Volunteering in development

Analysing and comparing branded representations of the Australian Government’s Australian Volunteers for International Development program and volunteer perspectives

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Abstract

Volunteering overseas has become a popular activity among individuals from developed countries. Governments in these countries often provide volunteer opportunities as part of their aid programs. In Australia, the Australian Government’s Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program offers opportunities for hundreds of skilled Australians to volunteer overseas every year in a range of sectors, organisations and roles. The program and its assignments aim to build the capacity of host organisations in priority fields identified by Australian and partner governments.

This thesis seeks to understand how the experience of volunteering is represented by AVID, as well as the range of experiences had by current and former volunteers. The study draws on discourses of development, in particular colonial discourses and the role of volunteers in development. Content and discourse analysis is applied to 10 texts produced by AVID to understand how these representations construct and contribute to discourses of development and power relations. In addition, perspectives of volunteers collected via a survey and interviews are analysed to understand the views and experiences of AVID participants. The findings are compared, revealing both alignment and disconnect between the stories being told about volunteering and the broader realities of the volunteer experience.

Key words: international volunteering, experience, Australia, government, representation, language, description, discourse
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introducing the topic

International volunteering in development dates back to the 19th century, however it has become increasingly popular - and formalised - since the 21st century (Schech & Mundkur, 2016, p. 6). The majority of these volunteers are from developed countries; many Western governments provide opportunities for citizens to lend their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm in developing countries as part of their official aid programs. While it has become more common for volunteers from developing countries to volunteer in developed, or other developing countries, Western volunteers far outnumber other groups.

It is estimated that around 50,000 individuals from developed countries volunteer overseas every year through organised initiatives supporting international development efforts (Georgeou & Engel, 2011, as cited in Georgeou, 2012, p. 1). These volunteers generally complete assignments of two or more years’ duration, with thousands more volunteers estimated to volunteer short-term or more informally (Georgeou, 2012, p. 1).

Volunteers play a significant and important role in international development efforts, however their contribution differs from the work of development professionals and organisations. One way in which volunteering can be distinguished from other types of development work is by its focus on the priorities of the organisation hosting the volunteer, and on relationship building between the volunteer and their local colleagues (Schech & Mundkur, 2016, p. 5). David Smith et al (2005, as cited in Georgeou, 2012, p. 14) situate volunteering within the development paradigm by focusing the following aspects of volunteering: “geographical scale, function, direction, level of government involvement, and duration”. In distinguishing volunteering and development work, “geographical scale” acknowledges the recent surge in volunteering numbers and subsequent diversity of programs available and sending countries involved, while “function” refers to the volunteer initiatives serving to produce, or impact, development outcomes (David Smith et al, 2005, as cited in Georgeou, 2012, p. 14-15). “Direction” reflects the “North-to-South” trend of
volunteer activity; “level of government involvement” reflects the funding or administration often provided by governments; and “duration” refers to the diversity in assignment length, ranging from short-term volunteering to long-term commitments of two years or more (David Smith et al, 2005, as cited in Georgeou, 2012, p. 14-15).

In addition to volunteering initiatives linked with Western governments, many more informal programs and organisations exist to facilitate opportunities for people to volunteer overseas. Often these programs require payment to volunteer, and do not require volunteers to have specific skills or experience. These types of programs generally facilitate shorter-term opportunities for volunteers to help with things such as building schools or teaching English.

In Australia, the Australian Government’s Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program is implemented as part of the country’s official aid program. Established in 2011, AVID offers opportunities for skilled Australians to volunteer overseas through assignments aligned with the government’s aid priorities. In exploring volunteering in development, this paper will specifically focus on this volunteering initiative.

1.2 Research problem

The research problem with which this thesis is concerned is how the AVID program represents the experience of volunteering, and how these representations compare with the actual experiences had by volunteers.

In recruiting volunteers to the program, the Australian Government produces stories and other materials to promote the program and what it involves. These materials feature stories from volunteers as examples of what participants are doing and achieving. While these materials are created with the intention of inspiring potential volunteers to apply, they also function as representations of both volunteering and development.
Whether these representations reflect the experience had by volunteers more broadly is also of concern to this thesis. The research aims to understand the various experiences that volunteers are having as part of their assignments, and compare these findings with the representations created by AVID.

As a former AVID, the rationale for such research is largely personal in motivation. I completed a communications-focused assignment in Indonesia in 2014. While I valued the opportunity to gain professional experience and live overseas, my experience as a volunteer was more complex than what I saw represented in the program’s materials that first introduced me to the program. While I had many of the typical experiences of volunteering - such as navigating a new culture, learning a new language and fitting in to a new workplace and city, I also experienced many other challenges such as communication difficulties, lack of professionalism and productivity in colleagues, and street harassment - challenges that aren’t necessarily depicted in government marketing collateral.

Similarly, a popular blog post by former volunteer Ashlee Betteridge (2013) on her experiences with the AVID program reflects upon these issues. Betteridge completed six months of an 18-month-long assignment in Timor-Leste, citing conflict with colleagues, management changes and lack of support from the AVID in-country team as the reasons for leaving her assignment early. She wrote: “In the bars and hangouts of the receiving countries, you sometimes hear different stories about volunteering to the ones that you hear back home. It also doesn’t take long moving around in the region and socialising with volunteers to hear stories about assignments that haven’t quite worked out” (Betteridge, 2013, para. 3). Betteridge described her original motivations for applying for the assignment as believing in what the organisation was trying to achieve, and wanting to contribute. Feeling like she wasn’t having a tangible impact, she left her assignment early. This left her feeling “incredibly guilty” and “uncomfortable”, especially as she was being financially supported to volunteer in an assignment where she “didn’t feel like she was actually doing anything because of roadblocks” (Betteridge, 2013, para. 11-12).
In light of these experiences that volunteers like Betteridge and myself have encountered, the research seeks to understand a broader range of experiences associated with volunteering, beyond just those depicted in program materials.

### 1.3 Core theories

In investigating the research problem, the study will look at which discourses of development, specifically which colonial discourses, are reinforced or reproduced in materials produced by AVID. Utilising ideas from Dogra (2012), this thesis will consider whether and how discourses of a Majority World and Developed World, the Other, and Oneness or universal humanism are evident in representations of volunteering. She argues that representations of people, places and issues in development are characterised by these colonial discourses, and her theories will serve as the basis in understanding the discourse.

In addition, theories as to the roles, capacity and motivations of volunteers over time will be utilised, as well as the place of volunteers in the development paradigm. Paternalism and partnership, and the extent to which these approaches to development are evident in the AVID program and its volunteers, will be analysed.

### 1.4 Research questions and design

Using the theoretical background above, the design aims to address several research questions. The study involves analysing two units of information: a sample 10 of texts produced by AVID and published on the program’s website, as well as the perspectives of 16 current and former AVID volunteers as collected via a survey and interviews.

The research design is made up of five parts, which will answer certain questions as follows:
1. **Word frequency mapping**

The first part of the analysis will quantitatively map the adjectives used in the texts to describe different elements of the volunteer experience. It will address the following question:

- What representations of volunteering are created using language?

2. **Identifying signs and understanding their meaning**

The second part utilises semiotics to interpret certain sentences or quotes in the texts which, again, describe different elements of the volunteer experience. It will address the following question:

- What representations of volunteering are created using signs and codes?

3. **Identifying discourse themes in the texts**

The third part uses critical discourse analysis to understand how people, places and issues are represented in the texts, and how these connect with different colonial discourses and themes in development. It will address the following question:

- What techniques are employed to represent volunteering, and how do these reconstruct or reinforce colonial discourses?

4. **Understanding volunteers’ perspectives**

The fourth part seeks to give a quantifiable account of the perspectives of volunteers regarding different elements of the volunteer experience, as collected via the survey and interviews. It will address the following question:
What are the experiences and views of volunteers in regards to volunteering, development and the AVID program?

5. Comparing the texts’ representations and volunteers’ perspectives

The fifth and final part will compare the findings of the analysis of the texts, with the findings of the analysis of the survey and interviews. It will address the following question:

- How do the experiences of volunteers as depicted in the texts compared with the experiences and views as told by volunteers?

In order to answer these questions, the analysis has a particular focus on descriptions, representations and views related to the following elements of volunteering: the AVID program, volunteers, assignment locations, local people, and volunteers’ work.

As an overarching or main question, this thesis will investigate the following:

What representations of AVID, volunteering and development are depicted in texts produced by the Australian Government, and how do these representations compare with the actual experiences had by the program’s volunteers?

1.5 Relevance to Communication for Development

The research connects with issues of Communication for Development in two ways.

Development organisations - including donor governments - are “carriers of material and cultural knowledge”, and therefore the way these organisations represent poverty and development is very influential (Dogra, 2012, p. 2). As “institutions of representation”, these organisations play an important role as “legitimate and proxy voices of the majority (developing) world”. In representing AVID and volunteering to potential volunteers and
other audiences, the Australian Government is influencing knowledge of development issues and understanding as to the roles of Australians in contributing to development.

In addition, as volunteers are key players in development efforts, their voices and experiences can, and should, play an important role in influencing future delivery of volunteering and development efforts, as well as contribute to alternative representations of volunteering and development.
Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter outlines the relevant historical and background information about international volunteering, the Australian aid program and the AVID program. This helps to place the study into context.

2.1 International volunteering around the world

2.1.1 Historical overview

The origins of international volunteering date back to the 19th century, as part of initiatives linked to “enlightenment education, religious instruction, and disaster recovery” (Smith & Elkin, 1981, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 1). This was followed by the establishment of workcamp movements and missions in the aftermath of World War One, with volunteers sent by non-government organisations (NGOs) to help provide relief in former colonial territories throughout the 1930s and 1940s. UNESCO convened the First Conference of Organisers of International Voluntary Work Camps in 1948 (Gillette, 2001; Lewis, 2005 as cited in Georgeou, 2010, p. 31). This resulted in the establishment of the then-named Coordination Committee for Voluntary Workcamps (now Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service), which helped streamline volunteering through international workcamps (Gillette, 1972; CCIVS, 2011, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 4). Prior to this, international volunteering mostly functioned to facilitate friendships between young people from Europe and to support reconciliation processes (Georgeou, 2010, p. 31).

Government-sponsored international volunteer cooperation organisations also began to emerge on a larger scale (Lough, 2015, p. 1).

These organisations helped to meet the demand for “middle-level manpower” in developing countries during the 1950s and 1960s, which also saw the United Nations (UN) designate the 1960s as the First Development Decade (UNV, 1985, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 1). Development initiatives more broadly during this period were politically motivated, with
aims of protecting national interests and “retaining geopolitical spheres of influence” (Berger, 2004; Duffield, 2005 as cited in Georgeou, 2010, p. 33). With young people from the Global North beginning to develop interest in helping international development efforts, volunteer sending organisations were able to utilise their enthusiasm. Funding became available in many countries for governments to support international volunteering initiatives (Lough, 2015, p. 1). Many volunteering programs were “explicit tools for communicating cultural and diplomatic ideas and fostering learning across cultural divides” (Moore McBride & Daftary, 2005, as cited in Georgeou, 2010, p. 34). However, the contexts in which volunteers worked were “closely related to the dual contexts of decolonisation and the Cold War”, contributing to the positioning of the West as “the ultimate point of development” (Sobocinska, 2017, p. 72). In 1962, an intergovernmental conference brought together government financed volunteer sending organisations from around the world, with the aim of facilitating a more organised and cohesive approach to volunteering. This conference resulted in the establishment of the then-named International Peace Corps Secretariat (now the International Secretariat for Volunteer Services) (UNV, 1985; Pinkau, 1977, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 4). These two decades revealed the “fluidity of the mixed economy of development”, where an “interrelationship” between state, NGOs, and the public brought “ordinary people into the sphere of international development” (Sobocinska, 2017, p. 71).

During the late 1970s, the popularity of global peace and anti-war movements increased public knowledge of global issues, and a continued desire among young people to serve as volunteers overseas (Lough, 2015, p. 4-5). Known as the Second Development Decade, the 1970s also saw the establishment of the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) program as well as many smaller, private volunteer sending organisations. UNV was also given a mandate by the UN General Assembly in 1976 to facilitate volunteering for development on a global scale (CCIVS, 1984, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 4-5). Later that year, the mandate was expanded to support Domestic Development Service, or volunteering by local community groups for development (UNV, 1985; Beigbeder, 1991; CCIVS, 2011 as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 6). The “service agenda” of volunteer programs “shifted from ‘for’ to ‘with’”, which also represented an attempt to address the issue of aid dependency (Moore McBride & Daftary, 2005, as cited in Georgeou, 2010, p. 36). By 1981, there were 125 recognised volunteer sending
organisations, between them engaging 55,000 volunteers by the following year (Woods, 1981; UNV, 1982 as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 2).

Neoliberal reforms in the aid sector in the 1980s resulted in a reduction in development efforts, including government support of volunteer sending organisations. Many of these organisations instead turned to the private sector for funding (Bird, 1998, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 2), as well as to organisations such as the World Bank (Georgeou, 2010, p. 56). This also meant that “donors became freer to impose new forms of upward accountability as well as whole solutions to poverty” (Desai & Imrie, 1998, as cited in Georgeou, 2010, p. 55).

Interest grew in the role of civil society and participatory approaches to development, with volunteer programs turning their focus to capacity building. Volunteer sending organisations and volunteers gained recognition as valuable actors in the delivery of aid (UNV, 2013; CCIVS, 1984 as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 2-3).

Such delivery of international volunteering continued into the 1990s. Shorter-term placements as well as South to South and South to North models were taken up by more organisations (UNV, 2013; Plewes & Stuart, 2007, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 3). In the 2000s, the introduction of the UN Millennium Development Goals saw volunteering initiatives become closely linked with these targets. Volunteering and its contribution to development efforts received much attention in 2001, the UN International Year of the Volunteer (UNV, 2013, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 3).

This decade also saw technology play a key role in the promotion, recruitment and training of volunteers. Online campaigns made it easier for people to volunteer and support initiatives in new ways. UNV established its Online Volunteers program in 2000, allowing volunteers to contribute to certain projects via the internet (Lewis, 2005, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 3). Corporate sponsorship of international volunteering also expanded in the 2000s as private companies began to consider their social responsibility. South-South volunteering models continued to grow (Stuart & Russell, 2011; Terrazas, 2010; OECD, 2018 as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 4). Also in the year 2000, the then-named International FORUM on Development (now the International Forum for Volunteering in Development) invited
membership from international volunteer cooperation organisations around the world, helping to share information and bring these organisations together (Lough, 2015, p. 7).

More recently, and particularly in the aftermath of the economic recession of 2008, government funding of volunteer programs has lessened. Shorter term volunteering options have become more common, particularly as a result of private and corporate sector involvement in volunteering (Lough, 2015, p. 4). Governments are increasingly funding programs that prioritise the development of volunteers themselves (Georgeou, 2012; Allum, 2012; Mati & Perod, 2011 as cited in Loud, 2015, p. 4), or those that can clearly demonstrate their impact on volunteers or host communities (Georgeou, 2012; Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Lyons, Hanley, Wearing & Neil, 2012 as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 4). Volunteer sending organisations are also being encouraged to align their work with the new UN Sustainable Development Goals (Lough, 2015, p. 4). UNV, Forum and CCVIS continue to function as key bodies in coordinating global volunteering efforts (Lough, 2015, p. 7).

In summarising this evolution, development and volunteering in development from the end of World World Two and throughout the Cold War largely functioned to “strengthen the state apparatus as a means of promoting development and securing strategic partners” (Georgeou, 2010, p. 61). Following the Cold War, international volunteering became more institutionalised, with neoliberalism helping to question its potential to “perpetuate dominate global hegemonies or to be used as a vehicle to challenge them” (Georgeou, 2010, p. 62). More recently, the state funding of aid initiatives and the new “donor-led, donor created system” has meant that “the dominant political and economic interests of donor states” are often driving development “unchallenged” (Georgeou, 2010, p. 62).

### 2.1.2 The volunteer profile

Cultural background, age, gender, level of education and financial situation are all factors which influence an individual’s likelihood of volunteering.

Volunteering during the First Development Decade favoured North to South volunteering among countries with historical links, with South to North or South to South volunteering
less common due to beliefs that volunteers from the South would have little to offer. There were a few exceptions to this model; by 1982, 80 per cent of volunteers with UNV were from (and served in other) developing countries (UNV, 1985, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 12). A small number of other volunteer programs have also adopted South to South volunteering initiatives, and initiatives where volunteers participate in South to North volunteering were occurring by the 1970s. However, most international volunteers continue to serve from a North to South model, with the majority of volunteers coming from Europe, North America, Japan, Korea and serving in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America. This is despite acknowledgement in the field that the “direction of technical cooperation” should change (Lough, 2015, p. 12-13). Within Global North countries, individuals from racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to volunteer when compared with individuals who don’t identify as part of a minority group (Bryant, Joen-Slaughter, Kang & Tax, 2003; Gallagher, 1994 as cited in Lee & Won, 2017, p. 8).

The majority of volunteers in the 1950s and 1960s were young people from industrialised countries. By the early 1970s, there was demand for volunteers to have more specialised skills which saw an increase in the average age and qualifications of volunteers. This continued into the 1990s, by which point the average age of volunteers was over 30 (UNV, 2013, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 15). Despite this, volunteer sending programs specifically for young people continued to emerge due to demand, and youth opportunities have become a focus of these programs across the world. Countries including Germany, France, Japan, Korea, the UK, the USA and Australia all offer dedicated programs for young people. Opportunities for skilled older professionals have also expanded in recent years, with programs for volunteers aged 40 and over offered by Japan International Cooperation Agency and the USA’s Peace Corps, among others (Lough, 2015, p. 15-16).

The gender ratio of international volunteers has also shifted over the decades. There were few female volunteers in the 1960s, however this started to change from the 1970s as part of the push for gender equality in other areas. By 1985, females exceeded males participated in Peace Corps (Peace Corps, 2013, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 17). This trend continues today; by 2013, more than 60 percent of volunteers with UNV, Australian Volunteers
International (AVI) and Peace Corps were female (UNV, 2014; Peace Corps, 2013; AVI, 2014, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 17).

As already highlighted, many volunteer roles today require specialised skills, which means that volunteers of all ages usually have educational qualifications. 90 percent of Peace Corps roles require an undergraduate degree (Peace Corps, 2014a, as cited in Lee & Won, 2017, p. 5) while UNV requires all volunteers to have an undergraduate degree or higher technical diploma (UNV, 2013, as cited in Lee & Won, 2017, p. 5).

Since the 1970s, many volunteer programs have provided financial and/or material support to volunteers. This is largely due to volunteers being unable to earn and/or save money while volunteering and having no job to return home to (CCIVS & UNESCO, 1968, as cited in Lough, 2015, p. 18). An individual is also more likely to volunteer the higher their economic status or household income (Lee & Won, 2017, p. 5). This is likely because individuals who have a high or stable income, and/or savings, have more freedom to volunteer for little or no monetary support.

2.1.3 Volunteering and volunteers in the 21st century

In more recent years, volunteering approaches have continued to diversify, with a “growing critical reflection on the question of who international volunteering serves” (Lopez Franco & Shahrokh, 2015, p. 24). North-South volunteering models still dominate the landscape, with Western governments continuing to support volunteering initiatives in developing countries. However, volunteering has also broadened “to include and to value local indigenous knowledge and forms of volunteering” (Howard & Burns, 2015, p. 14). This is where consideration of volunteering from a post-colonial lens is relevant. With research suggesting that volunteers are “well placed to respond to some of the big challenges of the new development landscape” due to the “relational” nature of volunteering, volunteers today are tasked with “navigating values that are embedded in power relations” (Howard & Burns, 2015, p. 12-14).
In addition to this, the trend of “spontaneous/informal” volunteering has also emerged (Lopez Franco & Shahrokh, 2015, p. 19). Such “voluntourism” is popular among “first-time travelers or young volunteers”, with their motivation to volunteer often being the opportunity to “capture every moment of their vacation or mission on Facebook or Instagram” (Gharib, 2017, para. 3). The surge in numbers of short-term volunteers eager to “paint themselves as saviors” has resulted in satirical articles and blogs dedicated to poking fun at these volunteers (such as Barbie Saviour), as well as campaigns to educate these travellers about the impact of their actions (such as those from Radi-Aid) (Gharib, 2017, para. 3).

The various roles, capacities and motivations of volunteers in contributing to sustainable development, and how these differ from that of development workers, is of relevant and important consideration. These theories are explored in more detail in Section 3.2.

2.2 The Australian aid program and volunteering

2.2.1 Aid and national interest

As highlighted above, governments in Western countries have influenced development agendas - including volunteering in development - for many decades. As donor countries, the provision of development assistance is often driven by their own national interests.

Recent reviews of the Australian Government’s aid program have revealed national interest drivers. The Aid Effectiveness Review of 2011 found that: “The fundamental purpose of Australian aid is to help people overcome poverty. This also serves Australia’s national interests by promoting stability and prosperity both in our region and beyond” (Byfield, 2016, p. 1). The government’s 2014 aid strategy described the aid program as aiming to “promote Australia’s national interests by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction” (Byfield, 2016, p. 1). Prior to the 2016 federal election, several major
parties highlighted the role of the aid program in regional security and stability. This has mirrored government agendas in the UK and USA (Byfield, 2016, p. 1-2).

While the meaning of national interests - as they apply to Australia - are not clearly defined, the concept traditionally covers two areas: economic interests, and strategic and security interests. Being a “good international citizen” is also in Australia’s national interests (Byfield, 2016, p. 2). In terms of economic interests, economic growth is seen as a way to reduce poverty and benefit Australia; “the development of trade and economics is good for both the recipient and donor” (Byfield, 2016, p. 2). In terms of security, providing aid to reduce insecurity among Australia’s neighbours and trade partners contributes to a more stable region. For example, the provision of assistance towards health initiatives helps donor countries to protect themselves from the impact of diseases and other threats (Byfield, 2016, p. 3). The notion of “good international citizenship” also plays a role in Australia’s aid program; the aid a country provides helps ensure “the enhancement of reputation over time” and “reciprocity” (Evans, 2015, as cited in Byfield, 2016, p. 4).

The 2015 Australian Aid Stakeholder Survey found it concerning that aid is driven by what’s “good for Australia”, rather than it being about serving the poor (Byfield, 2016, p. 4). However, if this is indeed the case, improved ability to measure the value of aid in relation to national interests is needed. This may help to strengthen the case to increase Australia’s aid program; result in improved understanding of the function of the aid program; and provide opportunities in other areas of international policy (Byfield, 2016, p. 5).

### 2.2.2 AVID program overview

In Australia, international volunteering dates back to the 1950s when several young Australians travelled to Indonesia to volunteer. Shortly after, the Volunteer Graduate Scheme was established, followed by the volunteer agency the Overseas Service Bureau in 1961 (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 2). Australian Volunteers Abroad, a Bureau program, received government funding in 1963 to send 14 volunteers to Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tanzania and Nigeria (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 4). Between
In 1963 and 1996, the Australian aid program funded volunteer programs offered by several Australian NGOs, and in 1997 the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) program was established (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 5-6).

In 2005, following a competitive tender process, the Australian Government Volunteer Program was tendered to AVI, Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) and Austraining International (now known as Scope Global) (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 7). In 2009, the program was reviewed and recommendations were made for the design of a united volunteer program. AVI, Austraining International (now Scope Global) and Australian Red Cross were the successful tenderers for this program (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 8).

In 2011, the Australian Volunteers for Development (AVID) program was officially launched. The program brought together the various volunteer programs and affiliated brands, under one identity (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 9). In 2014, the Office of Development Effectiveness completed an evaluation of the AVID program, producing several recommendations including consolidating the volunteer program. This resulted in the retirement of the AYAD brand (Australian Government, 2017c, para. 10).

In July 2017, a contract was signed for the delivery of the new Australian Volunteers program, which will replace the AVID program from January 2018. The program will be delivered by AVI in consortium with Cardno and The Whitelum Group (Australian Government, 2017d, para. 1).

In terms of the program delivery at the time of writing, the AVID program is funded and managed by the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and delivered by AVI and Scope Global. It supports Australians to volunteer overseas with the aim of building the capacity of host organisations in fields identified as priorities by Australian and partner governments. Volunteers also help to create a positive image of Australia in their host countries through developing links with individuals, communities, organisations and sectors (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 9-15).
The program offers assignments in Bhutan, Cambodia, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Indonesia, Laos, Lesotho, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Palau, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Nepal, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and Vietnam (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 15). Volunteers work in sectors including agriculture, forestry and fisheries; business and management; communications, marketing and media; community and social development; disaster and emergency management; education and training; health; information technology; law and justice; and skilled trades (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 19). Volunteers in these countries work at local and international NGOs, government departments and agencies, multilateral organisations including UN agencies, and educational institutions (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 22). These host organisations support their volunteers to achieve their assignment objectives and contribute to building capacity within the organisation (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 23). Organisations in Australia can also participate in the program through partnering with host organisations. This can provide or strengthen links between Australian and overseas organisations. Partner organisations can include government departments or agencies, educational institutions, NGOs and private sector enterprises (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 24).

Between July 2015 and June 2016, the AVID program supported 1,345 volunteers in 29 countries, which included 567 who began their assignments during that period (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 13). The program has a budget of $42.6 million for the July 2017 to June 2018 year. It expects to support around 950 volunteers in 26 countries, with 97 of volunteers placed in the Indo-Pacific region (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 4).

As the program’s delivery partners, AVI and Scope Global are responsible for sourcing host organisations and developing the terms of assignments with these organisations. They also recruit and support volunteers, providing training and assistance to volunteers before, during and upon completing their assignments. This includes monitoring and addressing any volunteer or host organisation dissatisfaction. AVI and Scope Global have in-country teams in each country where volunteers are placed in order to support volunteers (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 13).
As part of their assignment, volunteers receive the following provisions and benefits from the program: return airfares from their nearest Australian city to their assignment location; visa/s; medical insurance and vaccinations; modest living allowances and four weeks’ annual leave; safe and secure accommodation; and 24 hour medical and counselling support. Where applicable, volunteers also receive additional support for partners and/or dependants; disability support; and both a settling-in allowance prior to departure and a resettlement allowance upon returning to Australia for assignments over seven months in length (Australian Government, 2017e, para. 2).

2.2.3 The AVID volunteer profile

While Section 2.1.2 gave an overview of who is volunteering in a global sense, there are some differences in who is volunteering through AVID.

Of the AVID volunteers who volunteered between July 2011 and June 2012, 65 percent were female and the majority were aged between 26 and 35 (58 per cent), with 7 percent aged over 66 (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 33).

In this same period, no volunteers identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and two identified as living with a disability, disproportionate to numbers in the Australian community which highlights that these groups are underrepresented in the AVID program (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 34).

The Australian Government does not collect data about volunteers’ cultural background, languages spoken, or socioeconomic background (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 35).

2.2.4 AVID and national interest

One “premise” of the AVID program is that volunteer sending will help to “shape the perceptions” of domestic and foreign audiences (Australian Standing Committee on Foreign
Affairs, as cited in Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 64). Volunteers are also seen as a “vehicle” for generating “positive opinion” regarding the government’s foreign policy agenda (Conley Tyler, Abbasov, Gibson & Teo F, 2012, as cited in Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 64).

The AVID program’s 2012-2013 marketing plan identifies three objectives for the program’s external communications:

“Increasing awareness and understanding across Australia about the impact of international volunteering, promoting opportunities to participate in AVID to assist with recruitment, and increasing awareness and understanding of the AVID program among international audiences, especially to potential and current host organisations” (AusAID, 2012, as cited in Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 64).

The Australian Government and the program’s delivery partners promote AVID and volunteering to Australian audiences via:

- Information and recruitment sessions, which often include presentations by or stories about volunteers
- Media outreach, eg newspaper articles

An AusAID survey of returned volunteers in 2012 found that 87 percent of volunteers’ friends and family knew more about development as a result of their connection to a volunteer (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 65). This same survey asked AVID host organisations to describe where their volunteer came from, and found that 43 per cent said either “Australia” or “Australian Government”; the survey also found that 73 percent of host organisations still receive contact from their former volunteer (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 68-69).
AVID, through its volunteers, aims to build a positive perception of Australia. However, the Australian Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade is critical of the program’s lack of coordinated way of mapping “the benefits of the AYAD program [the program’s youth arm which was retired in 2014], or communicating those to the Australian public”, as well as the views held by other countries of Australia (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 69)
Chapter 3: Theory and methodology

In order to map and analyse the representations and views of volunteering in development, it is first necessary to consider the discourses of development and other themes of relevance.

The following theoretical sections outline various colonial discourses in development, as well as theories on the roles and motivations of volunteers in contributing to development. By “discourse”, we refer to Jørgensen & Phillips’ (2008, p. 1) definition: “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)”.

3.1 Colonial discourses and development

3.1.1 The developing and developed worlds

The concept of the Global North and Global South, with all of the world’s countries being part of one or the other, is common in development communications. Generally speaking, the North is associated with “stable state organization, an economy largely under (state) control and - accordingly - a dominant formal sector”; these countries “give” aid and are developed, while the Global South is home to the recipients of aid, or developing countries (Eriksen, 2015, para. 5). The UN Development Programme’s (UNDP) Human Development Index (HDI) classifies 64 countries as having a high HDI, with the world’s remaining 133 countries being part of the Global South (Eriksen, 2015, para. 6). References to North and South have become increasingly common in development discourse in recent years - in 2013, the term “The Global South” appeared in 248 humanities and social sciences publications, up from 19 in 2004 (Eriksen, 2015, para. 7).

The terms represent an “updated perspective” on the post-Cold War world, yet one which distinguishes only between the “victims and benefactors of global capitalism” (Eriksen, 2015, para. 8). Such classifications also highlight “methodological nationalism”, as the
circumstances and quality of life among citizens in all countries varies greatly; even if a country is in the Global North, some of its communities and citizens - however small in number - may be extremely poor (Eriksen, 2015, para. 10).

In regards to Australia, academics debate whether Australia is located within the Global North regardless of its high HDI. Its geographic location technically excludes it from the Global North, and its development priorities are largely focused on the Asia-Pacific region (as opposed to European countries’ long history with, and interest in, Africa).

Dogra’s (2012) concept of the “Developed World” (DW) and “Majority World” (MW) may be more applicable to this thesis. Simply put, DW countries are those that work in, and raise funds for, MW countries in Africa, Asia and South America. However, it is “historical processes, especially of colonialism”, rather than geography, that divide the world in this way. Categories and differences are “assigned” to each and impact ways of “seeing and representing” the groups, and as such, unjust and unequal power relations are created and reinforced (Dogra, 2012, p. 12).

These other colonial discourses often employed in development communications to describe, differentiate between, and connect the DW and MW. The discourses, as they apply to this research, are explained below.

### 3.1.2 Difference, distance and the Other

Depictions of those in the MW as “the Other” are common to development communications. Such representation is often achieved through a variety of techniques that use “difference and distance” to separate and differentiate between the DW and MW (Dogra, 2012, p. 25). Characters, space, and “easy” theories as to the causes and solutions of poverty all function to create this difference and distance between the DW and MW (Dogra, 2012, p. 25).

To elaborate, strategies such infantilisation and feminisation are used to portray characters of women and children, and depictions of the DW as “active and giving” and the MW as
“passive and receiving” are further ways difference and distance are created (Dogra, 2012, p. 31). Space serves to “enhance distance”, employing mechanisms such as “geographical symbolism” and “the absence of urban life” (Dogra, 2012, p. 64). Finally, “dehistoricised and depoliticised framings of the causes of poverty” further serve to divide the DW and MW (Dogra, 2012, p 74).

Together, these techniques “reproduce the colonial perception of the backwardness of the MW and the advancement of the DW while side-stepping the deep connected histories that shape current global inequalities” (Dogra, 2012, p. 56).

### 3.1.3 Oneness

In spite of the “difference and distance” present in some representations of development, Dogra (2012) argues that development communications also connect the DW and MW. This is achieved through “an ideology of universal humanism which brings together DW and MW into a ‘family of mankind’” (Dogra, 2012, p. 95).

While constructions of “difference and distance” omit details of historical significance, depictions of “oneness” attempt to highlight “the historical and structural connections between DW and MW, countering the difference” (Dogra, 2012, p. 95). Humanism serves as a “fuzzy, sentimental unifier” which connects all humans on the basis of being human (Dogra, 2012, p. 96). Concepts such as human rights and justice serve to connect the DW and MW, one where “good DW human beings help good MW human beings” (Dogra, 2012, p. 120).

It is this “dual logic” of difference and oneness, where characters, spaces and issues are deliberately included or excluded, that results in representations that reinforce colonial discourses and power relations.
3.2 Situating volunteering within the development paradigm

As highlighted in Chapter 2, volunteers have both assisted overseas and been linked with development efforts since the 19th century. The roles, capacities and motivations of volunteers over time, and still today, varies greatly:

“Some terms that have been used...regarding volunteer tourism include ‘mini-mission’ (Brown & Morrison, 2003), ‘petting the critters’ (McGehee, 2007), ‘charity’ (Wearing, 2001), ‘community-service,’ and ‘servant-leadership’ (Butin, 2003). These terms perpetuate the imagery of a feminized, childlike global South awaiting (white, Western) assistance” (Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017, p. 650).

As volunteers and their host communities often come from different “countries, cultures, wealth and levels of privilege”, this can create “unequal power relations between them” (Chen, 2017, p. 8). Therefore interpersonal relationships, as well as the length of time volunteers spend with host communities, are both key to affecting development outcomes (Chen, 2017, p. 7).

3.2.1 Paternalism

Early volunteering initiatives in development are strongly linked with more paternalistic approaches to development. Christian missionary groups have a long history of engagement with initiatives similar to development; these groups have often been described as “ignorant or dismissive of local customs (Meyer, 1999), allied with political powers of colonial exploitation and domination (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986), and intolerant and sometimes openly violent towards those with differing opinions (Clendinnen, 1982; Tinker, 1993)” (Smith, 2017, p. 64). However, most literature “tends to locate religious missionaries as separate from mainstream development actors” (Smith, 2017, p. 64).

Some other, non-religious volunteer groups from developed countries have historically displayed similar traits. Volunteers who are motivated by self-serving ideas of “rescuing” or
“saving” also often “simplify and dismiss” the experiences of communities they interact with; this maintains the view that Westerners “are entitled to interfere in the political and socio-economic agenda of the communities” in order to “save the world” (Gius, 2017, p. 1621). Such an approach to development could be seen as “a legacy of a colonialist ‘kinship politics’ in which global North actors are envisioned as the parents that will help underdeveloped, immature ‘third world’ countries reach civilization, maturity and development” (Patil, 2008, as cited in Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017, p. 650). Similarly, where volunteers are presented as “experts”, this can perpetuate a “one-way relationship in which the volunteer’s knowledge is perceived to be more valuable than that of their local counterparts” (Burns et al, 2015, p. 10).

3.2.2 Partnership

While paternalism in development still exists today, more recent development efforts - particularly volunteering in development - aim to have more of a focus on partnership. Volunteers are often strongly motivated by the opportunity to support development efforts on a grassroots level through working closely with local communities. Further to this, the role of volunteers differs again from that of development workers “because of the implication for two-way understanding and change” (Peter, 2008, p. 368). Such reciprocal relationships are “intertwined” with development impact, as they “reduce power relations” between hosts and volunteers, improve rapport, and allow “host participation and empowerment” (Chen, 2017, p. 7). Such “embeddedness” of volunteers can also result in a “different kind of collaboration, based on a mutual appreciation of each other’s knowledge, skills and networks” and contribute to “the generation of soft outcomes (such as increased confidence, agency and leadership skills)” (Burns et al, 2015, p. 10).

“Volunteering can be distinguished from other forms of development work by a stronger focus on the host organisation’s priorities and on development collaborative relationships. Less pressure to produce outputs creates more opportunity for sharing knowledge and experience with local colleagues. This can make the impacts of volunteering more sustainable, but also less predictable” (Schech & Mundkur, 2016, p. 5).
Volunteers can play a key role in affecting relationships between developed and developing countries, as they respond “at an individual, technical, and personal level to broad development goals” (Peter, 2008, p. 368). Their role upon returning home is also key in continuing to create links and new relationships, as well as challenging “the causes of underdevelopment” due to their on-the-ground experience.

For example, the assignments of AVID volunteers aim to build the capacity of host organisations, with volunteers promoting “positive people-to-people links between individuals, organisations and communities in developing countries and in Australia” (Australian Government, 2017a, para. 9). “Successful” AVID volunteers are described by host organisations as having the following attributes: “flexibility, adaptability, patience, proactiveness, openness and open-mindedness, and enthusiasm” (Office of Development Effectiveness, 2014, p. 36). These are in addition to qualifications, expertise and technical skills.

3.3 Representation

The following section defines and outlines theories of representation, and how to analyse representations as it applies to this thesis.

3.3.1 What is representation?

Media representations are texts which produce meaning. They are “images, descriptions, explanations and frames for understanding what the world is and why and how it works in particular ways”; these representations produce meanings via their textual, auditory, visual and discursive properties (Hall, 1997, as cited in Orgad, 2014, p. 47-48).

Representation and meaning creation has been theorised in two ways: the reflectionist approach, and the constructionist (or constructivist) approach. The reflectionist approach, as
its name suggest, theorises that representations reflect reality or mirror the thing that they depict (Orgad, 2014, p. 48).

The constructionist approach to representation - of more relevance to this paper’s research interests - argues that all representations are a construction of the creator, who has given something meaning by the way it has been represented:

“...The worlds we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualise them, the value we place on them” (Hall, 1997, as cited in Orgad, 2014, p. 53).

In other words, creators of representations “re-present” information, with intention, in order to depict something in a certain way. Representations are constructions in that they are “selective and particular”, showing some elements and leaving out others in order to create a particular meaning or meanings (Orgad, 2014, p. 53).

Constructionism has two major variants for analysis: the semiotic approach, and the discursive approach (Hall, 1997). Semiotic analysis is largely focused on how meaning is produced through language, while discourse analysis focuses on how representation produces or influences knowledge and power relations. Utilised in this study, both are explained in more detail below.

3.3.2 Semiotics

Semiotics is the collection and interpretation of signs to “reveal and discern the world” (Shank, 2012, p. 809). Analysis of signs in texts can help researchers to understand “how things stand in relation to other things, and how those mediated relationships help us understand things better” (Shank, 2012, p. 806).

A semiotic analysis of a representation involves looking at its “signifiers” - words, images, objects, actions and more - and determining the “broader, cultural themes, concepts or
meanings” that exist, or the “signified”. Together, these are what Saussure referred to as a “sign” (Hall, 1997, p. 23).

In a practical sense, determining signs involves what Barthes called denotation and connotation. The level of denotation, or descriptive level, is where “consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning”; connotation, or the interpretative level, is where connections are made to “broader themes and meanings”. As an example, take the following, made-up description of a volunteer: “Lisa holds a Master of Public Health and has ten years of experience in government health policy. At her assignment in remote Indonesia, she will develop a stakeholder engagement strategy to help her host organisation work more closely with local partners.” While this description could be taken literally, it also has broader cultural and historical meaning. It could be interpreted as “Lisa, who is a highly educated and working professional, will volunteer in a country where Australia has strategic interests. As she is more educated and experienced than the local professionals already working in the health sector, her presence will be of great need and benefit”.

It is important to note that meanings obtained through the application of semiotics are not fixed; they vary depending on the context, between senders, and between receivers.

### 3.3.3 Critical discourse analysis

The idea that language produces meaning is, alone, not sufficient in analysing representations.

Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis framework is a three-dimensional model whereby an analysis considers: “(1) the linguistic features of the text (text), (2) processes relating to the production and consumption of the text (discursive practice); and (3) the wider social practice to which the communicative event belongs (social practice)” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2008, p. 68).

To elaborate, while a text’s use of language plays a role in creating and contributing to discourse, interpretation should also consider “how a text’s author draws upon existing
discourses and genres in the text’s creation...how the text’s audience applies discourses and
genres in their own consumption and interpretation” as well as how the discursive practices
“reproduce or...restructure” the discourse and the impact of this on broader social practice

This thesis will utilise both semiotics and critical discourse analysis in its analysis.

3.4 Methodology

The following section outlines the methodology used in this study to both collect and analyse
information.

3.4.1 Triangulation

The methodology for this project utilises triangulation, “a multimethod approach to data
collection and data analysis” (Rothbauer, 2012, p. 892).

The triangulation used is four fold. Firstly, the study considers a combination of data sources
to obtain different types of evidence. Secondly, this data was collected using various
methods, which serves to provide “multiple perspectives and in different contexts”
(Rothbauer, 2012, p. 893). The units of analysis and their collection are outlined below.

Thirdly, the data is then analysed using different methods and using different theories as
they apply, as described earlier in this chapter. Finally, as this study utilises both qualitative
and quantitative data, the findings of the two are triangulated again, or compared, in order
to “provide a more complete picture of the research problem” (Rothbauer, 2012, p. 893).
3.4.2 Data collection and analysis

Two types of data were collected for analysis. The first type of data was texts, or stories, that AVID uses to promote the program to potential volunteers and other stakeholders (see Appendix 1). A sample of 10 volunteer stories were collected from the ‘Stories from Australian Volunteers’ page on the AVID website. Some stories are written from the first person perspective while others are written from the third person perspective. All contain images, however these are excluded from analysis due to focusing on representation and discourse as created by words and language.

The stories collected were the 10 most recently published stories as of 20 December, 2017. The stories are not date stamped. By collecting stories in this way, rather than choosing stories based on their content, this data set aims to be representative of the range of volunteer stories published by the AVID program. The stories were also deliberately collected from the AVID website, rather than the websites of program delivery partners, to understand how volunteers’ stories are represented by the overarching program.

The second type of data collected was AVID volunteers’ perspectives on the program. The perspectives of 16 current and former volunteers were collected via the combination of a survey (see Appendix 2) and phone interviews that I designed and distributed.

The survey consisted of 21 questions. It was designed to gather quantitative data about volunteers’ backgrounds including age, gender etc (see Section 4.4.1 for these details), as well as their experiences with the program. The questions were closed, with multiple choice, checkbox, checkbox grid and rating response options to allow for ease of response and “consistent response categories” to analyse (Julien, 2012, p, 846). Volunteers were advised their responses would be de-identified and not used for purposes other than this study.

The survey was emailed to volunteers on 7 December, 2017. Two current and 14 former volunteers, totalling 16, responded. A deliberate attempt was made to source respondents from beyond just my own AVID network in Indonesia through reaching out to colleagues and friends for volunteer contacts. This was to ensure perspectives from a diverse range of
volunteers were captured in order for the data to be representative of the broader volunteer pool.

Following the survey, qualitative research interviews were conducted with two volunteers who had completed the survey. The interviews were conducted by phone and were “semi-structured as a consequence of the agenda being set by the researcher's interests, yet with room for the respondent's more spontaneous descriptions and narratives” (Brinkmann, 2008, p. 470). The two interview participants were selected based on their responses to the survey, which stood out as they were more negative and critical than other volunteers’ responses. As such, I wanted to investigate these volunteers’ views and experiences in more detail, and the questions asked of these volunteers built upon their initial responses to the survey questions.
Chapter 4: Analysis and discussion

The following analysis, as outlined in Chapter 3, considers the texts, survey and interview results using different methods and theoretical perspectives.

In addressing the research questions, the analysis is focused on understanding the following elements of the volunteer experience: 1) the AVID program; 2) volunteers; 3) the assignment location (including landscape, culture and atmosphere); 4) the local people (including colleagues); and 5) volunteers’ work. Analysis in Sections 4.2, 4.4 and 4.5 are structured accordingly, with Section 4.1 focused on analysing elements 3 to 5 of the volunteer experience. Section 4.3 has a more explicit focus on discourse. Focusing on these five distinct aspects of the volunteer experience will help to understand how different elements of volunteering, and well as the experience more holistically, are represented.

4.1 Word frequency mapping

In order to understand what representations of volunteering are created using language, a quantitative content analysis of the 10 texts was conducted. The analysis produced frequencies of “categories or values associated with particular variables” (Julien, 2012, p. 121). This mapping helped to identify patterns in the language used across the texts.

The analysis mapped the key words, specifically adjectives, used in the texts to describe three elements of volunteering as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. The adjectives mapped were not pre-selected. For each of the elements being analysed, there is a table below which shows the different adjectives used and frequency per text. This initial mapping provides the basis for further qualitative analysis.

It should be noted that this analysis also intended to map the adjectives used to describe the AVID program and volunteers, however few occurrences of adjectives describing these elements appeared in the texts. The analysis did not consider other types of descriptive
language, as this was only the initial starting point of the analysis. In reading the texts, high frequencies of verbs and adverbs were also noted, which may be an area for future research.

4.1.1 Occurrence of adjectives describing the assignment location

Table 1: Occurrence of adjectives describing the assignment location, word frequency per text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Text 1</th>
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<th>Text 4</th>
<th>Text 5</th>
<th>Text 6</th>
<th>Text 7</th>
<th>Text 8</th>
<th>Text 9</th>
<th>Text 10</th>
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<td>Fantastic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Limited
Delayed
Vulnerable
Densely forested

Table 1 illustrates that adjectives describing the assignment location are present in just over half of the texts. It is notable that the frequency of adjectives used to describe the assignment location varies across texts; some texts contain eight or more adjectives used in this context, while other texts (four) do not contain any.

The types of adjectives used across the texts is quite diverse, however the words “natural”, “fantastic” and “mountainess” are used most frequently to describe the assignment location. Some adjectives describe positive aspects of the location, while other adjectives are less positive (eg “vulnerable”).

4.1.2 Occurrence of adjectives describing the local people

Table 2: Occurrence of adjectives describing the local people, word frequency per text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Text 1</th>
<th>Text 2</th>
<th>Text 3</th>
<th>Text 4</th>
<th>Text 5</th>
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<th>Text 7</th>
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<th>Text 9</th>
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<td>Passionate</td>
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<td>Kind-hearted</td>
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Table 2 illustrates that adjectives describing the local people are present in the majority of the texts. It is notable that the frequency of adjectives used to describe local people varies across texts; some texts contain 10 or more adjectives used in this context, while other texts do not contain any.

The types of adjectives used across the texts is quite diverse, however the words “wonderful”, “passionate”, “disadvantaged” and “resilient” are used most frequently to describe local people. Some adjectives describe positive traits in the local people, while other adjectives are less positive (eg “disadvantaged”).

### 4.1.3 Occurrence of adjectives describing volunteers’ work

Table 3: Occurrence of adjectives describing volunteers’ work, word frequency per text

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Table 3 illustrates that adjectives describing the volunteer’s work are present in only a small number of texts. It is notable that the frequency of adjectives used to describe local people varies across texts; one text contains eight adjectives used in this context, while most texts (seven) do not contain any. As mentioned at the beginning of Section 4.1, many verbs and adverbs were noted in the texts. While these were not mapped as part of the analysis, verbs and adverbs are more commonly used to describe volunteers’ work.

The types of adjectives used across the texts is quite diverse, however all adjectives are used only once each to describe volunteers’ work. Some adjectives describe positive aspects of volunteers’ work, while other adjectives are less positive (eg “under-resourced”).

In holistically considering the adjectives used to describe the three elements of volunteering, the frequency of adjectives is not evenly spread throughout the texts. This is likely due to some texts being more formal/fact-based in style than others which were more descriptive.

In terms of the texts’ discourse, which will be elaborated upon in Section 4.3, the adjectives used generally depict the assignment location as a “different” and “distant” (yet exciting) “space” (Dogra, 2012). For the most part, “oneness” is employed to portray local people and volunteers as “alike” through shared positive characteristics, while volunteers’ roles are depicted using discourses of both paternalism and partnership (Gius, 2017; Schech & Mundkur, 2016).

**4.2 Identifying signs and understanding their meaning**

In order to understand what representations of volunteering are created using signs and codes, semiotics was utilised to identify signifiers and understand what was being signified in the texts (Shank, 2012; Hall, 1997).
Where possible, the analysis in this section focused on interpreting signs and codes in the form of volunteers’ own words (in texts written from the first person perspective) and their quotes (in texts written from the third person perspective).

4.2.1 Representations of the AVID program

Many of the texts include mention, or description, of the AVID program. One text describes the program as follows: “The assignment was part of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program, and it gave Alice the chance to build upon her experience working in Australia on Indigenous land and sea management in an overseas context” (Australian Government, 2017m, para. 1). This description makes it clear that the volunteer’s assignment is part of the AVID program. It paints AVID as providing professional, career-progressing opportunities for Australians. The expression also implies that volunteers develop or gain skills and experience that they wouldn’t otherwise get in Australia.

Another description of the program is: “Since 2015, Australian volunteers have been working with BPBD East Kalimantan to strengthen their community-based disaster risk reduction program” (Australian Government, 2017k, para 1). This statement suggests that AVID has built long-term, productive relationships with local partners. It indicates that volunteers who have been placed at this particular organisation have been effective and their work sustainable, and have contributed to meaningful work in the community.

Statements in this category make clear links between volunteers’ assignments, the AVID program and the Australian Government, and receivers of these messages can picture themselves participating in a government affiliated program gaining professional skills and experience in an overseas setting.

4.2.2 Representations of volunteers

In this category, some quotes from volunteers are encoded with enthusiasm. One such quote is: “I also have a recurring sense of wanderlust; a curiosity about the world and a keen
desire to travel and explore” (Australian Government, 2017f, para. 4). This description paints AVID volunteers as having adventurous, spirited and inquisitive personalities, and appeals to receivers’ desire to experience something new, different and exotic. It also sends the signal that volunteers are worldly, global citizens who are well travelled.

The following description of Liz depicts volunteers as experienced and skilled: “Liz brings design and business experience to her Business Mentor role and recently had the opportunity to mentor two local women to pursue their employment goals” (Australian Government, 2017o, para. 1). It could be interpreted that volunteers bring practical, relevant skills and knowledge from employment in Australia to their assignments. The quote also implies that volunteers’ skills are more developed than those of the local people, and that volunteers and locals work together in a trainer/student capacity.

Statements in this category convey the message that volunteers are outgoing and proactive yet also skilled, more so than their local colleagues.

4.2.3 Representations of the assignment location

Many of the texts being analysed describe the assignment location. One text describes the assignment’s location in a small town in Myanmar as follows: “Thandaunggyi is one of the less well known hill stations established during British colonial times and, until recently, the area was not open to tourists. With easy access to Yangon and offering cultural sights, hiking trails, natural attractions and authentic local experiences, the MTF has identified the potential for tourism opportunities” (Australian Government, 2017h, para. 4). This description appeals to potential volunteers’ desire to go somewhere that few others (particularly foreigners) will. It could also be interpreted that the AVID program enables volunteers to experience these rare opportunities.

The texts also paint assignment locations as different and exotic, as highlighted by the following: “The rugged beauty of Timor’s mountains and coastline will remain a highlight, as will the inclusiveness of the TB program staff in involving me in field trips in the remote mountainous areas” (Australian Government, 2017l, para. 5). This appeals to volunteers’
desire to explore and have new experiences, and again positions the AVID program as providing these opportunities.

Statements in this category convey the message that AVID volunteers are placed in off-the-beaten track locations that few tourists ever visit, and will see things and have experiences that few others will by participating in the AVID program.

4.2.4 Representations of the local people

In this category, some quotes from volunteers depict the local people, particularly colleagues, as inclusive and knowledgeable. One such quote demonstrating this is: “I learnt a lot from my colleagues - they helped me learn more about the language, their culture, as well as learning new physiotherapy skills...I learnt so much and was so inspired by the organisation’s work, and the passion and drive of my colleagues” (Australian Government, 2017i, para. 13). It could be interpreted that local colleagues are hardworking and committed to their roles. It also paints them as welcoming and communicative, and that they include volunteers in activities. It also conveys the message that local colleagues are keen to share their knowledge, and that volunteers will learn new skills from their colleagues.

Another text paints local people in a similar way: “The staff care about and support each other. There is genuine love and concern, and a sense of community that I have not found in other workplaces” (Australian Government, 2017j, para. 19). This quote conveys that AVID volunteers join workplaces and communities that are respectful, supportive and accepting, where colleagues are collaborative and united by common motivations, perhaps in a way that differs from most workplaces, or workplaces in Australia.

Statements in this category convey the message that AVID volunteers work in environments that are positive and productive and where there is mutual knowledge sharing and learning.
4.2.5 Representations of volunteers’ work

In this category, some quotes from volunteers depict the work of their assignments as effective and fulfilling. One such quote includes: “My responsibilities are much more varied than they are at home, and again I find myself learning new skills. In the ED, I supervise interns, but I also contribute to a whole raft of quality improvement activities, including departmental teaching, guideline writing and policy development” (Australian Government, 2017g, para. 19). It could be interpreted that, through AVID, volunteers are provided with opportunities that are not available to them at home, including the opportunity to progress professionally and work in more senior or leadership roles.

This is also suggested by the following quote: “Since 2013, two Australian environmental lawyers have volunteered in FSM to help strengthen the country’s environmental management legal framework” (Australian Government, 2017n, para. 5). This quote sends the message that AVID assignments enable volunteers to have a significant amount of influence in their host countries, including at a national policy level.

Statements in this category convey the message that AVID volunteers have skills that are highly valued and practical. It could be interpreted that volunteers develop professionally due to the diversity of responsibility and work contexts that their assignment entails.

In holistically considering the representations of the five elements of volunteering, certain discourses are prevalent. While these will be elaborated upon in Section 4.3, the AVID program is represented as something that Australia, in the DW, has developed and is “giving” to the MW for their “benefit” (Dogra, 2012). Volunteers, in their roles’, are generally depicted as more skillful than, yet working in partnership with and learning from their local colleagues (Gius, 2017; Schech & Mundkur, 2016); while assignment locations are represented as “different” and “distant” yet also exciting (Dogra, 2012). “Oneness” is employed to portray local people and volunteers as “alike” in their shared passion (yet “different” with their different skills and backgrounds) (Dogra, 2012).
4.3 Identifying discourse themes in the texts

In order to understand the techniques employed to represent volunteering, and how these reconstruct or reinforce colonial discourses, this section engages more explicitly with the discourses and themes outlined in Chapter 3.

4.3.1 The developing and developed world

While the texts do not use language such as Majority World and Developed World (Dogra, 2012) or Global North and Global South (Eriksen, 2015), the stories clearly position the AVID program as an Australian Government aid initiative that is being implemented in, and benefits, developing countries.

In one text written from the first-person perspective, a volunteer describes the death of a patient at the hospital where he is placed in Papua New Guinea (PNG) as a “system failure”, adding that he hopes “the Australian volunteer presence” will mean such occurrences are soon a “distant memory” (Australian Government, 2017g, para. 26). This positions Australia and AVID volunteers as “giving” aid in the form of capacity building, which countries like PNG “receive” (Dogra, 2012).

Similarly, the stories highlight Australia’s influence on development agendas, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region where its aid is focused. One volunteer’s assignment forms part of the Australian Government’s official development assistance in Micronesia, with her role described as supporting “the review, development and enactment of a number of...environmental regulations” (Australian Government, 2017n, para. 6). This reinforces development efforts as being driven by developed, donor countries, and positions Australia as the “giver” of aid and PNG as the “receiver” (Dogra, 2012).

Such representations can serve to reproduce or reinforce unequal power relations between DW countries like Australia and MW countries, and communicate to audiences that poor countries are in need of assistance or saving from countries like Australia.
4.3.2 Difference, distance, and the Other

The above discourse is strongly linked with discourses of “difference, distance and the Other” in development, with some texts depicting this by employing characters and easy theories as to the causes and solutions of poverty (Dogra, 2012). Using the same example as referred to in the previous section, one text describes Ben, a patient at the hospital where a volunteer is placed in PNG. The representation of Ben and his death positions him and PNG as “different and distant” (Dogra, 2012) from Australia and Australians in two ways: his paralysis caused by snake bike is something that would rarely affect someone in a country like Australia, and the fact that the hospital “wasn’t equipped to support someone in such a vulnerable state” (Australian Government, 2017g, para. 26) would, again, be unheard of in a DW country. The story lacks any historical or contextualising information about PNG and its health system (Dogra, 2012).

Another story describes young women in Tanzania as “working hard from an early age carrying water, clothing or vegetables on their heads; and...have a strong sense of responsibility to home duties that come before their own advancement” (Australian Government, 2017j, para. 4). This again is an example of a “character” who, through descriptions of her everyday life and what it involves, is depicted as “different and distant” from the young women in countries like Australia (Dogra, 2012).

Similarly, the texts represent volunteers’ assignment locations or “spaces” in a way that enhances the distance between those countries and Australia (Dogra, 2012). Depictions that focus on the natural environment (such as “rugged” and “mountainous” [Australian Government, 2017l, para. 5]), as well as culturally specific features (as as “glittering pagodas” [Australian Government, 2017h, para. 1]) again, without any historical or cultural context, function to position MW countries and their people as “the Other” (Dogra, 2012).

Building upon discourses of the MW and DW, representations which serve to separate developing and developed countries using “difference and distance” only serve to reinforce stereotypes and maintain the way in such countries - and their relations - are viewed by audiences (Dogra, 2012).
4.3.3 Oneness

Discourses of “Oneness”, or “universal humanism”, are reproduced by the texts (Dogra, 2012). Common throughout the texts are themes of volunteers and their local colleagues being “united” by their shared motivation and passion for their work (Dogra, 2012). Several texts describe how volunteers and their colleagues work together to exchange knowledge, and contribute different, yet complementary, skills and experience to projects. In one text, the volunteer describes how “working alongside” her counterparts has allowed them to “share ideas and shape each program...and develop a stronger sense of empowerment through shared responsibility to reduce disaster impacts” (Australian Government, 2017k, para. 11).

“Oneness” is further evident in the texts through depictions of how volunteers’ relationships with their local colleagues progress (Dogra, 2012). One volunteer describes her colleagues as “friends and mentors”, adding that this “kind-hearted and compassionate family” have inspired her through their work (Australian Government, 2017, para. 9). Descriptions of how another volunteer is taught Swahili from her host organisation’s “kind, patient and encouraging” driver and her love of the local Tanzanian dish wali nyama also paint volunteers as assimilating to, and enjoying, the culture of their countries of assignment (Australian Government, 2017j, para. 20-21).

Such representations of universal humanism, in contrast to the difference and distance, further reinforce the roles of, and power dynamics between, different countries (Dogra, 2012).

4.3.4 The role of volunteers in development

Discourses of both paternalism and partnership are evident in the texts. Some texts describe volunteers and their responsibilities in a way that positions them as superior to their local colleagues, evoking discourses of paternalism (Gius, 2017; Patil, 2008, as cited in Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017). For example, one volunteer’s role involves supervising interns
and junior staff, with his role focused on “teaching and training” the hospital’s staff (Australian Government, 2017g, para. 16). Similarly, descriptions of volunteers’ roles involving “leading”, “mentoring”, “improving”, “expanding” and “building” reinforce volunteers’ status as that of greater knowledge, skill and expertise.

Despite this, volunteers are also depicted as working collaboratively with and in a way that complements their local colleagues. These descriptions portray volunteers and their local colleagues as in partnership (Schech & Mundkur, 2016; Peter, 2008); in one text, the volunteer emphasises that her assignment is a “two-way learning process” and that there is “strong capacity in the team...in areas that I lacked” (Australian Government, 2017m, para. 13).

The texts also highlight how volunteers’ roles differ from that of Western development workers; all texts depict volunteers as working on directly with local people and on initiatives and projects that are priorities of those organisations and for local communities (even if this is secondary, or in addition to, Australian government priorities).

It should be noted that the extent to which the texts contain these discourses varies. Some texts contain most/all of the representations as described above, while others only contain one or two. In highlighting these discourses, they serve as a summary for how the texts as a whole, and as a sample of AVID’s materials, represent volunteering and development.

4.4 Understanding volunteers’ perspectives

In order to understand the experiences and views of volunteers in regards to volunteering, development and the AVID program, this section discusses the key results of the survey and interviews. The results are presented as a discussion with numerical data where relevant, rather than purely quantitatively. To read the survey questions in full, see Appendix 2.
4.4.1 The volunteers surveyed

Of the 16 volunteers surveyed, 11 identified as female and 5 as male. The majority of volunteers were aged between 18 and 29, or 30 and 39 (31 percent each), with smaller numbers of responses from older volunteers. The overwhelming majority had postgraduate education (75 percent) while all remaining volunteers had undergraduate degrees. 13 of the volunteers had completed assignments in Asia (in order of popularity: Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Vietnam), with the other 3 having volunteered in South Africa. The roles of volunteers varied greatly, however 3 had a focus on communications, and 2 on education. The majority (31 percent) of volunteers had been placed at local NGOs, followed by 19 percent each at multilateral and government organisations. Smaller numbers were placed at international NGOs, educational institutes and research institutes. Most volunteers (56 percent) had completed their assignment within the last year or were still completing their assignment, with all other volunteers having completed their assignment between 1 and 4 years ago.

In addition, two of volunteers surveyed were also interviewed over the phone. Volunteer 1 identified as a 30-year-old female who volunteered at two local NGOs in Bangladesh in communications roles. It should be noted that she changed assignments during her time in Bangladesh. She has a postgraduate level of education and completed her assignment between 3 and 4 years ago. Volunteer 2 identified as a 72-year-old female who volunteered at an educational institute in Indonesia in a curriculum and library development advisor role. She has a postgraduate level of education and completed her assignment between 3 and 4 years ago.

4.4.2 Views on the AVID program

In regards to the program’s pre-departure training, the majority of volunteers said it was relevant (11 from 14 responses), helpful (14 from 15 responses), practical (10 from 14 responses) and interesting (11 from 15 responses). It is worth noting that not all volunteers responded to the adjectives in this question, nor were all responses positive.
Regarding the communication and support received from the applicable in-country management team and program delivery partner, all volunteers said the support was professional and appropriate, while 14 from a total of 15 responses said the support was helpful. 14 from 16 responses said the support was timely. Volunteer 1, when interviewed, described the in-country management team in Bangladesh as helpful when approached, but not very proactive in offering support. Similarly, Volunteer 2 said that the team in Indonesia tried to help her negotiate with her host organisation when she had trouble completing the work outlined in her assignment, but felt that the structure of the program’s management meant that assignment like hers were being designed and funded without proper consideration of the needs of host organisations. She added that her end-of-assignment recommendations were ignored.

From a total of 15 responses, 12 recommended the AVID program to others while 1 did not. A further 2 were uncertain and/or only recommended the program to volunteers with certain prerequisites.

These responses indicate a mostly professional and supportive experience with the AVID program administration, however some volunteers had experiences that were more challenging.

4.4.3 Views on themselves as volunteers

Prior to commencing their assignments, 63 percent of volunteers had experience volunteering overseas in the international development sector, while 38 percent had been employed in the sector in Australia. It is worth noting that 25 percent had no experience in the sector.

The strongest motivations for volunteers in undertaking an assignment were living in another country (89 percent of volunteers), gaining experience in international development (50 percent of volunteers) and meeting new people (50 percent of volunteers).
The majority of volunteers either strongly agreed (25 percent) or agreed (63 percent) that they learned more about international development through their assignment. While some volunteers were neutral or disagreed, none strongly disagreed.

Again, the majority of volunteers either strongly agreed (38 percent) or agreed (31 percent) that their assignment was valuable to their career. It is worth noting that one volunteer strongly disagreed.

In regards to personal development, the overwhelming majority of volunteers either strongly agreed (38 percent) or agreed (50 percent) that their assignment contributed to their personal development. It is worth noting that one volunteer strongly disagreed. Volunteer 2 when interviewed said that she “had a great time” and “learned a lot”, but felt that this was largely due to her assignment being a “holiday” from her life in Australia as she did not have the family responsibilities of home.

After completing their assignments, 31 percent of volunteers found employment in the international development sector in Australia. The same percentage of volunteers also participated in the program’s Returned Australian Volunteers Network. 19 percent commenced either undergraduate or postgraduate education related to the sector. It is worth noting that 19 percent of volunteers had no continued engagement in the sector after completing their assignment. Volunteer 1 in her interview said she was motivated to do an assignment for the in-country experience she couldn’t get in Australia, but found her assignments did not provide this. While she returned to employment in the sector in Australia, she described her role and its responsibilities as “the same” as what she was doing prior to volunteering.

These responses indicate that volunteers generally have some development experience, are willing to learn, and are motivated by career progression and the opportunity to live overseas.
4.4.4 Views on the assignment location

While no specific questions were asked about the assignment location, the opportunity to live in another country was a motivation for 89 percent of volunteers. 63 percent of volunteers also had prior experience working (25 percent) or volunteering (63 percent) overseas. 38 percent were challenged by a lack of social or relaxation opportunities in-country.

Volunteer 1 described her assignment location of Bangladesh as a barrier to being productive. She said the political situation at the time made it difficult to travel to and from work or socialise. She described having to take transport options such as a private car that were “too expensive” to afford on the volunteer allowance, yet required by the program for volunteers’ safety. She added that the pollution and noise of the city affected her health.

These responses reflect discourses of DW and MW, and of assignment locations being “different” and “distant” “spaces” (Dogra, 2012).

4.4.5 Views on the local people

In describing their colleagues, 15 (from 16) said their colleagues were both cooperative and supportive, while 14 (from 16) said their colleagues were both professional and respectful. 12 (from a total of 15 responses) said their colleagues were communicative, while 9 (from a total of 16 responses) said their colleagues were collaborative. This is worth drawing attention to. In her interview, Volunteer 1 described the director at her first host organisation as “really rude, aggressive and unprofessional towards me and my colleagues. She would abuse people over email, and shut them down in conversation. It was impossible to communicate with her”. It was ultimately this individual’s behaviour that led to Volunteer 1 changing assignments.

The majority of volunteers either strongly agreed (19 percent) or agreed (50 percent) that their presence had a positive impact on their colleagues and host organisation. 19 percent
were neutral, while one volunteer disagreed and another strongly disagreed. Volunteer 2 when interviewed described her presence as being of valuable to her local colleagues and the children at the school of her assignment while she was there, but not long-lasting. She described setting up a library and teaching the children about recycling, but was certain any impact she had made could not have been sustained after her departure.

These responses reflect discourses of DW and MW (Dogra, 2012) as well as paternalism (Gius, 2017; Patil, 2008, as cited in Bandyopadhyay & Patil, 2017) and partnership (Schech & Mundkur, 2016; Peter, 2008) in development.

4.4.6 Views on volunteers’ work

The majority of volunteers either strongly agreed (19 percent) or agreed (44 percent) that they were successful in meeting their assignment’s objectives. It is worth highlighting that 25 percent were neutral, while one volunteer disagreed and another strongly disagreed. Volunteer 2 when interviewed said the objectives of her assignment were not aligned with the reality of the situation at her host organisation. She said that the school staff “didn’t know what to do with me” and were mostly interested in having her teach English.

The skills volunteers learned or used while on assignment included written and/or verbal communication skills (80 percent of volunteers), analytical and problem solving skills (73 percent of volunteers) and adaptability (73 percent of volunteers). The skill less frequently used or learned was technical skills (33 percent of volunteers). Volunteer 1 felt she was successful at assisting local colleagues with individual needs such as learning English, but her work on projects “never amounted to anything”.

The challenges volunteers faced while on assignment included lack of material resources, lack of human resources and cultural differences (each of these challenges were experienced by 50 percent of volunteers). Other challenges included language barriers (44 percent of volunteers), lack of own skills (38 percent of volunteers) and lack of social or relaxation opportunities (38 percent of volunteers). Volunteer 2 described her lack of Indonesian skills as a barrier; while she tried to learn Indonesian during her assignment, she found that she
“could never be sure that the impressions I was getting were the correct ones” and that most locals preferred speak to her in English anyway to develop their own skills.

Again, these responses reflect discourses of DW and MW (Dogra, 2012).

4.5 Comparing the texts’ representations and volunteers’ perspectives

In order to understand how the experiences of volunteers as depicted in the texts compare with the experiences and views as told by volunteers, this section compares the findings of 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 (analysis of the texts), with the findings of 4.4 (analysis of volunteer perspectives).

4.5.1 Findings on the AVID program

The texts emphasise the AVID program’s affiliation with the Australian Government and as part of the country’s official aid delivery, as well as the professional and personal opportunities it affords to participating volunteers. The texts do not include details of the preparation and support given to volunteers before, after and during assignment. However, this is part of the process for every volunteer assignment, and the volunteers surveyed generally felt the pre-departure training and in-country support was helpful and useful. A small number of volunteers, including those interviewed, had less positive experiences in this area. Not all recommended the program to others, while it can be assumed all the volunteers featured in the texts recommend it due to sharing their story.

4.5.2 Findings on volunteers

The texts highlight the enthusiasm, passion, and high level of skill and knowledge of AVID volunteers, often superior or different to that of their local colleagues. The volunteers often
work in new contexts, but are depicted as adaptable and quick to learn. The volunteers surveyed were highly educated, and most had prior experience volunteering overseas in the sector. A smaller number had been previously employed in the sector in Australia. While most volunteers agreed their assignments contributed to their professional and personal development, it is worth noting that not all volunteers felt this way and a significant number (19 percent) did not continue to engage with the sector post assignment.

4.5.3 Findings on the assignment location

The texts depict volunteers’ assignment locations as exotic, exciting and beautiful. The volunteers in the texts do not seem to have any complaints or difficulties in adapting to their new environments, and any differences in lifestyle are referred to fondly. The volunteers surveyed were strongly motivated to volunteer by the opportunity to live overseas, with many having prior experience working or volunteering overseas. 38 percent were challenged by a lack of social or relaxation opportunities in-country, with one of the volunteers interviewed expressing challenges with safety and mobility in her assignment country of Bangladesh.

4.5.4 Findings on the local people

The texts portray the local people as welcoming and supportive of volunteers, as well as hard working and passionate despite their often different skills and knowledge. While the majority of volunteers surveyed had positive experiences with the local people, not all associated positive attributes with their colleagues. A small number of survey respondents did not attribute their colleagues with being cooperative, supportive, professional and respectful, while a larger number (7 from 16) did not attribute their colleagues with being collaborative. One volunteer interviewed also described one of her colleagues in particular as “rude, aggressive and unprofessional”.

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4.5.5 Findings on volunteers’ work

The texts represent volunteers’ work not only as fulfilling and interesting, but often much more diverse and impactful than similar roles at home. Volunteers are often depicted working in senior roles with responsibility over projects and local staff. While the majority of volunteers surveyed were successful in meeting their assignment objectives, not all were. Language barriers and lack of own skills were challenges identified by large numbers of the volunteers (44 and 38 percent respectively). The volunteers interviewed also cited difficulties with their work being sustainable, and that communication barriers with colleagues affected their productivity.

Overall, in comparing the texts’ representations and volunteers’ perspectives, there is strong alignment in the discourses produced by the two. However, it should be noted that there is some disconnect in volunteers’ experiences and how they view the program and volunteering, and the way in which AVID represents their experiences.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Key findings

This thesis aimed to understand how the AVID program represents the volunteer experience, and what discourses of development these representations construct or contribute to. It also explored the experiences and views of AVID volunteers, and compared these with the program’s representations.

A literature review considered the relevant background information on international volunteering in development, as well as the Australian Government’s aid agenda and where the AVID program fits in. The study’s theoretical background looked at the colonial discourses that still persist in development communications today, and the roles of volunteers in development efforts. Utilising a triangulated methodology, the study involved content and discourse analysis of 10 texts produced by AVID, as well as the discussion of insights collected from 16 current and former volunteers via a survey and interviews.

To elaborate, the 10 written texts from the AVID website were analysed using word mapping, semiotics and critical discourse analysis. This part of the analysis revealed trends in language used to describe five different elements of the volunteer experience, as well as how colonial discourses such as difference, distance and Oneness (Dogra, 2012) are reproduced by the texts through the use of characters and spaces. It should be noted that while all texts engaged with these discourses, some did so more than others. Such representations are therefore potentially concerning due to the role of these organisations in contributing to audiences’ understanding of development.

Sixteen current and former volunteers were surveyed on their experiences, with two of these volunteers also interviewed. This provided insights on volunteering that largely aligned with how volunteers were represented in the texts, however some volunteers encountered experiences not depicted in the texts. These differences highlight opportunities for volunteering to be represented in different, or more diverse, ways.
5.2 Limitations and reflections about the design

Despite my own position as a former AVID, the study did not reflect my own experiences with the program. While initial planning of the project did involve utilisation of autoethnography, the thesis soon came to be largely focused on content analysis. However, it should be noted my views and experiences did influence the decision to analysis texts, and guided the development of questions asked of volunteers in the survey and interviews.

One of the study’s limitations was its focus on only the written elements of the texts, excluding the images from analysis. While this was a deliberate decision, as it was assumed that the content of the images would be similar to the wording they accompanied, the images may have revealed other interesting insights of value. Analysing additional types of texts, such as videos, may have also been of benefit to the study’s aims.

The small sample of volunteers surveyed and interviewed was another limitation, and ideally more responses would have been gathered in order to provide more representative results. However, the survey included a large number and range of questions, as it was anticipated that obtaining responses may be difficult. It should also be noted that the volunteers who responded were quite diverse in terms of age, gender and experience. It is also acknowledged that conducting additional, more in-depth qualitative interviews, rather than the study’s combination of a survey and two interviews, may have been an alternative approach worth considering.

5.3 Future research

There are many options for further research in the area of representation of volunteering. One option would be to gather the insights and experiences of staff working for one of the AVID program’s delivery partners, or in the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to understand why representations of volunteering exist in their current state. Alternatively, an analysis of the materials of other government volunteer sending
programs around the world would serve as an interesting comparison to the results revealed by this study.

Another interesting area of research would be to speak to volunteers about the representations, and whether they feel the texts accurately reflect their experiences. A research avenue including a more practical element could involving asking volunteers to tell their own stories using any medium, content and angle they choose.

Finally, as highlighted early in the study, there is “growing critical reflection” on who international volunteering serves (Lopez Franco & Shahrokh, 2015, p. 24). Further consideration and analysis of volunteering, and its role in today’s development landscape, particularly from a post-colonial perspective would build upon the findings of this thesis.
References


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Appendices

Appendix 1 Texts used in the analysis

The 10 texts produced by the Australian Government about AVID volunteers’ experiences that this thesis analyses are:


**Appendix 2 Survey of volunteers**

The survey sent to, and completed by, 16 current and former AVID volunteers can be viewed at the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScJPclldazOv-0yeurKJJT1Ittd1qhHSf-79KMc2R48XfIDC1g/viewform?usp=sf_link