



Using the above diagram based on Stephen Toulmin's system of argument, fill in the icons with numbers from the following 7 elements of an argument regarding the representation of prostitution in *Bangkok 8*.

1. "I switch Pisit and his guest off when the cab arrives but find myself haunted for a moment by the rice grower from Isaan. I can see her, uncomfortable without her sarong in the short skirt or black leggings and black tank top which are almost a uniform of the trade. Perhaps her legs are short and muscular, her ass a little on the wide side, her expectations wildly out of whack with reality as she stares at passing white men, wondering which of them will be her savior. She owns the broad open face and smudge nose of the northern tribes. I experience her astonishment when her first customer tries to initiate her into the black art of fellatio, her disbelief that he could be serious, that people really did that sort of thing. In my mind's eye I follow her all the way to the terminus, share her disgust with the city while she waits for the bus home. I find I love her, though I've never met her. If we are to be saved it will be by the likes of her" (Burdett 111).
2. *Bangkok 8* argues that prostitution is evil.
3. "More traditionally Thai than Nong, Pichai's mother went to work in the bars soon after dumping Pichai's Thai father for being a 'butterfly'...She vomited the first time she slept with a *farang*..." (Burdett 33).
4. The protagonist's opinion reflects a novel's point of view.
5. "From the Greek ἥρωϛ, in mythology and folklore, a hero (male) or heroine (female) usually fulfills the definitions of what is considered good and noble in the originating culture" (Wikipedia).
6. But Sonchai describes the prostitutes in *Bangkok 8* as good women, and he seems to understand and agree that their work is respectable and functional in Thailand.
7. Overall, *Bangkok 8* argues that prostitution is a necessary evil for Thai women at this historical moment.

Kat's hovel belongs to a project almost identical to my own, except that it is not near the river, or anything else of interest to the eye. I stand at the edge of a man-made desert, waiting for a cab, wondering if this wasteland is another Western import. Have we, in our headstrong grabbing of all things Western, inadvertently bought up pieces of the Sahara? Fortunately, I have brought my Walkman with me and listen to Pisit Sritabot's phone-in radio show while I wait. A female professor of sociology is talking in such authoritative tones about prostitution that Pisit for once forgets to interrupt.

"It's an unfortunate word in that everyone has a different definition. These days a huge percentage of young women studying at university and colleges are subsidized by so-called sugar daddies—men, often *far-angs* but usually Thai, who pay their expenses, even a kind of salary, in exchange for the right to sleep with the students whenever they choose. It is not illegal, but the girl is certainly selling her body. If the sugar daddy isn't rich enough to pay all her expenses, she'll have to take on another, perhaps as many as three. Often the girl will own three separate mobile telephones, one for each lover so she doesn't get the name wrong when one of them calls. Then you have the very naïve rice grower from Isaan who has heard about the money to be made in the big city, who spends a weekend hanging out at the bars on Sukhumvit, perhaps finds a man or two who hire her, only to discover she has not the slightest clue about foreign men, speaks not a word of English. She may be horrified and mystified by the very idea of oral sex and catches the next bus home to her farm in the far north, never to visit the big city again. Then you have experts, very talented and attractive women who can literally wrap men around their fingers. Such girls often receive income from three or more foreign men, who live overseas and of course are unaware of each other, who are paying her to stay out of the bars until they arrive for their vacations. Of course, she continues to sell her body every night and is probably receiving a total income in excess of any middle-ranking professional, such as a

lawyer or doctor. Then you have the girls who travel, often on false passports supplied by our local mafia, who also procure visas for countries like Britain and the U.S. Such girls, if they are gifted in their profession, may make as much as U.S.\$180,000 a year in cities like London, Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Paris, Hong Kong, Berlin, Tokyo, Singapore. Of course they never pay tax, and usually they save a significant amount, so within a few years they return to join our wealthier classes. Then there is the girl who is caught in some loan scam, usually in order to pay medical bills for her mother or father, who finds herself trapped in a brothel in the country, or in Malaysia, who is in reality a sex slave all of whose earnings go to pay off the original loan, who may be required to service a man every twenty minutes while she is on duty, which may be for as long as twelve hours a day. Then there are the pool hustlers. Our girls cannot compete with Filipinas, who are world class, but they're improving all the time."

"What's pool got to do with prostitution?"

"Thai pool. The game is used as a hook. Not every *farang* likes go-go bars or wants to spend an evening drinking beer. Pool mops up the remainder of the market—shy men like it too, it provides a lead-in, a hobby in common. It can seem almost like a holiday romance, which happens to last an evening instead of the usual week."

"I see."

"There is really no comparison between the destinies, mind-sets or lifestyles of these different women, but because they are all prostitutes we inadvertently find ourselves talking about them as if they were in the same plight, which they are not. The truth is that prostitution fulfills many functions. It is a substitute for social welfare, medical insurance, student loans, a profitable hobby as well as being the path to that wealth which many modern women expect from life. It also brings an enormous amount of foreign currency to our country, which means the government is never serious about suppressing it."

"I see," Pisit says again, in an unusually somber mood. "And we are talking about a significant proportion of Thai women?"

"Huge. When you consider that many women are ineligible by reason of age, or lack of physical charms, it begins to look as if perhaps twenty percent of women in Krung Thep who are in a position to sell their bodies do so. If you include the sugar daddy phenomenon and the overseas industry, which is very very big, the figure must be even higher."

"Are we as a nation dependent on this trade?"

"I don't want to exaggerate or paint these women as heroes, but it's true that without their work we would all be a little bit poorer."

"Is there something about Thai women that leads them so easily into the trade?"

Laughing: "Well, *farangs* especially say how beautiful we are and we don't seem to have the same hang-ups as many Western women. The West tries to turn the act of sex into a religious experience, when to us it is no more than scratching an itch. I'm afraid we're not as romantic as we seem. And perhaps we are a little strange. In other countries such as Japan and South Korea, prostitution declined dramatically as the economy improved. When our economy improves, the number of prostitutes tends to go up rather than down."

I switch Pisit and his guest off when the cab arrives but find myself haunted for a moment by the rice grower from Isaan. I can see her, uncomfortable without her sarong in the short skirt or black leggings and black tank top which are almost a uniform of the trade. Perhaps her legs are short and muscular, her ass a little on the wide side, her expectations wildly out of whack with reality as she stares at passing white men, wondering which of them will be her savior. She owns the broad open face and smudge nose of the northern tribes. I experience her astonishment when her first customer tries to initiate her into the black art of fellatio, her disbelief that he could be serious, that people really did that sort of thing. In my mind's eye I follow her all the way to the terminus, share her disgust with the city while she waits for the bus home. I find I love her, though I've never met her. If we are to be saved it will be by the likes of her.

On the way to my own hovel I meditate on my penis. Not only mine, my thoughts encompass every owner. Sooner or later one comes to a forked path: make it the centerpiece of your life, or put it away to be used in tumescent mode only on special occasions. Those who take the first option must surely reach a point where the sole function of one's lovers is to serve the organ in all its glory? You might put it anywhere, share it with anyone, so long as it's running the show. I find I'm not thinking about my cock at all, I'm thinking of Bradley's: the man who sported a perfect phallus on his web page. And what of his strange bedfellow Sylvester Warren, the man who played so rough only Siberians would partner him?

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They came from the north and the south, the east and the west. Krung Thep was not only the biggest city, until recently it was the only modern city we had. They came from the plains and the hills. Most were ethnic Thai but many were tribespeople from the north, Muslims from the south, Khmer who sneaked over from Cambodia, and plenty were technically Burmese who lived on the border and never paid it any mind. They were part of the greatest diaspora in history, the migration of half of Asia from country to town, and it was happening at an accelerated speed during the last third of the twentieth century. Men with iron muscles and the dogged heroism of unmechanized agricultural labor, women with bodies ravaged by continual pregnancies, they possessed in full measure all the guts, all the enthusiasm, all the naïveté, all the hope, all the desperation necessary to make it in the big city. The only thing they left out of account was time, of which they knew very little apart from the rhythms of nature. The sadistic vivisection of life into hours, minutes, seconds was one of the few hardships never inflicted by the soil. Deadlines, especially, were the source of a new kind of anxiety. Stress? Its urban version was strange, alien, insidious and something they had no way of dealing with. *Yaa baa* was a poison whose time had come.