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What is the cost of caring? What is its rightful place? Can we care at a distance? Who is kin?

In the documentary film *Mother*, Belgian director Kristof Bilsen does not so much answer these questions—but takes the time and the courage to ask them properly. *Mother* is set in both Switzerland and Baan Kamlangchay, a nursing home in Thailand for German-speaking European people with dementia. Shifting between skin-close shots of the practice of caressing, feeding, keeping quiet, humming, gazing, and breathing—to name a few—and the broader ‘landscapes’ of care in the international care market, Bilsen witnesses the transformations of relations that dementia urges and invites for.

Baan Kamlangchay is a private care center owned by Swiss psychotherapist Martin Woodtly, who once sought and found appropriate care for his mother with dementia in Thailand. He founded the center after she died, and it is now home to a small group of German and Swiss men and women with dementia. They were brought here ‘on holiday’ by their family members who were looking for the best possible life for their beloved ones. This echoes a new global trend in elder care: as the global increase in life expectancy necessitates complex care, family members and kin need to rely on costly, professional caregivers to support them in this process. Meanwhile, chronically underfinanced care institutions struggle to find the time, energy, and resources to give the care they perceive as ‘good.’ The outsourcing of eldercare to low-cost countries is one trend to meet these emerging care needs in a globalized world. While the movie contains many voices, one of the most pertinent and direct ones is that of Pomm, a Thai woman who worked as a caregiver in Baan Kamlangchay at the time of filming, and to whom Bilsen “hands over the camera” (Chalfen and Rich 2007, 53) to document her life as it unfolds along multiple practices of care. She is one of the women at the facility that makes it possible for residents of the care home to have full-time company and receive one-on-one care day in and day out. As Pomm, together with Bilsen, reminds: in a capitalist economy, privilege for some often means the consolidation of existing disadvantages for others. In a particular scene, Pomm poignantly reflects:

Every day when I see patients in this condition, I think to myself, “how lucky they are.” They are lucky: They have three caregivers taking care of them when they are in this condition. They’ve got money to pay for all of this assistance. I think to myself, “If one day, I get like this, what will I do? Who will take care of me? Will my kids do it? Will they love me?” I don’t want to live a life that is a burden to other people. It made me realize the big difference between the rich and the poor.

Pomm looks after patients in Baan Kamlangchay who are other people's mothers (such as Elisabeth and Maya). She embraces patients so intimately, as if they were her mother, and mourns for them as a child. This is directly at the cost of 'mothering' her own three children, whom she has to leave with her mother, who faces health issues herself. Caring as a professional to support her family financially, comes at the cost of caring for them as a mother and as a daughter. Thus, the scenes of Baan Kamlangchay, which instinctively evoke limitless love and devotion, are also always drenched in guilt at multiple sides of caregiving: of Pomm for failing her daughterly and motherly duties and of spouses and kin for letting their loved ones go. Additionally, I would like to focus my reflections on Pomm as a professional caregiver.

The movie takes place between the last days of one patient, Elisabeth, and the first days of a new patient, Maya, both of whom are Pomm's responsibility in the care home. Maya is a beautiful and intelligent woman with early onset dementia, who lives with her husband and daughters in a house in Switzerland. Bilsen showcases the family's intimate struggles on what would be best for Maya. One of her daughters talks about this difficult process of balancing their own needs and that of their mother's, to ultimately decide on what would be 'the best':

It was a process spanning several years, when we first talked about it and said "no," and then "ah yes, maybe it's not bad after all." And it was actually Dad (Maya's husband) who said: "Should we be selfish and keep her here because we want to see her? Or should we think for her: Where will she be better off? And that's in Thailand, where she receives all of the care, love, and attention she needs." Ultimately, we have to decide for Mom. . .

Maya has difficulty adjusting to life in Baan Kamlangchay and has lost certain abilities that would allow her to communicate this in words. She can only express her frustrations through behaviors. Martin, the supervisor of the center, and Pomm discuss possible approaches to this issue and conclude that Maya is still young compared to other residents and might feel uncomfortable being surrounded by them. This person-centred perspective, which focuses on her behavior as a meaningful expression rather than a marker of the disease, makes them decide to take Maya out regularly. They do this to cheer her up, and eventually, take her shopping, which appeals to one of her previous modes of being a woman, being Western, and being pretty.

Two reflections come to mind when considering such forms of person-centered care as good practice. Firstly, such patient-centered care requires massive resources. Maya is fortunate to receive the full attention of Pomm, but these kinds of alternative practices would be impossible if she lived in a care home in which one caregiver looks after six or even more patients. Another reflection is that although patient-centered care is 'good,' there should be a shift towards patient-directed care that would include Maya in discussions of her care. Since Maya is not able to express herself in words, she can still exert control over how care is provided through facial expressions and gestures.

Bilsen uses expert film techniques to poignantly convey how senses may prevail when words fail, not only through forgetfulness and loss with dementia but also in moments of careful attendance, in distancing, in wondering, in mourning, in longing, in joy. We hear Maya and her daughter's last steps in the snow together, dampened by the distance of what is yet to come. We sense the loneliness of Pomm at the end of the day, when she finds herself in bed, alone and defective, all the while surrounded by love. And we come skin-close to Pomm's massaging movements on the hands of Elisabeth, who can only urge sounds and gestures—not words—to anchor herself in the world. Elisabeth's touch is subtle but conveys meaningful messages, such as her appreciation for Pomm and her trust in the integrity of

their relationship. Bilsen skillfully captures such significant moments and gives the word to Pomm, who cares through touch. Pomm says, “You have to use your feeling to reach her.”

*Mother* furthermore powerfully evokes the reciprocity of caring. While Pomm and other caregivers in Baan Kamlangchay look after people living with dementia, they become care partners and share their lives. In the film, Pomm expresses how Elisabeth supports her and is the only one with whom she can share her frustrations, “because every time I talk to her, she shows compassion, and then she forgets it, and she won’t tell anyone about it either.” The “ethics of care” perspective (Hankivsky 2004) supports Pomm’s feelings about her relationship with Elisabeth. It reminds us that we are interdependent and can be both caregivers and care-receivers, often at the same time. In Pomm and Elisabeth’s case, Pomm is Elisabeth’s caregiver most of the time, but Elisabeth is also Pomm’s caregiver and gives her emotional support when Pomm is frustrated.

Caregivers and patients in Baan Kamlangchay develop close, intimate relationships. When patients pass away, caregivers mourn. In the film, there is a poignant scene in which Pomm accompanies Elisabeth by her bedside when she goes to bed. When Elisabeth passes away later, Pomm finds Elisabeth’s empty room. Using a method of audiovisual participatory ethnography (Gubrium & Harper 2016; Jarrett & Liu 2018; Yang 2015), Bilsen hands Pomm the camera. Pomm films the room and says, “An empty room. Granny (Elisabeth) is no longer here. It’s not the same.” Bilsen then takes the camera back and films Pomm—she is crying. Not only does this depict the emptiness Elisabeth leaves in space, but also the emptiness of Pomm’s heart; due to Pomm and Elisabeth’s close relationship, it is as if Pomm has lost her own mother. Also, at Elisabeth’s funeral, Pomm is sitting next to Elisabeth’s daughters as if she is one of them. To be a caregiver is extremely stressful, both physically and emotionally, as patients may show challenging behavior towards them due to dementia. Still—and because of that—caregivers often form tight bonds with their patients, so losing them can be a painful experience, similar to that of losing a family member.

*Mother* is an extremely touching film. It is a film for everyone. More significantly, I believe that people who have experience looking after people living with dementia can particularly resonate with this film. It will also be of interest to scholars working in the field of transnational care, labor migration, and kinscapes.

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