

Czech Association for Social Anthropology
is pleased to Invite you to

217th GELLNER SEMINAR

Thursday 24 April 2025 at 5:30 p.m.
Seminar room B1 Kampus Hybernská
Hybernská 4, 110 00 Prague

Taras Fedirko

University of Glasgow



The Gifts of War: Enmity and Violence in the Making of Ukraine's War Economy

Drones, cans of Red Bull, and hand grenades: beginning with three emblematic war gifts circulating on Ukraine's frontlines, this talk examines how a war economy emerges through acts of valuation and commensuration in the trenches. Drawing on research with Ukrainian combatants and military crowdfunding activists who channel various goods to the frontline, I explore how people in the orbit of war understand the transfers and sacrifices that sustain soldiers' violent labour. Classical anthropology, responding to the upheavals of colonial and world wars, developed models of economic life centred on the order-making powers of exchange. Thus, both Mauss' gift and Malinowski's kula modelled the emergence of social contract through transactional obligations. My Ukrainian material illustrates a similar connection between gifts and political solidarity: donors and recipients in military crowdfunding networks routinely imagine themselves as contributors to an economy of national solidarity that reproduces their threatened polity. Yet, to the extent that this economy is directed toward the enemy's destruction, it reframes exchange, consumption, production, and social reproduction as tools of organised political violence. Thinking with the Ukrainian gifts of war, I argue, helps us understand how enmity, violence, and destruction transform who and what is valuable, and what people owe each other, in moments of conflict and existential threat.

Taras Fedirko is a political and economic anthropologist studying war, media, and oligarchy in Ukraine. He serves as a Lecturer at the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Glasgow and is a Research Associate at LSE IDEAS. After obtaining his PhD from the University of Durham in 2017, he has held postdoctoral positions at Cambridge and St Andrews, and recently was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) in Vienna.