Werewolves of the Sea: Deep sociality along the North Pacific Rim

North Pacific mythology and sea mammal hunting practices reveal a mutual exchange between humans and killer whales (*orcinus orca*). This beneficial relationship is reflected in maritime legends that tell of a primordial bond between wolves, orcas, and humans. Imagined as a shape shifter that switches seasonally between wolf and whale form, killer whales play a pivotal role in maritime hunting communities past and present.

Tracing human-orca relationships along the Pacific Rim shows not only a common mythological substrate and an intricate human-animal companionship that developed and co-evolved over hundreds of years, but furthermore sheds light on how humans relate to other sentient and highly intelligent beings outside of their own species. Comparing indigenous knowledge with the understanding that behavioral ecology and evolutionary biology have about orca communities reveal distinctive epistemologies, yet come to surprisingly similar conclusions.

**Tobias Holzlehner** is an academic assistant at the Institute for Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg. He defended his dissertation on informal networks and cross-border trade in the Russian Far East at University of Alaska Fairbanks in 2007. In the course of his last National Science Foundation research project, “Far Eastern Borderlands: Informal Networks and Space at the Margins of the Russian State” (2012-13), and as part of a collaborative research with Prof. Peter Schweitzer, “Moved by the State: Perspectives on Relocation and Resettlement in the Circumpolar North” (2008-2010), he lengthily engaged with sea mammal hunting communities in the Bering Strait region. Currently he is working on his habilitation, “Hunters and traders in a fluid world: A maritime anthropology of the Chukchi coast”.