A Farang[1] Ethnographer: The Question of Ethnographic Identity in Cleo Odzer's *Patpong Sisters*[2]

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What is clear now is that the West's fascination with the primitive has to do with its own crises in identities, with its own need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe. Marianna Torgovnick in Gone Primitive

Introduction

In June 1988, Cleo Odzer, a graduate student from the New School for Social Research arrived in Thailand to do her dissertation research on Thai prostitution in Patpong, a red-light district for farang (Western tourists) in Bangkok. Odzer's book *Patpong Sisters: An American Woman's View of Bangkok Sex World*, was published in 1994 after the fieldwork and the dissertation were completed. The book, as a record of Odzer's fieldwork experience of Thailand between 1988–1990, combines personal confession, romance, travel and adventure story with ethnography. The mixing of genres allows Odzer to turn the lens on herself and to explore autobiographically her confessional identity as ethnographer. In *Patpong Sisters*, the life of researcher and her subjects are inextricably intertwined. Odzer writes about the other culture but the world she is writing about is also the one that shapes her own life. Therefore, embedded in Odzer's ethnography of her "Patpong Sisters" is an autobiographical narrative in which she explores how her self-consciousness is developed through her contact and engagement with the other.

In what follows I will reevaluate the self-reflexive "I" in Odzer's account. My discussion draws upon work of many critics who raise questions about ethnography as objective science. For example, what makes Edward Said wonder about ethnographic discourse is "how someone, an authoritative,

explorative, elegant, learned voice, speaks and analyzes, amasses evidence, theorizes, speculates about everything — except itself."[3] From another perspective, Mary Louise Pratt offers her critique of ethnography, pointing out how the discipline suppresses the experiencing "I" of the ethnographer. Pratt argues, "There are strong reasons why field ethnographers so often lament that their ethnographic writings leave out or hopelessly impoverish some of the most important knowledge they have achieved, including the self-knowledge."[4] In *The Predicament of Culture*, James Clifford rejects the myth about ethnography as pure science, claiming that the discipline always depends on "intense intersubjective engagement" as a means for producing knowledge.[5] What these critics point out is that all knowledge is situated even if it appears to be objective or disembodied. Ethnography is no exception because it is always written under the shadow of the author who produces its discourse. This means that there is always the narrative of the self to be found in the ethnography of the other. The self-effacement demanded by the discipline thus creates false categories such as the inside and outside, the observer and the observed.

However, the focus on the self does not mean here that everything is reduced to mere effect of the author's consciousness. The mode of exchange between the ethnographer and her subjects in Odzer's narrative is similar to the one found in the "contact zone," the term Pratt uses to designate "social spaces where discrete cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination."[6] Pratt elaborates on her idea of contact relations, using the term "transculturation" to describe the collaborative process in which all knowledge is produced. Pratt argues, "While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery ... it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis."[7] The idea of transculturation is crucial to my discussion of *Patpong Sisters* because two things are going on at once in Odzer's account of

ethnographic practice: self-discovery through contact with the other and the discovery of the other through the medium of the self.[8]

The reciprocal nature of the field encounter should not blind us to the inequality of power existing in all contact relations. In her discussion of contact zones, Pratt uses the term "anti-conquest" to designate the "strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony."[9] Hence, the exchange that takes place in the contact zones does not necessarily dismantle the self-other polarity. It may result in the unintended effect of reinforcing and extending racial and national boundaries. My discussion of Odzer's narrative will focus on this contradiction of contact relations, calling attention to complicity and critique, violence and recognition, affiliation and difference as characteristics of the contact zones.

Entering Patpong

Odzer begins her narrative with the scene of her first entry into Patpong. In this scene, Odzer employs the "arrival trope"[10] of conventional ethnographies to set the circumstances of her first meeting with Patpong sex workers and the terms of her entry into Patpong. Since the scene sets the stage for what follows, it is worth looking at in detail. Here is how Odzer begins her narrative of Patpong:

> At night, the streets of Patpong, a red-light district in Bangkok, Thailand, teemed with Thai men attempting to hustle customers into bars. As I turned the corner onto Patpong 2, one fell into step beside me. My being a female did not discourage him. He noted only the blond hair and blue eyes, which marked me a foreigner and therefore a potential source of revenue.
>
> "Want see Pussy Show? Pussy Smoke Cigarette. Pussy Open Bottle.

> Pussy Ping Pong Ball Show."
> "*Mai ow* (Don't want)," I said without looking at him. I hoped speaking Thai would impress him into not thinking of me, as a tourist. Maybe he'd go away. He didn't. He continued to walk with me and held a plastic card in front of my face. In English, German, and Japanese, it listed the sex shows performed in his bar. In case I didn't want to read, he cited for me aloud: "Pussy Write Letter. Snake Show. Eggplant Show. Banana. You see already?"
> "*Du leeow* (Have seen already)," I lied. I hadn't seen a show yet. I supposed I'd have to sooner or later. I aimed a half smile at the tout; I'd probably have to befriend all these characters too. They were part of my research into Patpong prostitution ... .[11]

Odzer uses the arrival trope to introduce herself in the narrative. The self-portrait Odzer represents in the scene is that of a fieldworker — an embodied creature in the "field." While observing what is going on in Patpong, Odzer finds that the drama she is looking at includes herself since a tout recognizes her as one of the tourists. Odzer describes how the encounter with the tout puts her in a dilemma. On the one hand, she wants to get rid of the tout who follows her and does not let her alone. On the other hand, Odzer realizes that she has to befriend the tout because he is part of the research on Patpong. For Odzer, then, the arrival in Patpong does not correspond with the moment of her self-recognition as anthropologist. Instead what Odzer represents in the scene is the ambiguous subject position in which she is situated at once as subject and object, observer and observed.

Odzer offers the reader her social analysis of Patpong in order to show how her contact with the tout is an aftermath of the contact between Thailand and the outside world. According to Odzer, Patpong is a "tourist strip" situated in downtown Bangkok. Odzer traces the development of

Patpong in the tourist industry back to the Vietnamese War. "Polygamy and prostitution have been privileges of Thai men but during the Vietnam War, Thailand became proficient in serving its women to foreigners."[12] After the Vietnam War, the country shifts its strategies to target foreign tourism. As Odzer says,

> During the year of my study, 1988, men poured into Thailand from all parts of the world. Some ethnic groups had their own areas, so the women were specialized in certain peoples. Those working with the Arabs sections learned to speak Arabic. Others focused on French or Japanese ... . In Bangkok, the two main areas targeted Westerners, Soi Cowboy and Patpong. Thais called Westerners — Americans, Europeans, Australians, Israelis, etc. — farangs.[13]

In her social analysis of Patpong, Odzer complicates the meaning of the "field" and her self-definition as anthropologist. Odzer reveals that the Patpong she identifies as the research field is the same place historically constructed as a tourist resort especially for Western men. Hence, Odzer suggests here that her venture into Patpong is not an entry into an edenic place, uncontaminated by the outside world, and that her contact with Patpong is already part of the history of encounter between Thailand and the Western world.

The Patpong Odzer represents in her narrative is thus a heterosexual space, at once a research field, a tourist destination, and a farang male's paradise. Within this space, Odzer finds her role as an anthropologist overlapping with those as a tourist and a Western female. In entering Patpong, Odzer finds it necessary to negotiate among these multiple positions. Odzer ends the arrival scene by returning to the dialogue between herself and the tout. Dismayed at the tout's persistence, Odzer relents, "Well, why not? I thought. I'd have to do this eventually. Why not

take the first step?"[14] By accepting the tout's invitation, Odzer exploits the role of tourist in order to begin her research on Patpong and to become an anthropologist. Gender can be traced in her decision to accept the tout's invitation. As Odzer continues, "Studying Patpong could also be a way to retaliate against Western men. By becoming an expert on Patpong, I'd be invading their territory. If I could know everything about prostitution on Patpong, I could make it mine too."[15] Odzer brings her personal motive to bear in her study of Patpong. For Odzer, her project on Patpong is not a pure academic interest but has to do with her personal struggle as a Western female.

"The East as Career"[16]

Odzer begins her second chapter with a personal history in which she looks back to explore how she got to the field and why she became an anthropologist. The self-portrait Odzer offers to the reader in her personal account is the image of the anthropologist as a radical young woman. I will explore here Odzer's ethnographic self-representation by focusing on the image of anthropologist as a radical woman and its function in her actual engagement with Patpong women.

Growing up in the sixties, Odzer left home in New York to travel first to Europe and then to Asia. Odzer relates her feeling of alienation from her own culture to her background as a 1960 nonconformist. After her sojourn in the Freak Community in India and her life almost "in ruin" by drugs, Odzer returned home, seeking a "new philosophy and purpose."[17] She enrolled in a graduate school and majored in anthropology. Feeling alienated from her culture, Odzer claims to find home in anthropology where she learns about "foreign lifestyles."[18] As she says, "Learning about the development of my species, from caves to skyscrapers, drove me to do the same for myself — from beach bum to computer whiz. Mastering theories raptured my brains as well as any psychotropic drug I'd taken.

Knowledge was on par with LSD."[19] Here, the "new philosophy" Odzer discovers in anthropology matches the wisdom her sixties background induces her to find in foreign cultures. To study anthropology is thus a way Odzer addresses the state of dislocation and disorientation that come from her experience of being radical young woman in her society.

Odzer's self-representation sets the scene for her presence in and exploration of other worlds. Odzer says that after completing her course work, she felt she "needed a mission" for her return to Asia. "Charged with dedication," she declares, "I decided to do something for the prostitutes in Patpong."[20] Odzer's interest in Patpong prostitutes reflects her personal desire and her rebellion against authority. Odzer tells us a story of how the National Research Council in Thailand, where she applies for permission to study Patpong, rejects her research topic. According to Odzer, the encounter with the authority propels her to investigate the working of power and forges a link between herself and Patpong women. "My concern," she says, "lay with the women of Patpong, whom I felt were unjustly condemned as abomination and disgrace to womanhood. From my studies in preparation for the trip, I knew that Thailand considered these women to be bad human beings. In reality they supported entire families and even communities."[21] Although Odzer is doing her research on Patpong prostitutes, her concern with the others has its source in her personal experience and her construction of prostitution in Patpong as a patriarchal problem is a reflection of her own struggle.

By accepting the tout's invitation, Odzer is introduced to Pong, a Patpong bar girl at the Winner's. Odzer's account of Pong reveals how her ethnographic self-representation plays out in the actual engagement with Patpong women. At a restaurant where Odzer takes Pong out for dinner, Odzer begins to tell Pong her own life story in order to establish a rapport with her subject. As Odzer explains, "I wanted her to trust me so she'd tell me her life story [and] I thought that would ingratiate me as a fellow

renegade."[22] However, as Odzer notes, "Pong did not appear to be listening. Her attention was focused across the room on a table of businessmen."[23] Pong subverts Odzer's desire to enfranchise her subject into the struggle for gender liberation and calls into question the authenticity of the mission Odzer claims to have for Patpong prostitutes.

At the same time, Odzer is unable to trust Pong when Pong tells her about her life story. A series of misfortunes Pong recites in her account makes Odzer suspect that Pong is engaging in a hustle. As Odzer explains, "Newspapers often reported the destitution found in rural Thailand, and Patpong women were adept at using the well-known facts to stir compassion and generosity in foreigners."[24] Here Pong not only undermines the ground of identification between women but also challenges assumptions about the truthfulness and authenticity of informants.[25] Odzer's encounter with Pong makes her wonder how she is able to establish an identity for herself as a researcher interested in gaining reliable information if her subject insists on treating her as tourist and lying to her for money.

Odzer's narrative thus reveals a disparity between what she imagines and what she discovers in the field. In contrast to what she envisions as a long-term close relationship with Pong — her "first informant," Odzer discovers that her relationship with Pong is "expensive" and "untruthful," that she does not really find herself an informant, and that she does not learn much about Patpong.[26] Whatever concern Odzer may have about women in Patpong; on the level of exchange, this becomes less in evidence than deception and money-making. Despite her doubt about her subjects and her project on Patpong, Odzer cannot withdraw from the relationship she has already begun because she realizes that she will lack the "gumption" of starting it again. She needs to pursue her project and finds a "better way" to study Patpong.

After an unsuccessful attempt to find her informant, Odzer meets Tik, an

ex-Patpong bar girl, through Seymour, Tik's husband. Odzer recalls that from the start Tik tells her the Mafia story to scare her away from Patpong. Tik also tells her other stories, including the one about her rich father who happens to be a founder of a go-go bar in Patpong. Odzer does not believe what Tik tells her as she recalls: "It sounded like a hustle to get me hire her."[27] However, after her failure with Pong, she decides that she needs help from Tik and hires Tik as her assistant and translator. Although Odzer claims to have a mission for Patpong prostitutes, she is conscious that the main reason for being here is to get material for her dissertation. Odzer literally pays Tik in order to get information and even imagines that she has made a "good deal" with Tik for the amount of money she spends on the research. In her account about Tik, Odzer comes to admit that her relationship with Patpong women is very much one of mutual appropriation. Odzer realizes that she is exploiting her subjects for her personal interests just as her subjects are exploiting her for their own needs.

To begin her research, Odzer has to establish aground for her contact with Patpong prostitutes. In her personal narrative, Odzer represents herself as a radical woman who has a mission for women in Patpong. However, what Odzer learns from the actual engagement with Patpong women is that the ground on which she makes contact with her subjects is very much a site of mutual negotiation. Odzer has no alternative but to become part of the customer-prostitute relationship. Only when Odzer capitulates to the world of economic exchange and consents to be duped does she find the contact fruitful to her research.

Auto/ethnography[28] of Patpong Prostitutes

Central to Odzer's narrative of Patpong is her account of Patpong prostitutes, the main subjects of study. Odzer constructs her narrative of Patpong prostitutes, mixing her own life story with the life stories of her subjects. The mixing of genres in the narrative is a means whereby Odzer

examines the limits of the participant observation method by portraying how ethnography is an inter-subjective, interactive process.

In her ethnography of Patpong prostitutes, Odzer is interested in the impact of "tourist-oriented prostitution" on the status of the sex workers in Thai society. Odzer explores the gender hierarchy in Thai society and links the social attitude toward prostitution with the inferior status of Thai women. She argues, "Because Thai adhered to the double standard of sexuality where males had the right to sexual freedom but females had to restrict themselves to one male, they considered prostitution an evil that ruined women for life."[29] Gender is not the only single important issue in Odzer's discussion of Thai prostitution in Patpong. According to Odzer, most of the bar girls in Patpong come from Northeast Thailand or Isan. In her social analysis of Isan, Odzer claims that "Isan was geographically related to Lao and the people of Isan called themselves Laos."[30] She continues, "Because Isan was the poorest section of the country, its people were typically uneducated, considered 'unrefined,' and could be found in the most menial jobs in Bangkok."[31] By situating Patpong prostitutes in their historical context, Odzer allows us to see other statuses such as those of class and ethnicity that affect her subjects, most of whom are immigrant workers from Isan.

In an attempt to trace the history of her subjects beyond their immediate work setting, Odzer accompanies a number of Patpong prostitutes to their homes in Isan. Her first trip to Isan is with Hoi, a Patpong bar girl. In her account of Hoi, Odzer focuses on how working in Patpong affects Hoi's status in the community. Odzer describes the scene of Hoi's arrival in her village, "Swiveling around, looking for faces to greet, Hoi seemed to grow from being in her homeland. People on the side of the road waved ... . They exchanged hellos excitedly."[32] Since the villagers give Hoi a warm welcome home, Odzer is surprised when Hoi lets her know that the house where they will stay belong to someone else. As Hoi tells her, "No have home. I

stay here before. Give woman 10 baht a day."[33] The news of Hoi's arrival draws a crowd of villagers who come to the house in order to look at Hoi. Odzer compares these villagers to Hoi: "Next to them, Hoi looked like a princess in clean modern slack and white sweatshirt that said 'Los Angeles' in pink and black letters."[34] Odzer observes that Hoi seems to be out of place but not entirely. At home, Hoi plays a role of dutiful daughter to her father. Hoi is also aware that her neighbors dislike her for working in Patpong and refuses to mention her work when asked by a curious stranger in a village. Through her narrative of Hoi, Odzer stresses a significant role of prostitution in the socio-economic context of Thai society. Working in Patpong allows Hoi to improve the welfare of her family and to enjoy superior status among her neighbors. However, life in Patpong also subjects her to social condemnation of being a "bad woman" in their community.

Odzer embeds in her narrative of Hoi her personal narrative in which she parallels Hoi's journey to Isan with her journey to the same place. In her personal narrative, Odzer tells the reader of the difficulties she experiences in field research. Odzer wonders during the trip to Hoi's house, "what kind of ordeal I'd let myself in for."[35] When she finally arrives in the village, Odzer finds herself in a strange environment. Odzer is unfamiliar with Isan customs and finds it difficult to adjust. Most of the time, Odzer describes how she has to overcome her anger, frustration, and annoyance provoked by the interaction with her subjects. Odzer is shocked by Na, Hoi's sister, who has no respect for her privacy and personal property. She is annoyed that Hoi and her family take her for a tour but also invite the whole village to go with them. Since it is an Isan custom that the richest, the oldest, and the highest in rank pay for everyone, Odzer is frustrated when she is given this honor during the tour. By inserting the story of her travel to Isan, Odzer wants to emphasize that the fieldwork situation is fundamentally confrontational and interactive. Emotions already find a way into the field

and become part of intellectual activity.

Through her narrative, Odzer reveals how an insight about the self and other could emerge from the inter-subjective experience of fieldwork. The encounter with others makes Odzer realize that what she has taken for granted as unquestionable truth is culturally specific. As she says, "In the presence of people who did not say 'Please' and 'May I?' I realized how conditioned I was to using them."[36] Not only could others be useful as a source of our self-knowledge, self-understanding could also deepen our understanding of the others. As Odzer reflects on her travel to Isan, she realizes that her subjects too are travelers and must experience similar difficulties in the process of cross-cultural exchange. Recalling the bathing scene, Odzer tells us, "Thais were exceedingly modest. They never undressed completely, even when alone. Becoming accustomed to nudity was one of the extreme changes the working women of Patpong had to undergo."[37] Here, the experience of cultural displacement makes Odzer feel sympathetic and affiliated with her subjects who are immigrant workers in Patpong. As she says, "The more I came upon these clashes of culture, the more I appreciated the colossal adaptations made by the women of Patpong."[38]

Odzer stresses how her ambiguous position, at once inside and outside, both friend and stranger, allows her to see and hear what is ordinarily withheld from foreigners. Odzer juxtaposes the idea of Thailand as "paradise" for farang men with her subjects' view about tourism as a source of economic opportunity. Odzer recalls what Sao, a bar girl in Pattaya — another tourist resort, tells her: "In Pattaya can find farang husband easy, can make 500 baht one day."[39] Odzer also challenges farang men's attitude toward Thai bar girls as passive victims of poverty. She stresses her subjects' ability to engage, manipulate, and challenge the social identities available to them in a given context. Hoi, for example, confines to her that she is able to fulfill her dream of being a lady and doing nothing all day by living with

Alex, a farang male. Situated in both cultures, Odzer brings her subjects' point of view into a dialogue with the point of view of those in the dominant culture. Specifically, knowledge about Patpong prostitutes Odzer obtains from the field is crucial to her revision of farang males' sexist and racist attitudes towards Thailand and Thai sex workers.

The liminal subject position Odzer occupies in her narrative also provides her with a perspective to understand the contradictions she discovers in her subjects. Odzer recalls that many Patpong prostitutes she encounters express similar attitudes about their own men that they are "no good." Among those subjects Nok is the most articulate about this idea. Odzer recalls what Nok tells her: "Patpong men no good. You stay away from Thai man. I never go out with Thai man. Thai man no good."[40] Nok's statement seems to reinforce farang men's low opinion about Patpong men. However, Odzer discovers that Nok's latest boyfriend is not only a Thai but also a Patpong man. While farang men take the bar girls' opinion about their men as a simple fact, Odzer considers it to be evidence of her subjects' ambivalence as a result of living between cultures. Odzer challenges a farang man, "I know they resent attitudes the men have, but in the end the men and women of Patpong have a lot in common. It's them against farang and farang culture."[41] Odzer maintains that the encounter with foreign culture not only destroys some aspects of tradition but also strengthens other elements of Thai culture. This insight she gains from her straddling between two worlds allows her to expose the self-centeredness and Eurocentrism of farang men.

In her narrative of Patpong prostitutes, Odzer reveals how her experience of transnational border crossing decenters the universal self-knowing anthropological subject and brings about the better understanding of the subjects she is studying. By situating herself in the liminal position, at once inside and outside, both subject and object, Odzer manages to render a complex image of both herself and her subjects.

Romance of Patpong

Embedded within the ethnography of Patpong prostitutes is the autobiographical romance of cross-cultural love. Odzer tells the story of her romance with Jek, a young tout for massage parlors, as a relief from the exploitative relations she has experienced with farang men and Patpong prostitutes. In the romance, Odzer allows us to see not only the possibilities but also the limits of cross-cultural love as a form of human understanding and recognition.

Odzer begins her account of Jek with the scene of their first encounter in Patpong. In the scene, Odzer is puzzled by Jek's question to her, "Do you want a man?"[42] Odzer wonders, "Was he offering himself for sale? Or was he offering to sell me to someone?"[43] Odzer does not know exactly if Jek views her as a customer pursuing sex service or an object of sexual desire for native men. She explains, while farang men thought all Thai women were up for sale, Thai men thought all farang women gave it away free to anyone."[44] Odzer's response to Jek is equally ambiguous. She considers Jek as another "contact" in Patpong but finds herself attracted to Jek's "baby face" and the "glimmer of humor" in his eyes. After leaving Jek, Odzer imagines buying herself "a little cutie for an hour of sex to get an angle from the other side of prostitution, the customer's side."[45] The scene of encounter introduces desire in the narrative. What Odzer reveals through the scene is that the anthropological subject is also a sexual being who is at once seducing and seduced, potent and vulnerable. This ambiguity of sexual identity, as I will show, continues to inform Odzer's relationship with Jek throughout the narrative.

In the narrative, Odzer represents Jek as a forbidden object of desire. Odzer is looking for Jek whenever she walks past Patpong 3 where Jek is working. She loves to talk to Jek and flirts with him; however, she finds Jek "too dangerously good-looking to play around with."[46] Odzer is fully conscious that Jek is one of her informants and that her desire for him

threatens to dissolve the distance she has to maintain between herself and her subjects. In other words, as an anthropologist, Odzer "could love but not desire the 'objects' of [her] attention."[47] Jek is forbidden not simply because he is an informant. Odzer finds out from someone else that Jek already has a wife and a child but never mentions them to her. Odzer thus reminds herself that Jek is one of the typical Thai men she should avoid. "Thai men," says Odzer, "often acted single despite the major and minor wives they already had ... . In the future, I'd have to be wary of Thai men. Including Jek."[48] Here, Odzer associates the encounter with Jek with the danger of transgressing social and racial boundaries in the sexual realm.

However, intimacy with Jek is what Odzer desires. Odzer shows her interest in Jek's poor background and vocation. She finds out that Jek was born in a slum in Bangkok and works in Patpong to support himself and his family. Odzer notes how farang men look down upon Jek because he is a pimp and Patpong man. Odzer, however, distinguishes herself from other foreigners. Unlike them, Odzer maintains that "I never condemned Jek for fleecing tourists and often praised his resourcefulness."[49] She even claims that her intimacy with Jek also changes her perception about Patpong men: "I found myself considering them differently than I did before my time with Jek. Now they were more like people that research subjects. I saw them as male humans rather than foreign Thai beings."[50] Odzer projects her intimacy with Jek as a powerful force that disrupts and subverts all social and racial prejudices she might have about others.

In *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt explores the motives behind what appears to be an innocent loving relationship between a Western man and a native woman in the sentimental travel writing. According to Pratt, sex and slavery are two great themes of this mode of writing which draws upon traditions of survival narrative. Pratt argues that in such colonial love stories, the challenge to colonial hierarchies posed by romance is in fact a re-vision of colonial relations in a different form. Although the context of

Pratt's analysis is colonial encounter, I find Pratt's perceptive reading of the romantic love affairs in travel writing useful to my discussion of the romantic love affair in Odzer's narrative. I will argue that Odzer's romance with Jek should be seen in the context of her fieldwork experience in Patpong and her needs for survival within the alien environment. Thus, embedded in Odzer's narrative of desire is another story about violence where the Western subject seeks to re-inscribe and maintain its hegemony in intimate relations with the Other.

Although Odzer is sexually attracted to Jek from the beginning, there are some other reasons that draw her toward Jek. According to Odzer, her conversation with Jek is a relief from daily experience in the research field where she encounters conmen, prostitutes, farang men, and touts. Odzer describes how she has been wary of deception and exploitation and seeks in Jek a non-threatening relationship. As she says of Jek, "He was the bright spot of Patpong for me, a friendly island in the sea of crocodiles."[51] Here Odzer singles out Jek and views him differently than other informants. She seeks intimacy with Jek for her emotional needs and survival. By imagining having a friend, someone she can trust in Patpong, Odzer thus finds a way to alleviate her anxiety and fear resulting from her experience of displacement in Patpong. There is also a link between Odzer's longing for intimacy with Jek and her need to overcome the guilt of the past. For example, seeing Jek dancing and singing for her, Odzer recalls a "horrible image" of Jek as one of the Patpong go-go boys.[52] The revelation is immediately followed by the sentimental language through which Odzer expresses her empathy with Jek, thereby disengaging herself from arrogant farang customers. However, there is irony about this identification with the Other since in its innocence lies a "horrible image" of racial exploitation Odzer recognizes that she is in part responsible for as a member of Western society.

The significance of Jek in the narrative is further illustrated by Odzer's

motive in using Jek as a source of negotiating various forms of subjectivities: a lover, a researcher, and a farang woman. Odzer considers her affair with Jek as a means to know about the Other, therefore exploiting her desire for Jek for doing the research. As she speaks of Jek, "I wanted to be with him. I hadn't seen him in two days and I desperately missed his face. Well, why not? Why not have a fling? What better way to be part of the Patpong scene?"[53] Jek is made to embody Patpong. By having an affair with Jek, Odzer could imagine herself to be initiated into the other world. The way Odzer represents Jek, linking erotic desire with colonial desire, responds to her need to maintain the status quo even while she has crossed the line between anthropologist and informant. Also, Odzer exploits her relationship with Jek, a Thai and Patpong man, to flaunt her sexuality to farang men. When Dudley mentions to her about Sow, a "doll" he meets in Pattaya, Odzer lets him know about Jek, "My Patpong cutie."[54] Here, the significance of Jek is rooted in Odzer's desire to construct her self-image as a "radical chic" in relations to farang men. Implicit in Odzer's desire for Jek is the idea that racial difference is taken to be a source of difference in sexual practices that liberate a Western female subject from Western patriarchal norms.

Although Odzer finds that there are many advantages in her relationship with Jek, she also points out through her experience with Jek the dangers of being too close to her subjects. Among the dangers Odzer points out is the one derived from having a pimp as a lover. Odzer highlights the conflict between fear and desire she constantly experiences in her relations with Jek. Odzer takes Jek home for sex, worrying all the time that he might steal from her. Odzer also finds it difficult to maintain trust and intimacy with Jek, whose vocation is fleecing farangs. She is suspicious of Jek's motives and does not know if Jek really loves her or is with her only for money. Odzer says, "I remembered Chai and Hoi asked if I gave [Jek] money and felt a flash of worry that maybe I was being used."[55] Odzer's narrative

exposes the irony of her claim to be "part of Patpong scene." Instead of finding herself at home with Jek, Odzer reveals how her relationship with Jek is a source of constant fear and anxiety.

Odzer's multiple personalities make it easy for her to be emotionally involved and confused in her relationship with Jek. On the one hand, Odzer describes how she is dependent on Jek's approval and how she is worried about breaking the Thai taboo about the man-woman relationship. On the other hand, Odzer details her uneasiness about the way Jek treats her as a Thai woman because she is not a real native. Without a firm ground, Odzer discovers that she is at risk of internalizing Jek's ideas and losing the detached perspective necessary for recognizing some outstanding features of the foreign culture. Odzer complains to a farang man how her concern and fear about Jek subsume her every thought and action and diminish her fieldwork effectiveness. "The research," says Odzer, "has taken me too close to destitution and deprivation. Especially my boyfriend. I'm living his poverty and his cultural dilemmas. My stomach is always a knot."[56] Odzer uses hunger as a metaphor to describe her experience of emotional and social deprivation of her own culture as a result of her being too much involved in the foreign culture.

Odzer's story of romance ends with her separation from Jek. As she explains, "Jek has sapped my ego strength to the point of making me oversensitive to personal assaults, I had to end it, and to do that I had to prevent myself from seeing his face and leaving his pitiful stories."[57] Here, Odzer evokes the "pattern of loving and leaving" — the term Pratt uses in her discussion of cross-cultural love stories. However, it is not the context of colonialism but the reality of fieldwork — the exchange between anthropologist and informant, and its consequences — that reminds Odzer of the difficulties of "cultural harmony through romance."[58]

Leaving Patpong

Odzer employs the trope of travel narrative to describe her relocation to Ko Samet or Samet Island, a tourist resort near Bangkok. In Odzer's narrative, the trope operates in two ways: literally and epistemologically. Odzer physically leaves Patpong for Samet. But her leaving also brings about the revival of the "farang self" from which she has been estranged during the field research in Patpong. In this section, I will examine Odzer's representation of the farang self and its role in the ethnographic research.

Odzer knows about Samet from Western women she meets on Kao San Road, a farang residential area where she briefly stays to hide away from Jek. Odzer is interested in Samet because she thinks that the island may be a "better hideout" and a location where she could continue her research. Describing the scene she witnesses after her arrival on Samet, Odzer says,

> The beach was sparsely populated by sunbathers. How refreshing to see that many of them were Western women. Though they seemed mammoth next to the tiny Thai women I was accustomed to, they looked as luscious as ripe tomatoes, their tanned skins glistening with coconut oil. Compared to Thai women's bony angles, the female flesh before me seemed barely able to contain its healthy plum potency ... . Maybe this place —without go-go bars or prostitutes— was the right spot for me after all. Maybe I needed to be around Western women. They look alien to me. Was I that out of touch with myself ?[59]

After her immersion in Patpong, Odzer thus finds the presence of farang women on Samet a welcoming sight. Although Odzer parodies these farang women, calling them "mammoth" in comparison to Thai women; she feels the need to connect with women of her own culture. The sensuous imagery Odzer uses to describe farang bodies suggests her

craving for the familiar world of whiteness she has been alienated from.

The significance of Samet in the restoration of the farang self is manifest in the way Odzer describes the island as a playground for farang vacationers. On Samet, Odzer indulges herself with wind-surfing, massages, videos and exotic food. Odzer considers these things a "farang legacy" because they exist only for farangs. Odzer describe how living on Samet and engaging herself in tourist activities bring her back to her "farang senses": "On Samet, I didn't have to concern myself with poverty and hunger or women's rights. Ko Samet parted me from these inequalities of life. I no longer suffered their injustices because the island reminded me I was on the side that had it all."[60] According to Odzer, Samet safeguards her from all concern about third world suffering, thereby allowing her to put the West at the center of her reflection. Another attraction Odzer discovers as a sign of farang's privileges is Ko Samet boys, whom she places among resources for Farang consumption. One of Ko Samet boys Odzer attracts is Toom. Odzer distinguishes Toom from Jek insisting on seeing Toom as nothing but one of the Ko Samet boys whose service for farangs is seen as natural. Hence, what Odzer finds in her relationship with Toom is a vindication of her right as a farang woman. "Since my research dealt with Western men who paraded their Thai girlfriends as prizes of real way to treat a man — being with Toom afforded me revenge."[61] Odzer makes it clear that she is not emotionally attracted to Toom as she was to Jek, knowing that "[w] hen it came right down to it, I didn't have much in common with these Thai cuties after all."[62] Through her account of Toom, Odzer therefore rewrites the story of cross-cultural love between herself and Jek and reclaims herself as an independent Western woman.

According to Odzer, the journey to Samet brings her not only self-revelation but also revelation about her work. On Samet, Odzer discovers that she has more than enough material and should begin her work of writing her dissertation. In her thesis, Odzer illustrates how the farang self

she restores on Samet informs the self in writing the dissertation. She links the story of Patpong prostitutes with "the world struggle for women's rights, especially the right to promiscuous sex."[63] Odzer challenges the patriarchal idea of prostitution as a male privilege and constructs Patpong women as "the front legs of the elephant"— the pioneers in gender liberation in their society.[64] How Odzer uses Thai prostitution to advance the Western concept of sexual liberation is clear in her simplistic view of prostitution in Thailand. Thai prostitutes are acclaimed for the control of their own sexuality. In her analysis of Patpong women as pioneers of female liberation, Odzer denies the complexity of Thai prostitution. Her reading of Third world women is informed by Western liberal feminism that privileges gender as a dominant category. However, Odzer is aware that Patpong women may not agree with her. "Looking at prostitution as providing the women with independence and power was looking at something Thais didn't see or didn't value."[65] Thus, Odzer says, "[W] hile Patpong prostitution offered benefits to the women, it may have benefited me more than them ..."[66] Odzer comes to acknowledge that her desire to save Patpong prostitutes has more to do with her desire to save herself and her culture.

Odzer also employs the farang self to construct herself the role of anthropologist as a tourist, the image she previously struggles to deny but now wholeheartedly embraces. Recalling her visit to a bar whose patrons are gay foreign men, Odzer tells us:

> Suddenly I loved Adam and Eve — luxurious and comfortable, with so many perfect men dancing in front of me. I felt right at home, even though I was female. Because I was a farang female, these places were open to me. With the history of the women's movement and the history of my rich country behind me, these delights were as much mine as any other tourist's ... .[67]

Odzer represents herself as an anthropologist who studies sex tourism and at the same time participates in it herself. By the end of her narrative, Odzer says that it is not her subjects — Patpong sex workers, but those "oriental" men she has an affair with, that she is thinking of. Odzer concludes her narrative with a story of her affair with a tour guide during a trip in Northern Thailand, claiming "Thailand was a paradise for Western women too."[68] However, the farang self Odzer claims is obviously the male bourgeois consciousness. Back in Patpong where she meets with farang men, Odzer realizes her assertion of the farang self is ignored and challenged by others. Near the end of the book, Odzer returns to Patpong and comes across an old friend of hers. The man tells Odzer when he knows about her research topic: " I'll take you around Patpong. I know all about it."[69] Although Odzer protests that she too knows about Patpong, the man ignores her, saying "I can tell you stories about Patpong you wouldn't believe."[70] Odzer is weary of other farang men she encounters who treat her in a similar way and remind her that sexual freedom is a male privilege. She criticizes farang men for their fantasy and self-absorption and, in so doing, she is unintentionally engaged in a self-critique of the farang self she also shares with farang men.

Odzer tells us not only the story of her departure from Patpong but also the story of her subjects' denial and rejection of her. When Odzer returns from Samet to Patpong, she notes changes in her subjects. Odzer says that Nok no longer treats her as friend when she meets her again. In another visit, Odzer observes that Nok does not want to see her and even considers her a nuisance. "At this meeting," Odzer says, "I became exasperated as well as hurt by Nok's attitude, which I interpreted as a personal rejection. Since she seemed so distressed by my presence, I didn't arrange to see her again."[71] Odzer finds out that she also loses contact with other informants such as Pong and Hoi who have left Patpong. However, what seems to upset her most is her discovery about Jek. The day before she leaves

Thailand, Odzer decides to see Jek at his corner in Patpong. Odzer finds out that Jek not only treats her in a formal way but she also changes his name into "Jeff", does not seem to suffer from poverty and is proud of being a pimp. She recalls what Jek tells her, "It sounded wrong. It disturbed my sense of balance."[72] Odzer realizes that the old image of Jek she has known disappears. If the farang self is predicated on the fixity of the other in transparent space, the reality of the field characterized by fluidity and unpredictability, reminds Odzer of the illusion of the farang self as a powerful, knowing subject.

The encounter with the foreign others forces upon Odzer the need to return to her own culture and to claim the whiteness that allows her to survive the cultural dislocation. The farang self Odzer revives during her journey to Samet is a stronghold she clings to against the drift and confusion she experiences in the contact with the others. However, Odzer also reveals her ambivalence toward the farang self. Through her narrative, Odzer reveals that although the farang self is a need, the self in question is but a fiction, untenable, indefensible, and vulnerable to challenge.

Conclusion

In *Patpong Sisters*, Odzer calls into question the whole tradition of ethnographic search for knowledge about others. By retelling her fieldwork experience in an autobiographical narrative, Odzer foregrounds the self of the ethnographer previously excluded from the traditional ethnography. Throughout her narrative, Odzer shows us how the self is exploited in the ethnographic search for knowledge. From the beginning, Odzer represents herself as a radical woman in order to claim the authority to study Patpong. Then, Odzer disguises herself, playing a role of a Western customer or a Western tourist in order to gain an access to Patpong, one of the major tourist attractions in Thailand. Finally, to gain trust and confidence from her informants, Odzer insists on seeing her relationship with Patpong sex

workers as "sisters." By negotiating these various subject positions for her research on Patpong, Odzer renders a complex image of Patpong as a contact zone and her ambiguous role of an anthropologist as tourist. Knowledge about Patpong women produced in this contact zone is never objective or pure but is always already shaped by the unequal relationship between the researcher and the researched.

The narrative portrays Odzer moving in and out of Patpong, at once identifying with and differentiating from Patpong women as she struggles to deconstruct and reconstruct her Western female identity. Consequently, the sisterhood Odzer claims to share with Patpong sex workers is the notion fraught with conflicts and contradictions. Though sisterhood is formed by shared experience of women, Odzer discovers that in order to do her research on Patpong, she has no alternative but to become part of the customer-prostitute relationship, the one characterized by violence and mutual exploitation. Writing an ethnography about Patpong and Patpong women is a way in which Odzer reclaims her farang self and her authority as an ethnographer. Odzer formulates her thesis on Thai prostitution in Patpong on Samet Island — a Western female utopia separated from the contact zone in Patpong where we witness the conflicts of interests between the ethnographer and her subjects of research. Odzer's book ends with her defense of prostitution, illustrating the imposition of the Western conception of sexual liberation on Thai culture and sexuality. When prostitution is taken as an avenue for the liberation of female sexuality, all other important factors including economic and social exploitation are ignored. By appropriating the meaning of the Third world to the Western context of sexual liberation, Odzer wipes out the complexity of Thai prostitution and manages to claim the global sisterhood with Patpong women.[73]

Footnotes

[1] Farang is the term Thai people use to call Westerners, regardless of any nationality.

[2] Cleo Odzer (1950–2001) is an American anthropologist. She graduated from the New School for Social Research in New York and her book *Patpong Sisters* (1994) is based on her fieldwork in Patpong — a red light district in Bangkok, Thailand. Odzer's book *Patpong Sisters* appears in a number of book reviews, though the book itself has been ignored by scholars, both Thais and foreigners, due to its lack of academic values. In my analysis of *Patpong Sisters*, I read Odzer's book as an autoethnography — a form of self-reflexive narrative combing the author's life with the lives of those women she studies. The use of personal narrative as a locus of anthropological reflections makes Patpong Sisters an interesting account of ethnographic experience as the author narrates those untold stories she is not allowed to include in her dissertation.

[3] Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical inquiry* 15. 2 (1998), 212.

[4] Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Place," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, editors, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), page 33.

[5] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), page 24.

[6] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: New York, 1992), page 4.

[7] Ibid., page 6.

[8] Pratt's notion of transculturation is similar to Michael Fischer's idea of "mirror of bifocality" — that is, "seeing the other against a background of ourselves, and ourselves against a background of others" (199). For full discussion, see Michael Fisher, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory," in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, editors, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[9] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (Routledge: New York, 1992), page 7.

[10] Pratt speaks of the conventional arrival narratives that "[t] hey play the crucial rule

in anchoring that [ethnographic] description in the intense and authority-giving experience of fieldwork" (38). See Mary Louise Pratt, "Fieldwork in Common Places" in James Clifford and George E. Marcus, editors, *Writing Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986)

[11] Cleo Odzer, *Patpong Sisters: An American Woman's View of the Bangkok Sex World* (Arcade: New York, 1994), page 1.

[12] Ibid., page 2.

[13] Ibid., page 2.

[14] Ibid., page 3.

[15] Ibid., page 3.

[16] For a full explanation of the term, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978), pages 1–28.

[17] Odzer, op. cit., page 9.

[18] Ibid., page 1.

[19] Ibid., page 9.

[20] Ibid., page 10.

[21] Ibid., page 10.

[22] Ibid., page 12.

[23] Ibid., page 12.

[24] Ibid., page 12.

[25] Patpong women's stories remind us that "the cultural forms around the world today are not the products of an essential native culture but being the effects of Western imperialism and capitalism, which must be subjected to critique both across and at home in the West" (226). See Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, "Chinese-U.S. Border Crossings: Ethnic, National, and Anthropological," in John C. Howley, editor, *Cross-Addressing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996).

[26] Odzer, op. cit., page 15.

[27] Ibid., page 17.

[28] For a description of the term "auto/ethnography" see Deborah E. Reed-Danahay, editor, "Introduction" in *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[29] Odzer, op. cit., page 18.

[30] Ibid., page 66.
[31] Ibid., page 66.
[32] Ibid., page 18.
[33] Ibid., page 67.
[34] Ibid., page 68.
[35] Ibid., page 67.
[36] Ibid., page 73.
[37] Ibid., page 69.
[38] Ibid., page 73.
[39] Ibid., page 153.
[40] Ibid., page 141.
[41] Ibid., page 220.
[42] Ibid., page 6.
[43] Ibid., page 6.
[44] Ibid., page 6.
[45] Ibid., page 7.
[46] Ibid., page 11.
[47] Routes, 71.
[48] Odzer, op. cit., page 46.
[49] Ibid., page 44.
[50] Ibid., page 142.
[51] Ibid., page 58.
[52] Ibid., page 128.
[53] Ibid., page 110.
[54] Ibid., page 167.
[55] Ibid., page 188.
[56] Ibid., page 212.
[57] Ibid., page 245.
[58] Pratt, Imperial Eyes, page 97.
[59] Odzer, op. cit., pages 250–51.
[60] Ibid., page 253.
[61] Ibid., page 270.

[62] Ibid., page 279.

[63] Ibid., page 255.

[64] Ibid., page 273.

[65] Ibid., page 273.

[66] Ibid., page 273.

[67] Ibid., page 289.

[68] Ibid., page 305.

[69] Ibid., page 297.

[70] Ibid., page 298.

[71] Ibid., page 296.

[72] Ibid., page 304.

[73] In her article, "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty's critique of the category "third world women" exposes the power for discourse or what she aptly calls "discursive colonization" to contain the "material and historical heterogeneity of the lives of women in the third world" by producing a singular monolithic category "third world women." (335) A universal category "third world women" is then applied cross culturally to all third world women regardless of their difference in specific historical context. See Chandra T. Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse." *Boundaries 2* 12. 3 (1884): 333–358.

「ファラン」と呼ばれた民族誌学者 ――クレオ・オザール『パッポン通りの姉妹たち』における民族誌学的アイデンティティの問題

チュティマ・プラガットウティサーン

クレオ・オザール (Cleo Odzer) の『パッポン通りの姉妹たち』(Patpong Sisters) は、タイにおけるフィールドワークの模様と、研究対象であるパッポン通りの風俗従事者たちと著者との関係を自伝的に語った、ハイブリッドな形式の書物である。ジャンルを超越することにより、オザールは民族誌学のディスクールを個人的な語りとして再構築することに成功している。それこそ、著者が民族誌学の領域から排除されていると感じ、読者に伝えたいと望んだ側面であった。批評家たちは、地元民に西洋諸国に対する劣等感を植えつけるために、植民地政策において民族誌学のディスクールが巧みに利用されてきたことを指摘している。オザールは『パッポン通りの姉妹たち』を書くことを通して、そのような民族誌学における書くという行為の伝統そのものを更新し、再解釈することを試みているのである。題名こそ『パッポン通りの姉妹たち』だが、本書における語りは民族誌学者であるオザール自身をパロディ化したものに他ならない。自照的な態度で書かれたこの書物は、民族誌学者として他者についての知識を求めるオザールを中心に展開しながら、伝統的な民族誌学者につきものの自信過剰、知ったかぶり、尊大などといった性質を突き崩してゆく。混乱し、自らの研究対象に圧倒されて疲弊してゆく民族誌学者の像を描き出すことで、オザールは研究する側とされる側の関係性がとても脆いものであり、両者の遭遇や、異文化間の交流の度に、それが危機に瀕していることを示唆するのである。

Keywords:
民族誌学、オートエスノグラフィー、コンタクトゾーン、タイの売春、
第三世界の女性