thai people were facing, be they UDD (red shirt) or PAD (yellow shirt) supporters.

For the TMAT team it was the impetus for viewing the tour as more than an end to end journey. The participants began to see a glimpse of life in Thailand that went beyond photographs, work days and shopping. The team members lived the events as they unfolded. The people they interacted with were directly affected by the events that had taken place in Bangkok and the transfer of information between team members and Chiang Mai locals was unavoidable. They saw the new Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, and the reaction of the local people to him. They answered questions from home (Australia) asked by concerned
relatives and friends. This piece of Thai history was happening around them and not a media reflected experience. It was being discussed by numerous people every day on television, in restaurants and in the small villages visited on a mountain trek. Villagers and townspeople alike were consumed by the events. Chiang Mai, as a whole, was content to stay separate from the unrest in Bangkok, but the effect of the institution of a new government. The changes meant that they would now live with the results of what had happened in Bangkok.

Chiang Mai, traditionally an area inclined toward the previous administration, waited to see how the incumbent Prime Minister performed and in the early stages, he seemed to have a good deal of support even in Chiang Mai.

Rather than cause harm to the study, I believe that the project was matured by the unrest. Initial concerns from participants gave way to a deeper understanding of what was going on. Conversations within the team were stimulated. Concern for the Thai people and the country was expressed freely. Participants began asking questions about why the protests had occurred. They worked together to find answers to political and social questions. Empathy for the people developed, not so much over the political situation, as the team had little real knowledge of it, but over the consequences it had, economically in particular for the Thai people. The destination became more than a place to visit. Participants began to see the whole context as someone’s home and life in a comparative sense. They began to see past the smiles to how the pre-protest situation may have impacted people in the street and provided the impetus for such a decisive protest to take place.

Some western news media reported the protests as being an interruption to travelers, particularly Americans trying to return to the US for the Thanksgiving holiday. In this sense it was reported as an inconvenience. Participants saw past this interpretation of events. They saw it as a result of a chain of events that had been occurring over a number of years and finally bubbled over into drastic action. Although the team members’ understanding of political issues was limited, the concern for the situation was certainly heightened and more personalized as a result of the protests.

The situation gave the project a different level of depth as it promoted the desire to search for reasons behind what was unfolding. As a result it gave the participants greater insight into the culture they had entered and the country they were sharing. It is quite possible that some of the aspects of their responses would have been very different had it not been for the protests.
5.7.2 How the politics impacted the participants

The interest levels in events and empathetic responses from participants were heightened due to events that occurred prior to travelling. Life became more real as the participants lived what those at home were only reading about in the newspapers or seeing on the television. The distance of Chiang Mai from Bangkok brought with it security, but also allowed a closeness to events that could not be experienced by those in Australia or through the media. Tour participants were able to provide context to those at home by explaining their understanding of events as they unfolded. As such, some participants exhibited a kind of excitement at being near something that was internationally newsworthy.

However, once family and friends in Australia had been informed of the situation and participants settled into the accommodation and program in Chiang Mai the TMAT environment normalised. Participants became comfortable that they were not under threat or in danger and this allowed them to relax and take part in the program that they had prepared for, albeit with a slightly greater insight into the politics than would normally be the case. Some took quite an interest in events others did not. For most, the focus of their time was the activities and tasks associated with the TMAT program.

5.7.3 Those who elected not to travel

Given the media coverage of the Bangkok protests there was understandable hesitation and concern on the part of some tour members regarding travel. The total number of those initially planning to travel as part of the TMAT group was 42 and those actually deciding to travel numbered 32.

One school decided, on 19th December, 2008 not to allow their contingent (one teacher and seven students) to travel. The teacher and one of the students were to be part of the study. We were made aware of this by the travel agent who phoned us in Thailand to ask what the situation was and to notify us of the cancellation. That same day a student from another school, who was also to have been part of the study, made the decision not to travel. At that point, of the initial 11 study participants who were interviewed prior to my leaving Australia, eight were still involved. Whilst it was regrettable that three were no longer travelling to Thailand there was still a variety of experience and age ranges in the remaining eight study participants. The size of the new group also lent itself to being more manageable and promised more opportunity to spend one on one time with each participant. The size was also optimal for a focus group.
5.8 Summary

In this chapter I have presented information to contextualize and give background to the situation that the participants and I were part of in Thailand. It continues the journey into the unfamiliar, the foreign and shows the contrast between what can be known to participants and what can not.

The following four chapters give an account of the TMAT experience as it unfolded for participants. As such it is both chronological and thematic. Chapter Six outlines the pre-travel information taken from interviews completed in Australia. Chapters Seven and Eight present issues and experiences that occurred whilst in Thailand and Chapter Nine deals with participant responses and reflections after returning to Australia.

Chapter Seven begins with the arrival of the TMAT in Thailand and works through themes relating to their movement from Australia to Thailand, through Thailand and the complexity of the short term volunteer role. Chapter Eight introduces a focus on intercultural interaction and on participant reflection on issues and circumstances as they were experienced by them.
Chapter 6: The Journey Begins

6.1 Outline of the Chapter

In the previous chapter I outlined the political history of Thailand and contextualised the political situation in Thailand, during the research period.

In this chapter an overview of the pre-travel preparation of participants in this study is provided as a way of introducing the participants and research story through their expectations for the trip and through their recollections of previous TMATs.

Participants reflect upon their reasons for taking part in the program. Those who have traveled as part of the TMAT on previous occasions share recollections of interactions with missionaries and NGO workers and draw comparisons between their own lives and the lives of these people.

Material within this chapter is taken from pre-travel interview data. In-Thai insights occur as participants who have previously taken part in TMATs reflect on those experiences through these interviews.

This chapter begins the story as it occurred prior to travel. The story in Thailand continues in the next two chapters, and reflections on the experience upon return to Australia are explored in Chapter Nine.

6.1.1 The problem of presenting information- Mee Bun Hah Chao

The data for this study was gathered in three distinct spaces;

- Australia before the Thailand experience,
- Thailand and,
- Australia post the Thailand experience

The participants were in three distinct groups;

- those who had never been part of a TMAT program,
- those who had been part of a school midyear TMAT program in the past, and
- those who had previously been part of a TMAT end of year program.
As a consequence the anticipations and reflections of the various groups differed markedly. This became a challenge for the presentation of information from the data gathered prior to travel. Experiences and familiarity levels within the program effected the way participants answered questions. This was particularly noticeable in those who had traveled multiple times and referred to NGO workers and missionaries, as a matter of course, in their comments and responses. This made presenting information chronologically quite challenging as they often referred to people and situations in Thailand that first time travelers had not yet encountered. This was also problematic for the writing of information that could clarify, for the reader, when and where the data was acquired and the interviews administered.

To address this I have sought to describe the concepts that arose during the course of the TMAT program and how my thoughts about the concepts evolved. This has been undertaken by means of a chronology according to the three data gathering spaces.

6.2 Pre-travel interviews—การ ตั้งคำถาม

I began this study by listening to participants in pre-travel interviews, but was unaware of what the prospect of travel meant to them. Each year there was a new group of people travelling and whilst I enjoyed working with them and getting to know them before, during and after the trip, I was simply part of introducing a group of people to Thailand, a place I had grown to know and love.

As I began to listen carefully to what was being said in interviews and later written in diaries, I came to appreciate the depth of feeling and the meaning involvement in a program such as this engendered. In Chapter Two I wrote of the difficulty in agreeing on an understanding of guest. I wanted to see what and who participants saw themselves as and to learn about how they positioned themselves, not to direct them towards my concerns by immediately talking to them about a guest or absolute hospitality.

At no stage during the data gathering did I explain the meaning of Guest. Rather, I asked participants how they saw themselves and therefore answers came from their own interpretation and experience with the notion of the various positions they described. My intentional decision not to explain the Derridean notion of Guest was taken so as to avoid confusion in participants and to avoid any propensity they may feel to take on, or attempt to emulate, a particular position.
6.2.1 Beginning the interviews—การตั้ง

The TMAT meetings were held at the school in a double room separated by a sliding partition. On one side of the partition was a cooking demonstration room and on the other was a sewing room. The meetings started at 7:30pm. I organised to meet with participants at 6:30pm for pre-travel interviews, prior to meetings. Most of the interviews were conducted in this setting. As explained in Chapter Four, for the convenience of several participants their interviews were conducted at their homes.

The rooms were quiet except for the final preparatory set up of chairs and the occasional rustle of plastic bags laden with donated clothing, goods and equipment. The contents of these bags would be taken by team members at the end of the meeting for later carriage to, and distribution in, Thailand.

The interview space was set up in the room next to where the meeting was to take place so that we would have privacy and not be disturbed by other TMAT team members arriving early. The audio recorder and interview map were placed on the table, and I sat down to think and prepare whilst waiting for participants to arrive. Each of the pre-travel interviews was conducted on a one to one basis.

6.2.2 Participants and their reasons for going to Thailand—ผู้มีส่วนร่วม

As might be expected, participants spoke about a range of different motivations for travelling to Thailand with TMAT. In the pages to follow are brief descriptions of each of the participants, including details of whether this was their first TMAT or whether they had taken part in other TMATs. Included in these descriptions are selections of their reasons for traveling and some of their initial thoughts on what this TMAT might mean for them.
6.2.3 Louise—ลูอีซ

This was the first time Louise had been part of a TMAT program. She is a teacher and has traveled internationally in the past, but not to Thailand.

Her introduction to the program was via a workmate who had been part of the tour on several previous occasions. Louise was keen to express why she had decided to take part. She saw the trip as an adventure and “a stepping stone, a midlife crisis, call it what you will.” She explained her plans for the future and the place TMAT had in moving her towards them,

I would like to be teaching overseas whether it's teaching English overseas or doing volunteer positions. I've been a couple of times to a couple of organisations and I think this is a fantastic way to get the networking started and to find out what I do want to do in a few years’ time when I really am free to do what I want.

Deciding to take part in this program was, for Louise, a safe way of moving beyond her previous experiences and current circumstances.
I've come into this with no real expectations except that I was a little bit concerned about travelling on my own and I thought well here I am going with a whole group of people. There will be lots of people around as well as people who know the area that I'm going to.

Louise positioned herself as someone who had entered the experience with “no real expectations”. She was open to what may eventuate and had taken on a receptive position as learner in preparation for future work or travel. She indicated that part of her focus was instrumental in that participation in the program would enable her to “get the networking started” for a potential future teaching role. Louise explained that she had been “a couple of times to a couple of organizations” highlighting her experience while simultaneously suggesting she was someone who carefully gathered information with which to make an informed decision.

6.2.4 Andrea—แอนเดรีย

Andrea had traveled on more than five TMAT programs. She had established relationships with several people in Thailand through her involvement. She is a teacher and had become a valued participant within the program.

Andrea was introduced to the program by Graeme Smith and had followed its progress closely. As is shown in Figure 5, her main reason for going was in response to Graeme’s request for her to see where he had grown up.

Andrea had traveled widely throughout Asia and Europe. TMAT had been her only STM experience.

We’d been to China a couple of years before for a quick visit so I had some sort of understanding. I thought it would be a bit like what I’d seen in China and I was wrong. In China it seemed to me that nobody was interested in you and in Thailand people generally speaking are. They seem to be a friendly nation. I didn’t expect that.

Andrea entered the TMAT originally with the expectation that Thailand “would be a bit like what I’d seen in China”. She commented that upon experiencing Thailand and its people, this sameness was not the case, “I was wrong.”

I like to work at the leprosy hospital. I think that what we do there makes a difference. We’re not just doing something for someone who couldn’t be bothered doing it for themselves. We’re helping someone who can’t help
themselves. You can’t hold a paintbrush if you’ve got three fingers on both hands and there’s nothing wrong with my fingers. In fact it was the first time we went to Thailand that was the first time I’d ever thought to thank God for my fingers. I’d always more or less taken them for granted before then.

Andrea entered this trip with memories of previous experiences and with particular ideas attached to those memories. She believed that the work she had been able to assist with at the leprosy hospital... made “a difference” for people who, due to their level of disability, would otherwise have great difficulty doing the work for themselves. She positioned herself, at that point, as a helper. She related how her first TMAT caused her to reflect on something she had previously taken for granted, her fingers, “In fact it was the first time we went to Thailand that was the first time I’d ever thought to thank God for my fingers. I’d always more or less taken them for granted before then.”

However, Andrea’s emphasis on “not just doing something for someone who couldn’t be bothered doing it for themselves” and “helping others who can’t help themselves”, while positioning her as a charitable person, a helper, also suggested that she saw certain types of disadvantage as being the result of choice. A physical disability explained the need for help but being able bodied opened up the possibility that people choose whether or not to be “bothered”.

6.2.5 Kym—กิม

Kym’s initial reason for travelling was to support his wife. This TMAT was his fourth and his continued involvement had come about for other reasons,

I very much want to go and see [my orphanage buddy]. [He] is a young lad of 10. He’s turning 11 in a few weeks and he’s very important to me and I think I’m very important to him. He picks me out of everyone and runs at me and that’s very precious. All children are precious, but he is particularly precious.

Kym’s reason for going on this TMAT was still to be with his wife, but it had grown to include the “precious” relationship he now had with a young boy at the orphanage.

I’m very relaxed about going. I suppose my concerns are “do we achieve the work we want to do?” and “can we get there and do it?” Sometimes it’s very frustrating because I know what we’re capable of doing but because we can’t get the raw materials or whatever we unfortunately do a second class job sometimes or not as good a job as I think we should be able to do, but at the end of the day when we paint or whatever it all comes up fine and the locals are extremely
happy with what we’ve managed to achieve so we are achieving it. So there we are… just the fact that I could do it much quicker here with the right equipment…but that’s ok as long as we get it done.

Kym positioned himself as a worker, someone who traveled to complete a given task. Kym is a tradesman and an expert at his trade. He has high standards to which he would like work completed. Based on his previous TMATs he knew the work that may be required and the resources that would likely be available. He was also able to compare the work and resources with what would be available in Australia. His concern was with doing a good job and achieving what was planned in the time available. He realised, however that what can be achieved by a group of non trades people with limited resources, in Thailand, was not comparable with what could be achieved on a worksite in Australia.

6.2.6 Sally—แซลลี่

Sally was a student in her final year of high school. She was from a school other than that with which the main group are involved. She was the only participant from her school. She has been part of a mid year TMAT previously (during year 10) and was keen to join an end of year group. She was interested in learning about customs and culture when she joined her first TMAT.

Sally positioned herself as a learner on her first TMAT trip.

…I thought that it was a really good opportunity to meet new people and learn about their way of life and customs over there…They [Thai people] are very patient with my little knowledge of the Thai language and they are extremely patient with our not knowing very much about their customs or their culture.

She commented on how “patient” the Thai people were with her even though her knowledge of language and customs was small.

On this TMAT Sally positioned herself as an on-going learner who wanted to build on what she had learnt last trip,

[I’m] looking forward to going again and hopefully learning more than I did last time.

6.2.7 Hannah—ฮันนา

Hannah was a final year, high school student who had traveled on a Year 10 mid year TMAT previously where she had met Sally. She was one of two participants from her school. Hannah expected to go back to Thailand after her first experience.
…it wasn’t really a choice whether I wanted to go back. I really liked it last time and this time I expect it to be similar but different if that makes sense.

Hannah’s comment that “it wasn’t really a choice” was interesting. There was nothing in her words or interview that indicated any coercion or negative basis for this statement. It was simply a statement recognizing that she had intended and expected to return, as in an event that was considered inevitable, not needing a decision. Hannah’s positioning for this TMAT was not clear. She was concerned that she may be disappointed after her first trip. Hannah had a very positive experience on that first trip, “a great time” with a different group of people at a different time of year. She expressed concern that having had that experience it may be difficult to replicate or “come close to.” She was hoping for an experience that would “measure up” to the last trip she took part in.

I am a bit worried that since we had such a great time last time, will it measure up and come close to.

6.2.8 Lisa—ลิซ่า

Lisa had been on four previous TMAT programs. She is an experienced operating theatre nurse and has been able to use her skills to teach and assist at McKean Rehabilitation Center on previous TMATs. Prior to travelling neither she nor the TMAT group, had been aware that her skills would be utilized in this way. Her husband and three of their four daughters had accompanied her on a number of occasions. This time she was the sole member of her family traveling.

I first went over there with a total open mind so whether it was expectation or surprises I am not exactly sure. I can’t really say that anything was a surprise

During her interview Lisa conveyed that she was open to the experience that lay ahead on her first TMAT and she said nothing that indicated this openness had changed or diminished for this trip. She had been able to contribute in a number of ways due to her professional skills and was ready to do so again if needed. Her openness “total open mind” continued as she remained ready to take part in, and respond to, whatever eventuated.

6.2.9 Ellen—อีลิน

Ellen works in a school as an integration staff member. She joined this trip after planning it with her daughter who traveled on a mid year TMAT several years ago. Ellen had not traveled to Thailand before and had limited international travel experience.
I’m happy to be the follower. I tend to do that anyway. I’m happy to be told where to go, what to do rather than lead the charge. That will suit me quite well.

Ellen was quite clear about how she had positioned herself for the trip. She was content to follow others. She was in a new group and a new situation. Ellen was “happy” to take the necessary time to come to terms with the newness and to find her place within the experience. Ellen frequently referred to herself as a “newby”. Her positioning of herself in the TMAT group and during her time in Thailand is examined in more depth in the Chapter Eight.

6.2.10 Peta—ปีเตอร์

Peta had just completed Year 12 and had been on a previous Year 10, mid year TMAT. She attended the school with which the main group is affiliated. Her reasons for going originally were as part of a school work experience project. Her reason for returning was that she had enjoyed the previous TMAT so much and that she missed the children from the orphanage.

The kids are just awesome. I miss them. It’s really fulfilling.

During her interview she did not express other reasons for travelling. Her positioning was that of a returning visitor hoping to renew acquaintances with the children.

6.2.11 Sue—ซู

Sue is a teacher who has traveled widely across many parts of the world including South East Asia. She was one of a few TMAT participants who had been part of a short-term volunteer program outside TMAT and was the only study participant to have done so. Her main reason for going on the TMAT was to be travelling for a purpose, not just tourism. Her school had supported the orphanage TMAT visits for a number of years. During her pre-travel interview Sue spoke of hearing the founder of the orphanage speak at the school where she worked. She had found the talk inspirational and this had influenced her decision to join the TMAT.

[W]e have been supporting [the] orphanage at [school] for ages and I heard [the founder] speak at the school in my first year there, 2005 and she is one of the most inspirational people I’ve ever met. So I just went and talked to her afterwards and she was fantastic…

Sue expressed that she did not expect to change the world but sought to make it better and this became part of her reasoning for going:

I’m not expecting to go over and be [the founder] and in fact I think I will struggle because I get very emotional but you can still do what you can do. I don’t think you can change the world but you can make it better.
Chapter 6: The Journey Begins

Sue gave consideration to what she believed TMAT’s purpose in traveling was and to what her position within that would be.

I’m in two minds as to whether we’re not going to convert the heathens because I think that is God’s job and it is very arrogant because the way we perceive God’s plan could be wrong. I think what you can do is go and be the best person possible and as an example it could make people wonder what motivates you to come and do this.

This trip presented very real challenges to Sue. She was considering the spiritual aspects that she may encounter and had discussed this with her family members. She had positioned herself as a helper, but within this there was cautiousness at the possibilities the unknown aspects may present. During her pre-travel interview she became noticeably emotional as she expressed the following.

I had a really interesting talk to my older sister and when I told her about this trip she said “that’s something you really should do because it will help me think about things you have avoided thinking about.” It will be a challenging time. Although I don’t believe that anyone is so sure that challenges don’t upset them but I have avoided thinking, for a lot of my life, about my spiritual side and I am looking upon this as quite an opportunity to stop avoiding it.

6.2.12 Wendy—เวนดี้

Wendy had also heard the orphanage founder speak during one of her fundraising visits to Australia. She had been inspired as a grade six student and kept the thought of visiting the orphanage in her mind until she was able to go after completing Year 11. This TMAT was her second trip to Thailand with the group.

Wendy also wanted to be part of something that was more than tourism,

I actually didn’t forget it and then it was in Year 11 that I heard about it and I was like I would really like to go there and ... I wanted to do something different that wasn’t an actual holiday, it was helping people.

Wendy had witnessed some of the negatives exhibited by other Australians in Thailand and positioned herself as an ambassador of Australia, seeking to make up for some of these things.

I know how it’s really gross with Australia it is very stereotyped and we go places and impose our practices on people and that’s kind of yuk. I remember I was
there once and there was an Australian guy who was drunk and he’s like “oh you’re from Australia” and I was like “go away you’re embarrassing” and so I was conscious about that, so that’s why I really wanted to respect them.

Wendy was very aware of some of the dangers associated with “imposing our practices on people”, describing it as “kind of yuk”. While the example she chose to illustrate her point referred to an inebriated “Australian guy”, Wendy’s awareness of the impropriety of visitors/tourists/guests imposing cultural practices on hosts appears to go beyond the aberrant. Implied within her comments is the idea that intercultural encounters should be respectful and reverential. One should leave behind practices that might be tolerated ‘at home’ and enter into the intercultural relationship on terms that are nothing short of ‘our best’. This disposition tends towards the kind of hospitality that Derrida outlines. It is a disposition towards setting aside cultural practices and cultural norms to risk engagement with the Other on terms that are always negotiated.

6.2.13 Jo

Jo was a secondary school student who has just completed Year 11. She had been on a Year 10 mid-year TMAT and was looking forward to experiencing an end of year program. She was one of two participants from her school. Her initial reason for taking part was the challenge.

I think religion was a reason I went last time because I wanted to experience a different culture and also just personally discover myself more and learn how I react to different situations and things.

She was returning “because it was such a great experience last time and I just want to experience it all again.” Jo was returning for the experience of the trip. She enjoyed being with the children at the orphanage and spending time in Thailand and had positioned herself, at this point, as a tourist or visitor ready to receive what was on offer.

6.2.14 Before moving on

Within the reasons for travel mentioned by the participants above, many are noted in the STM and VT literature. Participants echoed reasons such as adventure and of being part of a great experience (Cheung, et al., 2010, Lyons & Wearing, 2008, Zahra & McIntosh, 2007). There also mentioned interest in culture, deepening relationships, or following what their older siblings had done. Several mentioned the influence the orphanage founder had on their decision to take part in the program and others spoke of the influence previous travelers had on them. The reasons for travelling in this group of participants were diverse but not
dissimilar to those of “purpose driven traveler[s]” (Rogers, 2007, p.20) or to those identified by Cheung et al (2010), who listed cultural immersion, interaction with local people and helping others, among motivating factors of their study participants.

6.3 Anticipation and expectation — ศัพท์หวัง

Responses to questions about what participants anticipated and expected from the TMAT differed according to whether or not they had previously traveled as part of a TMAT. Prior experience meant that participants were more likely to reference the various sites in Thailand in their responses. One of the places that would be visited regularly whilst in Thailand was an orphanage for children and babies with HIV/AIDS. The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS has been strong and devastating for sufferers (Alonzo & Reynolds, 1995; Bond, Chase & Aggleton, 2002; Parker & Aggleton, 2003). On each TMAT the same Chiang Mai orphanage is visited.

This orphanage is a significant part of the TMAT experience. Participants visit regularly, almost daily, over the course of the tour. TMAT has formed strong links with the orphanage over many years and several previous TMAT participants have returned to work there as volunteer nannies for six months or more. Relationships formed there have been deeper than passing acquaintances and have often continued via mail and email after the TMAT is over. TMAT does not just pass through as part of a once only project. It has become part of the calendar for the orphanage and for McKean.

Teams led by the same leader return each six months. New travelers hear about the children and workers at the orphanage before leaving Australia. They see photographs and write to the children prior to meeting them. Once in Thailand they meet and spend extended periods of time with them.

On this trip, as on every other, all TMAT participants chose or were allocated a buddy or two, from the orphanage, prior to leaving Australia. These buddies were sent a card containing a photograph of the team member as an introduction and to enable ease of identification upon arrival at the orphanage. During the time in Thailand the team member and their buddy/ies would spend time together playing, going on outings and generally having fun (similar to a big brother-little brother/big sister-little sister concept). Participants anticipated meeting up with the children (their buddies) and the workers at the orphanage whether it was to renew old acquaintances and friendships or to visit for the first time. During interviews prior to leaving Australia the participants noted the following:
Andrea: I’m looking forward to seeing the children in the orphanage. One particular little boy that we’ve become very fond of ... and I’m looking forward to seeing him again.

Kym: The people we go to work with at the orphanage and McKean mission. I look forward to going and seeing those faces again.

Louise: I also like working with young people. The high School students that you're taking over with you and then the kids in the orphanage as well.

Lisa: In the night markets we have found a particular artist that we are very fond of his work and he has done some really great pieces for us and I hope to be able to catch up with him again to do some more this trip.

Sue: People that have been to Thailand have said how fantastically friendly Thai people are so I am looking forward to that. I was also interested to hear that some of the older kids [at the orphanage] tend to muck around and push the boundaries and I thought how fantastic is that? I just think it’s wonderful that they can be naughty and not do the right thing. I thought “you beauty!”

The risks associated with HIV and modes of spread were explained in the team meetings. Only one participant asked about risks associated with visiting. The question related to playing with the children and whether that could expose visitors to HIV infection. This participant was travelling with TMAT for the first time and travelling overseas for the first time.

Ellen: I did have some thoughts about how you respond to the children that are AIDS carriers. I’m thinking well, you know, how much affection can you show them? Is it this much but not go this far. Peta spoke about one of the buddies that was her buddy last time, who was very sick and was isolated so she didn’t get to see her very much. I’m thinking well these kids have all been affected in some way by AIDS, how close can you get to them?

Those who were returning to Thailand for a repeat trip did not mention this. This did not mean they were at any less or greater risk, but it was more likely a reflection of the relationship they had formed with the children and how this had transplanted itself over any fears. It also highlights something of the way in which personal encounters with people who have HIV/AIDS helps quell fears of infection and opens up the possibility for engagement. Their knowledge of HIV and the risks associated with it were no greater than those traveling for the first time. However, they had met and dealt with the children who were healthy and
well and appeared no different from any other child. This tended to make the memory of their
health concerns fade or be completely forgotten in interactions with them. This can be an area
of concern as it was not until one of the children became unwell or showed signs of the virus
weakening their system that TMAT participants spoke about or wrote of an awareness of the
virus existing at all. This is elaborated upon in the next chapter.

6.3.1 Pre-travel reflections—“If this happened to me … but it happened to you”
During pre-travel interviews study participants, who had previously been part of at least one
TMAT in Thailand, reflected upon their relationship or interactions with NGO workers and
missionaries. For six months prior to travelling participants interacted with other TMAT team
members. On each previous TMAT relationships began to form during monthly meetings,
contact socially and whilst fundraising. These relationships and interactions continued in
Thailand yet in much closer quarters and for more prolonged periods. Whilst in Thailand
participants interacted with other TMAT team members, local Thai people, NGO workers
and missionaries while they worked with, or observed them as they went about their daily
lives.

During this time, intercultural interactions that were unrelated to racial identity or ethnicity
occurred among the various groups, challenging the TMAT participants to reconsider any
assumed similitude based on country of origin, religious affiliation, shared ideals, skin
pigmentation or other embodied signifiers of sameness and difference. When participants
tried to come to terms with the life choices NGO workers and missionaries had made, and the
perceived rationale for those choices, a clash of cultures and perceptions occurred.
Difficulties in negotiating this culture clash emerged as participants’ ruminated on how they
believed they would have responded to NGO and missionary choices if the same choice had
been theirs.

The responses to these interactions and the influence they had on participants differed.
However, I had not anticipated the level of impact in relation to expatriate NGO workers or
missionaries. Participants held an affinity with these people who seemed like themselves.
Consequently, when differences were identified these were more difficult for them to
reconcile. There was a cultural difference that had been recognized and this cultural
difference positioned the TMAT participants as simultaneously cultural foreigners/cultural
guests, and visitors arriving under patronage with shared cultural understandings. While each
had anticipated the cultural differences between themselves and Thai people, they had not
anticipated, nor been equipped for, the encounter of difference among those they imagined to
be like themselves.
When the way life and experiences of NGO workers and missionaries became recognised as foreign or different from that of participants, the relationships, interactions and communications with expatriates became intercultural. As noted, the physicality, language and backgrounds of some of these NGO workers and missionaries were not dissimilar to the TMAT participants. The cultural difference occurred in the way they lived their lives and in the priorities they held with respect to leaving their country of origin, and beginning the life they had chosen to live in Thailand. This was particularly evident in discussions of what the NGO workers and missionaries had sacrificed to live and work in Thailand.

6.4 Similarity and Difference

6.4.1 Sacrifice—Reflecting on others [not] like me—การบูชายันต์

TMAT participants recognised the actions of workers with whom they came into contact as being sacrificial in that they gave up something to be in Thailand and to do the work they did.

One participant, Kym spoke admiringly of the expatriate NGO workers, in a pre-travel interview utilising the concept map and reflecting on previous trips to Thailand. Comments came from a reflective perspective as positive observations were made regarding the commitment shown and sacrifice made in the work of NGOs. Kym stated:

It’s just an amazing witness that they’ve given up their own life for in some cases many, many years to help these people that they knew little about until they got there, but were so taken aback by their plight that they’ve given the rest of their life to trying to help them. That’s an amazing witness in many respects of how a Christian can go about his life and most of them that we’ve come into contact with are Christian people, and how they just dedicate their life to helping these other people. I think that’s just an amazing thing. I’m afraid I haven’t as yet got the guts to do that. It takes a lot just to sell everything up and pack up and go and do it. These people have done it. I take my hat off to them.

Kym perceived an “amazing witness in many respects of how a Christian can go about his life”, but is unable to imagine doing the same, “yet”. “I’m afraid I haven’t as yet got the guts to do that”. The conflict Kym experienced between what was seen in the NGO worker’s life and the reflective comparison with Kym’s own life, illustrates the difficulty in contemplating giving everything up.

Kym realised the magnitude of, what was perceived as, sacrifice when seen in the lives of the NGO workers and missionaries. There was a realisation that Kym may not be prepared to do
the same...yet. The comparison with those he spoke about leaves open the possibility that there may be an occasion, sometime in the future, in which Kym could do something similar.

Kym: The chap we met, [NGO worker’s name], the American chap, was a very successful business man, sold his business and went there. He is such a nice man, charming but he doesn’t blow his own trumpet about what a good fellow he is. He just quietly does the work and is a wealth of information, but he doesn’t brag about what he’s achieved but I think he’s achieved marvelous things.

Later in the interview, Kym again spoke of the admiration held for one of the NGO workers and noted how financial security was given up to travel to Thailand. Particular reference was made to the worker’s humility. These workers and missionaries had a significant influence on participants in relation to their view of the worker, the work and the consequent reflections they had on how these lives and experiences applied to their own.

6.4.2 Exploring Sacrifice—การบูชายันต์

The concept of sacrifice is central to Christian teaching and in speaking of the way NGO workers and missionaries gave up their previous lives and possessions. It became evident that participants struggled with this concept.

The characteristics participants saw in NGO workers and missionaries, as indicative of sacrifice or being sacrificial, became synonymous with how these people were identified or conceptualised by participants. As such these characteristics formed an important part of how they were positioned by participants. These characteristics were perceived as markers of their choices in life and, although the term was not used by participants, it became an indicator of what I have previously called being a Guest. The dual characteristics of empathy and sacrifice together became an example of the outworking of absolute hospitality through being a Guest.

Sacrifice is a theme found throughout Jewish and Christian thought. As such it is a theme that is familiar to those taking part in TMAT due to their Christian heritage. The Christian Bible’s Old Testament speaks of sacrifices and burnt offerings in atonement for the sins of the people. Leviticus 16 outlines this understanding of sacrifice through the rituals of the Day of Atonement. The New Testament shows sacrifice as something different and presents Jesus Christ as the sacrifice to atone for sin. After the crucifixion of Jesus the meaning in relation to sacrifice was no longer the taking of life for a purpose; it became synonymous with an act of worship.
Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship (Barker & Burdick, 1995 Romans 12:1).

Sacrifice was no longer a payment for sin because that payment had been made through the death of Jesus Christ. Sacrifice had become a way of living not a means of dying. It became an act of worship for God’s pleasure rather than for the benefit of all people as it had been prior to this. Being prepared to live sacrificially for God rather than to die for Him was quite a new and different prospect throughout the New Testament, exemplified in the life of the apostle Paul.

Participants in the TMAT program perceived that many of those NGO workers and missionaries with whom they had come into contact were living according to the sacrificial model Paul had set out in his life and it was, at times, confronting. This is explored further throughout the chapter.

Paul was a privileged Jew (Phil. 3:5-7) and Roman by birth (Acts 22:28). He was a student of Gamaliel, a great teacher (Acts 22:3). Even as a young man, he held an important place in the Jewish councils (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2), but when he became a follower of Christ, he gave up these things and, according to the Book of Acts, was despised by those who previously revered him to the point where they plotted to kill him. The record of his sufferings and struggle is recorded in his second letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11:23-28). Yet he did not regret exchanging a life of privilege for a life of hardship. He saw his losses as nothing in comparison with what he had gained (Phil. 3:8) (Rickard, 2007).

Living for God had very different implications for the conduct of one’s life than dying for Him had. This story and others like it are foundational to the Christian worldview of TMAT participants.

TMAT participants who had been on the TMAT trip previously expressed admiration for the expatriate NGO workers or missionaries and the work they carried out. Their western background and physical similarities made NGO workers seem more familiar to participants. Participants also spent time speaking with them as they shared English as a first language and therefore conversation was not difficult. However participants understood the workers as being different. This is discussed in more detail later.

Jo: I think it is really amazing what they do. How they give up their own time and do volunteer work and they’re doing it all for other people. I think that is really
amazing. The fact that they give up their own time, money and resources to do things like that.

Hannah: I found [NGO worker’s name] really inspiring to think that someone could give up their life back here, their family and friends, to go and help underprivileged people. It really makes you think about how some people don’t need all the material things and they are willing to give everything up for what they believe.

Here Hannah and Jo reflected on the work of people who “give up” their life, time and money to help “underprivileged people”. Hannah described people like this (NGO workers, in most cases these were missionaries) as having different and special characteristics from what is perceived as normal; they “don’t need all the material things and they are willing to give everything up for what they believe”. In doing so she reflects Winheld’s comment that “Missionaries must be superhuman giants!” (Winheld, 2010, p. 19). These people seemingly have more than ordinary human characteristics. They exhibit a hospitality that costs them something, a hospitality that requires effort on their part beyond the practices dictated by culture and place of origin.

As participants noted, for some it meant moving to Thailand leaving family, friends, jobs and home behind to take up a new position in an orphanage, an aid organisation, a leprosy hospital or somewhere else without the expectation that those they are working with, or for, provide for them, pay them, acknowledge them, do anything for them. They are in Thailand as guests of the country, but simultaneously, often as hosts of Thai people. A hospitality similar to that expounded by Derrida and practiced by Day (Fannin, 2007), Massignon (Jennings, 2006), Mother Theresa and others. In this hospitality one becomes both Guest and Host interchangeably and simultaneously, depending on the situation. For Mother Theresa she was a Guest in India (not a native citizen) and yet she Hosted the poor and infirm, of whom she made no expectation, for the entirety of her Guesthood. She was perhaps a true hôte (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000).

Similarly, Louis Massignon (a Christian living outside his native country) whilst a Guest, “established a house of hospitality and prayer to welcome Muslims, not in order to have the latter change their religion…, but…to represent the hospitality that is at the heart of faith” (Jennings, 2006, p.113). This spirit of hospitality, of the hôte, was in the characteristics participants had begun to identify in some of the workers they encountered during their TMAT experience. This was one of the main themes they had reflected upon in relation to the NGO workers and missionaries during their pre-travel interviews.
In relation to this, Hannah did not continue to the conclusion that “missionaries are simply ordinary people empowered to live extraordinary lives” (Winheld, 2010, p. 19). To Hannah missionaries, by the outworking of their role in helping “underprivileged people” again highlight a point of difference, or her recognition of a perceived difference. They were helping those who are not like us. This difference separated them (NGO workers/missionaries) from those who are not willing to “give everything up for what they believe”. These different people [missionaries or NGO workers] have given up everything, including their life, and in so doing they have left her (Hannah) inspired by them but not with a desire to become like them.

The notion of giving something/everything up suggests a sacrifice has been made. Life had not only changed or made a detour, in the mind of the observer but been halted, given up by the decision to move away from Australia. In this view the known had been given up completely in preference for the unknown. Australia was seen as being left, sacrificed for the unknown of Thailand. This was a frightening, unpredictable, confusing yet admirable step from the perspective of those who viewed this as sacrifice. This notion suggested that anything outside the known and familiar culture was to be looked at differently. It was somewhere to be visited but not to live, somewhere to know of, but not to know. It was out there. The encounter with this sacrifice began to challenge and suggest alternatives to what had been perceived by participants as the normal order of things.

If we take this further, the decision to sacrifice life has moved the NGO workers away from what is recognised as real or normal in life, onto what is seen as an alternate path or perhaps an aberration prior to returning to normal life in Australia. The sacrifice exhibited by these workers was inspiring yet the measure of their sacrifice was weighed, by some participants, as is the case with Wendy below, against their lost financial earning capacity. The greater loss equated with the perception of greater sacrifice i.e. the sacrifice of a doctor or lawyer was seen as greater than that of an unskilled worker due to the magnitude of earnings left behind on their original career pathway.

This alternate path is noble, inspiring, but again reflective of those different people, and not applicable to Hannah’s life. The path has led to a sacrifice, of aspects of a previous life by those different people, through practicing a form of hospitality and outworking of Guest that was not determined by the rules of cultural practice. It was a form of hospitality, like Derrida’s absolute hospitality, that accepted the Other without question or expectation. These different people had given up material goods and further they had given up a range of cultural practices in order to adopt those of their hosts, yet not to the point of trying to become native
themselves. They had done this whilst retaining what was core to them—their faith and their purpose for example—They remained a foreigner (farang—ฝรั่ง) yet they were loved and accepted having become a Guest.

From a Christian perspective they displayed the “hospitality that is at the heart of faith” (Jennings, 2006 p. 113), hospitality that is a “gift without reservations” (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 135) and hospitality that is “at the heart of the gospel” (Fannin, 2007, p. 37). When Hannah saw this outworked in a foreign context she responded with seeming awe.

Like Hannah, Kym also applauded the example of NGO workers with whom the TMAT team had come into contact.

Kym: The non nationals that have come from overseas are doing exceptional work. It’s an amazing thing that some of these people have put their own life on hold so that they can help the hill tribe people or people in the hills that are being persecuted for many reasons… [NGO worker’s name] who’s been there 30 years she’s given her life to these kids. She just knows no other way of life now. She just loves the place so much and the kids. She’s a tireless worker, an amazing woman.

Kym was amazed by those who had “put their own life on hold” to help others. This is similar to Hannah’s view, although initially the life is not seen as given up, simply put on hold, a more temporary decision. Kym commented that a worker has “been there for 30 years [and] given her life to these kids. She ... knows no other way of life now.” The length of service, 30 years, had changed the perception of a temporary decision to put life on “hold” to the perception of a life that was “given”.

The idea of putting a “life on hold” is common when speaking of incidents intersecting unexpectedly in life, surgical procedures (Alam et al., 2008) or waiting through automated telephone services (Tom, Burns & Zeng, 1997). In these situations there is a temporary hold or pause before return to the expected progression of life. It is a form of liminality. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

In the lives of many NGO workers and missionaries their lives did not hold or pause on an aberrant pathway but continued along an alternate and equally legitimate route. They continued to live in a different place and for a different purpose. Their journey into liminality had become what Rohr refers to as “chronic”. Reintegration into what had been normal for them previously had not occurred.
Hannah, Kym and Wendy all make reference to the NGO workers putting “their own life on hold” or “giving up their life” in order to work in Thailand. There is a sense that life is something to be enjoyed in the West, but lost or sacrificed elsewhere. Are these workers no longer living? Is real life only something to be enjoyed by those who are like us, who do what we do, live where we live and so on?

Wendy noticed the work done by NGO workers and missionaries and that they “gave up any other life at home…” However, her understanding of what this meant differed from that of Hannah and Kym.

Wendy: It is enlightening to see the amazingly good work done at McKean, and the way in which [NGO workers names] (as I understand it) gave up any other life at home to work in Chiang Mai. I refuse to say inspirational because it is misguidedly used too often and reeks of cliché ness and a limited vocabulary, but it is uplifting (still not the right word) to know that a surgeon chose to live and work at McKean where he would earn tuppence as opposed to in Australia.

Wendy perceived the work as positive and uplifting. She mentioned the diminished earning capacity of a missionary surgeon as a result of his work choice. This was her interpretation of his choice. The choice, however, was something that those most familiar with contemporary economic exchange practices of a capitalist society, find foreign. Western society largely apportions worth and status according to one’s earning capacity. The choice made by this doctor presented Wendy with a foreign and conflicting value system. It was something that was outside her familiar western, capitalist experience and came from a Christian worldview which was possibly outside that with which she was familiar. This doctor had given up a career in a respected profession in Australia and had seemingly given up the status and financial benefits that career afforded. He had done this to live in a third world country treating people who often did not have the money to pay for his services. He had spent over 40 years of his life advancing the treatment of leprosy across South East Asia on a missionary’s stipend in preference to treating people in Australia in a consultant practice with the accompanying comfortable wage and privileges. This was a foreign and perplexing concept for Wendy.

Sally also spoke of the influence the NGO workers had on her experience in Thailand.

Sally: We had quite a bit to do with [NGO worker’s name] at [orphanage] and she was just wonderful. She was so beautiful with the kids. She invited us into her house and to see how she lived now, she was showing us photos of where she
lived, she didn’t resent going over there and she didn’t want to leave and she was wanting to stay over in Thailand for a few more years. It did make me think I would like to do something like that.

Sally expressed her wonder at the lives of some of those workers with whom she had come into contact. She went further by stating that she would like to do something similar. Unlike Hannah and Kym, she reflected that what she had seen and experienced in others was possible for her also. For her, it was not something that only people of a certain type could be a part of.

Prior to travelling, Andrea expressed her impressions of experiences with expatriates whilst reflecting on previous TMAT trips. She also had great admiration for them.

It humbles me a lot to think that these people gave up their world and wherever they came from. One of the blokes, [NGO worker’s name], who works for [an NGO], sold his business, sold his house and came to Thailand to live on the proceeds of that. His money is being slowly whittled away. In Thailand he’s working for a non government group, a Christian group and they’re not really paying him. He’s paying his own way for the benefit of other people. Then I go home and I look at my nana’s blue china on the wall and I think could I give nana’s blue china up so that I could go to Thailand and live on the proceeds? Unfortunately the answer’s probably no. I would really struggle to do that. I admire those people immensely. I admire a doctor who’ll spend his whole life treating people who can’t pay him, when as a surgeon he could have stayed in Melbourne and bought a new Maserati every year. I admire that man. He made a lifestyle choice. Even now he doesn’t regret that choice that’s what he’s chosen to do with his life and he gave his life to God. That’s an amazing thing. He gave up his equivalent of my nana’s blue china so that he could work to better somebody else’s life. There’s no expectation at all of being rewarded for it. Most of the non-government workers that I’ve seen have been missionaries of some sort or another and therefore I’m filled with admiration for them.

Andrea, like Kym, Wendy and Hannah, also stated that these people “gave up” their world. In the case of the first example she used regarding a worker who had chosen to leave his career and business in order to live and work in Thailand, she perceived “his money is being slowly whittled away”. This response reflected a difficulty in reconciling what he had chosen when compared with what her choices may be.
To whittle something away is to slowly take it from one form to another, to carve, sculpt, fashion or shape. This can be a very positive reformation and change process. Andrea’s statement contained aspects of this positive view but also appeared to be negatively skewed – his money is being drained or eroded away. The life this man had chosen was confronting to her as it differed from her own. His sacrifice was seen as very great and she compared her personal equivalent “Nana’s blue china”. Her choice of “Nana’s blue china” as a comparative equivalent was significant. It signalled more than materiality. “Nana’s blue china” had symbolic value. It signified a history, a link with her past. It encompassed identity and connection with family and memories.

Andrea, through the use of this comparison, conveyed that she felt unable to measure up or make a similar sacrifice. Her emphasis was on what was lost or whittled away, and on “not really being paid.”

When in Thailand, during the TMAT, I spoke to one of the missionaries about what she thought of this sacrifice and, in contrast to the reflective pre-travel interview comments of participants, she was not concerned with what was lost. Her emphasis was on what had been given, gained or achieved. She felt it would have been more of a sacrifice not to go to Thailand and to have had no part in everything that she had been able to learn and experience. The metrics used by Wendy and others differed markedly from those that were used by this in-country worker. The perspective, the vantage point and the reality of those looking in as compared with those looking out, contrasted significantly. This translated into what Bennett (1998) termed a sympathetic response to the worker in this instance as Andrea put herself in the worker’s position and concluded that she could not give up “Nana’s blue china”. The result was a negative judgment on herself as she reflected:

Andrea: Then I go home and I look at my nana’s blue china on the wall and I think could I give Nana’s blue china up so that I could go to Thailand and live on the proceeds? Unfortunately the answer’s probably no. I would really struggle to do that. I admire those people immensely.

The worker had had the experience of seeing a need in Thailand, having contact with people he knew who had begun working towards meeting that need and then offering to fill a position within their organisation. He had then taken the practical steps that included selling his business and home, which would allow him to begin his new position. From a Christian perspective he made the decision to follow his calling, a purpose for which God had prepared him.
Conversely, unless Andrea had had the same experience she could not be faced with the same choice. She had not claimed to receive a call to fulfill a task or meet a need in Thailand other than what she was already doing by taking part in the TMAT. Therefore her comparison was made on uneven scales. The situation of the worker was not comparable with her own situation in the way she had attempted it. Her response to his actions and situation was blurred by her attempt to sympathetically imagine herself in his life and in his positioning and to contemplate whether she could take the steps that he had.

Wendy had a different experience to reflect on as she pondered the enormity of the problem faced by the workers and whether there was any point getting involved at all.

Wendy: And then the NGO workers. I know when I went to the [NGO that was helping people in Burma]. Why would you? I knew they were doing stuff but they can’t physically do everything and I think somewhere I was thinking why are they bothering because it’s so much? But then all you can come back to is that they have a really deep faith and they know that they should be there and that’s like their role in life. It’s existentialist and I guess that’s what I thought. I can’t fathom doing that myself. It would be a really good thing but I don’t think I could which is kind of a bad reflection on me. I feel like I really admired them.

Wendy wondered why NGOs got involved in issues that were so big and questioned whether they could make any difference at all, yet she admired them for making an effort against such incredible odds. The group Wendy referred to works to assist Internally Displaced People (IDP) in Burma. These IDPs live in Burma but have been displaced from their villages and homes due to the ongoing civil war in the country. Many have found refuge in the jungles. It is estimated that over 1.5 million people are in this situation.

Wendy found it difficult to comprehend the aims and actions of an organisation working against such insurmountable odds and sought to reconcile it philosophically. “It’s existentialist and I guess that’s what I thought. I can’t fathom doing that myself.” Wendy judged herself negatively, “a bad reflection on me,” for not being able to do the same. Yet, like Andrea, she had not been in the position of those workers in order to do the same.

They made their observations, however, by placing themselves in the position of the Other and commenting on how they, at this point in their experience would respond in that situation. This observation did not consider experiencing the view from the perspective of the Other.
They were commenting on the hospitality shown by these people in their position as Guest and comparing themselves when they had not yet taken on the same Guest position. The resulting judgment or conclusion several participants came to, in terms of comparing themselves with the expatriate workers, was negative. However, this was harsh self-judgment given that they had not been part of the experiences that led those workers to Thailand. Nor had they any reference point to decide whether they would respond similarly if confronted with a similar situation or a similar need or task to fulfill in a foreign context. Their only reference was that up until that point they had not done what the workers had.

Sally commented that,

she [an orphanage missionary] didn’t resent going over there and she didn’t want to leave and she was wanting to stay over in Thailand for a few more years. It made me think I would like to do something like that.

She had been exposed to a new idea and it appealed to her as an experience for the future. The sense of awe she had for the NGO workers and missionaries was evident and their example had inspired her to think of doing something similar. Unlike Andrea, Wendy and to a degree Kym, who applied a personal critique, Sally saw inspiration in the expatriates’ lives and expression of Guest. Through the choices these people (NGO workers and missionaries) had made they had, at some time, grasped and acted upon a notion of hospitality involving what participants would describe as sacrifice, giving something up for the sake of the Other (the host). They had become a Guest in the relationship of hospitality without placing expectations on their host, and doing so out of a sense of willingness rather than as a duty (Jennings, 2006).

The different lives that were identified in these people had caused some participants to make comparisons and to imagine how they would respond in similar circumstances.

Having explored some of these comparisons and imaginings I would like to draw attention to the notions of sympathy and empathy, as related to intercultural communication, by Bennett (1998b) because they relate closely to the way in which participants approached their interactions with NGO workers and missionaries.

Bennett defines sympathy as “the imaginative placing of ourselves in another person’s position” (Bennett, 1998b, p. 197) and empathy as “the imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in another person’s experience” (Bennett, 1998b, p. 207). There is an important distinction to be made here (Katz, 1963; Rogers, 1995). In empathy we do not
position ourselves in the shoes of another, as this would assume that our experience is essentially the same.

In empathy, we “participate” rather than “place,” and we are concerned with “experience” and “perspective” rather than “position”... participation [rather than placement] in another’s experience does not assume essential similarity (Bennett, 1998b, p. 207).

During the in-country experience there were various examples of participants exhibiting both sympathy and empathy with those around them. These are referred to in this chapter as they were included in the pre-travel interviews of those who had traveled to Thailand on TMATs in the past. The idea that “if this happened to me I would...” pervaded particularly in reference to TMAT participant encounters with, and reflections on, the lives of various non-government organisation (NGO) workers and missionaries with whom they came into contact.

In his discussion of sympathy and empathy Bennett (1998b) also talks about the Golden rule found in Matthew 7:12 (New International Version) “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you...” and its general use as a template for behaviour; i.e. when I do not know how to treat you I default back to how I imagine I would like to be treated in the same situation and treat you accordingly.

Bennett interprets the rule as being founded in the assumption that others are the same as me and want to be treated as I do. In this context this only works if we are all inherently the same and wish to be treated as such. However, we are not the same and consequently do not all desire similar treatment (Bennett, 1998a).

Many world religions have a form of the golden rule or ethic of reciprocity (Neusner & Chilton, 2009). It is founded in the basic truth that “all of us are equally human” (Bennett, 1998b, p. 191). It does not follow, however, that all of us are the same.

An insightful illustration of this is expressed in an old Chinese fable;

Once upon a time a monkey and a fish were caught up in a great flood. The monkey, agile and experienced, had the good fortune to scramble up a tree to safety. As he looked down into the raging waters, he saw a fish struggling against a swift current. Filled with compassion and a desire to help this unfortunate fellow, he reached down and scooped the fish from the water. To the monkey’s surprise, the fish was not at all grateful for his help (Foster, 1962).
What is desirable and good for us may not be equally good or desirable for anOther. Whilst we may desire the best for everyone, the best differs according to who we are, what our experience is and what we value. Bennett (1998b) argues that this is the frame of mind with which we must enter intercultural relationships. In the context of the discussion, and in examples, this frame of mind was not always present. Participants measured their own actions, responses and lives against those of others who did not share the same environment, experience or position in Thailand. The comparison was, at times, unrealistic and consequently unhelpful. This comparison was exceedingly evident in terms of participants’ view of the lives and actions of some NGO workers and how these were perceived.

Examples of these comparisons were combined with those associated with sacrifice. This was done because participants often identified and articulated these things in conjunction with the idea of sacrifice.

6.5 Summary—ผลสรุป

Preparation for travel gave participants a glimpse of what lay ahead in the TMAT experience. The experiences of others who had traveled before provided them with further insights.

Participants’ reasons for taking part in the tour program were outlined. These were found to be similar to those of volunteer travelers in other studies (Cheung et al., 2010; Rogers, 2007). Their willingness to take part in two, three or more tours was different and showed a level of ongoing commitment to their rationale for travelling, and to the group with which they traveled. This willingness and the way they spoke of those in Thailand also evidenced a heightened level of relationship being built with those in Thailand.

Stories recollected by TMAT participants, who had traveled on previous TMATs, in relation to people they had met at McKean Rehabilitation Center and a HIV/AIDS orphanage illustrated the depth of influence these people had had on the participants’ experience and perceptions. These stories also helped to illustrate the double-difference of these short-term mission participants: They were European Australians/foreigners/farang traveling to Thailand as guests who had come to help. They were also visitors/outsiders to the long-term missionaries and NGO workers who were different in their sameness and foreign in their familiarity both religiously and culturally. Thus this chapter has illustrated a little of the complexities encountered by STM participants as they tried to position themselves and learn to become guests in the homes of the Other.
This chapter provided information from preparation for travel through meetings and from information shared in pre-travel interviews. The next chapter continues the story as Australia is left behind and a new stage of the journey begins.
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand—ในประเทศไทย

7.1 Outline of the Chapter—ตั้งโครง

In the previous chapter I introduced the study participants and their preparation for travel to Thailand. I also outlined their reasons for joining the TMAT program and some of the themes that had been identified in the pre-travel interviews of participants who had taken part in previous TMATs.

This chapter presents an overview of the participants’ arrival in, and journey through, Chiang Mai, Thailand. Aspects of participant observation, diaries and focus group data are utilised to follow participants as they take part in the process of being in an unfamiliar cultural environment and physical space. This space is recognised for its educational and transformational implications and is explored as a form of liminality.

The complexity of the participants’ role and position within the Thailand experience, particularly with reference to relationships with others, became more evident during this phase of their experience.

This chapter continues the story as it occurred during the in-country portion of the study fieldwork.

7.2 Chiang Mai arrivals—ตกเชียงใหม่

7.2.1 Early arrivals

Three of the study participants arrived in Chiang Mai before the main group. I met each of these at the Chiang Mai International Airport as I later did with the rest of the group. One of the participants, Louise, arrived on December 21st and the other two, Peta and Ellen, arrived on December 24th.

Peta and Ellen had visited Malaysia with a friend for several days before travelling to Thailand. Louise had chosen to arrive early in order to acclimatize and avoid any jetlag or ill effects from travel so that she could begin the Thailand experience well rested and fresh with the rest of the group.

I gave Ellen, Peta and Louise their diaries upon arrival in Chiang Mai, and explained how to use them. All three were then able to begin using them from the first day of their time in Thailand. They were also asked to continue using them throughout the TMAT and for one week post return to Australia.
All three joined my family and a group of approximately 50 expatriates and Thai Nationals for Christmas lunch at the Smith home in the McKean Rehabilitation Center grounds.

### 7.2.2 Arrival of the main group

On December 26th, Boxing Day, the main group of the TMAT were due to arrive at Chiang Mai airport. My family and I had moved, on Christmas night, from where we had been staying at McKean, into the Green Lodge guesthouse in Chiang Mai. This was in readiness for the TMAT team’s arrival. We had brought with us, our luggage, the team fridge, cooking implements including toaster and kettles, plates, cutlery and other items that would enable team members to make breakfasts, tea, coffee etc. in the mornings. We woke early to make final preparations for the day and to ensure we were at the airport for the plane’s arrival at 9:00am.

The team arrived at approximately 9:30. Some looked tired after an overnight flight, but most were eager to get into the taxis and start the trip to Green Lodge. They boarded a songtao (สองแถว literally means two rows-in this sense, a taxi with two rows of seats in the back), a converted utility vehicle (also with two rows of seats in the back), an orphanage truck (usually used to transport the children to and from school) and an orphanage minibus.

Luggage was piled, Thai style, inside and atop the vehicles. Somphun and Noi (our Thai taxi drivers and friends) had brought each team member a welcome necklace of jasmine (malee - มะลิ) flowers.

Once back at Green Lodge, team members were asked to unpack their bags and bring all of the donated goods back to the foyer for later pick up by NGO workers or for delivery to McKean. I worked with Lisa and Louise to sort the goods into piles of clothing, medical goods, toys and miscellaneous items in order to ‘bag it up’.
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand—ในประเทศไทย

After completing our task, I spoke with Kym, Andrea and Lisa, gave them each their diaries and explained how to use them. I also asked that they continue using them for one week post return to Australia. They appeared keen to begin.

Picture 3- December 26th—Boxing Day arrivals – TMAT program begins

After completing our task, I spoke with Kym, Andrea and Lisa, gave them each their diaries and explained how to use them. I also asked that they continue using them for one week post return to Australia. They appeared keen to begin.

Picture 4- Donated goods sorted for NGO pickup or delivery
The TMAT team members had approximately one hour to sort their belongings, change clothes if they wished and meet in the foyer before an orientation walk around the neighbourhood. Some of those who had been to Chiang Mai on previous TMATs chose to stay behind and rest, particularly those who had not slept on the plane. Others led groups to orientate those unfamiliar with the surrounding area. Team members were taken to the local mini-mart, where they could buy local SIM cards and credit for their phones, and then taken through the Night Bazaar precinct. They were shown where bank money exchanges could be found and general landmarks were pointed out. This took between 45 minutes and one hour depending on the route taken by the group leader and the depth of commentary given.

Once everyone had returned to Green Lodge they boarded songtaos for the trip to lunch. Upon arrival menus were perused and food ordered, sometimes dubiously, if unsure of what the choice would look or taste like when it arrived at the table. Most choices were met with positive reviews and those that were not were passed on to someone who liked the look of them. A second order was then made. In this way everyone managed to receive a lunch that could be enjoyed. Participants also discovered how comparatively inexpensive eating out in Chiang Mai was.

Whilst waiting for orders to arrive I gave Hannah and Sally their diaries and spoke to them about how to use them. I asked that they also continue using them for one week post return to Australia. We discussed the study and Sally said that she was looking forward to keeping a record of what happened over the course of the TMAT as she had not done that on her previous trip. She said she thought it would make a good reference for putting together a photo album of the experience once she got home. Hannah agreed and said it would also make it easier to explain experiences to friends and family at home.
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

After returning to Green Lodge team members were beginning to feel more tired as a result of travel and the time difference (four hours behind AEST). As the day wore on this tiredness became evident through comments from participants and diary entries that were made. Yet the tiredness they spoke and wrote of seemed to go beyond that which could be attributed to travel and time difference.

Kym: Arrived very tired, it was good to see past friends, (taxi driver)...Enjoyed Thai food in market for tea. Nice to return to familiar places. Evening very tired, early to bed.

Lisa: By the time we went for dinner then came back for devos, I was really beside myself with tiredness & really struggled to stay awake.

Lisa wrote of being “beside myself with tiredness”. This level of fatigue intrigued me due to its intensity. These people had traveled for many hours, experienced a four hour time difference between Australia and Chiang Mai and could expect to be tired as a result. Yet they were describing near exhaustion.

Hannah described this further and also noted her sudden realisation of the foreignness of her environment regardless of the preparation or previous exposure she had had.

**Picture 5—First meal in Chiang Mai and diaries being explained**

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Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

She wrote of this in her first diary entry.

Today was our first day in Thailand. After about 10 hours of travelling I was feeling the fatigue and almost ready to go to bed! First of all, my first emotion – or feeling, was confused and a bit out of place. Even though we had done many team meetings to get to know everyone, it wasn’t on the level that you get to know that person in a completely different situation and circumstance – in this case from meeting someone at a meeting and in Thailand.

The atmosphere, the people, the smells, the differences all play a part, and even though I have been to Thailand before, I still had that sense of “out of placenteness” and confusion.

These people were experiencing physical responses to something more than travel and time factors. They were part of an interruption to, and disturbance of, the finely balanced relationship between physical, environmental, cultural and emotional aspects of their lives. This disturbance brought with it feelings that evidenced themselves physically. Gaur and Patnaik (2011) wrote of this phenomenon in relation to people experiencing displacement as “a purely subjective feeling irrespective of its explicability in (bio)medical paradigm, for instance feelings of fatigue, diffuse ache, loss of physical energy…” (Gaur & Patnaik, 2011, p. 86).

The TMAT participants were not displaced in the same way that Gaur and Patnaik’s informants were, but nonetheless they were outside their normal environmental and cultural frame of reference and subject to the effects of that.

This fatigue coupled with Hannah’s diarised comments on feeling out of place and of the influence situations have on interpersonal interactions, caused me to explore the idea of transition, transformation and movement. This in turn led to an exploration of the notion of liminality. Liminality was explored particularly as a vehicle of transformation into and out of a space in which learning can and does occur. Liminality, in this sense, is also something which has been written of in conjunction with missionaries and the missionary experience (Rohr, 2002) and as such is particularly relevant to this study.

7.3 Liminality

The TMAT preparation for travel had been anticipatory. The in-country period was to be a time of challenge and learning for participants, the period upon and after return to Australia would be one of readjustment and reflection.
The life changing claim related to volunteer travel experiences has been featured in the literature relating to both STM and VT, and previous TMAT participants have reported that their experience was life changing. Even with this as background, it was not until the depth of participant changes in perception and internal reflection became more visible, whilst examining the data, that the extent of this life changing claim became evident to me.

The literature related to STM and VT placed emphasis on the various experiences encountered whilst undertaking the volunteer venture. I have drawn on these types of experiences when discussing the data from this study also. However, I wish to highlight and privilege the importance of the space in which these experiences occur. I would argue that facilitators of education should be maximising the potential of this space for enabling learning and perceptual transformation.

Issues of safety, security, relationship, perception and matters of inclusion were themes discussed and dealt with by TMAT participants throughout their journey into Thailand. The space in which this journey occurred began as they crossed a threshold signifying their exit from Australia and from their known way of life into an unknown space, whether or not they had visited that space before.

Moving into a situation of unknown dimensions is always a challenge. Psychology and anthropology refer to situations whereby people move from one place or circumstance (separation) through a period of possibility or transition (liminal period) and then to readjustment post that period (reassimilation) as liminality or a liminal process. Arnold van Gennep, a French ethnographer, introduced the idea of liminality to anthropology in 1909. It was taken up and developed further by Victor Turner, a British cultural anthropologist, who concentrated his work on expanding concepts of the liminal period in this process.

Liminality may perhaps be regarded as the Nay to all positive structural assertions, but as in some sense the source of them all, and, more than that, as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise (Turner, 1986, p. 97).

Those participating in the TMAT program became part of this liminal process, or “realm of pure possibility” (Turner, 1986, p. 97) upon leaving Australia after which they were “betwixt and between” (Turner, 1986). They were no longer part of Australia as they had been before leaving, and they had not yet returned in order to experience Australia with their newly acquired perceptions. The life and society with which they were previously extremely
familiar would look different upon return when viewed in a new way. They were part of a liminal process.

the essence of liminality is to be found in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the "uninteresting" constructions of common sense, the "meaningfulness of ordinary life," discussed by phenomenological sociologists, into cultural units which may then be reconstructed in novel ways, some of them bizarre … Liminality is the domain of the "interesting," or of "uncommon sense." (Turner, 1977, p. 68)

When stepping out of a situation or place that is part of the “meaningfulness of ordinary life” (Turner, 1977, p. 68) and into the liminal space a threshold is crossed over. The word liminal comes from the Latin limen meaning threshold. Liminal pertains to a threshold or a between stage in a process.

For TMAT participants stepping onto a plane began the liminal period; no longer in Australia, not yet returning, but in a foreign space somewhere between leaving and returning, somewhere outside the previously known experience, no longer in reach of a familiar reference point, but in liminality. In fear or excitement, at the mercy of the space, the place and what lies within it. It is not always a comfortable space. Liminality is, however, transformational (Hjalmarson, 2005).

Rohr describes liminality as “the ultimate teachable space” (Rohr, 2002). Intercultural education such as that found in TMAT can, once facilitators and educators become aware of the potential and unique value of the space, maximise its capacity.

Nothing good or creative emerges from business as usual. This is why much of the work of God is to get people into liminal space, and to keep them there long enough so they can learn something essential. It is the ultimate teachable space… maybe the only one. Most spiritual giants try to live lives of "chronic liminality" in some sense. They know it is the only position that insures ongoing wisdom, broader perspective and ever-deeper compassion (Rohr, 2002).

The journey to Thailand for this group of TMAT travelers had a dimension of anticipation that had not been present on previous trips, due to the preceding political unrest in Bangkok, and this added to their liminal experience.

The public expression of the political unrest in Bangkok ended only 20 days before they boarded the plane to travel to Thailand. Therefore some were apprehensive, others had friends and family members with concerns. When leaving Australia they were unsure what
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

lay ahead. The time aboard the plane was divided between anticipation, excitement, anxiety and sleep. Upon arrival at Suvarnabhumi airport the in-country portion of the journey began.

Ethnographic research has embraced liminality as one means of explaining the insider-outsider experience the researcher outworks whilst being part of an observed culture, yet separated by her position as researcher. It has been described as a twilight zone, a cross roads, a place of transition. This idea, space, place or conceptualisation in the minds of those who find themselves within it or the minds of those watching others inside, is a unique thing. It is somewhere, sometime, someplace, something between worlds, times and stabilities. We move into liminality without the familiar props that inform our backgrounds and experience or provide our security. TMAT participants moved into the travel experience willingly, yet probably unaware of the existence of, or importance of, the space wherein the experience dwelt; Liminality.

Within Thailand spaces differed so that liminality became interrupted as participants moved from inside Green Lodge out into the streets of Chiang Mai. Inside Green Lodge Guest House TMAT participants occupied most of the rooms on three floors, almost completely filling the building with team members. This occupation of the guest house facilitated the creation of a pseudo Australia within its walls. Inside Green Lodge was a safe and familiar environment in which little intercultural interaction took place. It was a place of debriefing and reflection. The atmosphere was often one of a camp or holiday. The language spoken was English and the interactions were culturally familiar.

The HIV/AIDS orphanage was managed by westerners. The environment was culturally very western. This translated into a non-threatening and quite familiar environment culturally. The children were learning English at school and playing with TMAT participants offered an opportunity for friendship as well as English practice.

McKean Rehabilitation Center was less comfortable and familiar for participants as visiting there necessitated interaction with Thai nationals, many of whom did not speak any English and therefore communication for them and for TMAT participants, most of whom spoke only a few words of Thai, was more difficult. When working in larger groups the unfamiliar was less threatening. When in smaller groups the unfamiliar had greater influence on participants. In a group the space became owned and controlled by those of greater number. When working or participating singly or in pairs the dynamic changed and foreignness was more evident and sometimes daunting for participants.
In whatever situation they found themselves, work, markets, cultural excursions, the expectation of many participants was that the Other would speak English and assist in communication when and where necessary. This did not reflect the ethos of Absolute Hospitality yet in many cases it occurred.

*Picture 6- Chiang Mai’s night market street*

This was a place that became particularly familiar to TMAT participants, due to its geographic proximity to Green Lodge guest house. Yet it remained culturally unfamiliar.

7.4 **McKean Rehabilitation Center—formerly Chiang Mai Leper Asylum—โรงพยาบาลโรคเรื้อน**

As already mentioned, McKean was not a western environment and was therefore culturally unfamiliar to participants. Yet when working or visiting there as a large group the environment became more western for participants. McKean’s service to leprosy sufferers was also unfamiliar to participants. Therefore the information given and example shown by those working there were carefully noted by TMAT members.

Expressing appropriate sensitivity to the feelings, positionality and situation of others was something that was shown in the lives of NGO workers and missionaries. This was particularly evident in the visits to McKean Rehabilitation Center (former leprosy hospital)
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

and the orphanage (for babies and children with HIV/AIDS) given the stigma associated with leprosy and HIV.

The stigma attached to leprosy is historically strong (Gaudet, 2004; Navon, 1998; Rafferty, 2005).

[A] prominent merchant in Chiangmai said to me the other day, when leprosy has appeared 'Baw kit pen khon lao' they are no longer regarded as persons, to translate literally, or in other words are considered as practically dead (Navon, 1998, p. 95).

McKean Rehabilitation Center (McKean), one of the NGOs with which TMAT collaborates, has been at the forefront of efforts to reduce this stigma, and the damage it causes to lives of sufferers and their families, through education and social inclusiveness initiatives. TMAT seeks to incorporate this destigmatisation strategy in their induction education program by informing participants of what leprosy is, how it is transmitted and by giving information about the people and experiences that may be encountered whilst visiting McKean. This education takes place at the pre-travel meetings. Opportunity is given for participants to ask questions, raise anxieties and learn more about leprosy, its treatment, the stigma associated with it, safety concerns and the changes McKean has been instrumental in achieving in the South East Asian region.
Once in Chiang Mai TMAT participants also received an education session from Dr Trevor Smith. This session included anecdotes from working with leprosy patients in a variety of settings and situations, practical illustrations of the difficulties faced by people who have had leprosy and explanation of what McKean is trying to achieve for these and other patients.

Due to the success of the leprosy work at McKean and the training of health workers to recognise early signs of the disease, there are now very few new cases in Thailand each year. McKean is assisting with training of health workers from neighbouring countries in the hope that they will also see such a change.

After being exposed to these education sessions no one travelling as part of TMAT expressed any concerns regarding contracting leprosy, when visiting or working at McKean Rehabilitation Center. Participants were specifically asked whether they had any questions or concerns regarding visiting McKean and no one raised any.

McKean is a leprosy and rehabilitation hospital run by the Church of Christ in Thailand and supported by The Leprosy Mission. It began out of a recognised need to help and house those suffering with leprosy in the Chiang Mai area.

In the early 1900s missionaries from a Chiang Mai medical clinic responded to the suffering of those with leprosy with basic wound care and provision of food. They sought to take action against the stigma the disease carried by finding a safe place for these people to live and be cared for. They utilised 160 acres of disused land just outside Chiang Mai city, in a place known as Koh Klang. Koh Klang is bordered by the Mae Ping River and a canal, making it effectively an island. The then Prince of Chiang Mai, Chao Inthwarorot Suriyawong, owned the land and had used it to keep his elephants, one of which (a prized white elephant) had gone wild and become too dangerous to be of use. It had been left on the island until its death. After that time the land had been left unused as the people feared the spirit of the wild elephant (McKean Rehabilitation Center, 2010).

In 1907 one of the missionaries from the medical clinic, Dr James McKean, asked the Prince for the use of the land as a home for leprosy sufferers. His request was granted and in 1908, what is now McKean Rehabilitation Center began as “Chiang Mai Leper Asylum” (McKean Rehabilitation Center, 2010).

Opening the asylum provided security and care for sufferers. It also provided security for townspeople who believed the disease could not jump across the water and was therefore contained on the island.
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

As developments in leprosy treatment moved from symptomatic relief to anti-bacterial cure the Center continued to serve the needs of those who came to seek assistance.

Leprosy cases in northern Thailand were nearly all detected and treated by McKean in Chiang Mai up until the 1970s (Richardus, Meima, van Marrewijk, Croft & Smith, 2005, p. 251). Many patients heard of the treatment offered and walked from as far away as Burma, China and Laos. The asylum became a growing settlement and refuge.

Early treatment with chaulmoogra seed oil was extremely painful with debatable efficacy. Elderly residents of McKean Rehabilitation Center still recall the searing pain of chaulmoogra oil injections. Chaulmoogra trees were planted on the island as a source of the oil and still line the river’s edge today.

In India in 1941 Robert Cochrane began to use intramuscular Dapsone DDS in leprosy treatment with good results (this was bacteriostatic rather than bactericidal i.e. Dapsone DDS prevented the multiplication of the bacteria but did not kill it). Later it was administered orally. McKean began utilising this drug with patients (Greiner, Schleiermacher, Smith, Lenhard & Vogel, 1978).

This new treatment meant that patients were no longer being cared for in order to die, but could be cured. A new era of rehabilitation commenced. However, due to the stigma associated with the disease it was not possible for many patients to return to their home villages. Training in handcrafts, wood carving, sewing and other skilled areas was instigated.
In 1969 the Chiang Mai Leper Asylum had nearly 1000 residents and plans to build resettlement villages began. Before long 25 villages had been established.

After the appearance of Dapsone resistant bacilli it was necessary to improve treatment further. Other drugs began to be used in combination with Dapsone. By the 1970s Clofazimine (Lamprene) and Rifampicin were being used with great effect. This combination became known as multi drug therapy (MDT) with patients being treated according to the type of infection they had acquired i.e. patients at the tuberculoid end of the immunological spectrum would be given Rifampicin combined with Dapsone. Patients at the lepromatous end would be given these drugs with the addition of Clofazimine.

The Center made important in-roads into the rehabilitation of patients and began reconstructive surgery to replace lost eyebrows and collapsed noses and to repair function in hands and fingers where nerves had been destroyed. They also trained, and continue to train, medical staff and healthcare workers from Burma, Laos, Cambodia and China in the detection, treatment and rehabilitation of leprosy patients.

When in Thailand TMAT works alongside patients and staff at McKean to do whatever may be required of them. This ranges from maintenance and painting in the wards to moving compost or digging out the pig pens.
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand

On occasion there have been relationships built between TMAT participants and patients and their families. This was the case when a married couple from TMAT met a young girl who was living at McKean while her mother received leprosy treatment. They had offered to assist in sponsoring the girl’s education and generally supporting her in whatever way necessary. They took her (with her mother’s permission) on various outings, one of which was to a large shopping centre, Central Airport Plaza, to have dinner and then to the cinema to see a movie. This was something she had never experienced before.

They also invited the girl, her mother and a friend, who was also receiving MDT for leprosy, on a team outing to a limestone waterfall. The waterfall was about an hour’s drive out of Chiang Mai. The photo below was taken at the waterfall.

*Picture 10- Massage at Bua Dong Waterfall*

This couple, whilst not participants in the study, consented to the use of the above photo for research purposes. They had spent the day with the girl, her mother and friend travelling in the taxis together, eating and relaxing. Even with the restrictions of language they were able to communicate in ways that allowed them to enjoy each other’s company and to enjoy a relaxing day.
They wrote the following explanation as to how the situation in the photo occurred. Pseudonyms have been used in place of the names of those in the photo.

[Ying] was only 8 years old when her father abandoned her. He dropped her off to visit her Mum [Yim], at McKean Hospital, Chiang Mai, Thailand. He never returned to pick her up. [Yim] and her friend [Pern], were living at the hospital while they were being treated for leprosy. While visiting family in Australia, Heather Smith, the [deputy] director of the hospital was showing my husband and I photos. She mentioned her concerns for the continuation of [Ying’s] education, as [Yim] was unable to support her own daughter. [We] decided to sponsor [Ying].

Six months later we had the opportunity to meet our three new Thai friends. Heather organised for them to join us for a day out to the lime stone waterfalls. [Ying] swam with our daughter while [Yim] and [Pern], giggled nervously as we attempted to communicate. They spoke no English and we had only learnt some very basic Thai. They showed us photos of themselves before they had been treated for leprosy. Their skin had changed to a darker colour due to the medication they were taking. The local villagers at the leprosy hospital had nicknamed them "the twins" even though they were nothing alike. [Yim] was so appreciative of our financial commitment for her daughter to attend school. She called us "family". We felt so humbled when we laid down for a rest at the falls in the afternoon and [Yim] and [Pern] gave us both a Thai massage. It seemed their way of thanking us.

The group had shared photographs and learnt more about each other through these and the information each had been given through the interpreting of Heather Smith on previous occasions and prior to leaving in the taxis earlier that day. There was no mention of fear of leprosy or concern for health of any kind in the prose above and there was no indication of it in the photograph. None of the other team members mentioned this either. The only anxiety noted in the taxis on the way out to the waterfall was the lack of language skills team members possessed and the concern that this may have made their three Thai guests feel uncomfortable. The mood at the waterfall was one of ease and relaxation as is the case when friends and family spend the day together. Family was used to denote the importance of the relationship entered into. “She called us "family"”. The notion of family is discussed further in the next chapter.

This time family was used by a Thai woman when speaking about her foreign (farang) companions. These farangs had undertaken to pay the education costs of Ying, something
that is usually done by parents. Their taking on of that responsibility made them family from Yim’s perspective. The invitation extended to the three to join the waterfall trip also transformed the farangs into hosts whilst remaining guests in Thailand.

7.5 Complexity of the role of participants—ความลึกซึ้ง

The position of TMAT participants within Thailand was quite complex. They were guests and hosts in combination. It became apparent that they were not simply experiencing themselves in another space. One of the issues participants faced was the multiplicity of the relationships and roles they became part of within this space. There was great complexity in this. They were participant and observer in a range of relationships. They were guests of the Thai people and guests of the expatriate NGO workers and missionaries at various times. Within this there were distinctions between the Thai people with whom they regularly interacted (the known) and other Thai people they encountered (the unknown). That is, those who were known, such as regular taxi drivers, Somphun and Noi and people from organisations with which TMAT worked, and those who were unknown e.g. people interacted with in the market place as stall holders or product sellers. These distinctions are discussed in this chapter where findings relate to them.

Participants were also observers as they watched how NGO and missionary workers demonstrated being a Guest in the outworking of their lives. Therefore participants were simultaneously and alternately guests of the Thai people and the expatriates whilst also learning about being a Guest by seeing the position of Guest and Host demonstrated by NGO workers, Thai people and missionaries. In a few situations, such as that experienced with Ying, Yim and Pern at Bua Dong waterfall, they became hosts to specific people whilst remaining guests within Thailand.

Whilst participants did not refer to the people they met and observed using the terms guest or host, participants described characters and characteristics that embodied Guest and Host as described in Chapter Two.

Participants watched as those displaying these characteristics negotiated the terrain between cultures and passed through cultural practices into being a Guest.

One example of this observation was captured by Louise who wrote in her diary of her admiration for a missionary doctor, a Guest and Host in Thailand for many years. In contrast to other participants, written of in the previous chapter, who had drawn comparisons between themselves and in-country workers, this instance expressed no sense of self judgment, sympathy, empathy or comparison just observation of the life of a man who had made a
decision to leave Australia more than 40 years ago and had remained unwavering in that decision.

An excerpt from Louise’s diary 31-12-08

I stayed in until meeting time at 9:45 where we had a talk on leprosy given by Trevor Smith. That man leaves me awestruck. His presentation was understandable without being condescending and very entertaining. He brought in some biblical history of leprosy and obviously knows his bible thoroughly as well. He is gentle and kind and soft spoken too. If Jesus were around today I’m sure he would be much like Trevor Smith. Thank heaven for people like him!

7.6 A young boy dies—มรณ

As with Louise’s diary entry of Dr Trevor Smith, participants wrote of people and events according to their perceptions of them and involvement with them. Some happenings were written about by all participants. Some were written of by a few and omitted by others.

One of the happenings that most study participants wrote about in their diaries occurred in the second week of the tour. A young boy who had been living at the orphanage for several years died during the time the TMAT was in Thailand. He had been unwell and in hospital for some time. Some of the TMAT members (not study participants) had formed a relationship with him on previous trips.

His death was something that all participants wrote about, discussed or reflected upon in various ways whether they had known him or not.

Sally (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

[Lek] passed away this morning... after a long time of hospitals, treatment and pain; finally the suffering is over. It’s so hard to believe that such a young child could be put through so much in the short time they had on this earth. I couldn’t stop myself from crying when I found out. It was heart wrenching; more than words can express. I started thinking about the people in my life and how I couldn’t bear to live without them. The sad thing is that death is so unpredictable and you could easily spend your life worrying about when it was going to meet you round the corner but I would much rather cherish the time I have with them—to count each day as a blessing. After I heard the news [Deejai-another child] came up to me and gave me a massive hug and it finally re-occurred to me
how sick these beautiful kids really are. I can’t bear to think of anything happening to him! It’s hard because when I’m playing with him he seems like a perfectly normal little boy and in reality he is! It’s just his body isn’t functioning as it should be. However through this tragedy I am reminded to value life and each day that I am blessed with...

Sally related that her awareness of her buddy’s HIV status was clouded by his appearance as “a perfectly normal little boy”. “...it finally re-occurred to me how sick these beautiful kids really are”. Her concern though, is not for any risk this may pose to herself, rather it is that “I can’t bear to think of anything happening to him!” Her concern is for her buddy and the risk that HIV may pose to him in the future. The relationship she had built with her buddy was evident. Other participants related their impression of the young boy’s death and how it had affected them and those around them. None of them knew him well as he had been in hospital for much of the time they had been in Chiang Mai, but some did respond to how his passing impacted those TMAT members who had known him. No one other than Sally related his death to the relationship they had with their own buddy.

Hannah (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

Then after bowling we went to a playground with our buddies for ice-cream and found out that [Lek] had passed away earlier on. So [NGO worker’s name] was crying, a few of the buddies were, and even though I didn’t know him I still felt very emotional and let a few tears run. It was really hard to see, especially [team member’s name] take the news – because she just cried and cried and cried. So I just tried to be there for her, and anyone else that needed it.

Hannah did not know Lek personally but was still upset by the news. She sought to be a support to other team members who had known him. She spent time with one particular girl who was quite upset at the news.

Ellen (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

Today was very sad, as we learned that [Lek] had passed away this morning. He had been at [orphanage name] for about a year, and a number of the return trippers had known him personally. The [orphanage name] kids are confident in knowing that [Lek] is now with Jesus. I hope that our group might be involved in some way in a memorial service later this week.

Kym (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):
Different emotions from people and kids when we were told a child had died. [orphanage name] children were quite accepting and content that he had gone to Heaven.

Lisa (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

Back at GL by about 1730hrs & Graeme up & told me that the very sick little boy in hospital had passed away this morning. This is really a blessing because the little darling was so sick, bleeding internally & needing a lot of platelet transfusions. He’s better off in Heaven running amuck with [others]. The poor little darling – finally at rest in the loving arms of Jesus.

Peta (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

Tonight was a relaxer, watching ‘Bedtime Stories’...I couldn’t stop laughing. This high didn’t last long when I heard the news about [Lek]. It is comforting to know that he is in heaven though.

Kym, Lisa and Peta are all reflective in their response to the news about Lek. The orphanage children are familiar with this type of news and Kym makes the observation that they “were quite accepting and content that he had gone to heaven.” Lisa goes further in her comment on the situation by writing that because of the severity of his illness and suffering “[h]e’s better off in Heaven…finally at rest…” Peta is comforted in the knowledge that “…he is in heaven though.” These comments reflect the heart of their own Christian faith and belief in the sanctuary of Heaven to those who are suffering or in pain.

Louise also reflected on Lek’s death but, by contrast, she wrote of how the others felt without explicitly sharing her own response. “Many people are sad that he is gone but also very happy he is no longer ill and living happily with God.” She took note of the responses of others.

Louise (excerpt from diary entry 3-1-09):

I have saved for the end that the little boy from [orphanage name] passed away today. It sounded like he needed to let go. What sort of future, however long or short, would he have to endure with regular blood transfusions and being in pain constantly? Many people are sad that he is gone but also very happy he is no longer ill and living happily with God.

Andrea said something today that I will remember forever:-

‘The price for great love is great grief, and we gladly pay the price.’
Chapter 7: The story continues in Thailand —  ในประเทศไทย

Andrea did not write about the little boy’s death in her diary, but did have a discussion with Louise about it as reflected in Louise’s diary entry.

His death was something that affected each participant in a way that caused them to write about it or in Andrea’s case, to inspire someone else to write.

Even though they did not know him well they referred to him by name, as “a child” or as a “little boy”. There was no sense of Other. He was seen as a little boy who died and ended his suffering. Something about being a child transcended Otherness for participants.

The children, staff, orphanage volunteers and team members often form close relationships, some of these end in team members sponsoring or offering to sponsor the children as an ongoing commitment.

7.7 Summary —  ผลสรุป

Observations, diary entries and data from a focus group were used to investigate participants’ process of being in Thailand.

This chapter began with preparation for the arrival of TMAT participants in Thailand. Their arrival and initial movements were explained. Observed and diarised participant fatigue was discussed as something more than travel tiredness. It was argued that participants were affected by extreme fatigue as a physical manifestation of disruption to the familiar cultural, emotional, environmental and physical aspects of their lives. This in turn led to a discussion of the notion and importance of liminality as a teaching and transformational space.

The complexity of the participants’ role and position within the Thailand experience and the multiple relationships they became a part of were more evident during this phase of their experience. Participants saw alternate means of taking part in some of these relationships as they watched NGO workers and missionaries traverse them. These means included the outworking of attributes associated with being a Guest. This was seen in the choices made by, and lives lived by, those NGO workers and missionaries participants watched.

Participants wrote of people and events differently yet all responded to the death of a little boy as they expressed the universality of grief and suspension of Otherness in response to the death of a child.

The next chapter continues the story of participants in Thailand and employs a more event related approach to how participants engage with the situations they experience and the people they encounter.
Chapter 8: Engagement with Thailand—ความแท้ในราวข้าง

8.1 Outline of the Chapter—ตัวโครง

In the previous chapter I began the story of the study participants’ arrival in Thailand and their process of being in that liminal space.

The amount of information collected during the participants’ time in Thailand was quite substantial. This chapter and the last both explore aspects of this data taken from diaries, participant observation and a focus group. The setup of these chapters does not follow a strictly chronological sequence. Specific events and situations are utilized to construct a picture of how participants engaged with the experiences they were a part of.

Intercultural interactions are explored in terms of the difficulties that can occur even when attempting to show politenesses, due to its cultural implications.

Focus group reflections on issues of safety and security that influenced participants’ decisions on whether or not to travel were explored with particular reference to the emergent themes of servant leadership and trust.

Finally, the journey of a first time TMAT participant is examined in terms of her passage from the TMAT’s beginning to end and her positional response to that. In this chapter the in-Thailand story continues.
8.2 Politeness as a cultural behaviour — ภาวะที่น่าจะ

The situation described below occurred in Thailand midway through the TMAT whilst the group were visiting Bua Dong limestone waterfall approximately one hour out of Chiang Mai. It was a day of relaxation that was organised by Thai friends, Somphon and Noi. They had also provided a lunch of gang hung lai (Burmese pork curry), kao neow (sticky rice), moo satay (pork sticks with satay sauce) dang mor and supparot (watermelon and pineapple).

The situation below occurred whilst packing up after the meal had finished. Most of the TMAT group had gone down to the waterfall to cool off, relax and take photographs. A few remained at the picnic site talking and resting.

Louise began collecting plates and rinsing them under the tap. Both Somphun and Noi waved to her to signal that there was no need but she smiled and continued. I’d explained to her that our Thai hosts would not want her to help, but it’s very difficult when two cultures collide in demonstrating ‘politeness’. Louise was being polite by rinsing the dishes. Somphun and Noi were being polite by insisting that they do it themselves. Neither was right or wrong and both wanted to help the other. Louise would have felt uncomfortable not helping with the dishes. Somphun and Noi were uncomfortable with her doing
them.

We began to pack things up for the long drive back to Chiang Mai. Another team member, Andrea, had noticed what was happening and, having been to Thailand several times before, began to explain Louise’s actions to Noi so that she would understand that there was no intention to offend and that Louise had only wanted to help. Even though Noi was well aware of our strange habits and had seen us rush to do the dishes before, Andrea continued either forgetting this or feeling the need to make things clearer.

Noi knelt on the mat packing plates and cutlery into a bag, about three metres from where I was rolling up mats. Andrea stood on the grass near Noi’s side of a mat.

“Noi, when Louise washed the dishes she was showing her thanks to you. In Australia when we visit a friend’s house for a meal we show our thanks by washing the dishes.’

Noi seemed only to be half listening. Not to be deterred, Andrea continued, speaking and gesturing.

“She was complimenting your kindness…”

She continued along the same vein for several minutes. Noi nodded and continued what she was doing.

This type of situation can be very difficult. Until a couple of years ago I had struggled myself with the issue of washing dishes. At that time two Thai friends had told me that in Thailand it was an insult to the host to do the dishes. That was all it took to stop me offering to do the dishes again and much as I hated to sit back and watch someone else pack up dishes and wash them I had done it out of consideration for those who had invited me into their home.

Being prepared to position oneself as Guest and knowing the different expectations of being a guest in Thailand does not make the feeling of awkwardness in situations like the one described, go away, but it does help to avoid embarrassing or insulting those we care about and whose hospitality we have enjoyed. Success in hospitality is not solely the responsibility of the Host. The Guest plays an equally important role. Being a Guest or Host sometimes involves setting aside your own needs and cultural practices in order to attend to those of the Other. This is not compromise. This is Hospitality.
8.3 Safety and Security—ความปลอดภัย

The hospitality experienced and enacted at Green Lodge guesthouse was, in the main, culturally western, as written of previously. TMAT participants spent time together in the security and familiarity of Green Lodge. Much of this time was utilised in discussion and reflection on the events and people encountered outside.

The way in which each team member dealt with what was encountered and the way in which they relayed their impressions back to those in Australia was a source of discussion and change throughout the course of the trip.

*Picture 12: Green Lodge guest house in Chiang Mai*

As explained in Chapter Five, shortly before we traveled to Thailand, protestors in Bangkok attempted to unseat the government by blockading the international airports. Between that event and the Thai High Court’s ruling that removed the Wongsawat government from power, much of Thailand’s air export, tourism industries and associated businesses suffered a devastating blow both financially and to their international reputations.

One day after the Bangkok international airports were blockaded the Indian city of Mumbai sustained terrorist attacks that continued for three days. Meanwhile in Melbourne, Australia members of the TMAT group were watching events and making decisions as to whether they
would remain part of the TMAT program and travel to Thailand. The timing of these attacks caused families of TMAT team members to be understandably uneasy about travel outside Australia. Not only had Bangkok become a questionable destination in their minds, but within a day, terrorism had hit Mumbai and travel to and from that city had also become undesirable, if not impossible. These events caused participants to question and test the strength of their original motivation for joining the team. They were forced to look at the situation, assess the risks and decide whether to accept or reject them.

The needs of those in Thailand remained the same regardless of the risk assessment. Thailand’s door remained open to them, but the offer of hospitality had, for some, become conditional upon the assurance of their safety. This conditionality is a reality of the hospitality we practice as we seek to protect ourselves and those things that matter to us and in so doing set aside absolute hospitality. “[A] cultural or linguistic community, a family, a nation, cannot not suspend, at the least, even betray this principle of absolute hospitality: to protect a ‘home’,”(Derrida, 2005a, p. 66) or to protect oneself. But if absolute or unconditional hospitality is to be practiced it is “to calculate the risks, yes, but without closing the door on the incalculable, that is the future and the foreigner”(Derrida, 2005b, p. 6).

As previously explained, the situation resulted in ten TMAT members not making the trip to Thailand. During the focus group discussion in Chiang Mai towards the end of the TMAT, the study participants who did travel to Thailand discussed safety and in so doing further reassured one another.

The dialogue below illustrates various perceptions and interpretations of the situation in Thailand based on news coverage seen in Australia prior to travel, reports seen in the Thai newspapers (particularly “The Bangkok Post” and “The Nation”, as they are in English), on discussions with other team members and with friends and family back in Australia, and on the lived experience of being in Chiang Mai during the early days of the new Vejjajiva government. They made the following observations on the subject of safety.

Tammy: ...The other thing I wanted to touch on too is... given the protests and everything that was happening before we left Australia, any concerns you may have had to start with, whether they’ve been allayed or whether you’re feeling better about it, or whether you still have concerns. I mean we’re still not back yet. What are your thoughts there?
Peta: As I was coming over, I was thinking we might see remnants of what was happening and stuff like that. But as [Ellen] and I were walking through Bangkok Airport – and we did it twice – there was nothing to be seen. You wouldn’t have known that there was civil unrest there. It was quite interesting to see that.

Louise: And people that I’ve spoken to say that in Australia we got a very exaggerated version of what went on; in fact, it was an extremely peaceful demonstration. We were just told about the violence that was there. I think there was a death, but that was related but not related, almost more coincidental than related to this demonstration itself. So I haven’t felt at all concerned since being here.

Louise described the demonstration not just as “peaceful”, but as “extremely peaceful”, thereby asserting her disagreement with, not just an “exaggerated version” of events, but what she believed had been portrayed by the Australian media as “a very exaggerated version”.

Here Louise protected the international reputation of the Other, when communicating with those back in Australia, from the perceived inaccuracies portrayed by the western media. In doing so she was also protecting her own decision to take part in the trip and illustrating to those who did not support her that her decision was correct. This is discussed in more detail below. She also enacts the authority afforded by being there in the situation upon which she made comment.

The situation she was in and those, in Bangkok, who had brought about the international attention, were seen as essentially good and in need of protection. There was also a sense of the colonial in that whilst she may perceive danger for the Thai nationals the threat did not extend to her as a white foreigner. It is the idea that whilst being in a place she was not of it and was therefore somehow separate from what may take place in that place (Spurr, 1993).

As a result of her observation, a degree of naivety and her limited understanding of the political situation, Louise assumed that all would be safe and secure.

In the continuation of this excerpt from the focus group shown below, Sally agreed with Louise’s sentiments and expanded on them.

Sally: The bad thing about the news is that it always just focuses on the bad. So I know my nana’s like a worry-wart… So she was like, you know, starting to say to my mum and dad ‘why are you letting your daughter go over there by herself?’,
and my parents were like ‘it’s fine’. We knew that you guys wouldn’t let us go if it was going to be any threat to us or anything. It’s been fine here.

With these comments Sally introduced the issue of trust in, and of, the leadership. This had become evident within the TMAT program.

8.4 Servant leadership and trust

The TMAT program is based on servant leadership and as such the cultivation and honouring of trust relationships is very important (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). Robert K. Greenleaf is credited with first using the paradoxical term “servant leadership” in his 1970 essay The Servant as Leader. He defined the term as follows;

The servant-leader is servant first… It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is leader first…The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002).

This was a form of leadership that came about in the TMAT program as a result of the Christian ethos of servanthood that underpins the tour and the emphasis on relationship building. Servant leadership is explained here as the result of a style that had always been present and accepted in TMAT and as such had not been overtly recognised or identified. Through observation and comparison with other programs, it became more apparent. This type of leadership is compatible, with absolute hospitality through its attention to the needs of the Other, but is not included here because of this. Rather, it is included to draw attention to a style that existed and lent itself to the purpose of the TMAT program and complimented the building of relationships. I also include it because, for me, it was something of a turning point when I finally became aware of it, what it was, and how it worked within the TMAT program.

According to Joseph and Winston (2005), “…organizations perceived as servant-led exhibit[ed] higher levels of both leader trust and organizational trust than organizations perceived as non-servant-led” (Joseph & Winston, 2005, p. 6). This display of trust had been evident in the situation that preceded this particular TMAT as participants and their families chose to continue with the program despite the political unrest that had occurred in Bangkok prior to travel.
Parents of those TMAT participants under 18 years of age sent their sons and daughters on the TMAT tour in full expectation that they would not be taken into a dangerous situation, and had advocated for the tour to their own extended families. Sally’s words, “[w]e knew that you guys wouldn’t let us go if it was going to be any threat to us or anything”, highlight the great amount of faith and trust that was placed in the tour leaders as a result of the relationship that had been built between families and the tour leaders prior to travel. Those who chose not to travel came from schools other than the one the leaders were affiliated with, and therefore the same depth of relationship and trust had not been established.

In a world where there pervades a crisis of trust (O’Neill, 2002), the depth of trust that parents displayed by sending their children overseas was unmistakable. “Trust is a moral value that does not depend on personal experience... we learn to trust from our parents” (Uslaner, 2002, p. i). The trust that was expressed by parents in this instance became a significant lesson for the students who traveled because of it.

Sally echoed Louise’s sentiments in speaking about her experiences of Thailand.

Sally: Yeah, the news kind of exaggerates everything and it only focuses on the bad bits. It kind of gives it a really bad name, I guess, because when everyone thought of Thailand a couple of weeks before we left, they thought of that and they didn’t think of like anything else apart from that. We haven’t had anything like that happen.

From the distance of Chiang Mai everything that occurred in Bangkok was “exaggerated ... and only focuses on the bad bits”. Sally proclaimed the romantic idea of nobility in fighting for a cause and the essential goodness of those fighting for it (Kiely, 1999; Spurr, 1993).

Hannah: One of my friend’s grandparents, they were—she went on the mid year trip just gone. Her grandparents were saying I can’t believe they’re letting—talking about my parents—her go. You know, it’s so dangerous, and do they not care about their daughter enough to pull her out, and stuff like that.

Once again, parents showed the expectation that their daughter would be safe as they endured the judgment of others in Australia. Hannah stated the extent of her grandparents’ disapproval in the words “it’s so dangerous, and do they not care about their daughter enough to pull her out”. Her grandparents saw the situation not just as dangerous, but “so dangerous”. They were also recounted as having questioned whether her parents cared “about their daughter enough to pull her out”. This level of criticism and questioning is difficult when coming from
outsiders or friends. When it comes from close family the level of difficulty in hearing it and responding to it can be compounded.

This displayed a tangible commitment to the tour on the part of Hannah’s parents to allow her to go amid the pervading judgment and criticism of her grandparents.

Hannah: But then when you come out here, you realise, like Sally said, that you wouldn’t even know what’s gone on. It’s really sad to look back and think that the [other school] people pulled out, and a few others pulled out, because of this. They could have had maybe a life-changing experience, and it’s fine. Like it’s really disappointing that that happened.

Hannah then turned her attention to the TMAT members who did not travel to Thailand. These people were missed by those with whom they had prepared for the journey. Hannah’s comment regarding what they may have missed in not taking part reflects the extent to which she felt secure and safe, the positive nature of the experience she was having, as well as her disappointment that they would not be part of the experience themselves or experience what she had.

Peta: On the subject of grandparents, my pa – that’s my dad’s father – he got very serious with me. He called me up and he got very serious. I had a bit of a laugh and he’s like no, this is serious. He’s like you’re old enough now, you need to look after your mum, you need to take care of yourselves. It was a very serious conversation, and I’ve never actually had that with him. Yeah, but one of the first things we did when we got over here and we saw that it was actually okay was that we called them and said no, we’re fine, we’re having a good time, everything is okay.

Tammy: That must have been hard for you.

Peta: It was a bit sudden and a bit okay, yep.

Tammy: A different situation for you to have to face.

Peta: Yeah.

Tammy: Well, I’m glad it’s all okay.

Ellen: Peta’s the youngest grandchild on that side of the family too, so it’s a strange thing for the grandparents to sort of let them go off and do that in some ways.
The implications of the tour on those taking part went beyond that of a holiday or volunteer experience. Family involvement and concern had transformed it before the physical travel began. Peta was charged with the responsibility of looking after her mother in a very serious and unexpected way. “It was a very serious conversation, and I’ve never actually had that with him.” The use of the word actually signified surprise as she reconciled what had been asked of her, by her grandfather, with her usual role as granddaughter.

Andrea: [We] had friends who rang us from Darwin to ask had we heard about the situation in Thailand. They just assumed that if we had we would have cancelled our trip. She really rang to commiserate with me over my cancelled trip. She was quite horrified to discover – she said ‘are you sure that you’ve looked into it Andrea, you know, the situation there is quite dangerous’.

I was trying to explain to her that that was the situation in a very localised area and we were in fact going to a completely different area 600 miles away over a range of mountains. I don’t think they had much of a concept. For people who’ve not been to any given country, the capital city is the whole country.

You know, if there was unrest in London, then that’s the whole country, the whole of Great Britain is not safe. That was the same in Bangkok; there was a problem in Bangkok, therefore the whole of Thailand was possibly not safe. I really didn’t have much luck convincing her that it wasn’t going to be dangerous. She just thought I was very brave.

Andrea had communicated with friends who had very real concerns for the safety of those going on the tour. She commented; “I don’t think they had much of a concept” of the situation or the geography. For Andrea the sheer distance between what had been reported and known as a dangerous area (Bangkok), and the area to which she was travelling, provided a sense of security. It was “a completely different area 600 miles away over a range of mountains.”

Andrea’s comments were rich in meaning. They suggested that she was undertaking an intellectual exercise and playing with familiar landscapes to demystify the foreign or unfamiliar for her friend. This was implied as she attempted to emphasise the familiar rather than the foreign as a strategy to support understanding.

This was outplayed in the conversation simply. She utilised her teaching skills and story telling ability to provide her friend with a more familiar lens through which to view the situation in Thailand. Her goal was to help her friend understand the decision to travel.
Andrea did this by introducing Great Britain into the discussion. This introduction provided a familiar physical and cultural landscape from which her friend could consider information. Andrea had taken foreignness out of the analogy thereby allowing her friend the opportunity to consider the events that were being discussed with reference to a known location. In doing this Andrea had given insight into the complexity of her own concept of the situation.

Her decision to use the analogy of Great Britain highlighted her perception that an unfamiliar place or situation can translate as applying to an entire region or country to those observing from outside. The point she attempted to make to her friend was unfortunately unsuccessful in “convincing her that it wasn’t going to be dangerous.” Andrea then took part in the tour knowing that friends in Australia remained concerned for her welfare.

Each day of the tour the team website was updated with photographs and information about what happened during that day. This is important as a communication device for family and friends on any tour but was particularly significant for those waiting to see news of this particular tour and relieve any lingering anxiety regarding what may have been happening to their loved ones in Chiang Mai. Whilst the relative security of Chiang Mai was reported by TMAT participants, sometimes there can be a false sense of security in not being aware of what lies beneath the surface when in an unfamiliar context.

I remember, more than 15 years ago, my introduction to the difference of Thailand. We were on our way up to Chiang Rai by boat and had stopped at one of the police check points to have our passports perused when I wandered up past the police building and around to the other side of it where I could see several soldiers (men in khaki camouflage fatigues) mulling around a boat. I waved and started to walk towards them to say hello, but as I got closer I caught sight of what lay in bottom of the boat. There was a multitude of automatic weapons and what looked like a Rambo style bazooka. I smiled waved and quickly turned back towards the check point trying not to look concerned.

At that moment I realised that I was no longer in Australia and that what was normal and usual for me was not universal. The comments made by Sally and Hannah whilst rich and highly complex, had a degree of pre bazooka naivety embedded. This resulted in an opinion of travel safety that was accurate but not because Hannah or Sally knew the situation they had entered or had any real understanding of it. Their opinion was based on trust in the TMAT leadership. As exemplified in Sally’s comment, “[w]e knew that you guys wouldn’t let us go if it was going to be any threat to us or anything. It’s been fine here.”
They believed that they would not be taken into a dangerous situation and therefore their interpretation of the circumstances in Thailand reflected that belief. They did not request or require further information or evidence to support that belief. Their past experience and trust in the leadership was enough to assure them that they would be safe and they took up their position within the group on that basis.

8.5 Journey from the outside in—เคลื่อนที่จากที่ภายใน

The issue of how travelers position themselves influences how they interact with those around them whether these interactions are within a tour group or with members of the culture being entered and experienced. Positioning has been previously described in Chapter Two.

In this part of the chapter I have chosen to write about the journey Ellen was on through the course of the TMAT program. Her descriptions of herself and her place within the TMAT team provided me with an insight into the dynamic environment participants become part of. Examination of her story greatly assisted my understanding of the complexities of what can happen for participants within this type of short term volunteer experience.

Some of the ways in which participants positioned themselves were evident in Ellen’s journey into Thailand and back with TMAT.

Ellen had not been on a short term mission or mission awareness trip prior to this one and expressed that she was feeling very much the “newby” in comparison with some travelers who had taken part in tours in the past. She was comfortable in taking up this position within the group. During her interview prior to leaving Australia she noted

…I haven’t mixed with a large number of Thai people. I’m working at a multi cultural college, but they’re mostly speaking about different groups of people not Thai. So I don’t really know how to take the people at the moment.

I’m looking forward to it. I’m feeling very much like the new person coming in. A lot of the crew have been several times already so I feel a bit like the newbie. I’m happy to be the follower. I tend to do that anyway. I’m happy to be told where to go, what to do rather than lead the charge. That will suit me quite well.

What appeared to be of concern here for Ellen was her position within the group. She was the newbie. She did not position herself in relation to the Thai people at all as she did not “really know how to take the people”. She did position herself in relation to others in the TMAT group. She was a double foreigner, foreign in relation to the group and in relation to Thailand.
and its people. Yet at this early stage of her journey as it was prior to traveling, the group was of primary concern. At this point the group was what had become tangible through introductory meetings and therefore the Thailand experience and the people that would be encountered whilst in Thailand remained an abstract and distant prospect. She was dealing with what was current and in existence – the here and now.

Prior to travelling and with regard to Ellen’s interactions outside the group she expressed her lack of knowledge about the Thai culture. This was quite matter of fact, something that was considered to be the case and would be a base for her to work from;

I don’t know much about the culture apart from what I’ve read in Graeme’s notes about the trip, mixing with different religious groups. It’s interesting his notes on the cultural aspects and his expectations and how we go in as the visitors and respect their own cultures and traditions.

Ellen acknowledged her limited knowledge about the culture she was to enter yet did not position herself in relation to it. The experience was still abstract and part of a future circumstance to be dealt with at another time. “Graeme’s notes” were part of the information given at pre-travel education sessions. They incorporated basic cultural information, Thai language phrases and general travel information as explained in Chapter Six.

Ellen remained outside the culture she was to enter. She saw herself as an outsider, one looking in. As the travel experience progressed Ellen was able to reassess her feelings towards the culture and the people she had met. Her expectations were challenged and her outlook modified as she acknowledged, to her surprise, that changes in mindset had taken place. As illustrated in the following excerpt from the Chiang Mai focus group some suspicion, however innocuous, lay beneath the surface of interactions and in conjunction with any relationships that may or may not exist or hope to exist.

During the focus group in Chiang Mai Ellen contributed;

Ellen: I found the local people generally speaking very friendly, whether it be shop assistants or restaurant owners and that sort of thing. I expected them to be polite and very civilised, because they’re dealing with tourists and that sort of thing and it’s business for them, but it goes beyond that. I mean they’re very friendly people. I feel more at ease here than I thought I would.

I was saying to Peta tonight, I actually said to her ‘do you feel threatened going down the street? Do you feel a bit vulnerable with people sort of approaching you or watching you, or they might come up and touch you or take something from
you?’ She said she didn’t, and I said I don’t anymore either. I did when I first went down to the shops and I was hanging onto everything, keeping it really close. Now I don’t feel like I’m going to be sort of mugged or pushed around or…

Andrea: Stolen for the slave trade.

Ellen used the word actually several times in the course of her focus group contribution. Actually is an enigmatic word. It is one of a group of words commonly referred to as discourse markers or particles. Although it is similarly pervasive in written language, actually attracts specific attention from linguists in spoken language (Alam et al., 2008).

Whilst the place of discourse markers in certain syntactic models is argued (Alam et al., 2008) the semantics of these markers is clearer. As a discourse marker, actually, links two ideas; one idea introducing an undisputed other within the same field (Alam et al., 2008). It links one idea or claim with another narrower idea or claim.

When Ellen used actually she seemed to have rethought what was originally expected and actually was used in what Clift refers to as a “change of mind” (Clift, 2001, p. 266). It shows surprise at the existent situation. The response the Thai people she interacted with had to her, and her participation in the TMAT, was not expected. She spoke of how she was actually treated and how those she interacted with in English actually responded to her being in the country. The positive response, and in particular, the level of the positive response was unexpected.

This is illustrated in the above excerpt from a focus group facilitated whilst in Chiang Mai. The period of time between this excerpt and the pre-travel interview was approximately four months. Time outside Australia at this stage was approximately 20 days.

Interestingly, once in Thailand Ellen’s focus shifted away from her position within the group. The travel experience had become current and present and took pre-eminence over previous concerns or priorities. Her identity as newby or otherwise was no longer a focus, or at least was not important enough for her to mention again. Whether her identity in the group had changed due to her inclusion, acceptance or absorption within a team no longer appeared to concern her. Once in Thailand she positioned herself in relation to the new experience. Old concerns were gone.

It seemed that rather than simultaneous repositioning occurring within the group and with Thailand, it was a matter of positioning for a purpose, positioning by necessity. The issue of greatest concern and immediacy was dealt with first. In this case, the new circumstances
dictated that they must be assessed and responded to in priority over a situation (position within the group) that had already been mastered. Priorities shift as the need arises.

Even though Andrea’s comment about the slave trade was meant in jest it reflected a gendered terror and a fear of criminality that is common in racialised discourses. These are discourses that circulate in white Australian society about the Other (Ho, 2007; Poynting et al., 2004; Whitzman, 2007). They tend only to be verbalised once the threat is no longer thought to exist (Krupat, 1974; Wedell, Hicklin & Smarandescu, 2007), as in this situation. The perception of a threat had been modified when Andrea made her comment.

Ellen was surprised by the hospitality she had been shown, once again signified by her use of actually.

Andrea’s comment on the slave trade prompted Ellen to continue, explaining that her mother had fears.

Ellen: Yeah. That was my mother’s fear with us coming over here too with the political situation that we were going to end up stuck here in some sort of airport barricade or in a Thai jail or something like that. I don’t feel threatened in any way.

The perception of a threat had passed at this point and Ellen’s words, “I don’t feel threatened in any way”, reflected the relief that came from realising that the threat was born out of perception (Poynting et al., 2004).

Tammy: What do you think made the change? Do you remember at what point you changed your thoughts about that?

Ellen: I’ve actually observed yourself and Graeme and how relaxed you are operating within the Thai community. That puts me at ease anyway. And watching how Somphon and his family actually treat us. I feel very sort of welcomed and accepted. Shop owners obviously are keen to secure business from us, and that’s sort of probably a large proportion of why they’re so polite. But they also appear to be really genuine as well, and they try to engage you in conversation. As Peta said, a lot of them do speak English.

Here Ellen looked to fellow westerners and then to Somphon’s family to make sense of what she was feeling. Graeme and I blurred the boundaries for her by “operating within the Thai community”. Somphon and his family provided a closeness to the Other that was comforting and pleasant yet unexpected. The word actually once again denoted surprise, as Ellen came to
terms with an apparent paradox of context where the opposite may have been expected. The opposite fitted more readily into preconceptions and expectations (Stanko, 1995; Whitzman, 2007). Ellen had thought that the exchange with shop owners would be money for goods only, but upon arrival, interaction and reflection, that thought was challenged and reorganized to incorporate a new understanding according to the experience she was having.

Ellen: A couple of people that actually speak English have actually started saying ‘okay, looking at your shirt; you know, you’ve got Australia on there’; asking us what it’s all about and asking us why we’re here. When we sort of start discussing that, they say ‘thank you for coming to our country’, which is very nice. You know, you’re welcome; you’ve come here to actually support us, not to just sort of take. They’re quite impressed.

The shirt Ellen refers to is the Thailand Mission Awareness team shirt, pictured below. It is used for identification purposes when travelling, teaching in schools or visiting various NGOs.

*Picture 13: TMAT team shirt*
Ellen did not expect to understand the Thai people and never thought they would try to understand her, but her experiences of the people in the market and around the town noticing the shirt, asking why she was in Thailand and what she was doing there, began to change that. She noted that once her presence in Thailand was explained “they’re quite impressed”.

After returning to Australia and on reflection Ellen answered a series of questions some of which are listed later in this chapter and in Chapter Nine. She saw her experience as an opportunity to serve, referring to herself as a servant not a guest. Her position as outsider had been further modified as she identified the people she had met as “family” and spoke of her desire to return to Thailand, to “go back and embrace family again and continue where we left off”.

*Picture 14: Relaxing at Bua Dong Waterfall picnic site*

**8.6 Family**

Ellen’s use of the concept of family and extended family illustrated the depth of acceptance and inclusion she felt. Family is a multifaceted concept. Ellen’s experience of family, due to her background, was within a Christian context. Derrida’s reading of Hegel in Glas (Critchley, 1999) outlines Hegel’s philosophy on the family in terms of the Sittlichkeit, which
Chapter 8: Engagement with Thailand—ความเกี่ยวข้อง

is the “living agape, the spirit that quickens, and [the] Moralität [which is defined as] the dead letter, the law that kills” (Caputo, 1997, p. 237).

He places the

loving Christian family on the side of Sittlichkeit... [which] begins with the family, and the family begins with love, so that the movement from Moralität to Sittlichkeit is set in motion by love. The family is the first and most immediately concrete embodiment of love; the family is felt love, a natural unity... (Caputo, 1997, pp. 237-238).

Ellen reflected on this familiar notion of Christian family and love as she conveyed the closeness of the relationship she was part of. This relationship was with those who were once strangers to her within the TMAT group and within Thailand. That movement from foreigner to acceptance within a family is unique and seemingly impossible. Derrida (2000) writes of its seeming impossibility by invoking the importance of the family name in identifying to whom one belongs. Unlike Ellen, he sees Absolute Hospitality, the hospitality of unconditional acceptance as prohibitive of family membership because participants in that hospitality do not share a name or a family heritage. They lack a family name, a bond passed on by blood. Absolute hospitality enables guesthood but stops short of family membership because of a lack of genetic connection or legal status as a relative.

Precisely because it is inscribed in a right, a custom, an ethos, and a Sittlichkeit, this objective morality … presupposes the social and familial status of the contracting parties, that it is possible for them to be called by their names, to have names, to be subjects in law, to be questioned and liable, to have crimes imputed to them, to be held responsible to be equipped with nameable identities, and proper names. A proper name is never purely individual.

If we wanted to pause for a moment on this significant fact, we would have to note once again a paradox or a contradiction: this right to hospitality offered to a foreigner “as a family”, represented and protected by his or her family name, is at once what makes hospitality possible, to the foreigner possible, but by the same token what limits and prohibits it (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, pp. 23-25).

For Ellen family related to her feelings of acceptance by the Thai people. Not only had change occurred within the group but she also saw herself as part of the extended family made up of TMAT members, NGO workers and Thai nationals with whom she had made relationships. At one point she noted, “...we as newcomers were grafted into this extended
family”. Using the word “grafted” Ellen described how she came to be part of the extended family. To graft something is to unite it or bring it together for example a shoot or bud being united with a growing plant by insertion or by placing it in close contact (Farlex, 2011). Grafting is a close and often permanent bond yet it also signifies difference.

Ellen’s sentiment, post travelling to Thailand, was in graphic contrast to the feelings of being a “newby” that were expressed by her prior to travelling. She felt acceptance as a foreign guest in the home of her Thai hosts to the point of being grafted into the family. Ellen’s “extended family” also included the TMAT group and expatriate workers. Those people had been part of the TMAT for many years. Ellen’s position within the group had changed from “newby” to family member.

“Family” was mentioned in interviews and journals by several participants in reference to the relationships they experienced whilst in Thailand. It was also mentioned in relation to the way Yim (lady in the photograph at Bua Dong waterfall) referred to the TMAT couple, “She called us “family”.” None of the other participants elaborated on their feelings of being part of a family in relation to the Thai people in the way that Ellen did.

For most participants, the family was a concept noted in relation to their feelings of acceptance and unity within the TMAT travelling group. For Hannah it was a combination of the two.

Hannah: It was a little bit daunting but when I actually got over there it was like we were all one big family and that we all kind of look after each other. It sort of doesn’t matter where you came from or how many times you have been over there. Everyone really looks after each other. That’s the same with all the Thai people as well and they are very welcoming and even just with the buddies we looked after.

Hannah described feeling accepted by the TMAT group and by the Thai people. She observed that “everyone really looks after each other” and she was able to look after the Thai orphanage buddies as if in “one big family”. Her experience of “one big family” encompassed the whole range of people with whom she interacted, whether part of the travelling group, in-country expatriate workers, or Thai Nationals.

Her experience was one of acceptance yet it differed from that of Ellen. In Hannah’s experience of family there is security and protection given and received; a large group of people functioning together whilst in a particular place and for a particular purpose. Ellen takes family a step further and sees it as an ongoing entity. She has been “grafted into an
extended family”. This is possibly a permanent relationship that will endure beyond the finite experience of a TMAT program.

One of the complex ways in which subjects positioned themselves was evident in Ellen’s journey from Australia to Thailand and back. As has been stated, she began her journey as a “newby”, an outsider looking in to the tour group and to the Thailand experience. Through the involvement she had, she finished the journey as an “adopted family member”.

![Picture 15: TMAT participants, NGO workers, missionaries and Thai Nationals.](image)

### 8.7 Summary

This chapter drew on data from my observations as a participant in the field, diary entries and a focus group. These were used to investigate themes and challenges that emerged out of the experience shared in Thailand.

The chapter began by outlining the difficulty seemingly simple acts of politeness, such as helping to wash the dishes, can present in the presence of cultural difference and noted that this can be further complicated by the cultural confusion space dominance elicits. The issue of safety and security was discussed in relation to what it meant in the context of Derrida’s
Absolute Hospitality. Safety and security was also discussed in relation to what it meant for some TMAT participants regarding their decision whether or not to travel. For ten of those who had initially intended to travel with the TMAT, this decision became conditional upon aspects of safety and security.

Relationships of trust were explored as they related to decisions on whether or not to travel with the group. They were also explored as they differed between those who had greater levels of relationship with TMAT leaders and those who did not. This greater level of relationship existed with participants who were associated with the school with which TMAT leaders were affiliated.

This was further examined in terms of what it meant for relationships between participants, who chose to travel, and their wider family and friends. Some of these participants had received phone calls or been part of discussions that questioned the wisdom of travelling to Thailand when there was unrest occurring in Bangkok. One example given was of Andrea who explained, during the focus group, how she had communicated her understanding of security in Thailand to a concerned friend.

In an attempt to allay her friend’s anxiety and demystify the situation for her, she utilized her teaching skills and interpretation of the situation in Thailand to emphasise the familiar and take the foreignness out of the situation for her friend. She created an analogy that contained familiar concepts and locations with the aim of reducing her friend’s level of concern. This highlighted the complexity of her understanding of the influence of perception and of the role a familiar lens plays in viewing an unfamiliar situation.

Examples highlighted that participants’ rely on their own experience as their single reference point when in unfamiliar situations. Their experience influenced their perceptions. This meek reference limits the behavioural choices available to participants within those situations. As intercultural exposure and education increase so does the scope of experience.

This chapter concluded by following the experience of a first time TMAT participant as she journeyed from the outsider position, she describes as “newby”, to the intimate insider position she calls an “adopted family member”.

The next chapter continues the story as Thailand is left behind and a new stage of the journey begins as participants return to Australia and reflect on their experience.
Chapter 9: Participant reflections on their experience

9.1 Outline of the Chapter

In the previous chapter I recounted the study participants’ story as it occurred during their time in Thailand. The experience of being outside a familiar context was introduced as a powerful facilitator of learning and change for participants. Through the unique situation that existed prior to and during travel, team members gained a greater knowledge of the politics and predicament of the Thai people and this brought a different responsiveness in regard to them.

On previous TMATs there had been discussion of the politics of neighbouring countries, particularly Burma, in reference to refugee projects and non-government organisations (NGOs). As a result TMAT participants had developed awareness of, and sometimes an emotional response to, the situation as it was explained to them by NGO workers. However, the politics of Thailand had not been discussed beyond the importance of reverence and respect for the King and royal family. That is, the politics of a bordering country (Burma) had been discussed at length, due to the long standing situation of civil war within. The internal circumstances of Thailand had not been similar or of a kind identified as necessary for detailed discussion and therefore there had always been a general silence about the politics of Thailand. The events that preceded travel on this trip, the media coverage and the introduction of participants to Thailand in the wake of that, elicited a similar awareness and response, by participants, for the people of Thailand.

In this chapter an overview of participant responses upon return to Australia is given in an attempt to bring together their reflections and understanding of what actually happened for them. Data was gathered at two points post their return to Australia. Interviews were undertaken soon after the trip ended, and encompassed initial responses to the trip and the Australian context upon return. Ten months later, a series of questions were explored with participants to see how they reflected on their experience after more time had elapsed.

This period of time was chosen in response to research mentioned in chapter four. Friesen (2005) found that in as little as 12 months after completing a mission trip many participants had “regressed in virtually all aspects of the positive changes they had made, in some cases to below their pre-trip level (Friesen, 2005, p. 227)”. As the group was remaining in contact as part of the follow-up process to the trip, I asked study participants if they were willing to
answer questions regarding their experiences and reflections at this point post their travel. They were all willing to do so.

This data was used to investigate reflections on the Thailand experience as well as ongoing thoughts and feelings brought about by, and through, the experience. These thoughts and feelings were influenced, and made unique, by the Black Saturday bushfires that occurred in Victoria on February 7th 2009. Black Saturday transpired soon after the group’s return to Australia. In these bushfires 173 people lost their lives.

On this TMAT the team had lived the events as they unfolded. The people they interacted with were directly affected by the political changes that had taken place and the transfer of related information was unavoidable. Participants saw the new Prime Minister, Abhisit Vejjajiva, and the reaction of the Thai people to him. They answered questions asked by concerned relatives and friends, in Australia, and passed on their perceptions. This continued upon return to Australia and was evident in their reflections.

They had been part of a piece of Thai history, indeed world history as it occurred. The situation was real for them and highly tangible. It was discussed in the streets, on TV, in restaurants and even on the mountain trek they took part in. People were consumed by the events. The Black Saturday Bushfires caused this engagement with world events to occur again for participants soon after return to Australia.

This chapter explores participants’ responses to the TMAT experience with the benefit of added time and hindsight and attempts to make sense of the various levels of relationship experienced by, and expounded by, participants during their journey.

9.2 Upon Reflection

Upon return participants were in a position to reflect back on the experience. They were able to think about what had happened for them before, during and after the Thailand experience. They had left Australia with the uncertainty of what lay ahead, returned and then in a short space of time terrible bushfires broke out in Victoria. So they encountered a level of anxiety again, but this time in their own place. Watching others and listening to how they viewed these events assisted participants in rethinking what they were experiencing and had encountered.

Three to four weeks after their return to Australia, participants were interviewed as part of a debriefing session. These debriefing sessions were limited in their time and participants generally focussed on a couple of themes that they raised themselves. Two key themes included issues relating to security and materialism.
Most participants were interviewed on the day of the team reunion which took place in late February. The reunion was held to enable TMAT participants to spend some time together and debrief regarding how they had responded to being back in Australia, and how they had coped returning to normality.

During this time participants shared stories, perused each other’s photo albums and watched a presentation that had been put together as a memento of the trip. At the reunion they all received a copy of the presentation on DVD, as well as a CD copy of many of the photographs that had been collated. Participants who were not present at the reunion were interviewed the following week.

9.3 Context and Comparison

The Victorian bushfires were covered in the news media worldwide in a similar way to the unrest in Bangkok. In this instance participants were part of events in a way that they had not been in regard to the situation in Bangkok. They were within the context of the news situation, and consequently had a greater understanding of it. In the bushfire situation they were native to the country and familiar with bushfires, seeing events through their own local lenses as well as through the media’s eye. Their understanding of location and of bushfires contrasted with the understanding they had had of what happened several months before in Bangkok. They had seen Bangkok’s events through eyes that were unfamiliar with the location, and circumstances. This influenced their responses.

Concerned friends from overseas were recipients of the news coverage on the fires in the same way that TMAT participants had been in relation to unrest in Bangkok prior to leaving Australia. Similarly, these friends had limited understanding of the situation (fires) and geography of it in much the same way as had TMAT participants (regarding unrest in Bangkok) only months earlier. During the post travel interviews in Australia some participants spoke of friends, from overseas, who had seen the media coverage of the bushfires and contacted them to verify their safety. Some participants drew parallels between this situation and what had occurred prior to travelling to Bangkok.

Ellen commented that it was “not unlike how we were sort of reacting to the Bangkok Airport closure weeks beforehand, thinking we shouldn’t go, this is dreadful, everything is in sort of chaos, and yet it wasn’t that way over there.” Others also spoke of the parallels in relation to reporting and of the response of those overseas who were watching and acquiring the perception that the whole of Australia was on fire.
Chapter 9: Participant reflections on their experience

Peta: I was just going to say it’s clear how the news sort of puts things out of perspective to what they really are.

Tammy: And when you know the place and you know the geography…it’s different.

Hannah: I got an email and a text message at about five o’clock in the morning as well from a friend in Germany. She said – and then I got emails from her friends, like ones I hadn’t really even been in contact with; they sent me messages asking if I was okay. It was people I could barely remember, but they were really concerned for me.

Participants drew parallels between the two situations and began to convey their emerging understanding of the significance of context, familiarity and perspective. Interestingly, this reflection on their own experience was made possible when they saw parallels in the actions of others (friends from overseas) yet was not evident when they spoke independently about their own experiences. Those others (friends overseas) responded similarly to the way in which participants had done when the political unrest in Bangkok was reported several months before. When this was recognized in others, participants were able to apply this observation to themselves.

Participants also recognised other aspects of human response after the bushfires. Media coverage was not the only medium that highlighted something for them. Upon return to Australia they had been keenly aware of the relative wealth of the country in contrast to that which they had seen in Thailand. Their response was to judge the way those around them used money as being ‘materialistic’. Yet this use of money had previously been accepted as normal, and participated in, by them. As illustrated below, the accuracy of their initial judgement was challenged, when they saw how Australians used money in response to the suffering caused by bushfires.

After returning to Australia participants experienced a variety of emotions and responses.

Hannah: Like I remember I went out – I can’t remember where I was, but I was at a shopping centre – and just to see how materialistic everyone was, it made me kind of angry… just the amount of money they were spending…

Hannah’s response to what had previously been accepted as normal was indicative of her making a transition in the way she viewed the world. She had been exposed to a different set of values and a different way of perceiving the comparative wealth of Australia. This contrasted with the way she had previously accepted normality. However her new
perceptions and judgments of those in Australia were also challenged when she saw how Australians responded to what happened after the Black Saturday bushfires. This was significant enough to cause her to rethink those judgments in response to what she saw.

But then with the fires [people’s donating money and goods in response] was really good. That was a different perspective on how you go from such extremes, from people being self-indulged to… I don’t know how much, $10 million or something… just as much money as that being raised.

The response of Australians to the devastation was to donate millions of dollars to those affected by the fires. This response challenged the perceived self-indulgence Hannah and other participants had initially seen upon return to Australia. When confronted with the horror of the bushfires Australians responded to what they saw and felt in a tangible way, through donations and practical assistance. Participants had responded similarly when experiencing what they had in Thailand, though not through the same means. Something that made the response of Australians more impressive was that it came about in the presence of economic concerns related to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and Ellen noted that “[i]t [the GFC] became irrelevant.”

In each case people had responded to what they saw from the vantage point afforded them by the position they had taken up. “… a person inevitably sees [and judges] the world [and events/actions within it] from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned.” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 3)

These people responded to what they observed and/or experienced. They responded to what they saw or were tangibly aware of from the position identified with and embraced at that moment.

9.4 Participant Reflections of ‘Positions’ in Thailand

I also asked a list of questions of participants at least 10 months post their return to Australia. These questions required reflection on their experiences. Participants were asked to write their answers and then to return them to me via email (See appendix 4). The questions related to how participants felt they were received in Thailand and how they perceived their position and that of others within the TMAT group.

Responses to the questions highlighted the differences in understanding of specific concepts, particularly that of guest.
This section of the chapter provides an overview of answers to some of the questions asked of participants. It highlights how participants saw their role in Thailand; the way in which they understood the term guest; whether they saw themselves as a guest or as something else; how, if at all, “learning to be a guest in the home of another” related to their experience; the way in which they were received by people in Thailand; and how they saw the role of other team members. It also reflects upon how these terms and ideas interrelated.

While this thesis focuses on some of the ways in which participants positioned themselves, I used the word role when asking them about their understanding of this. The meaning of role is more commonly understood and the word more widely used in social context than is position. Therefore to avoid confusion and enable participants to answer questions without having concerns regarding whether they had applied a term in the way intended, I chose to use role rather than position in questions. To use position would have necessitated teaching participants its meaning in this context, separating it from its geographical connotations and hoping they would apply it in the intended way. This use of role still enabled me to examine the way in which participants positioned themselves. This was done by examining the way they described, spoke of and wrote about their role.

Participants described understandings of their role and positioning in Thailand in various ways;

Hannah: I saw my role in Thailand as a guest in another country. I had to respect their culture and traditions and be mindful of what I was doing and where I was doing it. Also, I had to think about who could see me as this could give them a negative perception of westerners/Australians. I also saw my role as a helper, as we had come from a very fortunate country to a third world country. I felt as though I had to do all I could in my time in Thailand so that whoever we came in contact with felt special and got a positive experience with us.

Hannah positioned herself in a role that she called “guest” and “helper”. It was ambassadorial in nature. Her concern to avoid a negative reflection on westerners and promote a positive experience for the Thai people with whom she came into contact suggested that she had embraced a form of ambassadorial positioning. This was about presenting a particular image, but, did not move into engagement with the Other. It was a matter of taking on responsibility and doing what was needed to promote a positive experience for others. It contained no hint at reciprocity or relationship building beyond that.
Yet there was more. Hannah’s perception of herself as “helper” reflected her belief that her comparative wealth as a member of the first world necessitated her contribution to those “in a third world country.” Here the responsibility or sense of obligation was again evident.

Peta: I saw my role in Thailand as one of a helper I guess. I feel I didn’t quite fit the missionary category because we weren’t openly evangelising but we were there to assist and impact the lives of some of the locals. Sometimes I felt like a tourist when we went shopping and sightseeing, but to describe the role as completely tourist like would be wrong. We gave to them and they gave back to us, so it was more on a friendship basis.

Both Hannah and Peta saw themselves as helpers in Thailand. They understood that they were going to help by working on various projects and consequently they positioned themselves as helpers, yet they were not specifically taught how to approach the helping or position of helping. The outworking of that help took different forms according to the concept and interpretation of helping that each participant had.

Hannah saw helping as giving. Peta saw the giving involved in helping as more of a reciprocal process or a mutual exchange, “We gave to them and they gave back to us, so it was more on a friendship basis.” Both spoke of giving, yet the meaning attached to giving, and the reason behind why this giving was worked out in practice, were very different. One was helping the needy and the other went to help a friend. The underlying relationship with their hosts (those to whom they went), that was suggested through the use of this language was different also. Helping the needy, “a third world country”, whilst noble does not require the level of connection and commitment to relationship that “friendship” does.

Hannah also saw herself as “a guest in another country.” Peta saw her interactions as being friendship based and relationship building. Each participant had a view of their position in Thailand and how it was outworked yet the view differed between participants. There was no uniform or consistent idea in how participants positioned themselves and consequently answers, to questions posed, differed accordingly.

Andrea: I went because I felt I could make a difference in the lives of the people there and I could facilitate that experience for the others in our team because I had been to Thailand before.

Ellen: As this was my first trip into Thailand (and my first extended trip out of Australia) I felt as though I was going in as a “student” of the people and the culture and the whole mission experience. I was the inexperienced missioner and
traveler. I was also both an observer and a participant in the program, and was happy to be guided by the experience of those who had gone before. I also saw my role as an investment into the lives of the Thai people.

Andrea and Ellen both stated that their intention was to assist. Andrea traveled to “make a difference in the lives of the people there” and like Hannah, saw it as something she would give the “people there.” Ellen traveled to invest in the “lives of the Thai people.” Ellen also positioned herself as a “student” which suggested a willingness to learn from the people and the experience. This was an interesting and receptive position and was something not mentioned by others. It suggested a reciprocity of sorts as Peta had.

Louise: I went initially to assist chaperoning a group of high school students on their annual Mission Awareness Tour and to learn more about the volunteering opportunities in Chiang Mai. In the end, the students were pretty self-sufficient and I was just ‘one of the gang’.

Sally: To spend time with the kids at [name of orphanage] in order to demonstrate to them they are special and worth someone’s while.

Sally reflected that her purpose in travelling was also to invest in lives by showing the orphanage children that “they are special and worth someone’s while.” The rationale for those who traveled remained consistent with what they had said in interviews prior to travel. This was to help those in Thailand. This rationale was in common with the Western propensity for doing as noted by Schwartz (2003) mentioned in Chapter Three. The actuality of experience for Louise was an unexpected positioning as “one of the gang” which suggested less responsibility and greater comfort and acceptance than anticipated prior to the trip.

The doing ideal with which participants entered the experience and the western background from which that came was contrasted with values they saw enacted by Thai Nationals.

Participants were then asked how they felt they were received by the people they met in Thailand. Participants experienced reception in Thailand in different ways. All recounted positive interaction with the Thai people. The TMAT education program prior to travelling to Thailand, did not teach participants about the comparative values often placed on material wealth, personal attributes, or relationships by westerners and Thais, and these differences were commented upon after the trip.

Hannah: I felt as though they were very helpful and would do anything for us, in their power. Even if it was just a smile, they made us feel very welcome from the
very start of our trip. Especially since a lot of the Thais didn’t have that many possessions they were very generous with what they had. They would all go out of their way to make us feel welcome, and in general and in my opinion I believe that Thai people are one of the kindest people on Earth.

Andrea: The Thai people were very gracious and kind. They had very little compared to western people but they freely offered friendship and hospitality and kindness. Even my atrocious attempts to speak Thai were met with encouragement (even if I did say some odd things at times).

Hannah and Andrea referred to and made comparison between the material wealth of Thai people and themselves. They commented that Thai people were willing to share what they had even though they had comparatively less in material terms. The implication was that these people were perceived as doing something unusual or surprising, something that would not have been expected by Hannah or Andrea in their own culture.

The comparison separated materiality from personal qualities, social interaction and relationship, “[t]hey had very little compared to western people but they freely offered friendship and hospitality and kindness.” Hannah and Andrea once again used a generalised western perception and set of values to deduce the meaning of actions towards them, and to decide the wealth of those with whom they interacted. The idea of difference was in terms of one who had and one who did not have, what was determined to be adequate material possessions. Livermore (2006) made similar assumptions when working with an STM group in Northern India and was consequently rebuked by a local friend for doing so;

“...Why do they think we’re so poor? What makes them think we want what you have?” [Livermore responded] Ashish. Give me a break! This is a good thing. Financially speaking you are poor compared to any of those kids. It’s so hard to get their minds off their consumerist passions. I’m really grateful to hear they experienced some dissonance when they saw poverty.”

Ashish rebutted, “Well, that’s nice and all, but I’m so sick of the sympathy of Westerners who think we need more stuff. Why would that have anything to do with our happiness? Please don’t help import the idol of consumerism into India” (Livermore, 2006, p. 93)

Hannah and Andrea commented on their perception of what they were confronted with in the same way as “those kids” travelling with Livermore had. They were moved by what they saw as sacrificial giving, yet their metrics were different from those used by the people they were
measuring. As a result their interpretation of actions and events may also have differed from that of their hosts as Livermore’s had.

Peta: The people in Thailand were always so welcoming and friendly most of the time. Some not so great encounters with the hill tribe people at the night market but that might have been a language barrier.

Louise: I found the locals to be extremely friendly, accommodating and helpful. Everyone was happy to mix with English speaking tourists and I found my brain was constantly being picked for information regarding my cultural background and language. I never once felt frightened or intimidated, although occasionally I felt a bit exasperated with the street merchants trying to sell me goods I didn’t want.

Sally: Extremely well, they were always very patient when we didn’t remember to participate in certain practices or abide by certain norms.

Interactions, other than some market encounters, were positive. These market encounters were with Thai people who were unknown and outside those she had been introduced to (those who were known). So when these negative interactions occurred a lack of familiarity and relationship with the people involved existed.

Sally was concerned about making cultural mistakes which signified a cultural awareness. This was a concern with doing the right thing; of getting the task done, and can be highly stressful. This type of situation reminds me of a poignant story I heard many years ago. There was a little boy who sat in class and tried so hard each day to recite his times tables with the other children, but could not do it. One day he began to cry and his teacher asked him what was wrong. He replied “When we do our tables, I know the tune but I don’t know the words.” When cultural practices become the main focus for travelers the rationale behind them and the relevance of them can be lost, if ever it was known. It becomes a case of knowing the tune but not the words or, in hospitality terms, knowing the laws but not the Law.

Sally showed an awareness of culture and was also positive in her evaluation of how she was received when she “didn’t remember... certain practices or...norms”, by stating that her hosts were “always very patient”.

Ellen: The Thai people seemed delighted to have us in their country. In some ways they fulfilled the stereotype of the polite and respectful Asian person. The shopping and bartering experience was both novel and uncomfortable, and highlighted my lack of functional language. While shopping, I felt and looked
very much like a tourist. However, living and working amongst the people was an entirely different feel. This is when I felt most welcomed and received by the local people. I was grateful to be allowed in their country, and they were grateful to have me. They showed generous appreciation for even the smallest of tasks that we could perform to serve them. Over the three weeks I grew to know the people better and began to feel an emotional connection with them, which was most obvious as we said our goodbyes. I left with a sense that I would always be welcome back.

Ellen experienced her reception in Thailand in terms of the way she felt in certain situations. Whilst shopping she “felt and looked ... like a tourist”. Whilst “living and working amongst the people” she felt “most welcomed and received by the local people”. Ellen felt more received when she was doing or accomplishing something. Her sense of acceptance and value to the “local people” was not as strong when she took part in seemingly less productive activities such as shopping. In these less productive and more self-oriented times she perceived herself as “like a tourist”. This is reflective of the western emphasis on doing rather than being (Schwartz, 2003).

According to Schwartz, the western perception of the relative importance of volunteer group activities can be linked to its tangibility. This may be due, in part, to the perceived need to report back to those who are at home or to those who have assisted in raising funds for the trip. Whilst Schwartz acknowledges the western emphasis on doing he contrasts it by stating that “…there is something about our witness which is greatly enhanced when people see us for who we are, rather than what we do” (Schwartz, 2003, p. 29). The term “witness” used by Schwartz, in this context, refers to the visible outworking of Christianity in the life of a Christian.

Ellen says she was “grateful to be allowed in their country”. Her experience with acceptance of the Other in the Australian context is one of conditional hospitality. One is allowed into the country according to the “government [which] asserts property rights over the territory” being entered (Deutscher, 2003, p. 9). In Australia there is ongoing debate surrounding who should be allowed into the country and on what conditions. This was part of Ellen’s Australian environment and background and thus contrasted her own experience. She expressed gratitude for being “allowed in”. Ellen also noted the appreciation she felt from the Thai people when she and other group members, performed acts of service. This is in keeping with her understanding of Christian service written of previously.
Ellen speaks of an emotional connection with the people in Thailand and of the sense that she “would always be welcome[d] back”. Her sense of acceptance and inclusion indicated a progressive journey from “newby” to this point.

The hospitality the Thai people showed Ellen was welcoming and inclusive. The laws of hospitality, where tasks are performed, appreciation shown and cultural exchanges made, had been evident. This occurred as travelers struggled to come to terms with what it meant to experience hospitality and what hospitality meant in an unfamiliar cultural context.

Up until this point participants had responded to questions that asked them to comment on their own role and on issues surrounding it and their understanding of it. The next question asked them to look beyond themselves to the role of their peers and fellow travelers. It asked how they saw other team members; were they guests, visitors, tourists or something else and how would participants define that role. Participants differed in the understandings of various positions yet there was a hierarchy of value attached to the sequencing of these in terms of responsibility and relationship.

Ellen: The regular team members who return often were so comfortable in the country and with the people; it was like they were natives. Being able to speak the language fluently made a big difference in how they were received and accepted, and made it possible to connect cross-culturally.

Ellen’s comment demonstrated a tendency towards us/them or we/they identity categories in relation to first time TMAT participants and those who had traveled previously; a point of separation through difference, even if the nature of the difference itself was not quite understood. “Being able to speak the language fluently made a big difference in how they were received and accepted”. Being fluent did make a difference, but only one team member could be construed as fluent in the Thai language. Ellen’s lack of language knowledge led her to perceive any spoken language as fluency.

This same tendency to attribute knowledge to others applied to perceptions of participants in matters relating to cultural practices and general information about Chiang Mai. Those who had traveled to the area on previous TMAT programs would often share their understandings and insights on history or culture. These were constructed from their own experiential reference points and did not always reflect the actuality of the issue or topic being discussed. Yet those listening would invariably expect that due to their previous participation on the team, they must have greater knowledge of the issues. As with the perception of language fluency, knowledge fluency was erroneously attributed.
Andrea made some interesting observations on how the members of the group were seen.

Andrea: That’s the thing about 40 odd people having what appears to be the same experience --- what they experience depends largely on them. And the expectations they bring and how they are able to respond to them.

And there are 40 different levels --- so some were guests – others remained a little apart and were visitors, while others saw Thailand only on the surface and compared it with home and consequently remained tourists.

And perhaps we were all a bit of all three descriptions on some days – people are complex beings.

She was the only participant to mention the difference that expectations can make on interpretation of experiences and events. She was also the only one to note that participants may have taken up different positions at different times indicating that she saw positions as fluid not fixed.

Andrea’s description of guests, visitors and tourists introduced levels of engagement with others, and with the experience, as a marker of position. Participants were given status as a particular type of traveler according to their levels of engagement. This is expanded upon later in the chapter.

Sally observed some team members and was struck by the way they positioned themselves and the way they took part in the relationship of hospitality with their Thai hosts.

Sally: I sadly noticed a small number of my team members not fully grasping the two street relationship of being a visitor they expected to be treated like a guest and be respected but I noticed in their failure to respect customs and norms they didn’t understand their responsibility to this role.

Sally took ownership of the team members, “my team members” viewed as not grasping the relationship of hospitality between them and their hosts in Thailand. She did not admonish them or separate herself from them and was also mindful of relationship responsibilities she perceived team members had as part of the team and the Thailand experience.

Sally looked beyond the welfare and needs of the team members to the needs and responses of their hosts by noticing the failure “to respect customs and norms”. She responded with sadness to what she saw as a breach of their responsibility. Her outward looking observations suggested a greater level of cultural sensitivity and maturity than she perceived in those she described. This level of sensitivity was more indicative of early ethnorelative (Acceptance)
positioning according to Bennett’s DMIS. People exhibiting this positioning accept that the feelings and behaviours of those from other cultures may be different and unusual, but they also acknowledge that these other ways are just as valid and rich as their own.

9.5 Positions and Definitions

Participants were also asked how they would describe a guest. A particular definition or meaning of what it meant to be a guest in Thailand had not been provided. However, participants were told that foreigners stand out and to ensure that they stood out “humbly and positively” (Smith & Smith, 2008, p. 3).

Consequently, the meaning each participant attached to guest was based on their own experience of the concept. Participants described the guest and the role associated with it, in accordance with their own understanding. In most cases their description anticipated questions about how they saw their own role. This anticipation was evident through the way they assigned qualities to the guest. Previous comments (Chapter Eight) in relation to guest encompassed being waited on and suggested aspects associated with a guest as a paying customer, as for a hotel guest. This form of guest was not referred to in their descriptions of the word below.

Hannah: I would describe a guest as a visitor somewhere, somewhere that they have never been before or is not usually there. Someone who is a tourist and someone who visits on the reasons for friendship, business, travel, etc.

Peta: A guest would be someone … in the home of another but they don’t arrange everything around themselves selfishly… they help out more like another family member would. In Thailand we tried to be active in our helping not passive.

This understanding of guest described an active position, someone who was there to do and who did not want to be viewed as causing an imposition. There was also an assumption of acceptance; “like a family member.”

Andrea: Someone who comes to stay for a time – however long that time is – and however often you come. Some guests are welcomed and others are tolerated – I’d like to think I was welcomed

Sally: A visitor to whom hospitality should be given but also it is a two way street, the “guest” should show respect and courtesy for the people being hospitable towards them, in light of the tour I believe the latter was more important.
Sally placed the onus of responsibility in the guest-host relationship on both parties. She was concerned that “respect and courtesy” be apparent in the guest’s interaction with the host and made the point that the relationship is a “two way street” indicating her stance that responsibility is held on both sides of the relationship. After having stated that hospitality “should be given” to the guest Sally moved to a position in which, due to the tour, the guest should be more diligent in the relationship. It was interesting that “the tour” changed her perception of how the role and relationship should be outworked in practice. In this instance the situation and her place within it, influenced the role. The role was not defined or fixed, it was negotiable and situational.

After giving participants opportunity to contemplate how they would describe a guest, they were asked how they viewed themselves; was it as a guest, visitor, tourist or something else and how would they define that role.

Answers to this question reflected the understanding, or meaning each participant assigned to their concept of “guest, visitor, tourist”.

Ellen: In some ways we were guests in the sense that we were required to be conscious of and respectful of the language, culture and customs in which we were immersed. I saw myself and other newcomers more as extended family or adopted family rather than as a guest. Sometimes the tourist element popped out especially in the vicinity of markets.

Ellen viewed being a tourist as being less appealing or desirable, but unavoidable or unintended “Sometimes the tourist element popped out...” Being a guest was surpassed by being part of a family. This had been a consistent theme with Ellen. Being part of a family was not unproblematic, yet it encompassed a different level of belonging and acceptance. Family in Ellen’s case was not an accident of birth; it was choice and acceptance of a different type.

Hannah: I would see myself as a tourist, and definitely a guest because I am not a local and didn’t know the language either, so that played a massive part as to why I felt like a tourist/guest. I would define that role as someone who is not a local and almost like a neighbour in someone else’s house. They make you feel welcome, but it’s not where you belong, but they do everything they can to make you feel as if you were at home.

Peta: I saw myself as a guest
Chapter 9: Participant reflections on their experience — การพิจารณา

Andrea: A tourist sees from the outside really – just the surface stuff. A visitor comes and goes and remains a stranger to an extent. I’d like to think that I was a guest -- someone who was welcomed with pleasure and whom people looked forward to having stay.

Louise: As above [that is ‘I saw myself as a ‘tourist with a task’. I was there to see the place for the first time as well as contribute to the tasks/responsibilities of the whole group.]

Sally: Yes I did see myself as a visitor in Thailand I realized that my role as a guest was to abide by their customs and fit into their culture and not bring in my own.

Hannah and Andrea saw themselves as guests and in their interpretation of that position, gave responsibility for their feeling “welcome” or “at home” to their hosts. Sally did state that being a guest meant that she would behave in a particular way. This involved leaving her own culture behind and fitting in with the culture and customs of Thailand. This is a difficult position to enact or sustain as it requires leaving the familiar behind and engaging with practices of which we have little or no knowledge.

Being a tourist had previously been commented on with negative connotations yet here this is not the case. Hannah used tourist and guest to describe what her position on the TMAT was “I felt like a tourist/guest.”

For Andrea, the tourist remained an outsider. For her, the positions of tourist, guest and visitor continued to link with relationship and proximity. This has remained a consistent thread in her comments on position.

Louise described herself as a “tourist with a task.” This was quite a novel concept. Tourist implied position without responsibility, yet having a task associated added a level of responsibility and duty. As such the tourist position was expanded in its purpose. This may have been what others meant when referring to a visitor; a position beyond tourist but not seen as guest.

Visitor was spoken of concurrently with guest by Sally who noted “[y]es I did see myself as a visitor in Thailand. I realized that my role as a guest was to abide by their customs and fit into their culture and not bring in my own.” Sally, could be thought of as substituting one term for the other suggesting that she had assigned no set definition or meaning to either term. In this context they would appear interchangeable, a visitor or guest. However, she did talk about abiding by customs and fitting into culture after mentioning guest. In this context there is a
Chapter 9: Participant reflections on their experience

...responsibility attached to guest that was not apparent for her understanding of a visitor. Either term served a purpose in describing her position, yet guest involved some level of responsibility for the one who was in the space for a limited time.

A guest and the outworking of that position was seen in various ways;

- My role as a guest was to abide by their customs and fit into their culture and not bring in my own (Sally).
- We were guests in the sense that we were required to be conscious of and respectful of the language, culture and customs in which we were immersed (Ellen).
- Someone who was welcomed with pleasure and whom people looked forward to having stay (Andrea).
- Someone who is not a local and almost like a neighbour in someone else’s house (Hannah).
- A tourist with a task (Louise)

It is difficult to display attributes of being a guest when the practice of guest is unclear, ambiguous or contested. Participants responded to the position they saw themselves as holding which, in each case, involved the outworking of certain responsibilities that reflected their own understanding. Their brand of being a guest was according to the internal definition they held of guest. It came from pre-travel information sessions and knowledge of the laws of hospitality as demonstrated through their own cultural practices. Therefore within this confined group of people guest and guesthood differed.

The outworking of a consistent and particular form of Guest or Guesthood requires a consistent understanding of the terms. The need for a consistent understanding of terms and concepts for the purpose of outworking practices and dispositions applies when these terms and concepts are important to the experience and its outcomes. Regardless of what the term or concept is discussion to assist participants in constructing a functional definition of it will aid understanding. This will also assist in avoiding ambiguity and promote effective outworking of that term or concept. Establishment of this type of understanding in the pre-travel education process is important to aid participant positioning throughout the intercultural experience.

Ellen’s own concept of guest was that of someone to be waited on, and consequently, she did not relate to the idea of being a guest. This was evident in her responses to the following...
question in which participants were asked how, if at all, they related their experience to the idea of ‘learning to be a guest in the home of another.’

Ellen: I didn’t feel like I was supposed to be a guest, in the sense of being waited on and catered to, while we were in Thailand – although the Thai people, in their generosity, treated us like honoured guests. Guests are served by the host, but I felt instead it was our role to serve the Thai people.

In suggesting that it was her role to serve, Ellen promoted a reciprocity of sorts. A type of guesthood, but one that was uncomfortable with allowing the hosts to practice hospitality according to their understanding of cultural responsibility. That cultural position conflicted with her understanding of the role, how it was practiced in her own culture and as a categorical imperative. The Law of Hospitality and the laws of hospitality were bypassed in order for her to find comfort within a familiar cultural frame. This bypass was not done intentionally, as Ellen was practicing what she was culturally familiar with. Without being aware of the cultural practices that made up Thai hospitality Ellen could not position herself as guest in that culture. She could, however, position herself as guest in her own familiar culture.

Without knowledge or awareness of the cultural practices of anOther positioning according to those practices could not occur. As previously explained in the introductory chapter, culture is not universal and what is comfortable or polite for one person or culture may be quite the opposite for another. This is when it is important for travelers to think and act according to the Law of Hospitality thus transcending the laws of hospitality that are embedded in already established cultural practices. Therefore in intercultural situations consideration and accommodation of this is important so that positive communication and interaction can take place.

Ellen: I never considered myself to be a guest, before, during or after my trip, except in so far as I needed to respect culture and customs. My experience and perception both then and now was that of being a servant not a guest. I was very much aware that we were treated like guests even though I did not view myself that way.

Here Ellen was bounded by the constraints of what she perceived the word guest to mean from her cultural standpoint. She interpreted a guest as being one who is served whilst she noted a responsibility to “respect culture and customs”. Her emphasis reflects, once again, the laws of hospitality and their emphasis on cultural practices. She did not position herself as a
guest and therefore could not accept treatment as one. In this sense it was not only a matter of cultural practice, but also a matter of difference or conflict between the position assigned to her by Thai hosts and the position she assigned to herself. She could not expect to reflect or respect that with which she was unfamiliar. Her reference point was her own culture and that was the perspective from which she operated. Her cultural experience and background led her to believe that it was impolite to allow or expect others to wait on her. Whilst conversely, the culture of those around her led them to believe that waiting on her was a sign of cultural politeness and hospitality toward a guest.

Hannah:

I think this statement related to my experience while in Thailand, as you have to learn what is socially acceptable and appropriate, as you are a guest and not a local. And it’s not something that someone tells you to do or not to do. You as an individual have to learn how to be a guest; How to be polite and give a good impression, about people from overseas especially Australia.

As was mentioned earlier, the position and discursive practice from which a person operates in a given moment influences their response and this is not fixed. According to Winslade (2003) “[i]t is a concept that points to the ways in which people take up positions in relation to discourse in the very moment of making an utterance in a conversation” (Winslade, 2003, p. 9). Hannah had taken up a particular position wherein she showed concern for appropriateness and positive ambassadorship. This focused on cultural practices (laws of hospitality). Within this positioning “[a]t least a possibility of notional choice is inevitably involved because there are many and contradictory discursive practices that each person could engage in”(Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 3). At different times and over time, different positions can be taken up within different discourses.

This difference was echoed in Sally’s comments when reflecting on the trip. She wrote of changes in mindset that occurred for her;

Sally:

Before the trip I thought it meant being polite and courteous but during and after the tour I realized it was so much more than that, it was actually showing respect and dignity for another culture and not being ethnocentric in the way I look at their way of life in comparison to my own.

Andrea:

Perhaps that’s part of the “I feel at home” comment. Travelling to anywhere is different and you need to learn to accept that as the way it is --- it’s not weird or shabby or wrong or anything – it’s just the way it is there. Eating at Aunty
Margaret’s in Melbourne is different to eating at my home, and so is eating at [Somphun and Noi’s] – taste it and enjoy it here and now. I think it’s best to just roll with it --- this is how it’s done here – it’s not better or worse it’s just the way it is. I’ve learned lots of things whilst in Thailand and I have valued my stays.

Accepting difference for being different rather than having to assign a status designating it right/wrong, acceptable/unacceptable is made very clear here through Andrea’s use of illustrative language. These responses to questions on position and role highlighted cultural perceptions and perspectives reflective of those discussed earlier in this chapter. The idea of being waited upon or served was not desirable, whilst serving was. The idea of practicing politeness and creating a good impression were important for Hannah. Whilst Andrea’s response, emphasising accepting difference without judgment, was indicative of a more ethnoretative perspective and was considerably different from the responses of others.

Louise:

There really is no difference between the ‘before, during or after’ experience relating to that statement. I was always careful not to offend anyone and viewed myself as the ignorant one, not knowing how to communicate with the locals. I wouldn’t dream of ever putting down the Thai people for leading different lives or eating different foods to me, let alone speaking a different language.

Louise used interesting phrasing when she commented that she “viewed [herself] as the ignorant one…” She mentioned not wanting “to offend anyone” and reiterated this with “I wouldn’t dream of ever putting down the Thai people for…” These combined comments suggested a desire not to give the impression of viewing Thai people negatively or differently despite their difference in relation to the identified areas of lifestyle, food choice and language. Minimisation of difference is indicative of a thought process based in the ethnocentric spaces of Bennett’s (1998) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). Several participants were aware of difference and chose to treat it with a display of tolerance. They tolerated or put up with the difference because they were in an unfamiliar space and did not want to offend. Conversely Andrea acknowledged the difference and chose to “…roll with it” in a response more indicative of ethnoretativity.

9.6 Circles of Position

The roles and positions expounded by participants varied, but there were several forms that recurred. A hierarchy or preference for the way participants saw themselves and others in
Thailand seemed to exist. The positions and their hierarchy are illustrated below through a series of circles.

![Figure 7- Circles of position](image)

Participants seemed to be saying that there are outer circles and inner circles of relationship and proximity associated with identified positions/roles. The responsibility to learn about the other, to begin to understand who the other is and who I am in relation to them, increases with changes in positioning until reaching family which, although seen as the pinnacle of relationship, does not involve a responsibility level above the others. In family there is something else present. This is not to say that family comes without responsibility to learn about who the other is, but the way participants speak and write about family suggests that once they are family the obligation to find out is removed because now, they are known.

The great outer circle is the tourist. The tourist is seen as the one who comes and looks and is largely self-oriented. They just move through the experience. There is no obligation or responsibility to know or engage with the other, other than to abide by the laws of the country to which they have traveled.

Andrea: A tourist sees from the outside really – just the surface stuff.

Peta: Sometimes I felt like a tourist when we went shopping and sight seeing...

Then there is the visitor which could be placed side by side with the tourist but this positioning is something slightly different. A visitor moves beyond the tourist in that they must come to know something of who they are encountering and what their responsibilities
might be, and yet the visitor is not seen as a guest because they come from beyond, without invitation but also without necessarily needing an invitation either (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000). The visitor remains a stranger whilst being more familiar than the tourist.

Andrea: Others remained a little apart and were visitors.

The guest is next and comes and was spoken of, by a number of participants, as having certain associated expectations or responsibilities.

Ellen: In some ways we were guests in the sense that we were required to be conscious of and respectful of the language, culture and customs in which we were immersed.

Hannah: I saw my role in Thailand as a guest in another country. I had to respect their culture and traditions and be mindful of what I was doing and where I was doing it.

Hannah: ...you have to learn what is socially acceptable and appropriate, as you are a guest and not a local.

Sally: ...the “guest” should show respect and courtesy for the people being hospitable towards them.

Ultimately there is the family in the centre. To some extent this suggests that a guest is always a foreigner, at times absolute but at other times familiar, however always foreign or outside the family. When the participants spoke about family they did so in a way that suggests that one is accepted without the responsibility to know. One is generally a family member by birth not by action and so the adjustments made by a guest are not required.

Ellen: I saw myself and other newcomers more as extended family or adopted family rather than as a guest.

I have previously written of family as a close and strong relationship (Chapter Eight). Participants, when in Thailand, were in an unfamiliar culture and space within which, and from which, the concept of family, with its associated warmth and strength of relationship, provided comfort, security, acceptance and respite.

Their positioning of family, as the pinnacle of relationship, in preference to guest is really interesting but what is more interesting to me is that when talking about guest they recognised that some form of obligation existed and were saying that guest means me knowing about you. It seems to be that I need to understand your culture if I am a guest and
that I need to modify me. This obligation is not spoken of by them in relation to family. When family is encountered the landscape can become more negotiable and pliable according to how family is understood, used and engaged with. Family is simultaneously at the very centre of the positions described whilst also being a place of escape where engagement with absolute hospitality or Guest does not need to occur.

Could it be that the use of family provides comfort yet removes a level of responsibility and becomes a reason why I do not have to shift or change? Could this insistence on family, as a central point, be a way of avoiding engagement with the positionality of guest and, further, does being family exempt one from the responsibilities of behaving as a guest? Is it possible to have a family guest or to be a family guest? Is it possible that there could be another circle within the family circle? That is, the absolute Guest Derrida describes (hôte) where the Other is privileged over the self even within the confines of family and even as family members (See below).
relation to her understanding of guest when she illustrated the idea by likening it to her understanding of family.

Peta: A guest would be someone say in the home of another but they don’t arrange everything around themselves selfishly… they help out more like another family member would.

Guest goes beyond family and also goes into family. It is so important that when engaged with, it means that in a family situation in which it would be easy or natural to act in a way that would suit me, but not suit or benefit other family members, I act to benefit the Other. In practical terms it may mean eating with gratitude what is served rather than with criticism or complaint. Likewise it may mean resisting the urge to change or rearrange the way others have done things when my preference is for something else as Peta suggested above.

9.7 Summary

This chapter outlined participants’ reflections on their time in Thailand in relation to the events that occurred soon after their return to Australia and on their role (position) and perception of the role (position) of others in their team whilst in Thailand. Participant responses included reflections on initial return to Australia and the changes that occurred after participants observed the nationwide reaction to the Victorian Bushfires.

After having been part of the liminal process that took them out of Australia, into Thailand and then returned them, changed, to Australia, their perceptions of life in Australia had altered. This affected their interpretation of people’s actions in terms of spending money for example. They formed judgements and opinions of these people and their actions which were challenged when they saw these same people donating money, goods and time to the bushfire victims. This brought about realisation of the influence perspective and experience has on a situation and upon responses to that situation. This also highlighted the importance of context and comparison when living through, and reflecting on, experiences particularly in relation to familiarity with subject matter and location.

Throughout the examination of data the importance of making meanings explicit was apparent. Assumptions relying on unexplained or unclarified terminology and concepts, such as Guest, resulted in multiple meanings and definitions of these terms. Consequently, as participants did not have a clear sense of the Derridean concept of Guest they were unable to enact being a Guest. Given this multiplicity of meanings it would have been unreasonable to expect them to do so.
Answers to questions posed in a questionnaire included reflection on positioning, what participants understood being a guest to be, how they saw their role, whether the idea of ‘learning to be a guest’ had any meaning or relevance for them or their experience, how they were received by Thai nationals and how they viewed the role and behaviour of other team members. These answers showed the levels of relationship that existed for participants, between positions and the obligations and responsibilities attributed to each. These levels translated into a system of understanding that has been represented through circles of positions ranging from tourist through visitor to guest, family and then Guest. Interestingly, the question of why family membership was seen as ultimate arose. Was it an indication of ultimate acceptance, belonging and position or could it also be utilized as a way to avoid engaging with the positionality of guest?

The next chapter brings the thesis to a close, but continues to explore ways through which improved intercultural interaction and communication in short term volunteer experiences.
Chapter 10: In Conclusion

The preceding chapters have outlined my interpretation of two journeys; one of the study participants as their experience occurred in the field, and one of reflection on that journey as it was analysed and the written thesis took shape. This thesis set out to study human interactions in an intercultural context through the expectations and reflections as expressed and experienced by TMAT participants. As such it began as an analysis of an experience and of positioning for that experience. It became a realization of just how important, influential and diverse positioning was within that experience.

Through this thesis I have sought to highlight some of the issues surrounding short term mission (STM) and voluntourism (VT) and to do so from the research perspective of one who has been enmeshed in STM for many years.

This chapter provides an overview of the research story of this thesis. In doing so, the importance of each chapter, to the research area and the thesis as a whole, is outlined. This chapter also outlines some of the limitations of the study and makes suggestions for future research.

I believe it is also necessary to provide insight into the deeper motivations for this study to further contextualise its substance and relevance to the area, and my ongoing involvement in it. The root of these motivations was expressed in Chapter Two where I used a personal story to outline the privilege it is to enter the home of another and the importance of remembering to whom that home belongs. This recollection from my own experience was also analogous of concerns I had had when watching intercultural interactions between people in Thailand and within Australia. My intellectual and emotional struggle had been with the idea of how people valued, or failed to value, each other and how this failure could, and did, occur even with the best of motives and intentions as initial drivers of interaction.

As I began to plan my study and thesis I investigated frameworks for levels of intercultural sensitivity and modes of enacting hospitality. I had hoped to observe and chronicle the movement of participants along a continuum, such as that proposed by Bennett (1993), from one point of understanding to another. However I found that the development of participants’ understanding did not seem to happen in that way. The movement and changes that did occur were related to participants’ reflection upon, and judgments of, themselves. The issues of reciprocity and behaviour in the home of another that I set out to study did not turn out to be simply about participants’ knowledge or lack of it in relation to cultural practices or differences. What became apparent was that the issues were equally related to the beliefs,
understandings and experiences participants held about being a guest. This being the case, participants often lacked awareness that their attempts to do the right thing led to imposition of their own belief system and understanding of what was right, on others in the culture they were entering. Participants’ own belief systems were therefore not recognized as culture but as the right way of doing things. Consequently Thai behaviours were identified as cultural, whereas participant behaviours were regularly identified as normal or right rather than cultural. That is, it was not simply a matter of cultures ‘out there’ but of what participants could and could not see about their own beliefs, understandings and behaviours. An example of this occurred when washing the dishes after lunch at Bua Dong waterfall.

10.1 Reflections on the main themes discussed
Notwithstanding this, some form of development, as described by Bennett, did take place over time. This is illustrated later in this chapter through revisiting examples that took place whilst in Thailand. These examples as well as a number of themes that arose throughout the study have led me to conclude that a somewhat modified framework, apart from what was suggested in the literature I started with, needs to be adopted in relation to preparation of STM and VT participants prior to travel. In relation to the in-Thailand experience, something I had not considered was the extent to which group leaders were observed and emulated by participants and the role that leaders could play in reminding participants where they were and to whom the space belonged.

In this chapter I have chosen to revisit those themes that were of special interest and that provided new or different insight into the way participants conducted themselves or responded to their situation.

These themes included expectations of similarity and difference (with particular reference to interactions between participants and missionaries/NGO workers), liminality and its relationship to TMAT (in terms of participants’ movement through a liminal process from Australia, to Thailand and back again), expressions of culture and difference (and the way in which these are/are not perceived or recognized by participants), cultural positioning and expression being more than a geographical state (this was the case when TMAT (Australians) were the dominant culture either in their guesthouse, on outings or via their communications), and that the participants did not embody being a Guest in the way that I elaborated early in the thesis. This discussion will highlight that in order for this Guest to be possible a new form of pre-travel education, and ongoing support from group leaders, is required.
10.2 Similarity and Difference

In Thailand, and on reflection on previous trips, TMAT participants encountered more than one type of intercultural experience. This led to a range of responses and some of these were explored in Chapter Six. Participants expected that there would be differences between themselves and the Thai nationals. However similarity was expected in those expatriates whose backgrounds were similar. On examination of the lives of expatriate workers, missionaries and NGO workers with whom participants came into contact, participants noticed differences. The differences, being unexpected, were more difficult to reconcile than those that had been encountered, and expected, in Thai nationals. These differences were often identified as sacrificial in nature. This resulted in many participants viewing the differences as indicative of people who were special or set apart from them in some way.

The sacrifice identified in missionaries and NGO workers was something that was not unusual or unexpected in the life of a Christian missionary. Yet while I had expected a possible sense of admiration of a life lived in this way, I was quite surprised at the awe most participants conveyed when speaking or writing about people who lived their lives this way. This was an example of living that Christians aspire to, yet it was confronting and awe inspiring for participants when they saw it enacted by real people. Participants were familiar with the ideals, but not the lifestyle displayed in this instance. Most participants felt the need to compare their own lives with that of the missionary or NGO who lived what they perceived as a life of sacrifice. In doing so, a form of self-judgment and criticism occurred. The exemplar left them in awe that this lifestyle could be attained by some people and, in their own view; they themselves had fallen short of the ideal.

As I watched and reflected upon the reasons for this and examined participant negotiation of the time spent with this different group of people, it became clear that participants had become part of a type of intercultural clash that was unrelated to ethnicity. It was, nonetheless, a clash of cultures between two distinct groups. Interestingly, when considering participant responses to this, Bennett’s DMIS was equally relevant and insightful even though ethnicity was not the factor distinguishing the two cultures.

In displaying Reversal, as described in the DMIS,

\[
\text{[t]he person feels that some other culture is better and tends to exhibit distrust of, and be judgmental of, their own culture. (MDB Group, 2010)}
\]

I found that the ethnocentric form of interaction displayed in Reversal was evident in the self-criticism that took place in this instance. The responses that occurred whereby most
participants in the study saw their own lives as being of less purpose and less significance than the lives and sacrifices of NGO workers and missionaries could be looked at, in part, as a form of *Reversal*.

The comparisons made by participants between themselves and NGOs were based on participant experiences and circumstances which differed markedly from those of the NGOs. Therefore comparisons were unrealistic as they were between two different *cultural* groups using very different experiences and circumstances, but were being evaluated by participants from their own cultural perspective without acknowledgement, or awareness of the variables.

The NGOs had responded to a particular *call* or situation that had not occurred in the lives of participants. Yet participants made the comparison regardless, or without awareness, of the differences that existed. This is important for sending organisations and group leaders to note when planning for future intercultural experiences. Knowledge of positioning differences, of this type, between participants and those they may meet in the field can be useful in preparation if introduced and explored in pre-travel education programs.

### 10.3 Liminality

The idea of liminality became central to the TMAT experience as participants left Australia, entered and experienced Thailand, then returned to Australia with new and different perceptions. This process was interrupted at various points and on occasions when specific circumstances arose. Their initial entry to Thailand and the associated physical effects of exhaustion was a tangible indicator of stepping into liminality. During the experience participants returned, in a sense, to Australia whilst still in Thailand. Australia was transported with them through their presence particularly when they worked or moved together in large numbers (numbers that were greater than that of the Other).

Whilst living in Chiang Mai participants were able to create their own pseudo-Australia inside the guesthouse and when they were together in large numbers. This enabled them to exist in familiar and safe cultural and linguistic circumstances. Their journey into another culture was therefore interrupted during the times in which this occurred. This pseudo-Australian space provided participants with respite from the unfamiliar. This also had implications for the Thai nationals who interacted with them during these times as participants were functioning, not as guests in another country but, as Australians in an artificially constructed Australia. In this space the cultural practices, rules and laws were Australian. At these times, being physically in Thailand was not recognised. When participants began to construct Australia in Thailand they were returning to their old pre-liminal state; a place they inhabited before the journey began. The challenge that faced them
was to resist the urge to return and to resist the urge to dominate the space, particularly in the presence of Thai people. However, it did not seem that this was recognized.

The liminal process continued when participants returned to Australia. They had been changed by the journey and their perceptions of life in Australia and responses to it had changed from those they held prior to taking part in the trip. They had begun the trip with one view of their world and returned with an added perspective, something different. This was evident in responses to what had previously been accepted as normal, for example watching the way people spend money at a shopping centre. This is useful for sending organisations to recognise and respond to in planning future programs. Awareness of this space can be a powerful facilitator of further development and progress in the intercultural communication of STM/VT groups. The returning responses of participants are also useful for future planning of debriefing and for providing assistance in informed transition back to Australia.

10.4 Politeness: Not Compromise, but Hospitality- Washing Dishes

The pseudo-Australian space, with the whole group present and TMAT participants in large numbers, had implications also for the practice of politeness as evidenced during an afternoon of recreation at Bua Dong waterfall. Participants had spent the time relaxing and were in a pseudo-Australian context. During the process of packing up a cultural anomaly had occurred, between Australian and Thai practices, in relation to how politeness was demonstrated. The artificially created Australia failed to recognize that the cultural practices of Australia were foreign in the physical space of Thailand.

In this space on this occasion, as the TMAT group members involved were not positioned as guests in a foreign space, they were not able to behave as guests. They positioned themselves as, owners of a constructed familiar space in which the practices they undertook were familiar to them. The culture that was familiar to the large group became the culture of the space regardless of its physical location. This situation once again showed the importance of understanding what was occurring in the space, to whom it belonged and who had taken ownership or control of it. It provided an illustration, for sending organisations, of how this type of situation requires recognition of what is occurring in the space, awareness of differences and then a careful negotiation of the cultural terrain being traversed by those involved.

It is quite a challenge for those leading groups to continually remind participants that they are no longer in Australia and that what is considered right or normal there may not be right or normal in Thailand. The concept of Guest is once again important to integrate as a position in
which the needs of the host/host community are acknowledged and negotiated carefully by the STM/VT participant.

10.5 McKean- Massage at Bua Dong Waterfall

Whilst at Bua Dong another, very different circumstance occurred. TMAT participants were present in large numbers, as before, yet cultures seemed to work in parallel in this instance. A photograph related to this was included in Chapter Seven. Leprosy patients undergoing MDT were accepted as guests of the group. No comments were made regarding concerns other than those made in relation to fears about communication difficulties and the awkwardness that could present for all parties. Nothing was written in diaries by participants in relation to leprosy or the fact that massages were given by, and received on, bare skin. Giving and receiving took place comfortably between cultures.

I was emotionally moved when I saw the picture. At first glance it was a group of people relaxing together and did not seem particularly remarkable. The significance and impact of the photograph was in the situation of those within it. Two ladies are seen massaging two TMAT participants. The setting is peaceful and relaxed. All are smiling and enjoying themselves. The striking factor is that the ladies giving the massages are both leprosy patients. In this situation the TMAT participants were comfortable to receive from their Thai guests, whereas in the dish-washing instance they had not been. The difference was in the mutuality that had occurred in one instance but not the other. The masseurs had received hospitality and financial assistance from the TMAT participants and so a form of mutuality had occurred. The dishes situation had occurred after TMAT had received a day of hospitality from Thai hosts. They had not had the opportunity of contributing and felt the need to do this in some way. It was a situation of needing to do as opposed to be which westerners struggle with (Schwartz, 2003).

This very need, however, was in contrast to the culture expressed in Thailand and in contrast to the Thai people with whom they were interacting – who prized being over doing. The space and the imbalance of Thai and western population within it created an environment whereby western culture dominated. This is at the crux of purpose in STM and VT and is exceedingly important to planning for these experiences. Who is the experience constructed for? Is it for the benefit of the guest, the host or both? Did engagement with hosts during planning and prior to travel occur? This was discussed in Chapter Three as an area of concern voiced by long-term in-country workers. These workers had expressed that the focus of purpose had shifted from those serving the host/host community to serving the needs of the STM/VT participants (Baar, 2003; Choi, 2009; Raines, 2008; Raymond & Hall, 2008). This
thesis, as was acknowledged in Chapter Three, also uses information about, and from, participants as a major part of the data.

As sending organisations plan their programs and outline their purpose the issue of doing and being as it applies culturally can also be examined. How does it apply to the next STM or VT group being sent out? Has it been discussed and addressed in pre-travel education sessions? Is there an awareness and appreciation that the notions, of being and doing, exist and that they differ between many STM/VT destinations and the West? Therefore understanding the purpose of a proposed trip before embarking on any planning towards it is highly important. That is, the purpose precedes and determines the planning.

10.6 Safety and Security - The Significance of Perception

The issues mentioned thus far have all, in some way, highlighted the importance of perception and perspective (position). During the TMAT’s time in Thailand a focus group was held in which safety and security was discussed in terms of the political unrest that had preceded their journey. The perceptions participants had of events were based on their own experiences and understanding of what had been reported in the media and of what they had seen upon entry into the country. The background and deeper issues remained unknown and were therefore unable to be part of perceptions.

There is value in teaching people about perception and of rotating their own perception or vantage point in a situation to encompass as much of the scene as possible. Edward de Bono (2008) uses the example of four people looking at a country house to illustrate the importance of this. As the four people look at the house they begin to describe what they see. Each is looking from a different side and so they argue about how the house appears. All believe they are correct because they are describing what they see right in front of them. All are correct and what they see is real, but it only takes into consideration one view of the house. It is only when they walk around the house and see what others had been describing that they can appreciate the house can be seen and accurately described from more than one position. In Thailand participants had one view of the house (country and culture) and operated in terms of that view. If and when they began to move around the house their view could be expanded. Thinking about the views in parallel gives those looking a more complete picture of what the house (situation) is like. The view and the thinking become multi-dimensional.

In intercultural communication this type of thinking can overcome traditional arguments based on perception and viewpoint. This type of thinking allows guest and host to interact with potential for greater understanding, reciprocity and the enactment of Hospitality.
10.7 Positionality – Implications for Pre-Travel Education

In relation to education for intercultural interaction this study focuses on positionality and emphasises the taking up of the specific subject position of Guest, and outworking of being a Guest, for STM and VT experiences.

In this project participants were asked how they understood concepts of being a guest. Interpretations of the word guest varied among participants. There are many different connotations, expectations and preconceptions both culturally and linguistically in terms of the meaning assigned to the word guest. Participants saw the guest as a role with set responsibilities, very much subject to the laws of hospitality. This was discussed in Chapter Two and evidenced in Chapter Nine. Upon reflection, given the meaning encapsulated in, and intended by, Guest in this study it is extremely important that pre-travel education be unambiguous about what a Guest is and what being a Guest means. This could be assisted through part of pre-travel education giving opportunities to see and reflect on different interpretations of this, including Derrida’s.

Perhaps a new word or phrase should have been coined so as to assign specific meaning anew and avoid confusion or misinterpretation. This may have been an option, but if education is designed in such a way as to enable participants to initially engage with, and become aware of, their beliefs and understandings concerning what it is to be a Guest, there should be no need for new words or phrases. As a researcher I have sought to provide lucidity. With the benefit of clear and simple pre-travel education a definitive term beyond capitalization of the initial “g” (Guest) is unnecessary to achieve that lucidity. Simplicity and clarity are particularly important for sending organisations when incorporating a new concept in their induction education programming.

When considering practicalities of STM and VT travel, sending organisations also need to be clear on the purpose of each trip. The reasons why they are sending a particular team and the outcomes they hope to achieve must be clear. Outcomes need to be measured against the preparation given and the way in which the traveler is positioned for their experience. In tours where interaction is mainly with expatriates the intercultural preparation will be different from tours where work and interaction with local people will be the prime purpose, expectation or objective.

I have suggested that pre-travel preparation education of short-term volunteer programs should be focused to enable participants to place themselves in the subject position of Guest, thus facilitating a relationship of hospitality that promotes building relationality across
Cultural boundaries. When bodies organising these travel experiences move away from a pre-travel emphasis on the teaching of cultural practices alone and instead balance this with education on how participants can appropriately position themselves for and within the intercultural experience, this facilitation can occur. This can be done through utilisation of the subject position of Guest and the promotion of enacting this, but to do that requires a particular active form of education which allows participants to actively perceive themselves in their interactions.

Further to this, my examples and findings show that participants prior to travel not only need to engage with the concept of being a Guest, and of the differences between cultures that value being and those that value doing, but equally, education needs to take a form where participants can see examples of what that looks like. This education also needs to take a form where participants can engage more directly with their own values of what 'good' behaviour looks like. That is, they need to have some focus on themselves to promote awareness of the existence and implications of their own culture, not just on the culture they are entering. In this way they begin with the familiar and move to the unfamiliar and from the known to the unknown.

What has also become clear to me is that whilst pre-travel education is very important it is not the sole means of assisting participants in their experience. It goes beyond pre-travel education to a kind of endless struggle with the self throughout the duration of the trip. The pre-travel education is vital to tune participants into the notion of being a guest, but the leaders’ educative role does not end there and change into that of a chaperone for the in-Thailand experience. As participants travel through Thailand they constantly seek familiarity by attempting to re-enter Australia (pseudo-Australia within Thailand) and it is at this point that the leaders need to interrupt and disrupt that attempt to return, to remind participants again and again that Thailand is someone else’s place; a space in which they are a guest.

In terms of implications for education, this points to the need for participants to not only learn about norms in the culture they will visit, but to focus more specifically on the understandings they may bring with them and that make it hard to become a Guest in the culture visited. That is, a metaphorical mirror must be held up to participants during pre-travel preparation education enabling them to see that their own understandings and belief systems are indeed cultural and that the West has a strong tradition of hospitality that they can draw upon – one that is responsive to the Other and is open to endless negotiations with the Other. This must be incorporated as part of pre-travel education so as to promote an understanding that culture exists at home and abroad, not simply abroad. This is important to
developing a sense of cultural self-awareness (Fowers & Davidov, 2006; Ting-Toomey, 2012; Weng, 2005). Participants then have the opportunity to appreciate that they exhibit behaviours that are cultural and that their home culture is abroad and unfamiliar to Others. Further to this, it seems that education needs to continue beyond the pre-travel stage to remind participants of where they are and to whom the space they are in belongs. Group leaders can provide important scaffolding supports for participants attempting to negotiate unfamiliar cultural terrain whilst outside Australia.

In theoretical terms the contribution this thesis has made is to show the actions of a STM group as directed, not simply by different cultural understandings, but by a particular philosophical positioning which itself conformed to some of the processes normally associated with cultural differences that relate to ethnicity.

10.8 Outline of the study

I commenced this study by outlining how my interest and involvement in the area of mission tours originated, and highlighted that my concern and commitment to the area was not transitory but ongoing. Importantly, this gave context to and rationale for the study itself. It undergirded the importance of the study and explained its foundation.

In Chapter Two I introduced the ideas of guest, host and hospitality with particular reference to Derrida’s conception of Absolute Hospitality. Ideas from leading interculturalists such as Milton J Bennett and social psychologist Geert Hofstede were explored in conjunction with Jacques Derrida’s philosophy of Absolute Hospitality. Absolute Hospitality was highlighted as an ideal and thus an exemplary way of taking part in intercultural encounters. Whilst this was the ideal it was also acknowledged that meanings and cultural practices ascribed to these ideas differed according to one’s experience of, and with, them. These differences in perception and understanding of ideas were part of the general difficulties often encountered in interpersonal and intercultural communication.

These challenges to ideals and practices led to an introduction and examination of the idea of being a Guest and of the practical potential this notion had for use in short term volunteerism experiences. It seemed necessary to better understand how participants currently positioned themselves, and what kinds of education programs would be appropriate for them. As such, I suggested exploring a way forward through pre-travel education programs that explored and invoked specific subject positions with participants. It was important to discuss taking up of the subject position of guest and then to use the notion of positionality as a means of enabling
participants to decide their purpose in a relationship that emerges through the practice and ideal of hospitality, and then to move forward to enact that purpose in their interactions.

In Chapter Three I undertook a review of relevant literature and argued that literature in the field had tended to be divided into two broad categories: Short term mission (STM) and volunteer tourism (VT). Whilst they are often written about separately I highlighted a large number of similarities. These included the lack of research on how short term travel affects hosts and their communities and the participant perspective from which much is written. That is, the literature privileged the importance of those who traveled and their experience over the importance or experience of the communities which they entered. Little to no importance was given to the relational nature of the travel or what it might mean to be a guest in the home of another.

Issues relating to hospitality and interaction in the intercultural context in STM and VT had been documented as problematic yet not addressed. I argued that being, in many non-western cultures, was of more value than doing, which was highly valued in the west (Schwartz, 2004). The relationship of hospitality provided a reciprocity and mutuality for those engaged within it. The importance of building reciprocity and mutuality into relationships between travelers and hosts, as part of the relationship of hospitality, was argued as a means of limiting identified negative outcomes (Raines, 2008; Reese, 2005).

However, the most striking aspect, in both literature categories, was the emphasis on positive profiling of participants (Guttentag, 2009). Like many other studies this thesis also focused on the participants as a source of data however, I sought to look at interactions and implications for guest and host in the experience to find a way of addressing the gap in data and in addressing the concerns at a field level. I argued that educating to position travelers as guest has the potential to transcend the physical journey into another cultural context by building these relationships rather than simply fulfilling material tasks. This was reiterated in the literature. Reese (2009) stated that “Included in the need for better cross cultural communication is the fundamental principle of putting human relationships ahead of tasks” (Reese, 2009). This reorientation of priorities in intercultural volunteer service becomes fundamental to building relationships and central to enabling one to be a guest. Initially, I was concerned with addressing these issues practically and sought to find a framework for improving this through pre-travel education of those undertaking STM and VT. This idea developed as the study and review of data progressed and influenced my ideas and understanding of how this education could occur.
In Chapter Four I discussed my methodology in terms of the purposes of this study, and my belief in the importance of using a method that would enable readers to hear the ways in which participants saw themselves, others and their experience. I stressed the importance of hearing *their* voices and sharing their stories in their own words. Their speech, writing and interactions became important vehicles that transformed feelings, insights and observations into an ethnographic story. Participants own words became the gateway to understanding their positionality and perceptions. This became pivotal to understanding the experience and the thesis as a whole.

In this chapter it was also important to address my position as a researcher in the field. My position was as one inside, outside and in between the group, research and experience. This posed particular challenges and highlights which were explored in the chapter.

Chapter Five provided a brief political history of Thailand leading up to the political circumstances, over the research period. This was provided to give context to the situation TMAT participants entered and to the situation behind some of the events they experienced. Many of the events outlined in Chapter Five occurred during previous TMAT visits to Thailand without the knowledge of participants. However, this chapter explained that the overt nature of the situation on this trip affected travel and travelers directly. Thus, the interest or concern of TMAT participants increased sufficiently to prompt further investigation into the state of political affairs. The most notable aspect of this was the unique position of respect, reverence and ‘reserve power’ held by Thailand’s king, Rama IX, Bhumibol Adulyadej.

The prominence of events in both national and international media was influential in participants’ decisions about whether or not they would travel to Thailand as part of the TMAT group. The media coverage was a source of concern for those who decided to travel to Thailand as well as for their friends and families who remained in Australia. This chapter gave context and background to the situation that existed in Thailand during the research period. It was also valuable in conveying the impact this had on the project, and the participants, in terms of travel, understandings, empathy and relationship to Thai people.

Chapter Six described how participants spoke of Thailand prior to travel. Data came from pre-travel interviews completed several months prior to departure, and prior to the unrest in Bangkok. Participants who had traveled as part of TMAT in the past began to identify differences between themselves and those in Thailand as they reflected on experiences there. From this a number of positions began to emerge yet were not specifically named by participants. This reflection gave insight into how they had positioned themselves and others.
on previous TMATs and on the influence the experience had on their perceptions of themselves and others.

The experiences that were recalled by participants about expatriate workers in Thailand were useful in providing the beginnings of a story around difference. They identified the missionaries and NGO workers who were often perceived as giving or sacrificial, by participants, in their efforts towards others. Participants reflected on their own thoughts, actions and lives in comparison with this example of life. They tended to compare the dissimilar lives of themselves and expatriate workers and generally judged themselves quite harshly as a result.

Participants often made comments that suggested feeling they did not measure up to the different lives lived by these people. The dissimilarity of the lives being compared was simultaneously interesting and unexpected. Participants had been drawn to these people initially through their physical sameness, common language, familiar background and, to a degree, the novelty of their vocation. Yet they had not been aware of, or considered, the dissimilar aspects, call or circumstances, that had caused them to move to Thailand in the beginning. This chapter, as a whole, conveyed the mindset of participants and the journey upon which they embarked, even before leaving Australia, as they worked through their pre-travel preparation. This chapter gave foundation to their story and provided a reference point from which to view what was encountered in Thailand and after return to Australia.

Chapter Seven gave an overview of TMAT’s arrival in Thailand and their introduction to Chiang Mai. During their first hours in Thailand participants experienced an interruption to what had previously been familiar to them. The identification of this interruption to physical, environmental and cultural factors of their lives was highlighted as important to their shift within the liminal process. Its intensity and effect on their functionality, in that first day, were surprising to me and provided practical data to inform the future planning and programming of activities for that initial period. This also provided a revealing insight, for organizers, into how to construct and underpin the development of future tours.

This chapter introduced the importance of the liminal step into Thailand. Liminality was recognised as a transformational and educational catalyst central to considerations in the programming and conduct of tours. This was an extremely useful insight for those organising similar travel experiences. It must be remembered, however, that as liminality is something that happens as part of a shift away from what is familiar and expected, it may not be a comfortable step or process.
Positionality and multiple relationships became more evident and defined in this chapter, as did varied means of dealing with them. Movement into and out of familiar circumstances and surroundings resulted in positional changes. This varied further according to how these movements occurred, the purpose of them and the number of people involved in them. For example, working as a large group brought a sense of familiarity, safety and ownership to the space it occurred in regardless of the geographical location. That is, working in a large group provided a pseudo-Australian context to work in regardless of being physically in Thailand or of working with Thai people. The culture of the larger group prevailed as the culture of the space occupied.

The thread of difference, begun in chapter six, was continued as a multiplicity of relationships emerged. It was explored and reflected upon in the light of the positions that were encountered or taken up across a variety of relationships and situations. The dialogic nature of positioning, highlighted that not only do participants position themselves but that they are also positioned by others and as such positions are fluid and changeable.

Chapter Eight focused on some of the difficulties that can occur as a result of intercultural interactions. This was further complicated by cultural confusion created through space dominance. That is, the culture represented in greater numbers tended to dominate the cultural practices of the space. This was discussed more fully in the previous chapter.

The issue of safety and security was raised in a focus group where participants spoke of the concerns and difficulties they faced in communicating their situation in Thailand with family members and friends. Their perception of circumstances with limited access to information about them was discussed in relation to this. The particular leadership style evident in TMAT and the trust engendered by that was also highlighted as it related to the group and the issue of safety.

This chapter illustrated that without intercultural exposure and education the behavioural choices available to participants, in unfamiliar situations, are limited. In these situations the only reference point available to them was their own experience. This chapter also continued to explore various alternative relationships and participant responses to them, this time through the eyes of a first time TMAT participant.

Chapter Nine highlighted participant responses upon initial return to Australia and what occurred after they observed the reaction to the Black Saturday Bushfires. The influence of perspective and experience on situations and upon responses to those situations was apparent through this. Participants had experienced a liminal process having left Australia, been part of
a TMAT experience and then returned to an Australia that seemed different to them. Their perception of life in Australia had changed and this altered the way they saw people and events.

Participants were asked to complete a survey that invited reflection on various aspects of position and positioning of themselves and of those with whom they interacted. Both wording the survey for the participants, and interpreting their answers entailed a grappling with the difficulty of accessing meanings, and I reflected on this throughout the chapter. Multiple meanings resulted from assumptions relying on unexplained or unclarified terminology and definitions of terms, such as *Guest*.

Participant responses also revealed an interesting hierarchy of relationship that existed for them. This hierarchy was noted in terms of the positions of tourist, visitor, guest and family member and the obligations and responsibilities attributed to those positions in varying degrees. This hierarchy was transformed into diagrammatic form, *circles of position*, which outlined a system of visualising the hierarchical levels. The interesting question that arose through exploring these comments was whether identifying as a family member was always an indication of ultimate acceptance, belonging and position or whether it could also be a way of avoiding engagement with the positionality of guest.

**10.9 Areas for further research**

The claim to new knowledge is made whilst acknowledging that this research is a small part of a larger picture. As outlined in the methodology chapter it is acknowledged that this study does not seek to provide, or believe it is possible to provide, the whole picture even of the TMAT program.

Whilst the findings relating to becoming a Guest when one is a volunteer are broadly applicable to volunteer travel programs, the focus of the study is more limited encompassing eight participants over the period from August 2008 to April 2010 and occurring at a time of political unrest in Thailand. Having seen the effect this had on participants and their responses to the situation and to the Thai people, it would be useful, and interesting, to know how, or if, a trip of this intensity could be experienced by future TMAT participants not part of these circumstances. Was this response a result of the circumstances or of the insights highlighted by them?

It is hoped that this contribution to the increasing knowledge of volunteer travel through STM and VT will resonate with those organising, involved in, or sending out similar teams and programs.
In relation to STM and VT research further research into the perspective of host is necessary and would indeed be valuable (Guttentag, 2009). This is important to ensure benefit for all members of STM and VT experiences.

In this research, however, I have also been prompted into my own liminal journey of Hospitality, how it looks in practice, how being a Guest can best be taught and a myriad of questions as yet unanswered. This auto ethnographic focus is something I would like to explore in future studies. In many ethnographic studies more questions are born than are answered and this study is no exception in that regard.

In regard to this project issues include research into the efficacy of the type of education proposed in this thesis and how, or if, that education influences the positionality of participants. Further to that, I would ask how that education and the resultant positionality is responded to by hosts in the intercultural context.

It would also be worthwhile to implement some better approaches to reflections on the position of guest in the pre-travel education as described above and then evaluate the intercultural relationship outcomes of that education. All of these possibilities for further research work are aimed at improving intercultural communications and relationships and therefore further work into evaluating the plausibility or otherwise of this end would also be encouraged.

Finally, the work undertaken in this thesis outlines the importance of educating volunteer travelers for positioning themselves in a particular way when entering an intercultural context. Further work should seek to test the effectiveness of that positioning from the perspective of all involved in the context.

10.10 In closing

In this study I have addressed the question “How do participants in TMAT become guests in an unfamiliar cultural context?”

This has been done through investigating notions of guest and hospitality, examination of relevant literature that informs short term mission and volunteer tourist travel, in-depth scrutiny of notions of intercultural interaction, examination of the political history of Thailand and its relevance to the labile circumstances prior to travel, examination and analysis of the data gathered during fieldwork with TMAT participants before, during, and after their in-country experience.
For TMAT participants, becoming a Guest did not happen automatically because ideas of guest as a set of cultural practices are so different. Not only are they culturally different but ideas of the different types of guests, within a culture, are very diverse too.

It does not seem that this position was something that was chosen or seen as necessary or even identified as something that may be useful or productive in an intercultural relationship without prompting. If or when that prompting occurs, it seems necessary to precede it with discussion and education around what a Guest is, what Hospitality is, in the context that we are talking about, and how that can best be outworked in the intercultural field.

Not only has this study been an ethnography but it has also had potential as an auto ethnographic journey. This is something that I would like to explore more substantially in future studies. As I have worked through this study and now looking back and reflecting on it I have come to understand the importance of the Guest-Host relationship and the importance of agreed concepts and interpretation in establishing the meaning of Guest and Host within that relationship.

As I carefully watched what it was that TMAT did before the team went overseas, how participants responded before going, what happened for them while they were away and upon return, I began to understand the importance of making the notion of the Guest, as a categorical imperative, explicit through education prior to travel. It became evident to me that this pre-travel education needed support and reinforcement throughout the experience in Thailand. Thailand was where responses to new cultural experiences occurred, which included efforts to return to the safety of familiar culture through construction of a pseudo-Australian space. It also became evident that preparation for dealing with and recognizing this is important.

I have come to understand the importance and uniqueness of the space in which the intercultural experience and learning takes place and the centrality of relationship building in effective intercultural interaction and communication.

My work in this area will continue as I seek to influence sending and training organisations with the goal of facilitating improved communication and experience for all involved in the intercultural volunteer aid experience. I think that this is possible through provision of educational intervention prior to travel into the field using the principles outlined in this thesis.
This chapter brings the thesis to a close, but the study and the challenge of improving intercultural communication and relationships in, and through, short term volunteer aid teams is far from over.
Chapter 11: References


Chapter 11: References


Chapter 11: References


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Chapter 11: References


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Chapter 11: References


Appendix 1: Participant Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Consent form for persons participating in research projects

PROJECT TITLE: Learning to be a guest in the home of another: An analysis of the expectations and reflections of participants in the 'Thai Mission Awareness Tours' program.

Name of participant:

Name of investigator(s): Responsible Researcher: Dr Barbara Kameniar, Co Researcher: Professor Lyn Yates, Student Researcher: Tammy Smith

1. I consent to participate in the project named above, the particulars of which involve participation in interviews, focus groups and journaling. Written recording as well as audio and visual records will be utilized. A written copy of the information has been given to me to keep. (Interviews will be limited to 10 minutes. Focus groups will be no more than 30 minutes.)

2. I authorize the researcher or assistant to use, for this purpose, the information and records gained through interview, focus groups, journaling and recording as referred to under (1) above.

3. I acknowledge that:

   (a) The possible effects of participation in interviews, focus groups and journaling have been explained to me to my satisfaction;

   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unpreserved data previously supplied;

   (c) The project is for the purpose of research

   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements.

   (e) I consent to interviews, focus groups, journals being video/audio-taped and understand that copies of transcripts will be returned to participants for verification. I understand that participants will be referred to by pseudonym in any publications arising from the research.

   (f) I consent to video and audio taped material being used in conference presentations and still photographs being used in journal articles or other printed material. I understand that anonymity may be made difficult by the use of these materials.

   (g) I understand that participation or non-participation in the research will have no affect on participation in the Thailand Mission Awareness Tours Program.

Signature ____________________________ Date ________________
( Participant)

Signature ____________________________ Date ________________
(Parent/Guardian) (if under 16 years of age)

HREC: 071700.1; Date: 9/07/11; Version: 2
Appendix 2: Research Details and Plain Language Statement

Research Details and Plain Language Statement

Project title: Learning to be a guest in the home of another: An analysis of the expectations and reflections of participants in the ‘Thai Mission Awareness Tours’ program.

University: The University of Melbourne

Department: Faculty of Education

Involvement: Involvement in this project is completely voluntary and participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any data previously supplied. This will in no way affect ongoing participation in the Thailand Mission Awareness Tour program.

This Project is being undertaken as part of the Doctor of Education degree program.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible Researcher</th>
<th>Co Researcher</th>
<th>Student Researcher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Barbara Kameniar – Faculty of Education, The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Professor Lyn Yates - Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Foundation Professor of Curriculum The University of Melbourne</td>
<td>Tammy Smith Ph: +61 428 341 602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tel: +61 3 8344 8411</td>
<td>Phone: +61 3 8344 8166</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Purpose of the research project:
This study will examine expectations and reflections of Thailand Mission Awareness Tour participants with regard to themselves, the tour, the places they go and the people with whom they have contact. Being in an unfamiliar culture can affect people differently; the study will explore participant responses to this in the context of changes that occur as evidenced in their expectations and reflections.

Commitment: Involvement in the project will require participation in interviews and/or focus groups, audio/video-taping, reflection sessions, and various forms of journaling. These things will take place over the course of the preparation meetings, the tour itself and after returning to Australia. Every effort will be made to ensure that research involvement does not interfere with participation in tour events. Video and audio taped material may be used in conference presentations and still photographs in journal articles or other printed material. Whilst pseudonyms will be used, the use of these materials in this way will make anonymity difficult.

Conflict of Interest: The Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) is aware of Tammy Smith’s involvement in the Thailand Mission Awareness Tours program and is satisfied that there is no conflict of interest.

The project has received clearance by the HREC.

Confidentiality: Materials gathered will be kept and disposed of according to the ‘Code of Conduct for Research’, i.e. retained intact for a period of at least five years from the date of any publication which is based upon it or longer than this if discussion of results continues, if there are regulatory or sponsor requirements, or if the data has historical or archival value.

The research will involve participants being referred to by a pseudonym in any publication arising from the research in order to protect their identity.

If participants have any concerns about the conduct of this research project that they can contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, ph: 8344 2073; fax 9347 6739

HREC: 071700.1; Date: 90711; Version: 2
Appendix 3: Diary instructions

How to fill in your diary

Thank you XXX once again for agreeing to be part of this study. Here are some points to bear in mind when filling in your diary/journal.

- Remember that this is *your* diary. I am interested in your thoughts and reflections – so please don’t think what you write needs to be the same as someone else’s. We are all different and experience things differently. Please write as much as you can about yourself, no matter how unimportant it seems. If you aren’t sure whether to include something or not, please include it. I’d rather have too much information than too little.
- Please don’t worry about spelling, grammar or ‘best’ handwriting just try to write as clearly as you can using a pen.
- Try to fill in the diary every evening. If you can’t make an entry for a particular day, then you can fill it in the following day.
- If you find that you have missed out on several days, please don’t give up. Just start again on the next day.
- Please fill in the day and date on the top of each page.
- If you have any queries please ask me. I will be staying with you at Green Lodge and can also be contacted by mobile on +668806 756 113 in Thailand and 0428 341 602 in Australia, or by email on t.smith3@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au if need be.

Tammy Smith

Some practical hints you may like to use when writing about;

People – Describe;
- The physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural, spiritual aspects you see.
- How they responded to you
- How you responded to them

Places – Describe;
- Where you were
- Why you were there
- How you felt about being there
- The physical setting

Things – Describe the thing with respect to;
- What it is
- How it is used
- Why it is of note
- How it impacts you physically, emotionally, intellectually, culturally, spiritually or in any other way

Situations/events – Describe the situation/event with respect to;
- What it is/was/will be
- Why it is of note
- How it impacts you physically, emotionally, intellectually, culturally, spiritually or in any other way
Appendix 4: Post Trip Questions

11/19/2000

Dear ……,

These questions relate to your reflections on the tour experience and all that surrounded it including preparation time. I would like to find out about your perceptions of ‘being a guest’ or even if this concept entered your mind.

If you don’t feel that the questions as written below give you the opportunity to say what you think/feel in relation to this then please add any thoughts in the comments section. Please use as much space as you need to answer questions. Just type away (don’t print and write answers in).

Once you have finished please save the file and attach it via email back to me at s.smith3@ngrad.unimelb.edu.au

Thank you once again for your assistance. It is much appreciated.

Tammy

On Reflection

1. How do/did you see your role in Thailand? Please describe it.
2. How do you feel you were ‘received’ by the people you encountered in Thailand?
3a. What was the mindset you went with?
3b. Is it the same now?
3c. If not, when did it change and why?
4. ‘Learning to be a guest in the home of another.’ How, if at all, does this statement relate to your experience before, during and after the Thailand tour?
5. How would you describe ‘a guest’?
6. Did/do you see yourself as a guest, visitor, tourist, or something else and how would you define that role?
7. Did/do you see other team members as a guest, visitor, tourist, or something else and how would you define that role?
8a. What role did the people of Thailand play in your experience?
8b. Is this what you expected?
9. Comments
10. Now that you have been back in Australia for a while how do you reflect on the experience?
11. Has your enthusiasm, fervor, interest in what you experienced changed with time? If so, how? If not, why do you think this is?

Thank you once again.

God bless and have a great Christmas.

Tammy
## Appendix 5: TMAT meeting timetable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting Dates</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
<th>Actions/Thoughts/Reflections</th>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Supper Provision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>August 6</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>GS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>Icebreaker activities</td>
<td>Passports!!!!!!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is on this team?</td>
<td>Injections!!!!!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are we doing in Thailand?</td>
<td>Complete forms for team details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>August 27</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>Icebreakers cont’d</td>
<td>Allocate buddies to repeat trippers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buddies</td>
<td>Allocate buddies to new trippers.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>September 17</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>Language Practise</td>
<td>Cards and photos for buddies given out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>English language activities to plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>October 15</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>Language Practise</td>
<td>Cards returned tonight!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>McKean</td>
<td>Sunday school preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 5</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td>Language Practise</td>
<td>Teaching preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>November 26</strong></td>
<td>Devotions</td>
<td>Reflection 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30-9:30pm</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tickets given out, departure information and liquid regulations, passport control cards completed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>