



CENTRUM FÜR ASIEN-WISSENSCHAFTEN UND TRANSKULTURELLE STUDIEN

INSTITUT FÜR ETHNOLOGIE



UNIVERSITÄT  
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SEIT 1386

# Institutskolloquium *Ethnologie*

Dienstag, 28.01.2020

17-19 Uhr, Raum 010.01.05

## Franz Krause

Universität zu Köln

### Navigating a disintegrating delta: on volatility and improvisation in the Canadian Arctic



Franz Krause is Principal Investigator (PI) of the research project "DELTA - Volatile waters and the hydrosocial Anthropocene in major river deltas" at the University of Cologne. Within the project, he conducts research on life in the Canadian Mackenzie Delta.

Travelling through and beyond the Mackenzie Delta in the Canadian Arctic is key to the livelihoods and socialities of the delta's Inuvialuit and Gwich'in inhabitants. Navigating this diverse landscape of water and land – freezing and thawing snow and mud – requires a host of skills ranging from wayfinding, trail making, and gauging water depth to reading trails, spotting animals and mastering the technologies of boats, snowmobiles and other vehicles. These skills develop in a context that has been marked by rapid transformations, including the boom-and-bust economies of the fur trade and hydrocarbon industry; the cultural politics of residential schools and land claim agreements; and the hydrologic implications of a changing climate and melting permafrost. In this presentation, I make two claims: First, I argue that Mackenzie Delta lifeworlds unfold less as a series of changes of otherwise stable structures, but are best seen as a volatile universe, where uncertainties and transformations are primary, and all structures – both social and material – are secondary, and necessarily temporary, phenomena. Second, I argue that inhabiting a volatile delta requires not only changing skills for navigating. It equally requires skills for navigating change. These skills afford flexibility, spontaneity and improvisation. They include non-specialist abilities and subjectivities like the tendency to remain open for seizing unforeseen opportunities, the interest in cultivating many different activities instead of developing a single one to perfection, and the refusal to commit to long-term, regular obligations remain meaningful during – and for managing – current transformations.

All are welcome!

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