From tuna to cash. The changing maritime economy of Minicoy (Maliku), Southwest India.

The people of Minicoy (locally called Maliku), the most southern island of the Indian Union Territory of the Lakshadweep, are Muslims, follow matrilineal kinship rules, and speak Mahal, a dialect of Divehi (the national language of the Maldives). From time immemorial they have been sailors, traders and fishermen. From the Indian mainland and from Sri Lanka they imported rice and other food items and exported cowry, coconut products and dried fish, also called Maldive fish. The social division in four status groups and a system of dividing the daily catch was fundamental for the daily interaction. Until the 1960 the local economy was basically cashless; my informants exchanged sweets at a shop for coconuts. Today the Malikun men work as seamen and the local fishermen sell part of their catch for cash to a factory and mobile traders.

The lecture is work in progress. It is based on four weeks of fieldwork and will present data from historical sources and from interviews to illuminate the development of maritime technologies, the changing gender relations, the advent of the Indian State and the economic change from tuna to cash.

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