

Book Launch

Humanitarianism from Below?

Universalism and the Politics of Inhumanity

**21 April, 2026
16:00–17:30**

Institute for Social Anthropology
OeAW, meeting room 2, 3rd Floor
Georg-Coch-Platz 2
1010 Wien

Since the late twentieth century, wealthy nations and international organisations have claimed a monopoly on humanitarianism. Even critical views of this regime of global aid and assistance have reinforced the image of a phenomenon shaped by secularised Christian ethics and Euro-American politics of life. At the same time, around the world various humanitarian institutions and practices have flourished that remain outside this realm.

Mostly invisible to Western publics, these forms of humanitarianism have reshaped global landscapes of aid in tangible ways; from protecting Indigenous communities in Canada to African diasporic initiatives in response to the Ebola pandemic; from Islamic economies of giving and Buddhist concepts of the human to crowdfunding aid in Ukraine. Written by leading scholars in the field, *Humanitarianism from Below?* forcefully illustrates that these humanitarian actors do not merely represent grassroots initiatives but have altered humanitarianism at large, involving alternative economies and politics. Drawing on original ethnographic and historical research, *Humanitarianism from Below?* addresses a wide audience of scholars and students in humanitarian and development studies, anthropology and political science. This volume considers humanitarianism's multiple histories and relations of power and offers a profound reassessment of humanitarian pluralism today.

Volume editor Till Mostowlansky will introduce the book, contributing author Taras Fedirko will give insights into wartime humanitarianism in the Ukraine, and author of the afterword Stephan Kloos will offer a book discussion, followed by an open Q&A session.



Till Mostowlansky, Elmira Muratova (Ed.)
Humanitarianism from Below?
Universalism and the Politics of Inhumanity
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UCL Press, 2026
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ORGANIZER

Institute for Social Anthropology (ISA)

REGISTRATION

No registration required.

About the Speakers

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Till Mostowlansky is a research professor of Anthropology at the Geneva Graduate Institute and professor of Anthropology and Science and Technology Studies at the Kyiv School of Economics. Previously, he taught and conducted research at the https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_1228857_smxx.jpg University of Bern, the National University of Singapore and the University of Hong Kong. He has published widely on humanitarianism, infrastructure and Muslim societies, and is the author of *Azan on the Moon: Entangling modernity along Tajikistan's Pamir Highway* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017), as well as a co-editor of *Infrastructure and the Remaking of Asia* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2023).

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Taras Fedirko is a political and economic anthropologist studying how social movements organise to transform states, markets and war economies, with a particular focus on Ukraine. He is a lecturer (assistant professor) at the School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Glasgow, and a senior research fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna. He received a doctorate from Durham University and has held postdoctoral positions at the University of Cambridge and the University of St Andrews. He is a co-editor of *Freedoms of Speech: Anthropological perspectives on language, ethics, and power* (University of Toronto Press, 2025).

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Stephan Kloos is deputy director of the Austrian Academy of Sciences' (ÖAW) Institute for Social Anthropology. His research explores the development and sociocultural, political, economic, and environmental consequences of Asian health industries, with a particular focus on Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan, Mongolian, and Himalayan medicine). Besides publishing the first qualitative and quantitative assessment of the transnational Sowa Rigpa industry in Asia, he has developed the concepts of "pharmaceutical assemblage" and "humanitarianism from below". He is also co-editor of two books, *Healing at the Periphery* (Duke 2022) and *Asian Medical Industries* (Routledge 2022), and his publications can be freely accessed at www.stephankloos.org.