

**INTRODUCTION**

**VOLUME 28**  

---

**NUMBER 1**





Stefan Beck lecture on Thalassemia in 2007 at Humboldt University, Berlin

# In Memory of Stefan Beck

COSTAS S. CONSTANTINOU, CONSTANTINOS PHELLAS, YIANNIS PAPADAKIS

This special issue of *The Cyprus Review* is dedicated to the memory of Professor Stefan Beck. *The Cyprus Review* is the most suitable scientific environment in which to host such commemorative work. It is a journal that publishes academic work on Cyprus, which Stefan Beck loved so much. This issue is also a review of Stefan's contribution to scholarship in Cyprus and of the people he inspired to take his work further and enhance the medical anthropology and sociology of Cyprus. Stefan was the first scholar who conducted systematic research in medical anthropology in Cyprus in the 1990s, which was a time when tertiary education and scientific research were becoming institutionalized on the island, but very few people knew what medical anthropology pertained to. He then collaborated for the following two decades with a number of social scientists in Cyprus and was an influential force in their academic careers. Though not many people in Cyprus specialise in medical anthropology or sociology, a good number of journal articles, books and research projects have been initiated; indeed, Stefan authored many of them and participated in others. Stefan Beck is deserving of the title 'The Father of Medical Anthropology in Cyprus', as he forged the path in the 1990s by influencing young scientists and continuing his research and publications for two decades. His work was thorough and his writing aspired, in the best tradition of anthropology, to reach the level of detailed, contextual 'thick description'.

Stefan Beck's work was primarily concerned with biomedicine, social and medical anthropology, and science and technology studies. He sought to enter into a two-way dialogue with medical experts and practitioners, and brought along key anthropological insights, something he achieved by dealing with people who were socially and historically situated, and who had their own priorities, needs, interpretations and ways of acting in their engagements with biomedical discourses and practices. In other words, he treated people as social agents, rather than just as passive biological medicalised bodies, and he tried to create a meaningful dialogue between the social actors and the experts involved. This is an approach that could make this process more democratic, interactive and hopefully also effective. He sought to critique the notion that experts have undisputed authority over human subjects, yet without rejecting the role that medicine and expert knowledge has to play. Thus, he also submitted the primary dogma of social sciences, namely social constructivism, to critical scrutiny. At times, moving stories emerged in the course of his research and writings, like the predicament of the parents who tragically kept secret their children's cystic fibrosis, in order to protect them from the knowledge that they were terminally ill and to allow them to enjoy their childhood.

Politics, of course, in its various forms, could not be left outside this domain, and one of Stefan's contributions was to show how politically, historically and culturally-specific such discourses and practices were. In terms of Cyprus's politics, which are obsessively focused on the Cyprus Problem, it comes as no surprise that Stefan would become interested in the bicomunal bone marrow campaigns. The Karaiskakio Institute's campaign to register donors was successful beyond the institute's highest expectations, and this is one of the lesser known stories about Cyprus yet also one of the most positive ones in its recent history. One of the reasons for this success was that bicomunal activists had campaigned energetically to encourage people from both sides to give samples in order to save children across the divide of Cyprus. While the campaign was a great success, in that it mobilised large numbers of people to come forth and that it led Cyprus to acquire possibly the largest donor register in proportion to its population, it did also create some risks. Inevitably, it embroiled the Karaiskakio Foundation in the politics of the Cyprus Problem. Even if this was all done in the name of humanitarian values, and even if one agreed with the particular bicomunal politics that fuelled the campaign (and our own sense is that Stefan himself would agree), this created other kinds of risks and complications that Stefan, as a sign of his academic integrity, was not averse to pointing out. Here one could also further ponder what it meant for Stefan to conduct research within the context of Cyprus's division, considering that he himself had grown up in a Germany that was, at the time, divided.

Stefan Beck's legacy and contribution to scholarship in Cyprus is presented in this special issue. At the beginning, Christophidou-Anastasiadou eloquently presents Stefan's work and his unique contribution to the medical anthropology of Cyprus. Christophidou-Anastasiadou reflects on Stefan's connection to Cyprus and his contribution to scholarship chronologically, starting from the 1990s and the study of cystic fibrosis in Athienou village to his more recent involvement in a thalassaemia study. Stefan did not only contribute to academic research and literature in Cyprus but also to important discussions about public health and bioethics in society. Christophidou-Anastasiadou also places emphasis on Stefan's personal qualities and the strong relationships that he developed in Cyprus. In the following article, Loizou *et al.* present the qualitative findings of a recent study of how patients in Cyprus experienced the thalassaemia disease. The preparation of this qualitative study was made possible with Stefan's help in order to finalise an effective interview guide and have well narrated accounts by research participants. The study showed that thalassaemia patients in Cyprus understood blood transfusion and especially iron-chelation therapy as restrictive experiences. Patients imagined that without thalassaemia they would have been able to regain what they had lost psychosocially as a result of their condition. Amelang explored patients' perceptions of organ donor-recipient relations in Germany, Sweden

and Cyprus by analysing qualitative data. The data derived from the European project, which Stefan participated in and contributed substantially to the design of the study and analysis of results. Amelang explains that Cypriots understood organ donation in a context of producing further relationships, whereas Swedish and German participants denied donor-recipient relationships. This is an interesting finding, which Amelang understands as based upon the different cultural values within these European regions. Niewöhner *et al.* were inspired by Stefan's ideas and came up with a new methodological approach and analysis, namely phenomenography. By phenomenography, the authors refer to 'the ethnographic study of phenopraxis'. Phenopraxis is a term the authors use to understand how people socially interact in certain contexts. Phenomenography thereafter is a term which combines the phenomenological approach and ethnographic methodology. Stefan's writing style also inspired Dikomitis who highlights the importance of ethnographic research in medicine. Drawing from her experience in teaching social sciences to medical students and working on research projects with other scientists who do not deeply understand anthropology, Dikomitis unfolds the challenges she was faced with while trying to fit her writings and publication priorities to medical schools' academic mindset. Dikomitis concludes that ethnography is an essential framework of research and understanding humans and deserves a more respected position in medical schools. The series of articles concludes with the English-language translation of one of Stefan's articles which was previously available in German. Early on, he had become interested in the professional biographies of clinicians, medical researchers, and health policy-makers while doing research on the impact of genetics on social life and on the implementation of epidemiological programmes in Cyprus. The protagonist of this article is the late Dr Minas Hadjiminias who laid the foundation for the thalassaemia prevention programme of the Republic of Cyprus in the 1960s. The paper argues that the 'civic epistemology' of postcolonial Cyprus allowed for the medical profession to establish a paternalistic regime 'for the common good' that was in turn motivated by a strong 'love for the people of Cyprus' on the part of the medical practitioners.

In addition to the articles, this special issue hosts a list and summaries of Stefan Beck's publications, which are relevant to Cyprus. This list was compiled by Gisela Welz and shows Stefan Beck's notable contribution to the scholarship of medicine and health promotion in Cyprus. We would like to thank Stefan for his friendship, academic integrity, guidance and support! His legacy will live on through his writings of the social sciences of health in Cyprus.

