Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch (1947–2012)

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Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch died on 4 February 2012. Many people, including the present and past editors of *AJEC*, are mourning the loss of this very special, indeed unique woman. However, she remains in dialogue with us through her numerous publications.

Between 2002 and 2007, Elisabeth was a co-editor of this journal. We called ourselves an Editorial Board, collectively discussing each individual thematic volume, for which one or more of us would then take on the editorship.

In our first volume of that new era, *Shifting Grounds: Experiments in Doing Ethnography* (*AJEC* 11, 2002: 51–72), Elisabeth wrote about ‘The Hardship of Life: Cultural Dimensions of Social Suffering’. The contribution presents findings from a project based on Pierre Bourdieu’s *La misère du monde*. The place of research was Graz in Austria, but the space is grounded in the globalization process and its effects on everyday life: ‘How do people achieve recognition in order to reject the euphemisms glossing over the pressures and injustices produced by the flexible market economy and by neoliberal policies in which

the individual hardly counts anymore' (p. 70). Through fieldwork employing the method of praxeology, Elisabeth sets out to develop an anthropology of suffering (see, e.g. Katschnig-Fasch 2003).

Social suffering, loneliness – not least that of female anthropologists in the scientific community – and gender problems were some of the deep concerns in her research projects. With Karl Kaser, Elisabeth edited the *AJEC* volume on *Gender and Nation in South Eastern Europe* (*AJEC* 14, 2005). In her introduction, she contrasted male writing and hopes of national integration into the internationality of a European neoliberal community with female writing and hopes of overcoming the backwardness of male hero attitudes to gender futures in these countries. Whether right or wrong, the case studies of Southeastern Europe show male and female expectations with regard to national integration into a so-called European-ness as different.

Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch always understood how to integrate, reflect, analyse and interpret people's subjective view of the world in the context of economic and social structures of the state. To strengthen social and cultural anthropology, both by enhancing its specific methodology and by interdisciplinary discourse, was her aim.

Her first contribution to *AJEC* debates was in the year 1998. She was a discussant at the conference on *Reflecting Cultural Practice: The Challenge of Field Work* (*AJEC* 7, No. 1, 1998). As a female critic of three male speakers, she confronted us with questions of differences and similarities in gendered approaches to the Other in fieldwork situations.

Under the theme of *Relations*, the contributions 'Bodies in the field' (Klaus-Peter Koepping), 'Friendship in ethnographic fieldwork' (Henk Driessen) and 'I can describe those I don't like better than those I do' (Christian Giordano) were critiqued by three discussants (Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch, Elizabeth Koepping and Johannes Moser), whose comments were published alongside the essays. All three essays were concerned with an understanding of the Other in the field. Their authors expressed skepticism as to the ethnographic use of emotionally highly charged concepts of love, sexuality and friendship for a deeper and better understanding, seeing them more as a matter of personal experience of the Self than as a way of reflecting cultural experience of the Other through autobiographical texts. It was notable that the two speakers on topics of love and friendship largely omitted any reflections on their own experiences (or lack thereof) in that regard, while Giordano introduced his theme of the 'baddies' as neither friend nor foe in fieldwork situations

by referring to a Weberian perspective, suggesting that ‘the anthropologist should voluntarily remain a *xenos* to the society which studies and as a consequence should constantly try not to be Caesar to understand Caesar’ (39f.).

Elisabeth considered the three contributions under the aspect of ‘projection groups’. As the contributions highlight, the differentiation between male and female perspectives also needs to be examined in terms of contemporary and historical anthropological approaches to understanding the object of field research. ‘Surrender and Catch’, rationality and irrationality, distance and proximity, ethnopoetic writing for the Other and for the Self, and the anthropological vision of ‘to be is being spoken with’ as opposed to a ‘to be is being spoken of’ were themes and problems in the discourses of the 1980s and 1990s in particular. If these discourses were primarily conducted by men, this reflects the exclusion; it also indicates the refusal of women to be included in the male-occupied Ivory Tower.

Elisabeth also gave a voice to the solitudes in the scientific community. Does the dialogic principle – according to which the I and You, We and You encounter one another in a reflective It – belong merely within historical discourses of knowledge? Or is the idea of the dialogic principle an intertemporal necessity, both in the scientific community and in the community of the field?

Elisabeth Katschnig-Fasch had this to say on the context of relations:

[I]t is necessary to rethink our relation to the question [of dialogue as the way towards recognition; IMG], the theme and our interest. Persuasion is the basic element needed to rethink the relation between the self and the loved or unloved, as the case may be. The question now is, what is the problem with these people, what problems are contained in this phenomenon. The inside view must be regarded in relation to the outside view, the own continual attempt to resist or the acknowledgement of the seriousness of the situation. By this is meant that it is not always just the unknown “I” and the own position in the social mirror that are to be discovered, but also ways that offer a chance to surpass mere updates of cultural phenomenon with an attempt at comprehension and the attainment of insights – about those we like, about those we don’t like, and about ourselves. (p. 68)

References

- Katschnig-Fasch, E. (ed.) (2003), *Das ganz alltägliche Elend: Begegnungen im Schatten des Neoliberalismus* (Wien: Löcker).