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THE REVENGE OF THE BANTAMESE:
FACTORS FOR CHANGE IN THE COCOS (KEELING) ISLANDS,
1930-1978.

John G. Hunt

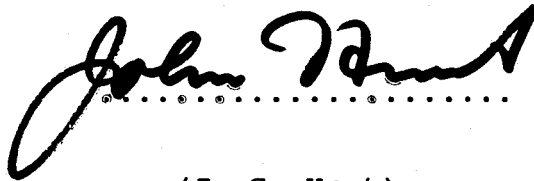


This thesis is presented for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Faculty of Arts, Australian National University.

December 1989

DECLARATION

Except where otherwise indicated,
this thesis is all my own work.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John G. Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J". Below the signature is a horizontal dotted line.

(J. G. Hunt)

19 December 1989

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My wife Sok Luan and my son Hume have been waiting patiently for four years for the end. Here it is.

J G Hunt

Canberra, 1989.

GLOSSARY OF FREQUENTLY-USED COCOS MALAY WORDS
[key references in text in parentheses]

- anak Raja - son of a Raja (p.53).
 atap - roofing of houses. (p.26)
 Bahasa Cocos - the Cocos Malay dialect.
 bangsawan - a form of traditional folk-theatre (p.47).
 beskat - shirt of frilled organdie worn on ceremonial occasions (p.45). English-waistcoat.
 biola - violin (p.46).
 boi - juvenile female servant at Oceania House (p.19).
 English boy (servant).
 bomoh - practiser of magic, man with psychic powers (p.38).
 brekat - sacred or blessed food (p.44).
 dalang - puppeteer (p.46)
 dangsa - Cocos dances of Scottish origin (pp.18, 46).
 doa - spiritual or medical power (p.38).
 dukun - woman with traditional skills in medicine (p.38)
 gamelan - Javanese percussive orchestra (p.46).
 gerakan - innate power/ability to act correctly in particular situations, e.g. to sense and fulfil a person's needs (p.34).
 Hari Lebaran - Muslim festival at end of fasting month [also called Hari Raya] (p.45).
 ilmu - religious knowledge or magical power (p.38).
 imam - leader of prayers in mosque (pp.38-9).
 Imarat - Cocos court usually presided over by head of Clunies-Ross family or (1944-53) by the British Military or Civil Administrator (p.33). Arabic-rulership, position of an Emir.
 jukung - small sailing-boat of Cocos design (p.50).
 juru - assistant headman (p.32).
 kampung - village (p.26).
 kendong - two-ended hand-drum (p.46).
 kepala - headman (p.32).
 Kongsí Pakat - profit-sharing co-operative concept devised by John Clunies-Ross in 1975 (p.169). Chinese kongsí-association. Arabic pakat-agreement.
 kramat - sacredness, generally of a place (p.37).
 mandor - foreman or head of a work-gang (p.40).
 melenggok - Javanese scarf-dance (p.44).
 Nek - honorific for an elderly respected person, conflation of nenek (p.28).
 nenek - grandfather or grandmother, plural for elders.
 nikah - religious component of wedding ceremony, held in mosque (p.45).
 Nuyar - Cocos New Year, 1st January (pp.45-6). English-new year.
 Nyonya - Rose Clunies-Ross, wife of John Sidney (p.20).
 orang Banten - Bantamese, originally contract labourers from West Java, and their descendants (p.11).
 orang Cape - Cape people, the original settlers on Cocos in 1826, and their descendants (pp.4, 6).
 orang Jepun - Japanese (pp.75-6).

- orang pulu - lit. the islands people, the Cocos Malays' name for themselves (pp.22-3).
- orang putih - white people, British (p.36).
- pantun - quatrain with alternate rhymes (p.46).
- pondok - weekend hut, generally on South Island (p.50).
- Ramadan - ninth fasting month of Muslim Lunar Year (p.39)
- sarong - continuous piece of patterned cloth worn around the waist by both men and women (Illustration 8).
- Sedekah Bumi - Cocos Harvest Festival featuring offerings of food to the spirits of the earth (pp.45, 172).
- selamatan - ritual meal (pp.45).
- selong - dance for eight persons, possibly introduced from Singapore (p.46).
- semangat - vital force of the body (p.42,n.84).
- songkok - black caps worn by Muslim men (Illustration 15).
- Taim Perang - World War II, also known as Taim Jepun [Japanese Time] (p.69). English-time.
- Toko - Clunies-Ross Estate Store and Office (p.10). Chinese-trading-store.
- Tuan - master, lord.
- Tuan John - Kampong name of John Cecil Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1949-78. (p.127).
- Tuan Pandai - lit. Skilful, Learned Lord. John George Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1854-71 (p.30).
- Tuan Ross - Kampong name of John Sidney Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1910-44 (pp.18-9).
- Tuan Tinggi - lit. Powerful Lord. Kampong name of George Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1871-1910 (pp.9, 16).
- Tuan Tua - lit. senior, Old Lord [see Tuan Pandai].
- tukang bengkok - circumciser (p.42).
- wayang kulit - shadow theatre (p.46).

GLOSSARY OF ENGLISH WORDS
[key references in text in parentheses]

- Administrator - Government-appointed civil servant resident in Cocos. British Civil Administrators 1946-55 (p.96). Australian Administrators from 1975 (p.166).
- barrel mail - ingenious system of mail exchange from Cocos to passing passenger ships (p.63).
- beri-beri - a vitamin-deficiency disease causing many deaths in Cocos 1880-88 and recurring occasionally in the 1920s and 1930s (p.57-8).
- Black Shirts - a faction within the Home Island Kampong (p.151).
- Cable & Wireless - communications body running the Direction Island international cable and wireless telegraphy system from 1901 [originally called Eastern Extension Telegraph Company] (p.47).
- Committee of 24 - United Nations Decolonisation Committee that sent a Visiting Mission to Cocos in 1974 (pp.156 and p.156,n.2).
- Christmas Island Phosphate Co. - a private company formed in 1897 to work the phosphate deposits of Christmas Island. The Clunies-Ross family had a major shareholding (p.21).
- District Officer - a civil servant in the Malayan or Straits Civil Service residing in a remote location (p.61).
- Estate - abbreviation for Clunies-Ross Estate, the economic structure through which the Clunies-Ross family ruled Cocos from the mid-nineteenth century until 1978 (pp.10, 40-1).
- Islander - C.I.P. Co supply ship, chartered two or three times each year by Estate to bring food and supplies to Home Island and carry copra to Singapore (p.31).
- Military Administrator - senior military officer appointed to govern the Home Island community and run the economy along Clunies-Ross Estate lines, 1944-46 (p.81).
- mosque - Muslim place of community prayer. There were four mosques on Cocos until 1951, and three thereafter (pp.14-5, 127).
- Oceania House - Clunies-Ross home constructed in 1890s on Home Island (p.17).
- Official Representative - comparatively junior officer from Australian Public Service who represented Government on Cocos 1955-75 (p.133).
- Red Shirts - a faction within the Home Island Kampong (pp.163-4).

- rupee - Cocos currency issued by the Estate, first as sheepskin notes, then ivory and finally plastic coins. Originally valued at 5/7 of Dutch rupee, then as equivalent to the Singapore dollar (p.16).
- VKW - West Island radio station, operating in English from 1961-62, and in Cocos Malay also from 1975 (p.165).
- White Shirts - a faction in the Home Island Kampong (p.151).

ABBREVIATIONS

- A - tape recording made by Ade Taiwo and Ibram bin Not, 1985.
AA - Australian Archives .
ABC - Australian Broadcasting Commission.
CO - Colonial Office, London.
CR MSS - Clunies-Ross Manuscripts Collection in Reid
University Library, University of Western Australia.
DOXI - District Officer, Christmas Island.
Hansard SSCFAD - Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and Defence, Hansard Proceedings, 1974-75.
J - tape recording by J.G.Hunt, made in 1985 or 1986.
JMBRAS - Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic
Society.
L - tape recording by R.J.Linford, made in 1977.
M - (i) tapes by Oral History Department, Singapore National
Archives, 1983, recording reminiscences of Roderick
MacLean, copied by Sok Luan Hunt. (ii) taped interview
with Roderick MacLean, made by Sok Luan Hunt, 1988.
OTC - Overseas Telecommunications Commission.
PRO - Public Record Office, London.
S - tapes made at High School, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, by
Weekley bin Liedie and Pauline Bunce, 1982-83.
UN 1974 - United Nations General Assembly: Report of the
Special Committee on the Situation with Regard to
the Implementation of the Declaration on the
Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and
Peoples, 19 November 1974. 'Report on the United
Nations Visiting Mission to the Cocos (Keeling)
Islands'.
UNIAT - Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and
Defence: United Nations Involvement with Australia's
Territories.

Preface

In November 1985, John Cecil Clunies-Ross left the Cocos (Keeling) Islands to reside in Perth, Western Australia, after almost 40 years' residence in the Islands. During most of that time, he had been in control of the economic destiny of the Cocos Malays of Home Island. The Australian media had called him the "King of Cocos", but his political authority over the Islanders had been eroded over several years by the increasing involvement of the Australian Government in Cocos affairs, culminating in the purchase of Clunies-Ross's land and assets in 1978 for \$6.25 million.

There had, however, been weaknesses in the economic and political domination of the Cocos Malay people by the Clunies-Ross family, weaknesses that had existed for many years beforehand. It is important to see the breakdown of Clunies-Ross rule in terms that give due weight to long-term processes. This approach has the added advantage of teaching us about the Cocos Malay community itself.

In terms of approach, this thesis, unlike previous research, does not treat the Clunies-Rosses and Government as the only active players on Cocos. I show that the momentum of events was also determined to a considerable extent by developments within the Home Island community itself. I give due weight to the social dynamics of the Cocos Malay community in bringing about the collapse of Clunies-Ross rule, and point out that, at significant points, notably times of economic hardship, there were three players in the game, although the final resolution in 1978 was between Tuan John and the Australian Government.

My research approach has made this explanation possible. Together with more conventional historical and anthropological materials, I have made use of oral accounts by Cocos Malay elders who lived through the events described in the thesis.

My supervisor, Dr Milner, directed my attention to mainstream Malay culture in the Peninsula and the Archipelago. There I found the roots of Cocos Malay political culture, and came to grips with the sometimes quite significant differences in religious and social practice between Cocos and the wider Malay world of the twentieth century.

Within the conditions set out in a "social contract" between the Cocos people and the Clunies-Ross family in 1837, the family shaped a society that bore a number of likenesses to a traditional nineteenth century Malay state. Their rule provided food, clothing, shelter and protection for all, under a system of total political and economic dominance by the family.

Under George Clunies-Ross (who ruled 1871-1910), social and economic control was attained through isolation of the Cocos Malays, a closed economy, use of indentured labour from the

Netherlands East Indies, intermarriage with the people, and their Europeanization. A wide range of social behaviour showed the imprint of Clunies-Ross influence. But from around 1890, a new and significant element entered the situation. Although disliked and feared by Clunies-Ross, Bantamese (labourers from Sunda and the seaports of Java) began to marry into the permanent Home Island population, and gradually their religious and social practices drew the Cocos Malays back towards traditional ways.

The predisposition of the Cocos Malays to accept these new practices may be traced to the similar cultural "baggage" brought to the Islands by the original settlers, retained by the people, and subsequently reinforced and developed by the Bantamese. That influence weakened the European influence, and led the Home Islanders to respond to hardship and authority in Malay fashion.

Beginning in the 1930s, the Clunies-Ross Estate faced a number of economic and demographic problems that eroded the family's capacity to fulfil their side of the "social contract". In addition, the controls set in place by George Clunies-Ross were eroded under his son's rule.

The isolation of the Cocos people was brought to an end by the Second World War. A crisis in confidence, Tuan Ross's death, and an explosion of social and economic contacts with Allied servicemen followed one another in rapid succession. The social equilibrium of Home Island was disturbed, and dissatisfaction followed the return of the Clunies-Rosses in 1946.

The next 30 years saw a number of increasingly sophisticated challenges to Clunies-Ross rule, followed each time by emigration of the dissident element and a period of social calm and comparative prosperity. The responses of the Cocos Malays were always within the Malay cultural tradition, and the most dynamic of these responses I characterize as "Bantamese".

The final challenge (1973-78) brought all the forms of internal opposition together - encouraged by an overt political challenge by the Australian Government. This time emigration weakened the Estate's capacity to provide for its people as a Raja should. John Clunies-Ross relinquished his power over the Cocos Malays and his obligations, to the Australian Government, which became their new "Raja".

Chapter 1

Cocos: The Setting

Introduction:

The first description of a Cocos Malay cultural ceremony dates from 1836:

After dinner we stayed to see a half superstitious scene acted by the Malay women. They dress a large wooden spoon in garments, carry it to the grave of the dead man, and then at the full of the moon they pretend it becomes inspired, and will dance and jump about. After the proper preparations, the spoon held by two women became convulsed, and danced in good time to the song of the surrounding children and women. It was a most foolish spectacle, but Mr Leisk maintained that many of the Malays believed in its spiritual movement. The dance did not commence until the moon had risen.(1)

Who were these people? What were their ethnic origins? How did they come to settle on a tiny coral atoll 900 kilometres (530 miles) from the nearest land (Christmas Island) and 1000 kilometres (600 miles) from Java Head and Sumatra [Illustration 1] In what ways were their customs altered by life in an isolated group of islands?

The opening chapters of this work answer these questions, and show how the Cocos Malay people had developed, by 1930, into an unusual Malay community. The major thrust of the thesis shows how, between 1930 to 1978, the fabric of Cocos life was changed by a combination of internal and external forces. The outside influences raised questions about the nature of local political authority, and fuelled aspirations to economic and social advancement. Ultimately the conflicts generated over the Home Island community were about the meaning of the question: what is in the best interests of the Cocos Malay people? The question assumes a passive role for the Cocos Malays, a role that they eventually discarded. The story of the struggle to resolve this question is a story without heroes or villains, in which men and women acted for a mixture of motives. It is, in fact, about ordinary human beings in an extraordinary situation who made history in ways that they did not themselves understand.

(1) Charles Darwin: Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of Countries visited during the Voyage of the Beagle, London, 1901 (first pub.1840), p.546. "Mr Leisk" was a member of the small colony established in the Islands in 1827. The ceremony is reminiscent of the Palm-Blossom Dance and the Dancing Fish Trap found among the Malays in late nineteenth century Selangor. W.W.Skeat: Malay Magic, London, 1965 (first pub.1900), pp.466-8. K.M.Endicott: An Analysis of Malay Magic, Singapore, 1985, p.170 links these two dances to the shaman's seance. Pauline Bunce, author of Cocos Malay Culture, Perth, 1987, has suggested to me that the "large wooden spoon" may have been a wooden grave post.

Settlement:

It was the isolation of Cocos that attracted the first permanent settler, Alexander Hare, to bring his entourage to the islands in 1826. Hare was one of the more interesting contemporaries of Sir Stamford Raffles - he was a trader, an adventurer and a striking example of that dead-end of Southeast Asian cross-cultural relations, the white Raja.

Hare was a successful merchant trader when he met Raffles in Malacca in 1808. Hare's fluent Malay and his knowledge of Borneo helped him gain the confidence of Lord Minto and appointment as British Resident in Banjarmasin in 1811 in the wake of the British conquest of Java. In Banjarmasin Hare obtained sovereign rights from the Sultan over 1400 square miles of territory (3625 square kilometres), which he tried to develop with the not-always-willing assistance of Javanese convicts, conscripted labourers, a few free settlers and a number of European adventurers including John Clunies-Ross, a former whaler. The 1814 Treaty of Paris restored most Dutch possessions in the East Indies and led to the collapse of the Minto-Raffles policies. Hare, assisted by Ross, struggled for over four years to retain his Banjarmasin lands, but by the end of 1818 the colony had been abandoned.(2)

In 1819 Hare was banned from residing in Netherlands East Indies territories, and the following year he arrived in Cape Colony (South Africa) with a party of 112 retainers. These people included persons purchased by Hare as slaves in Malacca, or "presented by Borneo Sultans and Rajahs [sic.] after the Slave Trade had been abolished".(3) Ethnically they included Bataks, Bugis, Dyaks, Javanese, Javan-Chinese, a Mozambique negro and a Papuan woman, who intermarried and became the ancestors of the "Cocos Malays". The retainers arrived in Cocos in September 1826 with Alexander Hare to establish the first permanent settlement.(4) [See Illustration 1 for places of origin in the Archipelago]. Hare's original intention was apparently to set his people down in Cocos, free from interference by the outside world, while he pursued compensation from the Dutch authorities and reversal of the ban on living in the Netherlands East Indies. Cocos was ideal for these purposes, being uninhabited, unclaimed by any power, and reasonably close to the Archipelago.

(2) C.A.Gibson-Hill: 'Documents relating to John Clunies-Ross, Alexander Hare and the early history of the Cocos-Keeling Islands'. Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol.XXV, Part 4, June 1953, pp.20-53.

G.Irwin: Nineteenth Century Borneo: A Study in Diplomatic Rivalry. Singapore, 1955, pp.13-49.

(3) The description is Ross's. Gibson-Hill(1953), pp.235-41. John Clunies-Ross; Voyage of the Adventure and Beagle, 1854, pp.54-5, British Library, Additional Manuscripts No.37361.

(4) Alexander Hare's account of the origins of his people is quoted in Gibson-Hill(1953), pp.93-4. John Clunies-Ross gives further details in Voyage(1854), Op.Cit., pp.133-4.

There are 26 islands in the main group, surrounding a lagoon 14 kilometres (9 miles) long and 10 kilometres (6 miles) wide. The largest of the islands are only a few hundred metres wide; some are virtually vegetated sandbanks; all are made up of coral clinker and sand thrown up from the surrounding reef, which is broken only at the northern end of the atoll, where ships can enter the lagoon. All the islands are flat, their highest points being sandhills on the seaward side. North Keeling Island is 24 kilometres (15 miles) to the north, across open sea. [Illustration 2]. The weather is tropical and pleasant. The south-east trade winds blow all the year round, except for the occasional cyclone in the January-April period. Average annual rainfall is about 1800 mm. (71 in.) per annum. The natural vegetation of the main atoll is undifferentiated, the coconut palm dominating a flat landscape, with a few stands of hardwood, cabbage-bush and introduced tropical plants in the settled areas. Large numbers of sea-birds nest on North Keeling Island and smaller numbers may be seen in the main atoll. The total land area of all the islands is only 14 square kilometres (5.5 square miles). The lagoon is home to large numbers of fish, which congregate in "blue holes", deep pools within the lagoon's rich diversity of coral growth.(5)

The arrival of Hare's former employee, John Clunies-Ross, with his own party of colonists in February 1827, led to a struggle for control of the islands. Ross's persistence gradually wore down Hare's health and mental balance, and the latter became increasingly cruel in his treatment of his followers. Desertions to Ross took place, and in March 1831, Hare left Cocos, vowing to return. He never did.(6)

Clunies-Ross was now free to develop the islands as he had intended, as a supply depot for passing ships. This was not successful, and the small community, which had transferred its allegiance to him, was set to work gathering and husking coconuts for the production of oil and copra for sale in Batavia.

Following an unsuccessful revolt against Ross by a group of the Malays, the relationship with the population was put into written form by an agreement dated 22 December 1837 between Ross and twenty heads of families, all former followers of Hare. The agreement bound Ross to provide a house and land for a garden for each family; it fixed rates of pay (1/2 a Java

(5) C.A.Gibson-Hill : 'Notes on the Cocos-Keeling Islands'. Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Vol.XX Part 2, December 1947, pp.140-2, 145-7. Department of Territories: Cocos (Keeling) Islands Annual Report 1985-86, Canberra, 1987, pp.11, 12, 68. P.Bunce: The Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Brisbane, 1988, Chapters 1 and 2.

(6) Almost all the information about the struggle for control comes from Ross, and must be treated with caution. Ross later claimed that Hare died at Bencoolen on 2 November 1834.

rupee for 250 husked nuts per day or "lawful and reasonable services or labour") and rates of deduction for absences from work; and bound the heads and their families to obey "all the lawful commands of the said J.C. Ross", "or to quit these Isles and proceed elsewhere." Free passage off the Islands was to be given to those wishing to terminate their services on Cocos, and outstanding wages were to be paid in metal coin exchanged for Cocos paper money. This remarkable document was of very dubious legal validity, as the islands were subject to no national authority, Cocos being unclaimed by any power at this time. It was in fact a "social contract" between the people and the ruling Clunies-Ross family head, and its essential principles remained in force until 1978.(7)

The expectations of prosperity and security (the Clunies-Ross contribution to the "social contract") were reinforced by the invisible "cultural baggage" brought to the islands by the people. Their understanding of the nature of political power and their relationship to the ruler had been shaped by their origins in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago.

The People:

The descendants of the original Cocos settlers were called "orang Cape" (Cape people); after their last place of residence before arriving on Cocos. A few Javanese seamen joined the community during the middle years of the nineteenth century, and there was some intermarriage between Cocos Malay women and Clunies-Ross men. A number of illegitimate children were borne by Kampong (village) women to Clunies-Ross men or other Europeans. Sometimes the children were acknowledged and sent to Singapore to live; more often they were brought up in the mother's house and took the name of her Malay husband. In the middle of the century, convict labour from Java was brought to the islands, but in 1875 the system was terminated and indentured labour from Java, which had been recruited for some years, replaced it entirely.(8)

Private and official visitors usually focussed upon the Clunies-Ross family and its achievement in providing a higher standard of living for "the natives" than was attained by Malays of the Peninsula and the Archipelago. Little attention was paid to the culture of the Malay inhabitants, although

(7) E.W. Birch: 'Report on the Cocos-Keeling Islands, 15 September 1885,' (see p.8, n.1) includes the 1837 Agreement as an appendix. The expression "social contract" is my own; it does not appear in any documents. However all the actions of the Clunies-Rosses and the Cocos Malays, in good times and bad, show that both parties believed in the validity of the agreement's principles.

(8) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.153, 164-5. Nek Dittie (Haji Dubney bin Bohin): Interviews 1987 and 1988. Nek Bika (Bynie bin Satar) and Nek Renja (Lauder bin Atlas): S7 and subsequent interviews with J.G. Hunt and P. Bunce, 1987 and 1988.

glimpses of their way of life can be seen.(9)

In 1857, Great Britain annexed Cocos by mistake (10); and Queen Victoria made an Indenture in 1886 granting all the islands to George Clunies-Ross and his heirs for ever. The Indenture was subject to: resumption of land by the Crown for public purposes; the laying of cables; and no alienation of lands to anyone outside the Clunies-Ross family without Crown sanction.(11)

The Indenture of 1886 gave legal form to Clunies-Ross rule and gave the family the impression that they needed to deal with, and were responsible to, the Crown alone.(12) Combined with the principles embodied in the 1837 Agreement, the Indenture provided the framework for Clunies-Ross rule, which was strengthened by the introduction of a wide range of economic and social controls, which we will examine in the next chapter.

(9) In fairness, it should be pointed out that the formal instructions given to Government inspectors did not require them to report on the culture of the people. But scientists like Henry Ogg Forbes: A Naturalist's Wanderings in the Eastern Archipelago, London, 1885, pp.11-14 and adventurers like Joshua Slocum: Sailing Alone Around the World, New York, 1984 (first pub.1900), pp.194-203 show a similar lack of curiosity about the culture of the inhabitants.

(10) Nicholas Tarling: 'The Annexation of the Cocos-Keeling Islands' in Historical Studies. Australia and New Zealand, Vol.8, No.32, May 1959 shows that "the Cocos Islands" that should have been annexed were in the Bay of Bengal!

(11) Indenture made 7 July 1886. Printed in Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence: United Nations Involvement with Australia's Territories, Canberra, 1975 pp.163-5. (Hereafter UNIAT)

(12) The Clunies-Rosses were wrong in making this assumption. The authority of the Colonial Office and the Straits Settlements Government was shown by the regular visits of inspection (see p.8, note (1)), the establishment of a school (pp.13-14), and the pressure for reform in the period 1936-41 (pp.60-69). The Government of Straits Settlements was made responsible for Cocos in 1882, and in 1903 the Islands were incorporated with Singapore.

Chapter 2

Taim Clunies-Ross (1871-1929)

Introduction:

The sixty years from 1871 to 1929 saw Clunies-Ross rule reach a level of control and stability that was remarked upon by all official visitors and the Colonial Office, which had responsibility for the Islands.(1) Cocos was a tiny state within the British Empire. It was free from political agitation, economically and socially self-sufficient, and loyal to the Crown. Like Sarawak under the Brookes, the "native" population in Cocos was ruled by a loyal British subject with genuine local authority. It was as though Cocos was a model of what the Empire could have been - prosperous native people ruled by a benevolent British paternalism, grateful for the protection of the Union Jack and satisfied with the local system of economic and political control.

This chapter examines the elements that combined to make Cocos such a stable society during the leadership period of George Clunies-Ross (1871 to 1910) and the first twenty years of the rule of his eldest son, John Sidney Clunies-Ross, known respectively as Tuan Tinggi (Powerful Lord) and Tuan Ross (Lord Ross) in the Kampong. It also introduces the "Bantamese", who entered the permanent Home Island community during this period, and were to change the culture of Home Island and ultimately bring an end to that Clunies-Ross stability.

Taim Tuan Tinggi (1871-1910):

In 1894, Hugh Clifford, of the Malayan Civil Service, visited Cocos for an official inspection. His Report concludes:

Specially have I endeavoured to express my admiration of the extraordinary power of dealing with the natives which Mr Ross displays. He is at once firm, just and kind with the islanders, and the fact that he rules a population of some 600 souls with no sort of force at back, that no serious crime has been committed for years, and that he has succeeded in earning and keeping the regard as well as the respect of his people speaks for itself.(2)

In the body of his report, Clifford described the remarkable impact of Clunies-Ross rule upon the Malays:

(1) From 1885 to 1902, there was an official visit from Singapore practically every year. Reports between 1885 and 1896 are in Colonial Reports-Annual. Reports of Visits to the Cocos-Keeling Islands, 1885-96, hereinafter called GB c8367; subsequent reports were printed in Colonial Reports - Annual. The 1897 visit is c8650, LIX, No.216. 1898 is C9046-25, LXI, No.257. 1899 is c3-9, LIV, No.286. 1901 is Cd788-22, LXIV, No.352. 1902 is Cd788-40, LXIV, No.370. I shall refer to them as GB 1897, GB 1898, etc. from now on.

(2) Clifford: GB c8367, p.71.

The manner in which the Cocos Malays live is wholly unlike that of any other Malays with whom I am acquainted...Among the Cocos Malays...the use of a table, and knives and forks when at meals is as indispensable as it is to the European, and the Bantamese, who still sit on the ground and eat after the native fashion, are regarded with contempt by the Cocos-born islanders...(Among the men) the sarong has been discarded, and a semi-European costume is now adopted, consisting of a bright-coloured shirt and a pair of white duck trousers bound round the waist with a sash. The feet are bare, but the head is covered by a large straw hat similar to those in use among the natives of South America...The costume worn by the women consists of a bodice slightly open at the neck, and a skirt which closely resembles a sarong both in cut and in the manner in which it is fastened round the waist. They wear no head-covering, and their feet are bare...the women wait at table, converse freely with strangers, and are generally more en evidence than is customary in Malay countries...The Cocos-born Malay...is a Mohammedan, and Mr Ross informs me that he always avoids, as far as possible, any interference in their religious matters. Nevertheless, by means of the influence exerted by himself and his family, the marriage laws...have been entirely superseded by the English marriage customs. Polygamy is unknown...Divorces among the Cocos-born are most uncommon, and permitted only when adultery is proved.(3)

This is a remarkable picture of a highly Europeanized Malay community. How was this state of affairs achieved? What methods of influence and control were practised by the Clunies-Ross family? What influence did the Bantamese have on the "Cocos-born", and vice-versa?

Intermarriage:

In 1894 the head of the family was Tuan Tinggi (George Clunies-Ross, 1842-1910). He had succeeded his father, John George, in 1871. Like his father, George had married a Cocos Malay woman, as did five of his brothers.(4) The Clunies-Rosses thus showed, in the clearest possible way, that they were part of the Home Island community, although they set an example for their people by retaining monogamy. Of course, these marriages into the Kampong were a means of control also, as they would strengthen the loyalty of the woman's family to the regime.

The Social Contract:

In line with the 1837 Agreement (p.5), building materials were made available free, for construction of houses on plots of

(3) Ibid., pp.66-7. Birch reported in 1885 that divorces were by mutual consent, with only two since 1855.

(4) Birch: GB c8367, pp.2-3.

land about three acres (1.2 hectares) in area for "Cocos-born" ("orang Cape") and one or two acres (0.4 or 0.8 hectares) for Bantamese. Medicines, salt and firewood were also free. Together with employment for all, this made up the Clunies-Ross contribution to the "social contract"; the "Cocos-born" and the Bantamese contributed their labour and their loyalty. There are clear echoes of the relationship between a Malay Raja and his people in these arrangements. Until about the time of the First World War, the Cocos-born and the Bantamese lived in separate villages on Home Island, while George Clunies-Ross and his family lived in a large house within a walled garden.(5) [Illustration 3].

The Closed Economy:

The Clunies-Rosses had developed a plantation economy in which every element was controlled by the Clunies-Ross Estate (called "Kompeni" by the people).(6) All able-bodied males over the age of 14 were required to work in the plantation or the workshops or on the Clunies-Ross vessels trading with Batavia and Singapore. Women could also work if they wished, usually husking coconuts.

Wages were paid as bills of credit which were drawn on the Store, and a small number of pressed sheepskin coins (valid only on Cocos) were in circulation. The monthly schooner brought food and clothing to the Islands from Batavia.* Fish, coconuts and some domestic fruit and poultry supplemented supplies purchased at the "Toko" (Store), which supplies were subsidized by the Estate. The economy was totally supported by exports of high-quality copra to Singapore and Europe up till 1900, when returns from the phosphate operation on Christmas Island began to come in (see p.19 and p.19,n.49 for further details about copra and pp.21-2 and p 22,n.57 for phosphate in the period to 1930).

* In the early 1900s the schooner was replaced by the twice-a-year visit by the supply ship Islander, which by the 1920s came three times each year.

Every official visitor in the period 1885-1910 was struck by the neatness and cleanness of both villages, and several commented on the European appearance of the houses of the Cocos-born.

The houses of the Cocos men, each standing in its own inclosed garden, partly hidden among luxuriant foliage and surrounded by roses, shoe-flowers, honeysuckle, and other flowering shrubs, look extremely picturesque.(7)

(5) It should be pointed out that there are also elements of the British manor-house and village tenants system in these living arrangements. The description of Cocos in the latter years of last century is drawn from the 11 reports printed in GB c8367, the most useful of which are Birch (1885), O'Connor (1887), Trevenen (1888), Venning (1893) and Clifford (1894).

(6) Presumably in imitation of the Dutch or British East India Company.

(7) Venning: Ibid., p.58.

The Javanese are far more neat than the Malays of the Peninsula, but the Cocos-born far excel their neighbours in Java in this respect...floors are invariably made of plank, which in itself shows that the inhabitants no longer regard the space below as a legitimate receptacle for rubbish. The houses are scrubbed every Saturday, and are scrupulously clean throughout.(8)

The Bantamese:

Soon after taking power, Tuan Tinggi began recruiting indentured labourers for periods of ten (but sometimes three) years, who were called "orang Banten" (Bantamese). Their original homes included Sunda, the Central Java seaports and Madura. Outside labour recruitment ended in 1910, but many of these men and their families made Cocos their permanent home.(9) As a group, they tended to be smaller than the "orang Cape", darker-skinned, self-absorbed, even brooding. They were far more independent and determined than the Cocos-born, who were easy-going, pleasure-loving people, closely bound to the Clunies-Ross family.(10)

The Bantamese influence was strong in the area of language, as a result of intermarriage with the "orang Cape" Cocos Malays. On the Cocos dialect, Hugh Clifford wrote:

...though most of the words in use among the Cocos Islanders are well known to me, a very large number of words in use in the Peninsula are not understood by the Malays inhabiting these islands, whose dialect, though closely analogous to that spoken in Batavia, is poorer apparently and less pure.(11)

Writing about the Cocos Malays in 1896, Arthur Keyser noted:

...this language, mixed with English and Javanese words, was gradually becoming an exclusively local dialect".(11)

Although debt may have forced some of the "orang Bantan" to

(8) Clifford: GB c8367, p.65.

(9) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.153. Bunce: Op.Cit.(1988), pp.49-50. Birch Report, p.7. J.G.Hunt: Home Island Population in 1930 (card index), which is based upon information from Cocos elders, gives places of origin for 107 "orang Banten" family heads as: Bantam 24, Batavia 8, Contract Java 9, Java 8, Madura 10, not known 48. "Orang Banten" is clearly a generic term. The term "Bantamese" was first used in the 1885 Report (p.7), and probably was Tuan Tinggi's term for the contract men.

(10) The official reports have a number of instances of complaints by Bantamese who were dissatisfied with conditions on Cocos. Illustration 4 shows both "Cocos-born" and "Bantamese". Bunce(1988), pp.51-2 and 112 has examples of Bantamese bravery, drawn from Island tradition. Every Report used the term thereafter.

(11) Clifford: Op.Cit., p.67. A.L.Keyser: People and Places, London, 1922, p.205.

remain on Cocos beyond their three-year or ten-year terms of engagement, quite a number found Cocos life sufficiently congenial to remain after expiry of their contract obligations. By 1891, 83 of the 183 Bantamese had been born in the Islands.(12) By 1899, children born on the Islands to Bantamese parents were no longer counted separately from "orang Cape" children, a clear indication that the old distinction was of diminishing significance (13).

The other indicator of acceptance of the Bantamese is the occurrence of intermarriage with the "orang Cape". The first official reference was in 1893, and other intermarriages took place up to 1896, leading George Clunies-Ross to remark: "More Islanders marry with the Bantamese than was formerly the case, but when they do so, the children of the union become Keeling-Cocos Islanders in name, and refuse to acknowledge any relationship with their mother's family - indeed, to allude to it is by them considered an insult." (14) I believe that Ross is here expressing his own dislike of the more independent-minded Bantamese.(15) Cocos men were dominated by their wives, and the intermarriages were between Bantamese women and "orang Cape" men. It therefore seems likely that this was the major route by which Bantamese influences would work their way into Home Island culture. The European influence was gradually eroded by that of the Bantamese.

"Wayang kulit" or "bangsawan" had been brought to Cocos by the Bantamese and were very popular among all sections of the community (description and discussion in Chapter 3).

Circumcision and "selamatan" feasts were part of Cocos life.

They are greatly given to feasting, one man having, shortly before our arrival, given a feast on the occasion of the circumcision of his son, on which he spent all his savings, amounting to f.175.(16)

Criticisms and Isolation:

Recurrent criticisms of George's rule appearing in official reports from 1885 to 1899 included the price of provisions in the Store (which was the only retail outlet in the Islands), restrictions on correspondence with the outside world, the

(12) Egerton: GB c8367, p.47.

(13) GB c8367, GB 1897, GB 1898, GB 1899, *passim*.

(14) Venning: *Op.Cit.*, p.59. Keyser: *Op.Cit.*, p.84. Ross is claiming that children of two or three years of age were rejecting their mothers' families - a most unlikely situation.

(15) The official reports include a number of complaints by Bantamese about wages and rations, but never any complaint by the "Cocos-born". Since Ross was sole employer, effectively judge and jury, and controlled the only means of transport off the Islands, it must have taken courage to complain at all.

(16) Venning: GB c8367, p.61. "f.175" means 175 Cocos rupees/florins/guilders, about 6 months' wages for a skilled worker.

lack of formal education and the very high level of child mortality.

Over this fourteen-year period, Ross stoutly maintained that he only charged actual Batavia purchase cost plus cost of transport to Cocos, and made no profit; on correspondence, Egerton wrote in 1891: "Mr Ross informed me that there was no restriction on correspondence, but I gathered from the people that letter-writing was discouraged, if not prohibited." (17) From Ross's point of view, it was important that the isolation of the Islands' population should continue, in order to maintain his control of the population.

The infant mortality rate was exceptionally high during the whole period: more than 1 death in every 3 live births in the period 1888-1907. (18) Official Reports from 1887 to 1899 show that the "Cocos-born" Malays had a rather higher infant death rate than the Bantamese: 158 "Cocos" infant deaths in 309 live births against 42 Bantamese infant deaths in 128 births. (19)

These very high infant death rates occurred in a population of healthy adults, and have never been satisfactorily explained, although George Clunies-Ross offered a number of reasons, each one wilder than the last - lack of grass on Cocos leads to difficulty in procuring milk (1890); mothers breast-feed their children too long (1893, actually Charles Ross's suggestion); neglect by parents because children are too independent as a result of education (1896); infanticide (1896). (20) One of the effects of the very heavy infant mortality was slow population growth, which enabled the Clunies-Rosses to develop an economy that could provide for all. Judicious recruitment of Bantamese contract-workers met any shortfall in labour. (21) [See further discussion, pp.20-1.]

Education and Religion:

On the matter of formal education, Ross was pushed by the Governor of Straits Settlements into agreeing to send a young

(17) Egerton: Ibid., p.46.

(18) Actual figures: 345.7 deaths per 1000 live births in the period 1888-92; 477.3 in 1893-97; 367.5 in 1898-1902 and 362.6 in 1903-07. T.E Smith: 'The Cocos-Keeling Islands. A Demographic Laboratory.' Population Studies. Vol.14, No.2, Nov.1960. Table 18, p.18. Smith examined all birth and death records.

(19) The visiting inspectors always included tables of births, deaths, arrivals, departures and marriages in their Reports, with separate figures for Cocos-born and Bantamese.

(20) Ridley, Venning, Keyser: GB c8367, pp.40, 49, 84.

(21) Smith(1960), Table 18, p.118. At pp.118-123, Smith analyzes Cocos infant death rates, but fails to arrive at a convincing explanation. R.Brockman: In Search of a "New Heaven, New Earth", 1978 Honours degree thesis, Murdoch University, W.A., pp.50-1, makes the interesting suggestion that expansion of copra production up to 1909 pressured women to work and neglect their babies. The delayed effect of abortives (commonly used at this time) may have been a factor.

Cocos Malay to Singapore for training in the Malay College as a schoolteacher. When he returned to Cocos with the Government inspector in 1891, apparently there was an expectation that the process of Anglicization would now accelerate:

Nearly all the older people speak English, but very few of the younger ones...The Cocos men seemed surprised and disappointed that Rajali (the trainee schoolteacher) had not been taught English in Singapore.(22)

In 1891, the Government Inspector wrote: "Nearly all the older people speak English, but very few of the younger ones, and it is a great pity that this language should die out as it is now doing."(23)

The school commenced with a flourish in 1891, had 46 pupils in 1893, but attendance fell to two in 1899 and four in 1902 before closing soon after. The official reports speak openly of Ross's belief that the (admittedly excellent) trade training provided by the Estate workshops was quite sufficient for his people, and it is clear that his attitude contributed to the collapse of the school.(24) Another contributing factor may have been the lack of English language instruction. The older Cocos-born may have expected the school to continue the process whereby they became more and more like Tuan Tinggi, and were deeply disappointed when this did not prove to be the case.

A regular theme of the reports is the low level of knowledge of, and interest in, Islam. Two inspectors, Trevenen in 1888 and Clifford in 1894, recorded that the Cocos imam (leader of prayers) argued that toddy-drinking was not forbidden in the Koran; many members of their congregations drank toddy in spite of Ross's disapproval.(25) By 1894 there were three different "Cocos-born" religious factions, each with its own imam, and a Bantamese imam as well. George Clunies-Ross admitted to Hugh Clifford "that he was inclined to encourage the existence of the Cocos factions, as he found the opposition each made to the remaining two useful in managing the affairs of the island."(26) There would come a time, many years later, when the existence of religious factions would help in eroding the authority of the Clunies-Ross family.

Until 1894, boys could learn to read the Koran in two evening schools, one in the "Cocos-born" village and one in the Bantamese village. Trevenen was not very impressed by the school run by Suma, the old Cocos imam. There were 17 boys present in a school-age population of over 40 boys and "only

(22) Egerton: Ibid., p.48. Cocos spelling in the population register is "Ragelie".

(23) Egerton: GB c8367, p.48.

(24) Trevenen, Egerton, Venning: Ibid., pp.31, 47-8, 60. Baxendale: GB 1899, p.11. Clayton: GB 1902, p.2.

(25) Trevenen, Clifford: GB c8367, pp.30, 68.

(26) Clifford: Ibid., p.67

two, who had attended some four years, could read, and that not well". There were theological and moral manuscripts at the mosque but few other materials. Suma was paid a fee for his teaching, which suggests a definite interest in education (this was in 1888, three years before Ragelie's secular school was opened) and Trevenen noted that he was intelligent and "acquainted with countries and nations such...as Russia, of which it would hardly have seemed likely he should have heard."(27)

Clifford remarked on the ignorance of Cocos Malays about religious phraseology in 1894; in 1898 Farrer saw no-one at Friday prayers (they were not given time off from work) and was informed by John Sidney Clunies-Ross, George's eldest son, that the people "care as little for religion as for education, being satisfied with one annual attendance at the mosque"; and in 1896 Keyser reported that "two or three" Cocos Malays were converted to Christianity during a visit to England with Tuan Tinggi!(28)

A much more religiously-focussed school was run by a young Bantamese man in 1886-94. He conducted Koran classes for two or three hours each evening for eight years. He built the school himself, received no pay, and taught his pupils "to write and read the Koran." His average attendance in 1893 was 12, which was about half the boys of school age in the Bantamese village. Venning was clearly impressed by him, and referred to his "excellent work."(29)

There is no further reference to religious education until the 1910 Report. The 27 November 1909 cyclone had wrecked the schoolhouse, but twelve village men were conducting Koran classes in their own homes by September 1910. The report goes on to say that the people were lax in religious matters, a rather surprising remark considering that the Kampong men had taken the trouble to continue religious instruction.(30)

It is clear that the "Cocos-born", and certainly the Bantamese, identified themselves as Muslims. I think it is fair to say that the Bantamese youths would in general have had a better religious education than the Cocos youths, at least as long as they lived in a separate village, and that religious orthodoxy would thus be more likely among people of Bantamese origin in their adult years. After Tuan Tinggi's time, the Clunies-Ross family generally did not interfere in religious matters.

(27) Trevenen: GB c8367, p.31.

(28) Clifford, Keyser: Ibid., pp.67, 87. Farrer: GB 1898, p.11.

(29) Venning: Ibid, p.60.

(30) Capt.E B Kiddle, R.N. : Report, 25 September, 1910, para.35. CR MSS 19/131.

The Cocos Economy:

George Clunies-Ross brought copra production to a peak in the last decade of the nineteenth century by a combination of paternal authority over the "orang Cape", the use of indentured Bantamese labour, and control of a closed economy subordinated to the interests of the Clunies-Ross Estate. The expense of running the Islands was kept down by the operation of the Store monopoly, which controlled the quantity and prices of food and clothing; the Ross decision to value the Cocos rupee at 5/7 of the Dutch rupee (guilder), and the use of Cocos-built and Cocos-manned boats to contain costs. Cocos was then a very profitable operation, supported easily by copra.(31)

Social Control;

Tuan Tinggi's public control over the population of Home Island was absolute. He dispensed justice (including corporal punishment) as president of a court of twelve elders from both Cocos-born and Bantamese communities; often, however, disputes were settled by him privately.(32) He had stopped wife-beating when he took-over the islands in 1871, with the result that the women "have completely subdued the menfolk, hardly any of whom can really be said to be the head of his own household."(33) The apathy of the Cocos men, in contrast to the Cocos women, was remarked upon by four different inspectors.(34) "Orang Cape" babies were usually given European names suggested by Tuan Tinggi or another member of

(31) In the period 1885-1910, average copra exports from Cocos per annum were 595 tons (604 tonnes) at a selling price in Batavia (Java) ranging from L 11 to L 28 (Sterling) per ton. The average gross income for the Estate was thus almost L 11,000 per year. Although virtually no figures for Estate expenditure are available for this period, extrapolations from a later period (1920-1929) indicate that the total cost of running the Islands in 1885-1910 (including purchases of fuel and equipment, the payment of commissions and salaries, as well as food, clothing and housing), would have been less than L 5000 per annum, with food, tobacco and clothing costing between L 1500 and L 2000 (these items cost L 1870 for 638 souls in 1901). No export figures were provided for 1896, 1900 and 1903 (no visit). For the years when copra exports were actually recorded, the average was 680 tons (691 tonnes). There is some evidence that selling prices were higher than the Ross figures given to the Government inspectors. Approximately 50% of the costs of running Cocos in the period 1920-1929 were for food, clothing and tobacco. Reports, 1885-1902: Op.Cit. CR MSS 20/144 gives 1920-29 figures.

(32) Keyser: GB c8367, p.86. Leach: GB 1897, p.17. The court was called the Imarat.

(33) Clifford: GB c8367, p.66.

(34) Keyser: Ibid., p.78. Leach: GB 1897, p.15. Baxendale: GB 1899, p.12. Kiddle: 1910 Report, Op.Cit., para.34.

the Clunies-Ross family; the Bantamese stuck to traditional names.(35)

George Clunies-Ross was a man of enormous will-power and striking personality, and made a great impression on all the Government inspectors, the Colonial Office in London, and the people of Home Island. An example of this is seen in his success in resisting the replacement of his sheepskin (or parchment) currency with minted coin. After his own arguments failed to convince London, he persuaded the Cocos headman Koomoon and 54 family heads to sign a letter which was forwarded to the Colonial Secretary, Singapore, protesting against any change in the "parchment money", on the grounds "that if silver or copper coins be used in this place, people will be corrupted and gamble, and all our customs will be upset."(36) I believe that George Clunies-Ross was fearful of erosion of his authority by the introduction of outside currency, and that the Home Islanders would have welcomed the opportunity to trade with passing ships, and to use minted coins to do so. The events during World War II showed that the Cocos Malays had not lost the commercial instinct during the generations of comparative isolation. [See Chapters 5-7]

In 1894 George Clunies-Ross commenced the construction of a large two-storied mansion at the southwest corner of Home Island, and extended the old wall to enclose the house and its large garden. The house was made of Scottish bricks and Christmas Island teakwood, and furnished from London with the very best of furniture and modern plumbing, with guest-rooms, a library and a ballroom, as befitted an ancestral home. "Expense could not have mattered at all," was the comment of the British Military Administrator when he inspected the property in 1944.(37) The imposing house of Tuan reflected his status and his power in a way that even the most recalcitrant Bantamese could understand. It was called "Oceania House".

Even in their recreations, the Home Island people were influenced by the Rosses. At a dance held at Tuan Tinggi's house at the end of the 1896 visit, Arthur Keyser saw "reels and old Scotch figures" danced by Cocos men and women together, dogs wandering about unheeded by the spectators and everyone partaking of whisky as refreshment.(38) After seeing a similar function the following year, Justice Leach named the

(35) The following names were given to "orang Cape" Home Islanders in the period 1880-1910: Angkah (Anchor), Atlas, Daniel, Esther, Gatling, Johndun, Kitchener, Lauder, Raglan, Slocum, Wallace. J.G.Hunt: Card Index...1930, Op.Cit.

(36) GB c8367, p.54. This is a translation of the letter, which was enclosed with George Clunies-Ross's letter of 28 June, 1892 to the Colonial Secretary, Straits Settlements.

(37) Lieut-Col. J.E.B.Jessamine: Report on Cocos, 5 December, 1944, p.12. CO 537/1526, Part 1.

(38) Keyser: GB c8367, pp.78-9. Taking of alcohol on special occasions was acceptable on Home Island until quite recently.

dances as: "malengo or posturing and scarf dance" ("melenggok"); selong or joget "performed by men and women"; and "something like the Sir Roger de Coverley...the only dance in which partners took hands and clasped one another" ("dangsa"). Leach noticed that the dances were "chiefly confined to Cocos-born people, but one or two of the Bantamese bucks joined in." (39)

The great cyclone of 27 November 1909 was the worst to ever hit Cocos. It destroyed almost every house on Home Island except Tuan Tinggi's behind its 8 foot (2.45m.) wall. In a last defiant act of segregation by George Clunies-Ross, two separate villages were reconstructed. He died on 7 July the following year on the Isle of Wight. (40)

Tuan Ross:

George Clunies-Ross left all his Cocos property to his eldest son. John Sidney inherited an economic disaster. Over 90% of the coconut palms in the islands were either uprooted or decapitated, and the huge amount of debris left by the cyclone led to too many palms sprouting, with the consequence that few bore fully. The effects of the cyclone on copra production were still being felt as late as 1941. (41) The export of 370 tons of copra (probably mostly in store when the cyclone struck) in July of 1910 was the last for several years.

At one level, that of descent, Tuan Ross (as he was now known) was one of the Cocos Malay community. He was born on Cocos on 13 November 1868. His mother Inin was from the Kampong and his grandmother S'Pia was, too. (42) And yet he was not a Muslim; in fact Inin was baptized as a Christian in 1885 and S'Pia became a Christian when she married John George Clunies-Ross in 1841. (43) John Sidney had been educated in Scotland from the age of 16 and had helped explore Christmas Island during the period of Clunies-Ross occupation from 1888 to 1899. (44) It was however a matter of notoreity within the Kampong that he was not favoured by his father, even though he

(39) Leach: GB 1897, p.21. See p.46 for more detail.

(40) Kiddle: Op.Cit., para.32. Notice of Probate of George Clunies-Ross's will, The Straits Times, Singapore, 17 October, 1912, p.16.

(41) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.160.

(39) F.Wood-Jones: Corals and Atolls, London, 1912, pp.31 and 34, says that the women were of "high birth" and "Royal Solo blood". Such claims should not be taken seriously.

(42) E.W.Birch: GB c8367, p.12. Inin, Edwin Clunies-Ross's wife and eight Clunies-Ross children were baptized. S'Pia (Sophia) had the Muslim name Dupong and was born in Cape Town. Gibson-Hill(1952), p.84, note 107.

(43) Wood-Jones(1912), p.119. Commander Bell: GB c8367, p.10. John Sidney's name is commemorated on Christmas Island by a road-building inscription dated 1894 and by "Sidney's Dale", a small watercourse apparently discovered by him.

was the eldest son.(44) Among the possible reasons for this was the remarriage of his father in 1895, six years after Inin's death, to Ayesha, a former "boi" (servant) in Oceania House and young enough to be his daughter; another was John Sidney's activities as a womaniser on Home Island. At least two Cocos women bore him children, and it was rumoured that his father forbade him to marry the one who bore him a son, because he had ambitions for him to marry a white woman.(45) In fact, John Sidney did not marry during his father's lifetime.

John Sidney lost no time in asserting his authority. Almost all his relatives, including his stepmother, his uncle Andrew, and his brothers and sisters departed, never to return.(46) He then brought a Scottish woman, Beatrice Atkinson, to the Islands and installed her as his mistress and employed his cousins Edmund and Cosmo as watchdogs over the two largest sections of the Kampong.(47)

Irregular shipping during World War I and declining markets during the War made copra production unprofitable, so Tuan Ross took the opportunity to divert most of his labour force into a complete reconstruction of the Kampong. After the repatriation of all the Bantamese who had chosen not to settle in Cocos permanently, he had the two villages consolidated into a single unit, a task that was completed in 1920.(48)

Only 213 tons (216.4 tonnes) of copra were exported in 1920, when the Singapore price for Cocos copra reached the record level of \$ 329 a ton (L 38/8/6). The sale price dropped to L 25/16/6 the following year, to L 19/4/- in 1922, and stayed around that level during the rest of the nineteen-twenties. The Estate made a profit from copra only in 1920 and 1921. For the rest of the decade, the Estate made losses that averaged L 1739/9/- per annum.(49)

(44) L.H.Clayton to Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 2 August 1902. CO273. J.S.Hughes: Kings of the Cocos, London, 1950. p.136. Nek Bika and Nek Renja to J G Hunt, 18/12/87.

(45) R.Brockman: Captives on Cocos, M.Phil.thesis, Murdoch University, 1981, p.58. P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 16 May 1988.

(46) Ian Clunies-Ross (great-grandson of Andrew), letter to J.G.Hunt, 14 February 1976. Brockman(1981), p.58.

(47) Nek Bika: Letter from P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 4 December 1988. CR MSS Unboxed Item M, Population Registers for 1919 and April 1921.

(48) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.161.

(49) Production 1920-29 was as follows:

1920	213 tons	:	1923	337 tons	:	1927	359 tons
1921	304 tons	:	1924	321 tons	:	1928	380 tons
1922	354 tons	:	1925	284 tons	:	1929	357 tons
			1926	438 tons	:		

An interesting point is the big jump in output in 1926, the year after John Sidney's marriage. Source: T.E.Smith: Confidential Report to Under-Secretary, Singapore, 9 January, 1947, p.2. CO 537/2134. CR MSS 20/144.

When Edmund Clunies-Ross died suddenly in 1924, Cosmo, who had had many clashes with John Sidney, decided to leave with his family.(50) Tuan Ross then employed a succession of Englishmen and Scots to serve as clerks, engineers and plantation managers over the next twenty years. Late in 1925, Tuan Ross returned from England with Rose Nash, a 22-year-old English woman whom he had married in June of that year. He was 56. The people could not recall the last time that a Clunies-Ross man had married a white woman, but they were glad to have a "Nyonya" at last. Nevertheless, a gap had been opened up between Tuan Ross and his people through his marriage outside the Kampong. Rose had a stillborn child on Cocos the following year, on 21 March 1926. It was a boy.(51)

Rose gave birth to her next child, Inin Anne, in England on 17 May 1927. Tuan Ross had hoped for a son. W.T.Lee, his London accountant and lifelong friend, wrote: "I was sorry to have to cable you that a baby girl was born."(52)

Population Trends:

Although a number of Bantamese were repatriated to their place of engagement in the years up to 1912, and occasional migrations to Singapore took place, the population of Home Island steadily increased in the 30-year period 1898-1927. The crude birth rate remained high throughout the period 1898-1927 - in excess of 50 births per 1000 population - and the infant mortality rate and crude death rate continued the downward trend which had begun around the turn of the century.(53)

The crude death rate was in the thirties from 1898 to the beginning of the First World war and down to 15.5 in the five-year period 1923-27. Some possible explanations are: the shift from polished to unpolished "country" rice in the 1920s; a programme of health education by the medical officers

(50) P.Bunce: Letters to J.G.Hunt, 2 October 1988 and 4 December 1988. Mrs F.Fogwell (friend of Cosmo's daughter): Cocos Photo Collection National Library of Australia. Gravestone on Home Island. Mrs J.E.Land: Letter to J.G.Hunt, 29 July 1973. Mrs Land's husband was Captain of the supply-ship Islander from 1922 to 1931.

(51) 'Clunies-Ross Family Tree, and other Trees.' CR MSS 4/40. The Brookes of Sarawak did not marry the local women. Perhaps John Sidney was following their example; perhaps he was belatedly obeying his father's wishes; just possibly he was showing an unfortunate streak of racism that appeared in his 1936 interview (see pp.59-60).

(52) W.T.Lee to J.S.Clunies-Ross, 31 May 1927. CR MSS 11/83.

(53) Smith(1960): Op.Cit., pp.102, 118 and 122. CR MSS 20/144. Infant deaths per 1000 live births fell as follows: 1898-1902 367.5 ; 1903-07 362.6 ; 1908-12 320.3 ; 1913-17 187.8 ; 1918-22 93.1; 1923-27 86.2. The high copra production period up to 1909 corresponded with the high infant mortality and, to a lesser extent, the higher death rate.

stationed at Direction Island (54); and perhaps the more benign style of rule exercised by John Sidney (Tuan Ross), as shown by his construction of a single Kampong, the introduction of a social security scheme and the drop in copra production during his rule. Even allowing for the 1910 cyclone damage, the drop in production to well below 1885-1910 levels suggests either benign neglect or a refusal to drive his people.(55) The lower death-rates and continued high birth-rates meant an increasing population had to be supported by a contracting economy, and this became an increasingly important factor for change during the 1930s and 1940s.

Phosphate Income to 1929:

In 1888 a Scottish scientist Dr (later Sir) John Murray sent a two-man party to visit uninhabited Christmas Island and search for phosphate. The Rosses had been stopping off there since the middle of the century on the way back from Java, catching sea-birds for food and cutting "bastard" teak for boat-building, and had come to regard the place as belonging to them. On 6 June 1888, the British flag had been raised, largely through Murray's efforts, but George Clunies-Ross prevented the Murray party from landing on Christmas Island and sent his own Cocos squatting party to occupy it instead. The settlement lasted for eleven years, by which time George Clunies-Ross had forced Murray to take him into partnership in the very profitable phosphate mine that was eventually established on the Island.(56)

The Christmas Island Phosphate Company Limited (C.I.P.Co.) was established in 1897 with a capital of L 15,000, George Clunies-Ross and his relatives taking almost half the shares and John Murray (who became first Chairman) and his friends and relatives the remainder. Up till the end of 1928, John Sidney's shares, which represented L 9,760 in capital, paid

(54) On "country" rice, see Smith(1960), p.119. Surgeon-Lieutenant J.G.Reynolds, R.N.V.R.: 'General Health Survey of Home Island, August, 1944', p.4, wrote that parboiled (partially-boiled) rice was imported after 1928 in an attempt to prevent beri-beri, CO 537/1526, Part 1. Smith(1960) makes the health education suggestion on p.119. No evidence is given. The Cable Station's doctor normally visited Home Island only once a week by standing arrangement. From around 1910 until 1924, Cosmo Clunies-Ross, Sidney's cousin, was the Home Island "doctor", apparently without qualifications.

(55) Sidney had his ruthless side also. See p.33 (below).

(56) Dr H.B.Guppy: Letter to Dr.J.Murray, 27 March 1889. CO 273/163. H.B.Burstyn: 'Science Pays Off: Sir John Murray and the Christmas Island Phosphate Industry 1886-1914', Social Studies of Science, Vol.5, No.1, Feb 1975, pp.18-9, 25-8. Periodically, new shares were created out of the very high profits of the Company and distributed gratis to the shareholders. By 1928 the Company's share capital was L 360,000, made up of L 10 shares.

out up to 120% per annum, about L 11,700 a year.(57) Almost all this income was paid into bank accounts in the U.K. that supported Uliana, his Cocos Malay mistress and their three children, who resided in England; Beatrice Atkinson, his Scottish mistress; an ever-growing list of pensioners - some of them relatives, some ex-employees; and from 1925, his legitimate family by Rose.(58)

Conclusion:

The foregoing account of Clunies-Ross rule over the Cocos (Keeling) Islands up to 1930 tells us that the Cocos people were a quite unusual Europeanized group of Malays, retaining a sense of Islam but not orthodox in many respects; physically secure within the geographical and social boundaries of the Islands and the rulership of the Clunies-Ross Tuans, but by no measure free. Their loyalty to, (which really means "sense of belonging to") the ruling family had not been seriously tested, because the Estate had been able to provide employment, food, clothing and shelter for everyone, at times after some difficulty.

Some of the controls imposed on the people by Tuan Tinggi were eroded during the first half of his son's rule. The practice of marriage within the Kampong was abandoned; the copra industry began to falter after the 1909 cyclone when labour was diverted to build the new single village; and, generally speaking, Tuan Ross was a more benign ruler than his father. But the "social contract" remained intact, and both the people and the economy remained largely isolated from the outside world.

The most serious challenge to Clunies-Ross hegemony was the silent evolution of Home Island culture towards traditional ways, under the continuing influence of the "orang Banten". It will not do to say that the family had "complete control" and refer to "the absence of an indigenous culture", as one writer has done.(59) The culture of the "orang Cape" had survived the economic domination of the Rosses for three generations. That culture included many pre-Islamic ritual and magical elements brought to the Islands by the "orang Cape" from their diverse homelands. These elements were in turn modified and enriched by the Bantamese, the once-despised

(57) At the end of 1928, the C.I.P.Co. Directors created five new shares out of undistributed profits for each one held by the shareholders, thereby converting John Sidney's shareholding from 976 to 5856 shares. A 10% return under the new scale was equivalent in cash terms to 60% under the old scale.

Burstyn: Op.Cit., pp.24-7, 34, note 74. List of C.I.P.Co.Ltd Shareholders, 17 November, 1928 is in Department of External Territories File A112/6/5. CR MSS 11/83, 12/92, 13/98.

(58) A typical quarterly sum was L 954/10/8 paid out for expenses against the "Brathay House" Account for the quarter ending 29 February 1929. CR MSS 4/40, 11/83, 12/92, 13/98.

(59) R.Brockman(1978): Op.Cit., pp.i and x.

temporary residents, and were later to be turned against the Clunies-Rosses.

The "orang pulu", the product of this merging of the two groups, were thus drawn back to Malay cultural practice after the long process of Europeanization in the period from 1837 (the "social contract") to the mid-1890s. At that latter time, Cocos-Bantamese intermarriage began, and the Bantamese influence began to work its way into the public and private culture of Home Island. This was a major turning-point for Cocos culture. Tuan Tinggi was right to fear the influence of the Bantamese, which eroded the Europeanization that was one of his means of social control. The Bantamese had seen a wider world than the "orang Cape", and brought more orthodox Islamic practices into the Kampong, first through their mosque and later through the public culture of Home Island. They did this without displacing the many pre-Islamic customs that had become part of the Cocos way of life. Indeed, they brought some non-Islamic customs of their own to the Islands. The other important turning-point was the return from Singapore of Ragelie, the best and brightest of the younger generation, not as a speaker and teacher of English, but as a teacher of Malay! Many of the "orang Cape" people, possibly influenced by Tuan Tinggi, showed their disappointment by not supporting the school, but several of the key figures on Home Island in the years 1947-1958 were educated in the Malay school. The school was no hotbed of rebellion, but Malay ways of thinking would have been encouraged there. It is one of the fundamental propositions of this thesis that the Cocos people responded to and eventually challenged Clunies-Ross rule in the period 1930 to 1978 in ways that seem characteristically Malay. This was "the revenge of the Bantamese", and, to a lesser extent, Ragelie the schoolmaster.

Chapter 3

Taim Tuan Ross / Taim Orang Pulu: Home Island in 1930.

Introduction:

In 1930, Home Island was an apparently prosperous community of just on 1000 persons, united in allegiance to the head of the ruling family, John Sidney Clunies-Ross. The "orang Banten" had been accepted into the mainstream of Cocos Malay life and some of their cultural practices (especially in religion) had been accepted into the community.

The "orang pulu", as all the inhabitants were now known, were deeply identified with the islands and the way of life therein. They had security and the assurance that the necessities of life would be provided to them by Tuan Ross. In order to get closer to the culture and life of the people, we must draw upon Cocos Malay memories of this time of stability and comparative prosperity, as well as written records.

This chapter describes the society and culture of the Home Island community synchronically, as it was in 1930, when the society had reached a point of social and economic stability. It traces the influence of Bantamese customs in the Home island Kampong, and identifies the Bantamese who had moved into positions of influence. Tuan Ross still stood unchallenged at the apex of Cocos society, performing many of the functions of a traditional Malay community leader.

Perspectives:

During the rulership of Tuan Ross over Cocos, there were several descriptions of Home Island life. One of the most striking was by George Webb, the visiting District Officer of Christmas Island, in 1937:

I had the good fortune to travel to Cocos with Mr Ross on his return to the islands after a year spent in Europe, and to see the reception accorded him by people on his arrival. Crowds of both grown-ups and children, dressed in their brightest, were assembled on the jetty to welcome him, and from the jetty to his house was like a triumphal procession. The children pressed around him tugging at his clothes and the old ladies came forward and hugged and kissed him, saying: 'How pleased we are you have come back. You have been away a long time and we have missed you. You are not going away for a long time, are you?' All the new babies were shown to him, and he had a joke and a smile for everyone. There is no doubt that he is

regarded as the father of his people.(1)

The accounts published in the inter-War period (always by Europeans) were unanimous in praising the regime of the Clunies-Ross family for the high standard of living, the cleanliness of the Kampong and the happiness of the community.(2)

Interviewed by the British press, Rose Clunies-Ross, wife of Tuan Ross, depicted a benevolent autocracy of enlightened Europeans protecting their childlike followers from the evils of the outside world:

It costs my husband about L 10,000 a year to run the people and the island. They all depend on him. Crime is practically non-existent. We have our own laws. ONE OF THEM IS THAT ANYONE WHO COMMITS A CRIME SHALL BE BANISHED TO CIVILIZATION.(3) [original italics]

Two much more searching examinations of life on Home Island took place in 1905-07 and 1941. Both were by Malay-speaking doctors working in the Direction Island Cable Station - Frederic Wood-Jones and Carl Gibson-Hill. Wood-Jones was close to Tuan Tinggi, and in 1910 gave expression to his romantic love of Cocos by marrying the Tuan's daughter. In 1912 he wrote a scientific book which contains a sympathetic description of Home Island society and the Clunies-Ross family. Gibson-Hill saw the community through a scholar's eyes. His writings are particularly revealing about the origins and health of the community. He spoke Malay and was able to get closer to the people than any previous outsider, with the possible exception of Wood-Jones. A comparison between their descriptions of the community in 1905-07 and in 1941 is quite revealing.(4)

(1) G.W.Webb: 'Report on the Cocos Islands', 8 December 1937, p.15. CO 273/632, Public Record Office, London. Webb visited Cocos to investigate allegations of slavery and mistreatment. Although he stayed only 30 hours, his Report provides considerable detail about the physical conditions of life in the Kampong. Webb was a Hokkien-Chinese speaker who had probably picked up some Malay during his service in Malaya and Christmas Island. For further details of his visit, see pp.61-2.

(2) Examples are Alain Gerbault: In Quest of the Sun, London, 1955. (French original, Sur la Route de Retour) and Captain and Mrs Irving Johnson: Westward Bound in the Schooner Yankee, New York, 1936.

(3) "'Queen" of the Cocos Isles comes Home': Sunday Express, London, May 17, 1936.

(4) F.Wood-Jones: Corals and Atolls, 1912 and Unscientific Essays, 1924, (both London). Almost all Gibson-Hill's writings were published in the Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in the post-war period. See p.71, note 2 for a short biographical note on Gibson-Hill.

However, these source-materials are not enough to give a complete picture of Cocos Malay life in 1930. Oral accounts by Cocos Malay elders, questioned on points of detail, and examination of photographs taken by Wood-Jones, Gibson-Hill and others provide sometimes very detailed information about community thinking and customs.

The Kampong;

Clunies-Ross social control was manifested in the layout of the Kampong. The 190 houses ^{were} identical in appearance, and were laid out in straight "streets" on a grid system. Each street was named, the three main ones being called Sauchihall Street, Leith Walk and Piccadilly, names that probably reflect Tuan Ross's sense of humour. [Illustration 5]

The houses were 20 feet (6.15m.) wide and 26 feet (8m.) long, standing in gardens about 115 feet (35m.) long and 30 feet (9.20m.) wide, bounded by wooden fences. A kitchen/store-room and a bath house stood behind each home. All buildings were made from local materials. The roofs were made of thick "atap" (coconut thatch). Every house was numbered, with the owner's name written above the front door. The sign was sometimes decorated to the owner's taste with a picture of a bird, a star or a crescent moon. [See Illustrations 6,7]

Four mosques stood in pairs at the eastern extremity of Sauchihall Street and Piccadilly. They were circular, identical in size (about 25 feet or 7.65m. in diameter) and made from the same material as the houses. The Kampong had no piped water, no sewerage system and no electricity. Untreated water was drawn from some 100 brick-lined wells fed by a lens of rainwater that had collected in the Island's coralline interior. The ocean beach served as the communal toilet and coconut-oil lamps provided light after darkness fell.(5)

The April 1 1931 Census of Malaya included Cocos and gave the Malay population as Males 551, Females 531, Total 1082.(6) Each house was occupied by five or six people on average. Families tended to be large, with nine or ten children being common. Cocos women generally married young, before the age of 18, and were grandmothers before their last children were born. Their husbands were often the same age as, or slightly younger than, their wives.(7)

(5) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.162-4, 175-9. Photographs by Charles Morritt in 1941 and Alan de Groot in 1945, Home Island Museum. Reynolds: Op.Cit. Interviews with Nek Dittie (Haji Dubney bin Bohin and Nek Ketie (Yapat bin Carey), December 1985 and with Nek Bika (Bynie bin Satar), October 1988.

(6) Smith(1960), p.102, Table 1, Note (c).

(7) Ibid., pp.107-8. Hunt: Card Index, Op.Cit.

In the five-year period 1928-1932 saw the continuation of the post-World War I trend towards lower infant mortality. In the period 1918-1947, life expectancy at birth was 50 years for males and 47 years for females, with a heavy incidence of mortality at ages one to four. Cocos in 1930 was, by world standards, a very healthy community.(8)

Wood-Jones distinguished between "orang Cape" and "orang Banten" in his writings about Cocos. In his time (1905-07), intermarriage between the two groups was still not common, and he could write about the "orang Cape" in these terms:

...after 70 years of intermarrying the resulting race may be said to depart from the typical Malay stock in two directions: first, and most conspicuous, is the negro type; and second, the type that possesses Chinese characteristics.(9)

In the period between 1907 and 1930, the process of intermarriage between "orang Cape" and "orang Banten", and the consolidation of the population into one Kampong had led to the self-identification of all the people as "orang pulu" (people of the islands), although everyone was well aware of his or her descent and ethnicity. By 1930 there were only a few old men in the Kampong who had not been born in Cocos, Bantamese who had made Cocos their home.

In 1941 Gibson-Hill made no distinction between "orang Cape" and "orang Banten":

The greater part of the stock from which the islanders were descended came from Java. As might be expected the physical appearance of the majority fell within the category loosely known as Malay, with the wide range of modifications common to a sea port. They were mostly of medium height, slightly built, with light brown skins and straight black hair. To this it must be added that some were definitely thick-set, a few were tall, and the head-shape and features varied considerably. Two young girls clearly had the full, round face and honey brown skins of the Balinese. The most obvious departures from the mean, each represented by very few families, were in the direction of the

(8) The annual number of births averaged 58.4, with a crude birth rate of 55.6 per annum. Infant deaths per 1000 live births were 82.2. The death rate for the period 1928-1932 was 14.8 per 1000. Smith(1960), p.102, Table 1, pp.118-9, 122, 125-6. The 1930 infant mortality rate in the U.S.A. was 64.6; for the U.S.S.R. in 1950 the rate was 81; for the Philippines in 1952 it was 102. Collier's Encyclopaedia, 1965, Vol.22, pp.687, 595; Vol.18, p.686. The U.S.A. death rate in 1930 was 11 per 1000; in the U.S.S.R. it was 20.3 in 1926; in the Philippines in 1926 it was 18.5. Collier's, Vol.22, pp.681 and 595, Vol.18, p.686.

(9) Wood-Jones (1912): Op.Cit. p21.

Zulu, Papuan, Chinese and European stocks.(10)

Clothing showed a continued European influence. Everyday work clothing for men was shorts or sarong, with singlet or shirt. Sun helmets from the Cable Station or Boer War army-issue helmets were worn when sailing in the lagoon. On formal occasions the men wore the traditional Malay costume of sarong over long trousers with a frilled coloured shirt over a singlet, and a black "songkok" or red-and white velvet skull-cap (this last was worn by students at the secular school, 1891-1902). The older Javanese still wore a folded headcloth. Women wore a sarong with singlet or shirt, or a sarong folded above the breasts. Mothers nursing babies wore only a sarong fastened at the waist. Young women working at Oceania House wore European-style dresses. Children went naked until four or five years of age, when the girls were dressed in sarongs and the boys in shirts. Everyone went barefoot except the Clunies-Rosses, their European staff and the Malay clerk employed at the store - Ragelie.(11) [See Illustrations 8-12] The reader is invited to compare this description of Cocos Malay clothing with Clifford's in 1894 (see p.9 above).

Malay teknonymy had been used on Cocos from the time of arrival of the 112 members of Hare's party from the Cape in September 1826.(12) At parenthood, one's given name was dropped, and that of the eldest child was adopted. For example, Daheron and Stala became "Pak Gres" and "Mak Gres" (Father and Mother of Gres) when their first child Grace (Gres) was born. When they became grandparents for the first time, they both became "Nek Gres"(Grandfather/Grandmother of/through Gres). As Wood-Jones commented, the system "possesses the advantage of conferring a desirable dignity on parenthood." Teknonymy is of course quite widespread in the Malay/Javanese world.(13)

The given names of the adult males in the Kampong in 1930 show a preponderance of Malay and Javanese names such as Aberin, Bohin, Jalil, Musta, Saheron and Zandleh, with a significant proportion of names of European origin such as Anggas, Boyd, Johndun, Mukden, Samson and Winston. The 69%-31% split in favour of Malay/Javanese names appears to reflect a "return to roots" as a result of the merging of the "orang Cape" and "orang Banten."(14)

(10) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.164.

(11) Ibid., p.174. Nek Dittie and Nek Ewat.

(12) Permits to Remain in Cape Colony, 1820-1838, Vol.3. Entry for 22 June 1820, Departure Note 24 September 1825. CO/6055.

(13) Wood-Jones, p.48. C.Geertz: The Interpretation of Cultures, London, 1973, pp.375-9.

(14) Hunt: Card Index. The actual count was: Malay and Javanese names, 178; European names, 56. This accounts for most of the males born in Cocos c.1860-1916, men who were fathers in 1930 and resident in Home Island.

The Language:

"Bahasa Cocos" (the Cocos language) was a dialect of Malay perfectly suited to the limited requirements of Island life, reflecting the historical circumstances that made the "orang pulu" such an unusual community. It showed strong affinities with Baba Malay (spoken by locally-born Chinese in Malaya, particularly Malacca) and Malay spoken in nineteenth-century Batavia. Other influences included Javanese, Sundanese, Peninsular Malay and English.(15)

It was purely a spoken language, marked by a strong rising and falling rhythm and many local abbreviations unintelligible to outsiders.(16) The glottal stop was very frequent, while pronunciation was often simplified (e.g. "pigi" for "pergi", "kalok" for "kalau").(17) There was much less use of prefixes and suffixes than in present-day Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia. The spoken language was (and is) packed with information at the noun phrase and word level, making it difficult to understand when the conversation is about the Islands' history and culture, unless one already has previous knowledge about the personalities and locations.(18)

Two examples from interview transcripts will illustrate:

Turunan kita, tempat 'tu tadinya dari tanah Jawa-lah? Mula-mula. Habisnya, Tuan kerja di Banjar-'tu..dari.. dari Aprika, datang bawa lagi, nenek-nenek moyang kita-'tu. Jadi campur gawal apa-lah! Jadi, banyak nang kawin 'tu sama-lah...sebelah ma sebelah-lah.

[TRANSLATION] We are descended, earlier on, from Java, right? In the beginning. Well, the Master [Ross] worked in Banjar...from..came from Africa, bringing others, our ancestors. So we were mixed together by mistake! So, many of them married each other, bit by bit.(19)

Habisnya orang Bantan di tanah Jawa, orang pandai akan ada juga, tulung kita orang Cape sana jadi dua. Sekarang 'da tiga sama orang Cocos sini, di sekarang orang Cocos semua di sini.

(15) A.D.Lapsley: Cocos Malay Syntax. M.A. dissertation, Monash University, 1983, pp.5,6. Tan Chee Beng: 'Baba Malay Dialect'. JMBRAS, Vol.53, Part 1, June 1980, pp.150-165. When reading Tan's article, I was struck by the number of similarities between Baba Malay and Cocos Malay.

(16) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.168 and personal experience.

(17) Lapsley: Op.Cit., p.17 and personal experience.

(18) Often, when transcribing taped reminiscences of elderly Cocos Malays, I had to make detailed inquiries through bilingual friends on Cocos in order to clarify elliptic references to people and places. Bunce, Lapsley and Boag had the same experience. Richard Whittington, a most sympathetic observer, has gone so far as to say that in some respects Cocos Malay is a code. Conversation of 14 July 1989.

(19) Nek Bika: S7/1. Compare with pp.4, 5 (above).

[TRANSLATION] After that, Bantamese from Java, clever men too, helped us Cape people here, so (there were) two (peoples). Now there is a third type, the Cocos people here, now we're all Cocos people here.(20)

Tuan Ross and the Kampong:

The relationship between the Cocos Malay people and the Clunies-Ross family (which in 1930 meant John Sidney, his wife and their children) had many facets and subtleties. The Home Island people were bound to the ruling Clunies-Ross Tuan in a manner reminiscent of the relationship of mainstream Malays to their Raja. Tuan Ross provided food, clothing, housing and protection, which in turn "obligated the recipient to equalize this situation by responding with a recognized acceptance of the state of dependence".(21) This state of dependence was voluntary and permanent, so long as people lived in the Islands, which were perceived as belonging to Tuan Ross.

The word "Tuan" was used to describe a person with power vis-a-vis the Cocos Malays:

- . Tuan Pandai (Learned Lord) or Tuan Tua (Old Lord) - John George Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1854-1871;
- . Tuan Tinggi (Tall Lord) - George Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1871-1910;
- . Tuan Ross (Lord Ross) - John Sidney Clunies-Ross, ruled Cocos 1910-1944.

The Estate Secretaries were also called Tuan:

- . Tuan Acton - S.W.Rayment-Acton, Secretary 1937-1941;
- . Tuan Young - A.R.Elton Young, Secretary 1930-35 and 1941-1943.(22)

The Home Islanders occasionally used the words "Raja" or "King" to describe a Clunies-Ross, and Tuan Ross called his eldest son an "anak Raja". Cocos Malays who left the Islands also occasionally used "Raja" or "King".(23) Past and present and the outside world were seen through the eyes of the Clunies-Ross Tuan (24), sometimes in a distorted

(20) Nek Ketie: J5/2. Compare with pp.11-2 (above).

(21) V.Matheson and M.B.Hooker: 'Slavery in the Malay Texts: Categories of Dependency and Compensation' in A.Reid (Ed.): Slavery, Bondage and Dependency in Southeast Asia, St.Lucia, Qld., 1983, p.200. This passage describes "the system of ranking and dependency which theoretically bound Malay society together" and describes the bonds in Malay society as a whole.

(22) Nek Bika: S6/2 and S7/13. Nek Renja: A3/1,3. Nek Dittie: J2/1.

(23) For Tuan Ross, see p.53. For Home Islanders, see p.167; ex-Home Islanders, see Nek Dittie, p.80 and Nek Ewat, p.98.

In all cases the Cocos Malays were talking to a European.
(24) Traditional Malay society saw social life, the past, and the outside world "through the prism of the Raja". A.C.Milner: Kerajaan: U.of Arizona Press, 1982, p.104.

fashion. Periodicization was closely linked to the Clunies-Rosses - "Taim Tuan Tinggi", "Taim Tuan Ross" were precise periods of historical time corresponding to the rulership (not lifetime) of successive members of the ruling family. The importance of "controlling the past" was shown in the success of the Clunies-Rosses in convincing the people that their ancestors had been brought to the Islands, first by "Grandpa" (John Clunies-Ross, 1786-1854) and not by Alexander Hare. This was effectively a "founding myth" that justified, through a claim to priority of settlement, Clunies-Ross political and social control.(25) The 1837 Agreement provided the formal basis for the relationship (see above, pp.5-6). Even when the Agreement document had been forgotten by the Cocos Malays [it was apparently destroyed in a fire in 1872 (26)], its principles remained in force, probably because they reflected Malay political culture so well.

The dependency of the Cocos Malay people was reinforced by the isolation of the Islands. The supply-ship Islander came only three times a year on charter to Tuan Ross and the Cable Company, and few other vessels called. No Home Islander was permitted to go to Direction Island, nor could any outsider visit Home Island, without Tuan Ross's permission. These restrictions were embodied in Regulations drawn up by Tuan Ross himself, and remained in force until his death.(27) Added to this was the unwritten law that anyone leaving Home Island to live elsewhere could never return.(28) Thus the isolation of the Cocos Malays was almost complete. They depended on Tuan for their picture of the outside world, because very few of them had been further than Singapore, and then only on holidays. A good deal of the information he passed on during his weekly meetings with the Headmen was designed to show him in a good light (e.g. his generosity to the poor in England); some was educational, with a pro-British bias; and the remainder was made up of tall stories about his

(25) Nek Bika: S7/1, 9-10, 23-4. Quoted above, p.29. On 17 January 1988, Nek Bika repeated this account of the settlement of Cocos, which had John Clunies-Ross arriving first with Malay people, Hare coming later as an intruder with other Malays, and intermarriage between the two groups taking place. This distorted account clearly emanated from the Clunies-Rosses. Nek Bika was most concerned when I explained that the facts were otherwise, as proved by the first Clunies-Ross's own writings. This is the only area of Kampong tradition where I have found demonstrably incorrect historical information. See pp.4 and 5 for an accurate account. Gibson-Hill(1953) researched the matter of priority of settlement in great detail.

(26) Minute by 'J.B.' of the Colonial office after interview with George Clunies-Ross, 21 October 1884. CO 273/134.

(27) Pencil and ink drafts in John Sidney's handwriting, together with a typed final version dated January 1922, are in CR MSS 12/94, along with a 1937 version.

(28) A 12 November 1940 letter from Arnan bin Ragi seeking permission to return has a blue pencil note "Governor replies not granted". CR MSS 12/86. See p.39 for an approval.

travel overseas and his sexual prowess. The Headmen solemnly believed everything he told them. After all, he was their Tuan.(29)

The political and judicial structure was based on the four wards of the Home Island Kampong. Each ward had a "Kepala" (Headman), assisted by a "Juru" (Assistant Headman) and four "Orang Tua" (Elders), these last being popularly known as the "Enam Belas" (the Sixteen). All these office-holders were chosen by the ward's inhabitants, although these leaders also held responsible jobs in the Estate work structure. Each ward held a regular court made up of its "Kepala" and four "Orang Tua". They heard minor disputes and punished infringements of Estate rules. Each court had authority to order corporal punishment.(30)

In 1930 the "Kepala" were:

- . Daheron bin Arsat (b.1873), Head Carpenter.(31)
- . Atlas (Ikhlas) bin Abas (b.1880), Copra Overseer.
- . Rapahie bin Kayoodin (b.1867), the son of a Bantamese labourer, had travelled to England with Tuan Ross in 1914. Workshops Overseer.
- . Kalwie bin Aksa, the son of a Bantamese labourer, born in 1881, had travelled to Java, lived near Oceania House and was close, personally, to Tuan Ross. Workshops Overseer.(31)

Two of the Headmen in 1930, Daheron and Atlas, were "orang Cape" by descent, and two, Kalwie and Rapahie, although born in Cocos, were Bantamese. One of the imam, Tariq, was Bantamese. The three leading "dukun", Nek Itjang, Harnie and Arkam, were all from Java.(32) Men of Bantamese origin were finding their way into positions of power and prestige in classic second-generation migrant style, under Tuan Ross's "one Kampong/one people" policy. Not only were many of them men of genuine ability; they had both a sense of "belonging" to Cocos and the opportunity to draw upon memories of the wider Bantamese culture. Kalwie was clearly the outstanding member of this group. He was related through marriage to another Headman and to three men ^{who were} 1930s imam. No other Cocos

(29) Nek Bika. P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, letters of 4 December and 19 December 1989. Nek Bika's father Satar, a Deputy Headman, and his father-in-law, Daheron, told him about the weekly meetings.

(30) Webb(1937), p.4 says that the "Kepala" were chosen by Tuan Ross. Nek Dittie: Interview of 20 August 1986. Brockman (1981), p.66.

(31) Nek Bika, Nek Dittie (Kalwie's son-in-law), Nek Ketie and Nek Renja (Atlas's son) provided the names of the Headmen. Gibson-Hill(1947), p.172. and Brockman(1981) were also useful.

(32) Nek Dittie: Adult Males Resident in Home Island, 1900-1928. Hunt: Card Index, Op.Cit.

leader had a comparable family network; it is quite possible that Kalwie was following a long-term strategy to maximize his influence in the community.(33)

Tuan Ross's own authority was symbolized by the sheathed knife that he always wore in his belt.(34) At noon on Saturdays he would meet at the "Toko" with all the Headmen, Assistant Headmen, the Elders and his European Manager or Secretary. Together they made up the Imarat (Cocos Court), which heard reports from the Headmen and work-leaders, listened to complaints, decided on requests for tools and building materials, and heard more serious cases. Fines were the most common punishment, but corporal punishment (usually with a knotted rope) was occasionally inflicted. There was no legal basis for this practice, and this was to cause Tuan Ross a good deal of trouble during the 1930s.(35)

The most dramatic example of Tuan Ross's power occurred in 1912 after the Imarat had found the Bantamese labourer Aspin guilty of murder. Both Aspin and his accomplice were sentenced to death (quite illegally, as the Imarat had no legal standing under Straits Settlements Law). The Headmen opposed hanging, so the men were taken out in a barge behind Horsburgh Island, where 70 lbs (32 kg.) of chains were tied to them before they were thrown overboard to drown. A storm a few days later damaged some houses in the Kampong, and was promptly named "Ribut Aspin" (Aspin's Storm). The effect of these proceedings on the inhabitants of Home Island may be imagined.(36)

One of Ross's regular practices was a shrewd method of manifesting his authority:

On Sunday mornings Mr Ross makes a regular practice of sitting in a shelter at the shore end of the landing jetty and has let it be generally known that at this time he assumes the role of an elder brother to whom the islanders can bring their difficulties and petty squabbles for advice and assistance. Some confess to him their misdemeanours at this time, knowing that a

(33) The connections were: son Boyd married to daughter of Zanleh the Imam; daughter Merin married to Hadlan the Imam; sister married to Sanjac (Headman); and one of Kalwie's mistresses was the daughter of Ragelie (Schoolteacher 1891-1902 and subsequently an imam).

(34) John Cecil Clunies-Ross imitated his father in this custom, as noted by journalists in the 1970s. Illustration 26.

(35) Webb(1937), p.6. Brockman(1981), p.66. J.S.Hughes: Kings of the Cocos, London, p.144 gives extracts from proceedings of the Imarat in the period of military rule.

(36) The Colonial Office never learnt about the executions until 1938, although an account had appeared in a 1936 book by two American visitors who were told that the events had occurred in Tuan Tinggi's time. Johnsons(1936), p.302. Webb's 1937 account of the Aspin case did not reach London until January 1938. Maclean: M6/2. Bunce(1988), p.105.

confessed transgression carries lighter punishment than one left to be discovered. A great deal of trouble is thus saved. (37)

An elderly Cocos man (Nek Bika, b.1913) described Tuan Ross in these terms: Allah has "gerakan", the sixth sense to know what you need and to give it to you; Tuan Ross had "gerakan" too - it would move him to action. When Kalwie put up his brother Sardaya to be a "Kepala", Tuan Ross said no, he didn't want him. There was no "gerakan". He said that if something went wrong, it was best if one family did not have all the power. Tuan Ross was "orang alim" (an educated and learned man).(38)

Tuan Ross's form of rule was not a full-blown Rajaship (for example, he had no formal religious function), but his authority on Cocos was supreme nonetheless. There was no alternative authority for the Cocos Malays to turn to. There was no resident District Officer, no regular inspection by outside authorities, and no system of reporting to Singapore or the Colonial office (apart from population figures). Even the Cable Station staff called him "The Governor".

World View:

The world of the Cocos Malay people centred around the islands. They called themselves the "orang pulu" (people of the islands) or "orang Cocos" ((Cocos people).(39) The identification of themselves with the islands was (and is) very strong. [See Illustration 33]

Nang lahir di pulu, orang bilang 'ank pulu' sudah.

[TRANSLATION] Whoever is born in the islands is counted as 'a child of the islands'..(40)

and

Jadi di mana kita pigi, jadi 'tempat darah kita', kita misti ingat.

[TRANSLATION] Wherever we go, we must remember 'the place of our blood'..(40)

Astinggalnya saya yang peningat kerja di tanah air sini.

[TRANSLATION] I who remain remember work in this homeland.(41)

There was a very clear distinction between Home Island and the other islands of the atoll. Home Island was called "Pulu

(37) Webb(1937), pp.5-6.

(38) Nek Bika to J.G.Hunt, 31 January 1988. I am grateful to Nek Ewat for explaining the finer shades of meaning to me.

(39) Nek Dittie: J2/1,3.

(40) Both statements by Nek Bika: S7/19, speaking to Cocos Malay secondary students, 1983.

(41) Nek Renja: A3/11.

Kelapa" (Coconut Island) or "Pulu Cocos" (Cocos Island). It was "darat" (mainland) in contrast with "utan" (jungle or plantation), which was applied to West Island, especially by women, and to South Island on weekends, and effectively meant "off this (Home) Island"(42) [See Illustrations 2 and 33] The other islands were given descriptive names that sometimes placed them in a geographical relationship to Home Island:

The life of the Cocos Malay people was centred around the islands with such intensity that it was almost impossible for them to imagine living elsewhere. The worst punishment was to be sent away forever (43), which was tantamount to a death sentence, culturally speaking. I have however found no record of banishment in the Clunies-Ross records or elsewhere, although the threat was often made.(44)

This close identification with the islands was counterpoised by a vague acquaintance with the outside world. In 1930, perhaps no more than forty or fifty Home Islanders had ever left Cocos for any reason, whether on a trip to Christmas Island, Java or Singapore for working purposes, or to Singapore or England for a holiday. The world outside Cocos was "negeri", which in "Bahasa Cocos" meant "foreign parts" or "overseas".[See Illustration 33].

Dia...pigi negeri macam-macam itu. Pigi England dan ma ke London lagi.

[TRANSLATION] He (Tuan Ross)...went overseas to all sorts of places. He went to England and to London too.(45)

Malacca, a source of dances, and Bantam were "negeri":

Dari sana juga, dari negeri.

[TRANSLATION] From there too, from overseas.(46)

Nang mana Banten, pulang Banten - negeri.

[TRANSLATION] Those who were from Bantam, went home to Bantam - overseas.(47)

Singaporean, Malayan and Indonesian Muslims were "orang negeri":

Kita panggil Hari Lebaran, orang negeri panggil Hari Raya.

[TRANSLATION] We called it Hari Lebaran, outsiders called it Hari Raya.(48)

(42) Webb: Op.Cit., p.6. See also comments above, p.25.

(43) See below, p.48 for emigration of Cocos women with Cable Station husbands. 'Village Wards and Rules and Punishments 1911-1941', CR MSS 12/94, has no records of banishment.

(44) Nek Benson: A1/2.

(45) Nek Bika: S7/8.

(46) Nek Bika: S7/12.

(47) Nek Nebie: A3/5. P Bunce, 8 April 1989 to J.G.Hunt.

(48) Nek Dittie: J1/11.

"Negeri" was sometimes used to mean "country" or "land", as in this reference to the Sultan of Selangor's realm in 1942:

Jepun masuk di dalam negarinya sana.
[TRANSLATION] The Japanese invaded his country.(49)

The isolation was not complete. There was a certain amount of knowledge of the world outside. The Cocos people who were able to visit Singapore would usually visit Ayesha, Tuan Tinggi's second wife and widow, who owned a large wooden house there. The fact that her cousin Agenan and another Cocos man, Bepu, had fought in World War I was a source of pride to the Home Islanders, who had absorbed Tuan Ross's British patriotism.(50)

That patriotism sat uneasily with a sense of Malayness and an affinity with the wider Javanese-Malay world that most "orang pulu" knew only by report. Nek Bika described the contrast in these terms: There are two worlds ("dua dunia"), the white man's world and the Malay world. The white man ("orang putih"-often meaning "British") has magic ("ilmu") that can be seen, like aeroplanes. You white people make everything in the world; it is a white man's world, therefore we are lower than you. But Malay magic cannot be seen; it is invisible. We have a stake in that world; we have heaven and hell. "Orang Melayu ada surga dan noraka." (51)

The Cocos Malay perception of John Sidney's role may have been as follows: Tuan Ross is the mediator between the two worlds of European and Malay power. He has power over us, he employs, clothes and feeds us, and takes a personal interest in our welfare. Therefore we owe him loyalty and obedience. He is "orang pulu", but he is "orang putih" too. He is clearly superior to the "Kebel Welis" (Cable and Wireless) white men, who rent Pulu Tikus from him, and who eagerly seek his hospitality; he travels to England almost every year, and he deals only with the King, whose grandmother gave Tuan Tinggi authority over the islands. Christmas Island certainly belongs to him also, because three times a year he summons its ship to bring food and clothing and other valuable things from Singapore for us. Perhaps he owns Singapore too. Of course he does not own Java; that belongs to the "orang Blanda" (the Dutch). Many of our "orang Cocos" beliefs are the same as Java's, because the "orang Banten" taught them to us. Yet the "orang pulu" are different

(49) Nek Bika: S6/1. Compare V.Matheson: 'Concepts of Malay Ethos in Indigenous Malay Writings', Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, Vol.X, No.2, September 1979, pp.351-71.

(50) Nek Bika and Nek Renja: Conversation with J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1987. Bunce(1988), p.54.

(51) Nek Bika to John Hunt and Pauline Bunce, 20 December 1987. Nek Bika gave this account of the two worlds after Pauline and I had been questioning him about the powers of the ex-Sultan of Selangor and his "pawang" (magician) when they were on Horsburgh Island in 1945-46. See pp.90-3 below.

from the people of Java. We are bound to the islands, to each other, and to Tuan Ross.(52)

Beliefs:

The small setting within which the Cocos Malay people spent their lives was (and is) closely constrained by a maze of prohibitions, customary procedures and superstitions designed to protect the individual, the family and the community, or to advance their interests. By 1930 the community had grafted significant elements of Javanese culture from the Bantamense on to the older stream of animism, Malay superstition and Islam as understood by the "orang Cape". More orthodox Islamic beliefs were beginning to have an effect upon the Cocos way of thinking. Seeds were being planted that would not germinate for a generation, when they would crack the crust of Home Island unity.

Home Island had within its boundaries evil spirits ("saitan") and ghosts ("hantu"), each with its own special location and distinctive powers. For example, belief in the vampire spirit woman "pontianak" had been brought to Cocos. When preparing for burial the body of a woman who had died in childbirth, elaborate precautions were taken to prevent her from becoming a "pontianak".(53) The northern end of Home Island was particularly infested with "saitan", presumably because the graveyard was nearby. Trees could speak, the ghosts of the unquiet dead ("siluman") would be abroad after dark, and certain rare types of coconut could grant wishes.(54)

The belief in "semangat" (see p.42,n.84) and "kramat" (sacredness) within the natural realm led to the need for ritual before performing certain actions. Thus Wood-Jones:

Would (the Cocos Malay) kill a beast, he must apologize to it and blame the blade that does the deed; would he trap a bird, he must address its spirit with formal politeness, and he may not, without breach of etiquette, offend wantonly the spirit of the tree he fells. (55)

The grave of Nek Botak (Suma the Imam) commemorated one of the earliest settlers (56) and stood to the east of the Kampong area. (See Illustrations 3 and 14) Although avoided after

(52) This view of Tuan Ross's role was not just held by the Cocos Malays. I believe that Ross himself shared it.

(53) Wood-Jones(1924), pp.34-42. Nek Dittie to J G Hunt, 18 November 1985. Skeat(1965), pp.325-7 calls the female vampire "langsuir", and her stillborn offspring the "pontianak", synonymous with "mati-anak" (dead child).

(54) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.171. Nek Bika to J.G.Hunt, 18 December 1987. Bunce(1988), p.89.

(55) Wood-Jones(1924), p.128.

(56) Nek Renja and Nek Rana (Haig bin Laksana, M.B.E.) to J.G.Hunt, 22 December 1985. Bunce(1988), p.104. Suma was possibly the child "Summah" mentioned by Harding in 1837.

dark, it may have performed the function described by Wessing in his analysis of life in Sundanese villages:

(One kind of graveyard) is that of the founder or a central figure of the settlement and is located in the center of the community. These graves are the focal point of supernatural power and the spirit of the person buried there is said to protect the inhabitants of the settlement against malevolent spirits and to provide a route of access to the supernatural, including Allah. (57)

There was a strong belief that personality and skills were inherited from one's ancestors. For example, people of African descent were considered to be impatient and short-tempered; those from Bima were mischievous and unafraid of death; "peranakan" (people of mixed blood, including those with a European parent) were kind and sexually attractive. (58) The capacity to be a "kepala" (headman), an imam (leader of prayers), a "tukang bengkong" (circumciser), a "dalang" (puppet-master), a "dukun" (midwife) and a "bomoh" (practiser of magic) was always inherited, although one had to learn the skill before practising it. (59)

There were three types of power:

. "doa", held by "tukang bengkong", "dukun" and "bomoh". These people had physical skills in medicine, the skill to perform circumcisions, or supernatural powers in the spirit world for black or white magic. The most powerful "bomoh" was Nek Mancet the Bantamese (b.1876). (60)

. "ilmu" was supernatural wisdom, which could take Islamic form among the elders and the imam, or magical form as possessed by the Bantamese "dalang", Nek Itjang (1867-1949). (61)

. "pancaran lima", visual-spatial skill possessed by fisherman, skilled boatmen and navigators. (62)

In 1930 there were four mosques. The first was led by Ragelie, the clerk in the "Toko". He had studied at the Malay College, Singapore, from 1888 to 1891, and had run the secular school on Home Island from 1891 to 1902.

(57) R.Wessing: 'Life in the Cosmic Village: Cognitive Models in Sundanese Life', in E.M.Bruner and J.O.Becker: Art, Ritual and Society in Indonesia, Athens, Ohio, 1979, pp.98,101.

(58) Nek Bika and Nek Renja to J G Hunt, 18 December 1987.

(59) Ibid.

(60) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.171. Nek Dittie to J G Hunt, 17 November 1985. Bunce(1988), p.89.

(61) Nek Dittie: J1/5.

(62) P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 2 December 1987, summarizing information from Nek Bika and Nek Renja on School Tapes.

Daheron bin Arsat was "orang Cape" by descent. He inherited the mosque leadership from his father. He was a headman in 1930 and remained so until his retirement in 1938.

Tariq bin Asmalie had been an imam since the brief imamship of Kalwie, who had followed his father Aksa. Tariq, like Kalwie, was the son of a contract labourer from Java, and born on Cocos. His mosque was considered more "orthodox" than the other three.

The fourth Imam was Zanleh bin Mydie, born 1887, the great-grandson of Suma the Imam. He had studied at Ragelie's school and became an outstanding pupil. He was a fiercely patriarchal man of iron will whose line of imam strove for orthodoxy, with important effects on the Cocos communities of Home Island, Christmas Island and Western Australia. (63)

Each family attended the mosque of the family head, who in turn attended the mosque of his father. At marriage, a woman joined her husband's family mosque. Pork was not eaten; boys were circumcised; marriages, funerals and other important occasions included Islamic procedures; but Friday prayers were not observed and not all Islanders fasted during Ramadan. (64) Although the Cocos Malays felt themselves to be Muslims, their way of life under Tuan Ross left them a long way short of orthodoxy. Nevertheless the mosques were important meeting-places for the men of the community. Books of prayers in Arabic script were handed down from father to son. These prayers apparently have Sundanese and Javanese elements. (65)

By 1930 the mosque school was being conducted by Hosman bin Awang, the Cocos-born son of a Bantamese coolie who had left the Islands with his family in 1913. Hosman returned some years later as a Direction Island employee, married a Cocos girl, and received permission to remain. In 1927 he was asked to conduct the mosque school, presumably because of his knowledge of Islam and his secular education in Singapore. At the mosque he taught Jawi-script Malay and the Koran to boys from families with religious aspirations. (66) In 1937 Webb remarked that the Koran was taught in Arabic, but that the students did not understand it. (67) [Illustration 15]

(63) Information about the imam was obtained from a number of sources, notably Nek Bika, Nek Dittie, Nek Kette and Nek Ewat.

(64) There were commonsense reasons for the last two omissions. The Clunies-Ross Estate did not give time off for Friday prayers, which were shifted to the day off, Sunday; and the hard physical labour required of most workers did not permit fasting. Gibson-Hill (1947), pp.170, 175-77. Smith (1960), p.97.

(65) R.Boag to J.G.Hunt, 14 August 1985, 14 November 1989. Nek Dittie (whose mother was Bantamese) was taught prayers by his uncle Kalwie. Years later, an Indonesian friend identified them as Sundanese. Interview, 16 December 1985.

(66) R.Brockman (1981), p.121. Bunce (1988), p.125.

(67) Webb (1937), p.13.

It will be seen that the Home Island community had moved some way towards orthodox Islamic practice since the period at the end of the nineteenth century. (See pp.14-15) It seems reasonable to attribute this to the influence of the Bantamese in the Kampong.

Organization of the Workforce:

Three European staff, an Engineer, a Manager and a Secretary, were in charge of the workforce. These men were not as committed to the interests of the Clunies-Ross Estate as family members, and the operations suffered accordingly. (68)

All Home Island males went to work at the age of 14. Females could begin work at 13 if they wished and leave the workforce (for example to get married). At the age of 60 a half-pay pension was paid to retired persons, an innovation of Tuan Ross's. Compulsory retirement was at 65. It was a 47 1/2-hour week, with Saturday afternoons and Sundays off. (69)

The workforce was organized under the four Headmen and 28 "mandor" in charge of tradesmen and the unskilled. About 1/10 of the total workforce of 320 were women. The prestigious jobs were at Oceania House and at the "Toko" (Estate Store/Office).

Weekly wage-rates reflected the strong stratification of the workforce. Rates were (in Cocos rupees and cents):

"Kepala" (Headmen)	9 to 12.50 ;	"Dukun" (Midwives)	3
"Mandor" (Foremen)	4.50 to 9 ;	Women Workers	1.50
Skilled Workers	6 to 9 ;	Apprentices (14-18 years)	1
Unskilled Workers	3 to 4 ;		(70)

Wage credits were paid into each family's account in the "Toko". A pay slip ("rekenan") was then made out and collected on pay-day, which was Friday. Women workers were paid in Estate ivory coins introduced by Tuan Ross to replace the pressed sheepskin coins of his father's day. (71) [See Illustration 17]

(68) One reason for their lack of enthusiasm was the very low remuneration paid by John Sidney.

(69) Webb(1937), p.8. Nek Bika: Interview of 18 December 1987. The bush gang, who worked on the outer islands, had to get up before daylight to sail to the plantation areas.

(70) Capt.P.G.Taylor : 'Report of Trans-Indian Ocean Survey Flight, June 1939,' p.12, AA CRS A461, T314/1/4, Part 2.

Brockman(1981), p.73. I have amalgamated the two sources, which are consistent with Webb(1937), p.9. These wages are scarcely different from those reported by Kiddle in 1910.

Around 1927-28, in Ross's absence, the Estate Secretary reorganized the workforce on commercial lines, but the "old methods" were reinstated by Ross himself. Webb(1937) p.16. (71) Webb(1937), p.9. Gibson-Hill(1947), p.162.

Lt-Col.J.A.Harvey to C.A.C.(M.), H.Q.. A.L.F.S.E.A., 6 June 1945. CR MSS 19/137.

The economy remained closed and tightly controlled. The Estate held a monopoly over the sale of consumer goods, including food, with everything being imported from Singapore. Prices of necessities like rice were subsidized by the Estate. On Saturday mornings, each family purchased its rice ration at the "Toko", together with chillies, tea, curry, sugar and tobacco. Limited amounts of clothing, cheap jewellery and fishing lines might also be purchased. All families supplemented "Toko" purchases by growing fruits such as "papaya" (paw-paws) and bananas and raising poultry and sugarcane in their gardens. Fishing and a wide range of coconut products also helped keep the community's health at a reasonable subsistence level.(72)

A Cocos Malay Life: Birth to Marriage:

The culture of the "orang pulu" had by 1930 absorbed influences from a large number of sources, and this is seen when we examine the customs and rituals that marked a Cocos Malay life.

A pregnant woman was hedged about with prohibitions derived from the pre-Islamic past.(73) The very high infant mortality rate would give extra point to the prohibitions. Cocos restrictions were reminiscent of, but not identical with, those around a pregnant Pahang woman in the 1890s.(74) The common factor is the powerful traditional belief in sympathetic magic.

On Cocos, a "dukun" would deliver the baby. A series of traditional steps would be taken to frighten away evil spirits.(75) After the child was born, the afterbirth was kept in a clam shell for three days before being disposed of by the father in the lagoon.(76) This custom apparently derives from the belief that the products of birth "are themselves endowed with possible life". The custom was practised in different forms among Peninsula Malays until recent times.(77)

(72) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.163, 185-88. Smith(1960), p.98. Nek Dittie: J1/6 and interview in English on 17 November 1985.

(73) Wood-Jones(1912): p.45. Dr M.Clarke: 'Some Medical Customs of the Cocos-Keeling Islanders': The Australian Nurses'Journal, Vol.9, No.4, October 1979. Cocos pregnancy superstitions did not change between 1905-07 and 1977.

(74) H.Clifford: Studies in Brown Humanity, London, 1898. pp.48-51.

(75) Wood-Jones(1912), p.46. Clarke: Op.Cit., p.43.

(76) Clarke, p.43. Radal Feyrel: 'The Little History of the Cocos Malay People', Cocos Clarion, November, 1985. Bunce (1988), p.70.

(77) R.J.Wilkinson: 'Papers on Malay Customs and Beliefs'. JMBRAS, Vol.30, Part 4, November 1957, p.15. (First pub.1906). J.Djamour: Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore, London, 1959, p.90.

Any abnormality in a new-born baby was countered by the "dukun" ignoring the baby completely for a time until the Evil One, discouraged, removed his handiwork and restored the child to normality.(78)

A "selamatan" feast, apparently introduced from Sunda, was held on the third day to thank those who had assisted at the birth.(79) After 40 days the "dukun" cut the baby's hair for the first time.(80)

In Wood-Jones's time, circumcision of boys took place at about ten years of age. Tuan Ross later reduced this to six, which effectively emptied the ritual of religious significance in that it was less likely that recitation of the Koran by the boys would take place.(81) The emphasis was on display and entertainment. The boy would be dressed like a bridegroom and paraded around the Kampong.(82) [See Illustration 11] The boy's parents might hire Nek Itjang and his "gamelan" orchestra to perform "wayang kulit" on the Saturday, the night before the circumcision.(83)

The next rite of passage, teeth-filing, occurred around the age of eighteen. Both males and females would have their upper front teeth filed straight across. After the ceremony they would be considered to be adults and able to be married.(84)

(78) Wood-Jones(1912), pp.46-7. Wood-Jones(1924), pp.165-7. Clarke, p.44, records the practice in 1977.

(79) Nek Ewat to J.G.Hunt, 20 December 1987.

(80) Right through life, both hair and nail clippings were kept safe by the owner to prevent them being used for malevolent witchcraft. The timing of cutting the hair corresponds to Acehnese custom. Mainstream Malays had a 44-day interval. Wood-Jones(1912), p.55. Clarke, p.44. Radal: Op.Cit. Clarke, p.44. B Leigh: 'Design Motifs in Aceh', in J.Maxwell (Ed.): The Malay-Islamic World of Sumatra, Melbourne, 1982, p.5. R.Winstedt: The Malay Magician, Singapore, 1985 (1925), pp.109-11. Djamour: Op.Cit., pp.91-2.

(81) Wood-Jones(1912), p.48. Cree bin Haig: 'The Cocos Islanders', in J.Jupp (Ed.): The Australian People, Sydney, 1988, p.325 and personal communication.

(82) Wood-Jones(1912), p.48. Clarke, p.44. Bunce (1988) pp.71-2. Compare with Alwi bin Sheikh Alhady: Malay Customs and Traditions, Singapore, 1962, pp.8-11.

(83) Nek Keti: J4/3. Nek Dittie: J1/6. Bunce(1988), p.72.

(84) Like a number of other beliefs held by the Cocos people, teeth-filing relates to the vital force of the body ("semangat"). Teeth, hair and fingernails contain a disproportionate amount of "semangat", which also appears in the liver of humans and animals, rocks, stones and iron. The purpose of the ceremony was to preserve the total store of "semangat" by sacrificing part of it. R.Winstedt: The Malays: A Cultural History, Singapore, 1981 (first pub.1947), p.19. Winstedt(1985), p.114. K.M.Endicott: An Analysis of Malay Magic, Singapore, 1985, pp.86-90. Radal: Op.Cit. W.W.Skeat: Malay Magic, London, 1965 (first pub. London, 1900), pp.355-9.

In an attempt to control the rate of population growth, the Clunies-Ross Estate had a rule setting eighteen as the minimum marriage age for males and sixteen for females. The rule was never effective. Pregnancy before then was frequent. The parties would be brought before the Kampong court. The penalty was a beating with the "tali" (a rope with a knotted end), or a fine of 25 rupees each. The young man would usually pay (50 rupees was equivalent to about 12 months' wages for a boy under 18). The marriage would be performed immediately.(85)

Pre-marital pregnancy was so common that it is difficult to resist the conclusion that it was the preferred path to marriage in most cases, and not just youthful indiscretion. Smith suggests that "for most couples, ability of the woman to conceive was a necessary precondition for marriage."(86)

The "respectable" path to marriage was much more akin to mainstream Malay custom. The young man would offer gifts to the girl, beginning with a turtle-shell comb, progressing to the final gift which was brought by his father to the girl's parents. In Wood-Jones's time it was usually an English gold sovereign, called locally the "mas kawin" (marriage gold). According to Gibson-Hill, the growing poverty by his time (1941) had curbed the gift-giving process. In this more formal courtship, the virginity of the bride-to-be (or at least her outward respectability) was clearly quite important. Gibson-Hill recorded that some girls were unable to get husbands "in consequence of their liberality".(87)

The customs and ceremonies of Cocos weddings bore the imprint of different cultures to a greater extent than any other rite

(85) Webb: Op.Cit., pp.4-5. Gibson-Hill(1947), p.171. Nek Ketie: J5/9. R.Maclean: M3/1,2. Cree: Op.Cit., p.325.

(86) Of 96 girls born between 1908 and 1917, (i.e. girls aged 13 to 22 in 1930), 58 gave birth to their first child within nine months of marriage. The most favoured marriage age was 18. Almost half of the women who never married had illegitimate children. Smith(1960) drew upon the full Birth Records of the Clunies-Ross Estate between 1888 and 1947. See p.105 and Tables 3 and 4, p.106. Winstedt says that "fornication ...in primitive Malay communities was the accepted road to marriage." Clifford remarked on the "Dyak custom of allowing unmarried girls to receive their own guests, and to practically manage all the preliminaries to their own marriages with the youth of their choice". Beside these possible influences, the sexual laxity of Tuan Ross appears to have set the tone for the community as a whole. Winstedt(1898), p.106. Clifford(1898), p.245. Maclean: M3/3 says that educated (and no doubt Islamicized) Cocos Malays in Sabah and Singapore now deny that such practices ever existed, unlike elderly Cocos Malays now on Home Island. Nek Bika said that Tuan Ross encouraged the men to "look for Paradise" with women. P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, letter of 4 December 1988.

(87) Wood-Jones(1912), p.49. Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.159-60, 171-2. Compare Alwi: Op.Cit., pp.26-8.

of passage or cultural ceremony. On the Friday morning, the day before the wedding (which was always held on a Saturday), the couple would go to the graveyard and pray to the spirits of their ancestors to obtain their blessing and involvement in the ceremony.(88) At the family mosque on the Friday evening, the formal "Nikah" wedding ceremony would be held.(89) On the day of the wedding, the bridegroom was dressed in traditional Cocos wedding costume - white trousers, a woman's sarong, blue satin jacket, yellow scarf knotted over the right shoulder, and a headdress of stiffened batik decorated with flowers. If possible he would wear shoes or sandals. His face was painted with tumeric, double eyebrows and a false moustache. [See Illustration 13.]

Sheltered under a black umbrella, with an elderly female relative by his side, the bridegroom was accompanied by a large band of male friends beating wooden tambourines and "kendong". Shouting, chanting, the firing of shotguns and mimic knife-play ("silat") punctuated the procession. At the bride's house, her mother and female relatives would put up a mock resistance to the entry of the bridegroom before permitting him to enter. The bride was dressed in similar costume to her husband-to-be, with a headdress of flower-blossoms or ivory Estate coins set on sticks.

The bride would wash his feet with scented water. A dish of "rujak" (fruit salad mixed with sugar and chillies) would be eaten by the couple to symbolize the bitter and sweet portions of their future life. The imam would offer prayers and burn incense. A feast of "brekat" (blessed) food would follow. The couple would then visit the groom's house, preceded by "ayam panggang" (a yellow-stained roasted chicken) on a pole. At the house, his mother would tie the couple together face to face. Afterwards they would sit in state. She would then ceremonially feed them with saffroned boiled rice.(90)

Post-wedding celebrations would include the "melenggok" (scarf-dance) performed by the groom and his new father-in-law and other adult males to show respect and appreciation towards those assisting in the wedding preparations and ceremony.(91)

(88) Wood-Jones(1912), pp.19-50 says that this was only done if one of the parents was dead. I follow Bunce: Cocos Malay Culture, Perth, 1987, p.10, based on close questioning of Cocos Malay elders who were married around 1930.

(89) The "Nikah" was not mentioned by Wood-Jones and Gibson-Hill, presumably because they never attended this ceremony.

(90) A comparison between Wood-Jones(1912), pp.50-3 and Bunce (1987 and 1988), especially her excellent photographs, shows that costumes and public proceedings in Cocos weddings changed very little until quite recently. Dr.Doug Miles of the A.N.U. Department of Anthropology said that the chanting and prayers at a Cocos Malay wedding was reminiscent of Sufi practice.

(91) Bunce(1987), p.15. Nek Bika: S7/2. "Melenggok" had been introduced from Java. The reader will have noticed animist, Islamic, Hindu, Balinese and European elements in the above description. No doubt there are more.

A Cocos Malay Life: Celebrations and Entertainments:

Wood-Jones described two Cocos festivals and the "selamatan" thanksgiving feast. The "Sedekah Bumi" festival was "one of the greatest events of the Cocos Islanders' year", even though no harvest was planted or gathered in the Islands. The most interesting feature was the pre-Islamic custom of burial in the ground or hanging in wicker baskets in trees of food for the spirits ("penunggu") to eat.(92) The "Bancahan" was a children's feast marked by the burning of aromatic fires under children's beds.(93) "Selamatan" feasts would be given to mark a departure, a safe return, or to honour an individual. The imam would offer prayers and burn incense, and a formal speech about the occasion would be given.(94)

On the occasion of "Hari Lebaran", the men would chant prayers in the mosques to the beat of tambourines. They would be dressed in their finest clothes - white trousers, ornamental sarongs, and frilly coloured organdie jackets called "beskat". Black "songkok" purchased in the "Toko", or red and white velvet caps retained from the abortive school would complete the costume. A dab of powder was painted on everyone's cheeks. At dawn the entire community went to the graveyard to offer prayers to their ancestors.(95)

A "Hari Lebaran" innovation by Nek Itjang, an elderly Bantamese (b.1867), gave children a share in the celebrations. He would construct archways of coconut fronds and flowers at the extreme northwestern end of the Kampong (Tanjong Garam - Salty Point) near his own house, and at the southeastern end (Ujung Waru - Hibiscus Point).(96) [See Illustration 5] The children would walk three circuits, passing through the archway each time. The custom ceased when Nek Itjang moved to "Kampong Tengah" (Middle Village) in the late 1930s. The day's proceedings would include boat races and a soccer match.(97)

The other major celebration was "Nuyar". In the earlier days of Tuan Ross's rule, the entire community would be invited to Oceania House for a feast. By 1930 this had been replaced by

(92) Wood-Jones(1912), p.53. Wilkinson (1906/1957) described this practice as the custom of the Malay "pawang" (medicine men), p.76. J.M.Gullick: Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century, Singapore, 1987, p.34 gives an account of spirit food being offered at the 1889 installation of the Raja of Perak. Two Cocos imam still offer "brekat" today.

(93) Wood-Jones(1912), p.54. Gibson-Hill (1947), p160.

(94) Bunce(1988), p.80. "Selamatan" are still very much part of the life of Home Island.

(95) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.174, 201 and Plate 4. Bunce (1988), p.83.

(96) Wessing: Op.Cit., in a footnote on p.121 quotes E.Sukarja as saying that the Sundanese of Gajah used "waru" (hibiscus) trees as a living hedge around their villages. It is possible that the Bantamese tried to do the same on Cocos.

(97) Nek Dittie: Jl/11,12 and interview, 17 November 1985.

a lunch for the Headmen, Assistant Headmen and "mandore", at which curried sheep and alcoholic drinks were served.(98) In the evening there would be a dance in the ballroom of Oceania House. Music was provided by "kendong", tambourines and "biola" (violins). The three types of dance were melenggok" (see pp.18 and 44), "selong" (also called "joget", introduced from Singapore, probably by Cable and Wireless Malays); and "dangsa", of Scottish origin, for four couples, the men wearing shoes.(99) "Selong" was noteworthy for the composition of "pantun" (four-line rhymed poems) to one's partner during the dance. Gibson-Hill wrote that some of the "pantun" in his day contained definite local allusions, but that the majority were "very similar to, or identical with, pantuns that have been published in the Malay Peninsula", another indication of the influence of the Malays working on Direction Island.(100)

Undoubtedly the most enthralling form of community entertainment in the 1930s was the performance of "wayang kulit". The art had been brought to Cocos as early as the 1860s by Nek Sebina, a Bantamese contract-labourer.(101) In 1930 Nek Itjang was the "dalang" (puppeteer). He performed with an orchestra of ten men playing the traditional "gamelan" instruments - "kendong", "kenong" (gong in a wooden frame), "gambang" (Javanese xylophone) and "suling" (flute). Nek Itjang normally performed "wayang" before a circumcision, for a fee of 25 Cocos rupees, which was about three weeks' wages for a skilled tradesman.(102)

One of the community's beliefs (common to the Javanese tradition) was that proximity to the "dalang" would have magical results. Small bottles of oil would be placed underneath the lamp illuminating the screen, and subsequently retrieved and used for massage and for magic.(103)

Seventy-five complete puppets have survived to the present. All the major characters of the Pandawa Cycle (the Javanese version of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata) are represented, including Arjuna the ideal hero, his wife Dewi Sumbadra, Hanuman the monkey warrior, the gods Batara Guru and the beloved Semar, and a host of monsters, villains, servants and heroes.(104)

(98) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.170. Brockman(1981), p.65. Webb (1937) mistakenly wrote that the feast with alcohol took place at "Hari Lebaran".

(99) Nek Bika: S7/1,2,5-8. Programme Notes for Indian Ocean Festival, Perth, 1984.

(100) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.173. See Bunce(1988), p.90 for examples of Cocos "pantun".

(101) Nek Kette: J4/3,4. Nek Dittie: Interview, 16 December 1985. Nek Bika, Nek Renja: Interview, 2 February 1988.

(102) Nek Nebie: J4/7,9. Nek Nebie (Knight bin Nahiman) was the "suling" player. Nek Kette: J4/5.

(103) Nek Dittie: J1/7,8.

(104) Nek Dittie: Interview, 17 November 1985. In December 1987 Nek Bika and Nek Renja identified the puppets for me.

As Benedict R.O'G. Anderson wrote:

All the main characters...are held in high honour. No hierarchy is imposed...the wayang world...is regarded as a model for Javanese life, lived on a high plane of moral intensity...The heroes of wayang were the conspicuously approved models by which a child grew up. (105) [Illustration 16]

The remaining form of public entertainment was "bangsawan" (Malay folk-theatre). Nek Itjang wrote his plots in "Bahasa Cocos", drawing upon a range of source-materials, including books from Java and Malaya. Performances might be given to mark a circumcision, a marriage, or at "Hari Lebaran". Proceedings would be opened by a prayer for Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (succeeded to the throne 1890, crowned 1898, abdicated 1948) - a further indication of the Javanese origins of Cocos "bangsawan".(106)

Both forms of entertainment would have strengthened the Malay identity of the Home Island people.

A Cocos Malay life: Outside Home Island:

The Home Islanders had only limited access to the other 28 islands of Cocos. They could not visit Pulu Tikus (Direct-ion Island), Pulu Luar (Horsburgh Island), Pulu Panjang (West Island) or Pulu Keeling (North Keeling Island) unless they worked there or had Tuan Ross's permission. [Illustration 2]

Pulu Tikus (lit. Rat Island) is a narrow crescent only 1000 metres (1100 yards) long, with 40 acres set aside for cable and wireless equipment and living quarters. Any transactions between company employees and the "natives" had to be in "the currency of the islands". In 1930 the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company employed 10 British staff, 20 Chinese and half a dozen Malays recruited from Singapore.(107)

(105) B.R.O'G. Anderson: Mythology and Tolerance of the Javanese, Ithaca, New York, 1965, p.24.

(106) Nek Kettie: J4/5,6. Nek Dittie: J1/8,9. Nek Kettie: J4/4,5. Nek Ewat: Conversation with P.Bunce, December 1985. J.M.Gullick describes Malayan "bangsawan" as being "rather like an English traditional pantomime", with plots from Shakespeare and other English sources, with topical allusions and stock Malayan stereotypes. Songs were in Malay "but with the words set to old English or American popular songs." Gibson-Hill saw similar "bangsawan" on Cocos. Both descriptions correspond with Cocos "bangsawan" seen by the present writer. Even imam and "dukun" were not safe from parody and ridicule. Gullick: Op.Cit., p.339-40. Gibson-Hill(1947): pp.173-4.

(107) Licence and Lease between George Clunies-Ross and Eastern Extension Australasia and China Telegraph Company Ltd, 22 November 1901. Webb(1937), p.2. Gibson-Hill(1947), p.166.

Home Island men could visit only if accompanied by a Headman, and no Cocos women were permitted to go there under any circumstances. Cable Station Malays were rarely given permission to visit Home Island. Even under these restrictions, Cocos women and Cable Station Malays formed relationships that led to marriage. The couple would then be required to leave Cocos immediately. Sometimes the woman's brothers and sisters, or even her whole family, would accompany her and her spouse.(108)

The "no return" rule and the restrictions on Home Island/Direction Island contact showed the fears of the Clunies-Rosses that the outside world would destroy the fabric of Cocos society and their own authority, if that world were permitted to influence Home Islanders. In 1937, Webb wrote that "a few years ago a few people could go to Singapore for short holidays. Now those who leave cannot return."(109)

Perhaps Singapore holidays had had an unsettling effect upon those who took them, and upon others in the Kampong. Those holidays would have commenced by embarkation on the Islander, the supply vessel. In Singapore the visitors would stay with relatives. The experience of living in Singapore must have made a great impression on people who had never lived anywhere but Cocos.(110)

The Islander brought supplies three times a year. But it also brought contagious diseases, to which the Cocos Malays were particularly susceptible because of their long isolation.(111)

Each British staff member on Direction Island was allocated a Home Islander as a "boat boy" and a boat for fishing. Headmen and other leading members of the community, and their male relatives, generally served as "boat boys", which gave them opportunities for barter. The items most sought after by the Cocos Malays were sarongs, cigarettes and scented talcum powder. In return they would offer fish, chickens, cakes and tropical fruits.(112) This small-scale activity gave the Home Islanders some experience in barter, which became quite important during the War.

(108) Nek Keti: J5/1. Nek Dittie: Interview, 30 July 1986. Webb(1937), p.7. Gibson-Hill(1947), p.166. Smith(1960) p.99.

(109) Webb(1937), p.7.

(110) Nek Bika says that Ross's withdrawal of the privilege of Singapore holidays was intended to reduce pressure upon Singapore Cocos Malays to look after their Home Island relatives. I am not so charitable about Tuan Ross's motives.

(111) For example, an epidemic of influenza in August 1929 caused 11 deaths and affected the number of live births from March to May 1930. Smith(1960), pp.99,116. Reynolds (1944), Appendix III. See also Gibson-Hill(1947), p.166.

(112) J.A.G.Milne: A Year on Cocos Keeling (unpublished MS.in Home Island Museum), pp.25, 41-2. Nek Bika says that permission to trade was always granted. Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 9 October 1988. Brockman(1981), p.86.

Pulu Luar (Outer Island) is the only island inaccessible by foot around the coral reef. It was the ideal place of isolation. A small community was located there in Tuan Ross's time, but visitors were strictly forbidden.

We heard of the harem that Mr Clunies-Ross keeps on one island, but our information could go no farther than hearsay as no other man is ever allowed to land on that island. (113)

Gibson-Hill wrote:

A number of the young girls were sent over to Pulo Luar for about a year about their fifteenth birthday...largely so that they should not become pregnant before they reached the official marrying age.(114)

However this was not quite the whole story:

Ah, di emang di Pulu Luar tempat orang buahan. Tempo Tuan Ross itu hari, mengkali orang nang, nang bujang nang ada anak, tak ada laki, dia buang Pulu Luar...Ya, kerja...Ada nang jaga ada nang mandurnya. Ah, perempuan nang mana tak ada laki nang mana dapat anak begitu...Anak Luar. Di buang di sana...di Pulu Luar. Nang kita bilang 'tempat buangan'-lah. Ah, di ...England dia dengar 'tempat buangan' Saint Helena. Tempat...sudah dalam Singapura...Sakijang. Misih ada buangan-lah...Tuan Ross paling sayang Pulu Luar.... Banyak ongkosnya...Labu, ketela, jagung...pisang tanam, ayam, bebek - semua ada.

[TRANSLATION] Ah, Horsburgh Island was an orchard. In John Sidney's time, at that time, people who, who were single and had a child, and no husband, he threw them away to Horsburgh Island...Yes, they worked...There were those that stood watch, there were foremen. Ah, women who didn't have a husband and had a child... Outside (Horsburgh) children. They were thrown away there...to Horsburgh Island. So we called it 'the place of cast-offs'. Ah, one heard that England's 'place of cast-offs' was Saint Helena.(115) There is a place in Singapore...Sakijang. They still throw people away there...(116) John Sidney really loved

(113) Johnsons(1936): Op.Cit., p.302.

(114) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.177.

(115) Description by a Cocos Malay boatman who travelled to England in 1914.

(116) This was either Pulau Sekijang Bendera or Pulau Sekijang Pelepah, two small islands just south of Sentosa Island, Singapore, now known as St John's Island and Kusu Island, tourist destinations. But in Tuan Ross's day they were the sites of the Quarantine Station and the Lazarus (Leper) Station. Colony of Singapore Annual Report for 1951, Map HIND 1035 Sheet 3L/12, Singapore, 1952

Horsburgh Island...It had so many benefits...Pumpkins, sweet potatoes, Indian corn...bananas were cultivated, chickens, ducks - it had everything."(117)

Usually the mother would remain on Horsburgh Island until the child was about two years old. The mother would then return to Home Island, while the child would remain on Horsburgh Island until the age of 13 or 14, when he or she would join the workforce.(118) This practice of isolation on Horsburgh Island appears to have been an attempt to discourage pre-marital pregnancy. As we have seen, it was ineffective.

Horsburgh Island was also Tuan Ross's "pondok" island, where he would spend his leisure time. Up till his marriage, his Scottish mistress lived there, attended by servants.

Every Home Island family had a "pondok" at which they would camp on weekends. All the islands and bays extending from Pulu Ampang, just below Home Island, to Pulu Blan Madar at the southern extremity of the lagoon were apportioned to individual families. [See Illustration 2] Members of the family would catch fish and collect shell-fish, crabs, crayfish and coconuts to supplement their food supply, and gather wood for fuel and coconut fronds for making swish brooms.(119)

The Cocos men were excellent boat-builders. All boys spent their first two years of employment in the Estate workshops, where they learnt carpentry and boat-building.(120) The distinctive Cocos sailing-boat, the "jukong", was a combination of Indonesian and English design-elements, perfectly suited to Cocos conditions. About half the boats were built by the Estate workshop and were based on a design by Tuan Ross, although some men built their own, which took about nine months.(121)

Nearly every family had a boat, which was used to get to West Island for nutting, or for fishing, or to get to the family "pondok". Fishing was a necessity, and a variety of methods were employed, including hand-line, trolling, seine-net, casting-net and casting-spear.(122)

(117) Nek Bika: S6/12,13.

(118) Interview with Nek Bika, 20 December 1987.

(119) Nek Dittie: Interview of 30/6/86. Bunce(1988), p.110.

(120) Lieut-Col.Harvey: 'Social Security in the Cocos', p.1, file 50757, CO 537/2134.

(121) C.A.Gibson-Hill: 'Boats and Fishing in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands'. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol.LXXVI(1), London, 1946, p.14. The Estate retained half ownership, while the individual had full use and part ownership. Half-ownership in an Estate-built "jukong" would cost a tradesman 3-4 years' wages. Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.161, 181-2. Webb(1937), p.9.

(122) Basket-traps and palisade traps were once used. The Estate restricted net-mesh size. Wood-Jones(1924), pp.123-4. Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.16-20, 189. Nek Dittie: J1/5,6.

The German raider S.M.S. Emden was run onto the southern reef of North Keeling Island after its defeat by H.M.A.S. Sydney on 9 November 1914. This led to a flurry of activity by Cocos salvage parties during 1915 and early 1916. Machinery, stainless steel, tinned food, uniforms and anything else that might prove useful was stripped from the wreck and taken back to Home Island. Two ghoulish souvenirs, the skulls of Emden seamen, were subsequently mounted on silver bases to stand on the table at the entrance of Oceania House. The Home Islanders no doubt saw Tuan Ross's possession of these skulls as a manifestation of his supernatural power ("ilmu").(123)

In the 1930s there was an annual visit to North Keeling to collect birds for "Hari Lebaran".(124) The Island generated its own rituals. Offerings of fresh water were always made at "Kuburan Nek Katek" (Grandfather Dwarf's Grave), the last resting-place of one of the original settlers. The island was also believed to be guarded by a female spirit ("penunggu"). Silence was kept when crossing the reef to shore, otherwise large waves would swamp the boat.(125)

Once on shore, the Islanders would set about killing as many birds as possible with flails and shotguns.(126) A number of men possessed shotguns, some of which had been in the family for fifty years or more.(127)

"Jukung" used for unauthorized visits to North Keeling were confiscated and tied up on the roof of "Rumah Denda" (House of Fines) at the end of the Home Island jetty.(128)

A Cocos Malay Life: Old Age:

The Cocos Malays had been born in the Islands. They would work, doing monotonous, sometimes unpleasant tasks; they would marry and raise children who would perhaps aspire to be headmen or "mandor" or imam. They would always have enough to eat; they would discreetly invoke magic to protect them

(123) Gibson-Hill(1948), pp.72, 99. Nek Dittie: Interview, 14 July 1974. The skulls were passed to the commander of the third Emden for burial at sea during a goodwill visit to Cocos in 1931. Gibson-Hill(1948), p.99.

(124) C.A.Gibson-Hill: 'The Island of North Keeling', JMBRAS, Vol.XXI(1), 1948, pp.69, 71-2. Webb(1937), p.2. Nek Bika: Interview, 27 July 1985.

(125) Nek Benson (Capstan bin Benjamin): Interview, 22 December 1985. Nek Dittie: Interview, 15 January 1986. Bunce (1988), p.128. R.Mathews: Conversation, 28 April 1987. Bunce (1988), p.130. Nek Dittie: Conversation, 16 November 1977.

(126) Gibson-Hill(1947), p.194.

(127) Ibid., p.194. The guns were usually German or French weapons of special design, brought back from Europe by Tuan Tinggi or Tuan Ross as gifts to headmen or other favoured members of the community. Det.-Sgt Ian Prior of the A.F.P. inspected the guns in 1984 and provided comments on them.

(128) Nek Dittie: Conversation, 17 January 1986.

through the dangers and crises of life by wearing "jimat" (charms) or consulting "bomoh". They would participate in major communal celebrations - marriages, circumcisions, "Hari Lebaran" and "Nuyar", and draw strength from their sense of community. They would grow old in the house of their youngest married child, watching their grandchildren learn the way of the islands, while they themselves accumulated respect for their piety and wisdom, and for their past prowess as a fisherman, a dancer or a musician, or for their reputation as a housekeeper, a cook, a "dukun" or a practiser of magic.

Death:

Death was a blow to the entire community. The body was wrapped in linen, placed on a bamboo litter with arching palm stems, and covered with flowers. The funeral procession walked to the northernmost point of Home Island, then crossed to Pulu Gangsa, the cemetery island, by boat. The grave was dug in the sand, then verses from the Koran were recited. A woman was buried with her jewellery, her head lying on a pillow made up of her own hair, carefully collected during her lifetime. In 1905-07, no special attention was paid to the direction of Mecca in aligning the grave. A wooden marker shaped to indicate the sex of the deceased was placed on the grave. [See Illustration 14]

The grave was carefully maintained for the period of mourning, during which relatives and the imam visited on the seventh, fortieth, one hundredth and one thousandth day after death. Portions of the rope that had been used to lower the body into the grave were tied around the wrists of relatives; when the rope dropped off, the time of mourning ceased.(129)

The ceremonies on Cocos following death were within the Malay tradition, with some local divergences from strict Islamic procedures.(130) It is possible that the experiences of Ragelie and Hosman in Singapore were beginning to influence Cocos practice in the direction of Malay orthodoxy by 1930. Direction Island Malays and of course the Bantamese may also have had an influence.

Members of the Clunies-Ross family, including John Sidney's mother and grandmother, were buried on the eastern side of Pulu Gangsa, away from the Muslim (lagoon) side. Their heads were all to the east, and most of them had marble headstones inscribed in conventional English funerary terminology.(131) In death, as Christians, they were set apart from the Cocos

(129) This description of the procedures after death is taken from Wood-Jones (1912), pp.54-6. Wood-Jones saw ceremonies in 1905-07. Gibson-Hill(1947) gives details of the appearance of graves in 1941, but apparently saw no funerals. Cocos funerals have moved rapidly towards mainstream Islamic practice in recent years, thus I am reluctant to draw too heavily upon Clarke(1979) and Bunce(1988).

(130) Skeat (1900/1965), pp.397-405. Alwi(1965), pp.52-8.

Malay people.

The "Anak Raja":

The Cocos Malays accepted Clunies-Ross authority, which meant that they accepted the family dynasty. When John Cecil Clunies-Ross was born in England on 28 November 1928, his father doubled everyone's wages for a fortnight and announced, "We have a new King!" Anticipating of the birth of a son in 1927, he had commissioned a bronze bust of himself in England. This developed into a set of four standing in pairs in the entrance hall of Oceania House. They depicted the complete dynasty - John (1786-1854), John George (1821-1871), George (1842-1910) and himself.(132)

The baby boy, the heir to Cocos, was over one year old when he was first brought ashore to Home Island one morning early in 1930. Rapahie the Headman carried the child, whom Tuan Ross had been referring to as an "anak Raja", on his shoulders from the jetty all the way to the "Rumah Besar" (Great House - Oceania House). Tuan Ross boasted to the Kampong that when his son took over, everyone would be rich enough to wear shoes, and that there would be boxes and boxes of clothes for everyone each New Year. No-one would suffer under him.(133)

That moment of exultation was the high point of Tuan Ross's rule over the Islands. He was 61 years of age, in good health, and he looked forward to many years of life, time enough to train his son to carry on the dynasty. There was a steady income from sales of copra and Christmas Island phosphate shares, enough, it seemed, to provide for his own family and the growing population of Home Island. His authority over the people was secure. He had a genuine affection for them, the affection of a father or an elder brother, and they reciprocated that affection with the respect due to one who was also their master.

Conclusion:

Tuan Ross was never to know a better moment. But the next fifteen years up till his death were to see the slow erosion of the elements underpinning his authority - the isolation of his people, the closed economy, and his social controls. Those elements, while they remained intact, protected the Clunies-Ross regime - so long as it could meet its side of the "social contract". The next chapter shows how that became increasingly difficult during the 1930s, leading to the weakening of the regime.

(131) Personal observation, April 1985 and January 1988.

(132) Letters from W.T.Lee to J.S.Clunies-Ross, 31 May 1927, 27 November 1928, 5 March 1929, 27 May 1929. CR MSS 11/83. Johnsons(1936), p.300 and photograph of busts, facing p.302.

(133) Nek Bika and Nek Renja, conversation on 18 December 1987. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 15 May 1989. The ownership of shoes has long been a status symbol on Cocos.

Chapter 4: Taim Memiskinan (Time of Growing Poverty):
 Home Island, 1930-1941.

Introduction:

In the decade 1930 to 1941 the economy of Home Island declined while the population grew from 1000 to 1400. The prosperity once enjoyed by the Islanders became a memory, and day-to-day life became a monotonous struggle as the quality and quantity of food and provisions in the "Toko" Estate Store dwindled. In some families, health levels began to decline, and the people as a whole came to depend more than ever before on local products such as fish and coconuts.

The response of the Cocos Malays was twofold. The majority stuck with their Raja, but some 13% of the Home Island community left Cocos forever. The bonds of dependence were weakened by Tuan Ross's failure to perform adequately his part of the "social contract", but his right to rule remained unchallenged by the Cocos Malays themselves. When a challenge came, it was from the outside, and it came close to changing the basis of Clunies-Ross authority over the Islands.

Poverty and Copra, 1930-36:

A typical account about working life on Cocos in the 1930s is this one by Nek Nebie, who started working in 1930:

Tempo lagi kecil, sudah kerja, kerja hutan, kerja hutan, terbang hutan. Sama parang, kampak, pigi pukul enam pagi. Pulang pukul lima sore. Ujan - tak pakai apa-apa kita pakai karung saja. Kita mahu pakai baju-baju, tak ada baju. Kita pulang lagi, besok pagi, begitu lagi, pigi kerja lagi. Sudah habis, dari mulai menebang, kerja di darat, bikin rumah, bikin jendela, bikin pintu...sudah besar lagi, mengalai lagi kerja-kerja jadi jaga ayam di hutan. Jaga ayam di hutan, balek rumah, sama jaga - pigi pagi, sore pulang. Sudah lama lagi, *saya bikin ini, 'ni *Kerja jaga kambing. Jaga kambing - sudah lama lagi belajar. Sudah di bagikan orang-orang beli, orang kampong beli...

[TRANSLATION] When I was still small, (1) I was already working, working in the jungle, clearing jungle with bush-knife and axe, going off at six in the morning, returning at five in the afternoon. If it rained - we wore nothing, nothing but gunny-sacks. (2) We wanted to wear shirts, but we didn't have them. (3) The next morning it was the same again, and again we went to work. When that was over, chopping (jungle), I worked on Home Island, (4) building houses, making windows and doors (5)...when I was a bit bigger, I lay idly on my back again, with the job of guarding chickens in the jungle. (6) I guarded chickens in the jungle, went back home, the same again - go in the morning, return home in the afternoon. A long time afterwards, I had the job of guarding sheep. (7)

Guarding sheep - a long time afterwards....I made things - I learned. As soon as I distributed them, people bought them, kampong people bought them.(8)

After his son arrived on Cocos in 1930, Tuan Ross spent most of his time in Oceania House behind the high walls. He left the day-to-day running of the Estate to his European staff and the Headmen. "Dia pigi dia orang bisu," (He went around like a dumb man) was the comment of a woman who served as a "boi" (house-servant) in Oceania House from 1929 to 1934.(9) There were a good number of disputes within the Kampong at this time, probably brought about by the growing poverty, and the Headmen were left to settle these problems.(10) The poverty of the Islands was brought about by the collapse of copra prices in the world trade depression. Rose Clunies-Ross described the effects on Cocos in this fashion in 1936:

Our only trouble is the slump in price of copra-oil. It has dropped from L 33 to L 10 a ton. Once it was as low as L 4 a ton...It costs my husband about L 4000 a year to run the people and the island. They all depend on him.(11)

- (1) Nek Nebie (Knight bin Nahiman) was born in 1916 and started work at 14, in 1930.
- (2) Gunny sacks - copra bags. They are still used by fishermen for protection from the rain.
- (3) Men wore either "sarong" or shorts to work. At home they had another "sarong" and a shirt. If their work clothes got wet, they would wear them again the next day. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988. The complaint about lack of clothes recurs from the first Government inspections in the 1880s until the end of Clunies-Ross rule in 1978. Photographs taken c.1920-41 bear out the impression of poverty, in the children's clothing in particular. [See Illustrations 8, 9 and 18] Only "mandor" had long trousers, which were a status symbol (Tuan Ross wore them), and so they were patched and re-patched rather than thrown away.
- (4) "Darat" - mainland (Home Island).
- (5) All Cocos boys did a carpentry apprenticeship.
- (6) The Estate chickens were for sale at the Store.
- (7) Sheep were kept for slaughter on New Year's Day and major celebrations but were not part of the regular diet.
- (8) Nek Nebie made baskets from coconut fronds. A3/5.
- (9) Nek Keti Perempuan (Ebetie binte Sebie): J5/8.
- (10) Nek Keti (Yapat bin Carey, b.1913) and Nek Keti Perempuan, b.1916) gave me an account of Tuan Ross as seen by the "orang kecil" (the small/uninfluential people) in J5/7-9. Nek Bika, whose father and father-in law were Headman, gave the view from the influential people's perspective, which was passed to me by P.Bunce in a letter of 20 December 1988. Haji Dubney confirms this picture in L1/40-3.
- (11) "Queen" of the Cocos Isles comes home': Sunday Express, London, 17 May 1936. Cocos copra had not fetched L 33 since 1920 and was never sold for as low as L 4. Rose's figure of L 4000 a year was the approximate cost of feeding and clothing the people and providing medical stores. CR MSS 20/144.

The total cost of running the operation on Cocos reached L 10,000 in 1930, was cut drastically the following year and was kept down throughout the decade to between L 5,000 and L 6,000 per annum, mainly through cuts in imports of food and clothing. Although copra production increased steadily during the 1930s, prices remained low. Every year in the 1930s except 1936 saw a loss in the Home Island operation.(12)

Just as copra prices were dropping, John Sidney was dealt a further blow. His phosphate shares, which, up to 1928-29 provided an income of about L 12,000 a year, returned low dividends in 1930 and none in 1931. On top of this, the Solicitor of Inland Revenue issued an information in the High Court of Justice in the United Kingdom, claiming L 12,700/15/6 in unpaid Super-Tax and L 3,955/15/- in Sur-Tax in respect of Sidney's income from Christmas Island shares from 1920-21 to 1929-30.(13) John Sidney had simply ignored the letters seeking payment of the taxes, convinced in his own mind that since he was domiciled in Cocos and supported the Home Island population without help from Government, he was not liable to taxation. The Taxation Commissioners did not agree.(14) A writ was served on him at Cocos by the Christmas Island District Officer, who travelled over specially on the supply ship Islander.(15)

In advising the Colonial Office that Clunies-Ross would deny the claim, his solicitors went on to say that he could not pay the sum in whole or in part, and that, although he had received very substantial dividends from the shares

(12) A recovery in copra prices in 1936, together with rigorous economies, enabled the Estate to make a profit of just over L 1250 that year, but an increase in expenditure in 1937 saw the accounts back in the red again. Tuan Ross kept the Headmen informed of copra prices, presumably to encourage them to work harder. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 30 December 1988. Annual production and prices per ton fetched in Singapore (converted into L Sterling), extracted from CR MSS 20/144, were as follows:

1930	412 tons	L 14/8/-
1931	464 tons	L 11/1/-
1932	449 tons	L 10/15/-
1933	450 tons	L 6/6/8
1934	475 tons	L 5/13/4
1935	510 tons	L 9/12/-
1936	560 tons	L 11/19/6
1937	625 tons	L 11/19/6
1938	424 tons	L 7/2/-
1939	488 tons	L 7/15/-

(13) Druces and Attlee to Colonial Office, 10 February 1933. CO 273/. Straits File 13043/1933.

(14) 'J.S.C.Ross - Supertax 1933.' CR MSS 12/92.

(15) Solicitor's Office, Inland Revenue, to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 7 May 1934. Straits File 33081/34, CO 273/591.

...it should also be stated that he has applied the whole of this income towards the maintenance and upkeep of the population of the Islands, numbering about 1000, as the only industry of the Islands, namely the export of copra, provides a fraction only of this cost.(16)

This was not true.(17)

On 19 December 1934 judgement was given to the Crown, and income from phosphate shares attached by the Inland Revenue went into the Taxation Commissioner's hands until 1937, when the debt and costs were paid.(18)

Ross's task of making the Islands pay was not made easier by the poor quality of the Europeans he employed to run the Estate. These men were described as

...either remittance men or black sheep...There are many papers and letters to prove that these men were of indifferent character and could not demand higher rates elsewhere! Their value as regards the betterment of the islands either from field work or engineering appears to have been negligible!(19)

As the Estate continued to lose money, the population continued to grow, from 1091 at the end of 1930 to 1356 at the end of 1936. An ominous development was the high proportion of children; in the 1936 total of 1346, 871 were minors, potential for a rapid increase in the future.(20)

In 1936 there was an outbreak of beri-beri on Home Island, the first cases for thirteen years. Beri-beri is a vitamin-deficiency disease, and presumably broke out because of poor diet. About 30 persons were affected in 1936, with eight

(16) Druces and Attlee letter of 10 February, 1933, Op.Cit.

(17) As indicated above (pp.21-2), almost all the income from phosphate shares was spent in England on John Sidney's personal expenses and his legitimate and illegitimate families. Copra accounts were kept separate, while the debt to Ross's Singapore agents (who arranged all Island supplies) gradually grew. In fact, personal expenses for John Sidney and Rose for passages and hotel expenses ex-Cocos were charged to the copra account. CR MSS 20/144.

(18) CR MSS 11/83. A.Hardy Bentley had warned Ross in 1932 that this might happen. Colonial Office Minute by J.A.Calder, 14 February 1933, Straits File 13043/1933, CO 273/. The News Chronicle, London. 20 December 1934, 'King of the Cocos Islands Sued for Unpaid Super-Tax.' Straits File 33081/1934, CO 273/591.

(19) Jessamine Report, 5 December 1944: Op.Cit., p.6. The Clunies-Ross records do not fully bear out Jessamine's assessment. The Secretaries appear to have been generally competent, while European field management was always weak.

(20) CR MSS 20/144.

deaths. Fortunately the disease did not recur on the same scale, although one death was recorded in 1939.(21)

Oceania House:

Rose never really settled down on Cocos in the almost 11 years from her arrival as a young bride in 1925. On Home Island Rose remained an "outsider" - she was Nyonya, Tuan's wife, a European woman. The children played with Kampong youngsters and spoke Cocos Malay as their first language.(22)

During her stay in England in 1935, Rose was confronted with the dilemma that all European women with children had to face in Southeast Asia: choosing between husband and children when the children reached school age.(23) Rose left the older children with her parents in Exeter and returned to Cocos with Charles, who was three years old.(24)

After somewhat less than a year, she left with Charles, apparently after a row with her husband. Eight years later, the evidence of her hurried departure could still be seen in Oceania House:

(Mrs Clunies-Ross's) almeirah [wardrobe] and dressing rooms and children's nurseries were in the condition she left them. The best description of the state of affairs in these rooms would be the disorderly litter left behind by someone who has done a hurried packing. Pictures, photographs, old clothes have been left lying around...(25)

After his wife's departure he used only two rooms in the large, rambling house - the lounge and his bedroom. These were the only rooms that were kept clean. No repairs were permitted; the beautifully-carved mahogany, teak and walnut furniture was invaded by dry rot; the servants' houses and

(21) Reynolds: Op.Cit., p.4. Beri-beri had been a serious problem in 1880-88, when over 50 people died. In 1923, half the population had been affected by eating poor-quality Malayan rice and old rice caused sickness in 1927. Reynolds wrote that the eight deaths in 1936 were not correctly recorded in the Register as being caused by beri-beri.

(22) Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988. One source of conflict was John Sidney's use of the strap on the children. Another possible source of conflict was Sidney's invitation to Beatrice Atkinson, his former mistress (see pp.22, 50 above), to visit Cocos for a holiday in the year after his marriage.

(23) A good description of the dilemma is found in C.Allen (Ed.): Tales from the South China Seas, London, 1983, p.173.

(24) Rose's arrangements for the children are described in The Sunday Express, 3 and 17 May 1936.

(25) Jessamine Report, 5 December 1944, Op.Cit., p.13. The state of disorder was so different from the way the servants normally kept the household that I can only assume that Tuan Ross gave them specific instructions not to clean up.

sheds in the garden fell into disrepair; and cockroaches, rats and spiders invaded the corners and crannies of the house without hindrance.(26)

The departure of Rose was probably seen by the Kampong as a blow to Tuan Ross's prestige, and the long absence of his heir must have raised questions in the minds of the Cocos Malays about the continuity of the family dynasty.

A Can of Worms:

In November of 1936, Tuan Ross boarded the Islander to travel to Singapore en route to England. Accompanying him were 36 Home Islanders who had decided to leave Cocos for good to reside in Singapore.(27) The three families who left on this voyage took "Toko" credits ranging from Straits \$400 to \$1,000 per family.(28) No doubt travelling with Tuan Ross helped ease the transition from their sheltered life on Cocos to the frightening bustle of Singapore. What is significant is that the migrating party were the first of several groups who left Cocos in the period 1936-1940 because of the growing poverty of the Islands.

When he arrived in Southampton on 14 December 1936, John Sidney found a reporter from the Daily Sketch waiting for him, and gave an interview as Rose had done seven months before. The article came out this form:

RULES 1500 WITH A LITTLE STICK

No Prisons in the Cocos Isles, but Whip is Sometimes Needed.

Carrying the little polished stick with which he keeps 1500 Malaysans (29) in order, as well as parcels of dates and Turkish delight for his wife and children, who live in Exeter, bronzed and athletic-looking Sidney Clunies-Ross, Known as "King of the Cocos Islands", landed at Southampton yesterday for his first holiday in six years.

(26) Jessamine Report, 23 September 1944, pp.2,3. CO 537/1526, Part 1.

(27) In 1891, Egerton wrote that at least 30 Cocos-born people resided in Singapore. GB c8367, p.46. Annual reports show that 25 Cocos-born people left the Islands in 1887-1899.

Ayesha, George Clunies-Ross's widow, provided hospitality and assistance for newly-arrived migrants. See p.36 (above).

(28) Webb: Op.Cit., p.9. Jessamine, in his 5 December 1944 Report, wrote: "Invariably, when the emigrants arrived at Singapore or Batavia, they found that the letter of credit was not according to their anticipated amounts." Since no emigrant was permitted to return, the Estate could get away with this practice, which probably arose from its payout valuation of the Cocos Rupee at 5/7 to the Straits Dollar.

(29) "1500 Malaysans" is both an exaggeration and a misnomer. "1350 Cocos Malays" would have sufficed.

Mr Ross, who is a copra trader, and has a freehold lease on the islands, Queen Victoria having granted a charter to the family for a period of 999 years (30) - is tall and lean.

"There are no prisons in the Cocos Islands", he told me, "and when my stick is ineffective, a whip is sufficient to restore order. The Malaysians are all natural thieves and liars, but to control them is not difficult.

A Lonely Life

"The head of the tribe can do no wrong. It is the same as with the old clans of Scotland. Three previous generations of our family have lived in the islands, which lie 800 miles from Java.

"The life is one of the loneliest imaginable, as in the islands there are only ten other white men, each living on a separate island.(31) Three times a year a mail boat calls to land stores and provisions."

Mr Ross has 5000 books in his library, and expressed his desire that the DAILY SKETCH should definitely deny that he claims himself as King of the Cocos Islands. "The suggestion is absurd," he concluded.(32)

In making these ill-considered remarks, Ross had exposed his regime and himself in the worst possible light to the outside world. He had in fact opened up a can of worms that became a powerful pressure for change on Home Island.

Government Involvement:

On 21 December 1936, a Mr Llewelyn Wynn-Williams wrote to the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, asking them whether the state of affairs described in the Daily Sketch "constitutes a state of slavery."(33) The Society approached the Colonial Office and asked for an assurance that there was no truth in the account of Ross's autocratic powers and use of the whip.(34) The reply was clever but evasive, in part because the Colonial Office had no recent information about conditions on Home Island.

(30) In fact the Indenture granted the land "for ever".

(31) Direction Island had all the other "white men".

(32) The Daily Sketch, London, 15 December, 1936, p.22. This interview shows John Sidney in a very bad light, especially in his remarks about the people whom he claimed were his "family". The unfortunate element of racism in his comments may relate to an attempt by a man, 3/4 Malay himself, who was pathetically anxious to impress the British public.

(33) Letter from Llewelyn Wynn-Williams to Sir John Harris, Secretary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, 21 December 1936. Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

(34) Sir John Harris to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 12 January 1937. CO 537/632, File 50299/1937.

Your presumption that Mr Clunies-Ross is vested with no autocratic powers by the Government of the Straits Settlements is correct and the Secretary of State is aware of no complaints on the part of the islanders against him or the manner in which he exercises the natural authority which his leading position in the Islands gives to him.(35)

On 9 April 1937, the Governor's Deputy in Singapore advised that unofficial visits by Christmas Island District Officers had revealed that the Malays were "entirely happy."

Mr Ross, I am told, treats the inhabitants as if they were his children and is regarded by them as a father. He feeds and clothes them, and on feast days provides entertainment for everybody, whatever the price of copra. The Islanders thus have no use for money, and will not accept it willingly for any service or in exchange for the curios which a visitor may wish to buy there...(36) Mr Ross exercises the only authority that exists on the island and on occasion he does administer corporal punishment; but I am told that the Islanders regard being sent away from the islands as the greatest punishment that could be inflicted upon them.(37)

The Islanders would not accept money for the very good reason that it was of no value to them on Cocos; only Estate celluloid currency was permitted, even on Direction Island.(38)

A formal inspection of Cocos was delayed until Ross's return from England on 6 November 1937. G.W.Webb, the young Christmas Island District Officer, joined Ross when the Islander stopped at his Island, and travelled to Cocos with him. Webb was very impressed by the affectionate welcome given to Tuan Ross by the women and children of Home Island. After a short stay of 30 hours he wrote a long report which concentrated on the organization of the community and the physical conditions of life in the Islands.

(35) Under-Secretary to Harris, 23 January 1937. Ibid. (36) The services referred to were probably the use of Home Island "jukong" for fishing trips, while the "curios" were probably the beautifully-made carved wooden fish, model "jukong", tortoise-shell ornaments or souvenirs made from Emden stainless steel, usually cigarette- or cigar-boxes, inscribed bands on walking sticks, or plain rings.

(37) Despatch No.137, A.J.Small, Deputy to Governor, to Colonial Office, 9 April 1937, file 50299/1937, CO 537/632. The Despatch was apparently based on information from Cable Station staff.

(38) E.B.Strout: 'At Home on the Oceans', The National Geographic Magazine, Vol.LXVI, No.1, July 1939, p.69. See also J.G.Milne: Op.Cit., p.18. The Strouts visited Cocos in late 1936. Milne was at the Cable Station in 1938-39.

I am quite convinced that the islanders form a happy and peaceful community, quite contented with their lot...Mr Lavin (Estate Secretary)...said to me quite spontaneously, "The Malays here do not work very hard. ...The Governor" - Mr Ross - "will not allow us to drive them." Mr Ross is in a way an autocrat, but a beneficent one. And his hand rests so lightly on his people that they do not feel it...If someone less scrupulous than Mr Ross were in command, of course, there might be a different story to tell. (39)

The Colonial Office recognized the limitations and objectionable features of Ross's rule, through the Arcadian glow of Webb's Report. These limitations were:

...the complete autocracy of Mr Clunies-Ross and complete dependence on him of every man woman and child in the place; presumably no means of escape if any Islander did want to leave the realm of Mr Clunies-Ross, and no money or other resources to enable a new start to be made outside the Islands; no education, no laws and no redress for any injustice, real or imaginary.(40)

It was decided to investigate the possibility of regularizing Ross's rule by making him a Magistrate (as his father and grandfather had been), and to have periodic visits of inspection - in other words, to revive the system that prevailed from 1885 to 1910.(41) This was the first attempt to introduce change in the Islands since the 1892 attempt to introduce minted coins. Unlike 1892, the views of the Home Island people were never sought at any stage of the negotiations over the future arrangements for the Islands.

The new Christmas Island District Officer, Richard Broome, was sent to meet Tuan Ross on Cocos in November 1938. When he heard the details of the regularization proposal, the old man flatly told Broome that he did not want any powers from Singapore, because "he does not regard us as having any jurisdiction in his domain." [underlining as in original] He agreed however to confer with the Colonial Office during his visit to England the following year. (42)

Broome described Ross thus:

He is now an old man... - and there are clear signs that his powers are not what they were...he appears not to realise the possible consequences of the Anti-

(39) Webb: Op.Cit., pp.15-16

(40) Minute by G.W.Gent, 8 May 1938. File 50299/1938, CO 273/632.

(41) J.C.Shuckburgh, Colonial Office, to Governor of Straits Settlements, 2 May 1938. Ibid.

(42) R.N.Broome: Report to Governor of Straits Settlements, 18 November 1938, p.1, enclosed with Governor's Confidential Despatch 28/38, file 50299/1938, CO 273/644.

Slavery Society's agitation, and...his mind is more likely to contemplate the past rather than to peer into the future...Mr Ross himself is quite sure that he can carry on as before for another fifteen years, and that his heir will succeed him exactly as has happened in past generations. (43)

Tuan Ross was in decline, and the Islands were in decline with him. The Headmen were not told the reason for the outside world's sudden interest in the Islands.(44)

When Broome left Cocos in mid-November 1938, another 36 Cocos Malays were on the ship. They too had decided to settle in Singapore, and carried with them a total of Straits \$7000 in credits. 49 Home Islanders left Cocos forever in 1938. The thrifty and the more adventurous Islanders were voting with their feet, and it was a vote against Tuan Ross. (45)

The First "Kapal Terbang":

The outside world always came by sea to Cocos, and always brought a sense of excitement, none more dramatic than the "barrel mail". This was a system whereby passing P. & O. liners dropped a barrel containing mail, books or fresh food for Direction Island staff. Cocos Malay and Cable Company personnel would retrieve the barrel by "jukong" and leave a tin can with outgoing mail and Home Island souvenirs in it.(46)

Early in June 1939, the Home Islanders were informed that a new kind of ship was coming, a "flying ship" ("kapal terbang"). This was to be a totally new experience for the Cocos Malays, who had never seen an aeroplane before. The Guba, was a civil version of the wartime Catalina flying-boat, and was engaged in surveying a trans-Indian Ocean route. The entire Home Island workforce was given the afternoon off to watch it land, and on 6 June 1939, it appeared out of the clouds after its flight from Java. There was a feeling of awe at the magic of such a heavy machine flying in the air, mingled with fear for the safety of the men on board. But the Guba touched down safely on a stretch of water opposite Direction Island.(47)

(43) Ibid., pp.1,2.

(44) When I mentioned the controversy to some of the older members of the Home Island community in 1986, it was the first they had ever heard of it.

(45) Broome: Op.Cit., p.2. 1938 Population, CR MSS 20/144.

(46) Zodiac 1947-48 (Cable & Wireless Co. magazine), pp.8-10. Milne: Op.Cit., pp.35-40 gives an excellent description.

(47) J.G.Milne: Op.Cit., pp.62-70. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988 provide both a Direction Island and a Home Island perspective. The Times, London, 21 July 1939, influenced by boys' fiction, said that "many of the 1400 Malays on Home Island ran for cover when the flying-boat approached." Nek Bika and Milne's photos contradict this.

The next day, Captain P.G.Taylor, his crew and passengers were guests of Tuan Ross at Oceania House, and over the next few days the flying-boat did several survey flights over the Islands. Captain Taylor's Report stated that "Governor Ross...appears to welcome the possibility of Cocos Island being used as an air base. This latter fact is recorded as it is in contrast to policy with regard to visitors generally and any development or outside influence." (48) Apparently Ross had finally grasped the necessity for the Estate to obtain alternative income, and saw an air base as a means of doing so. On 13 June the Guba departed for Diego Garcia. (49) It was the first of many aeroplanes that would visit Cocos over the next six years, and bring most dramatic changes to the world-view of the Cocos Malays.

Taim Perang: The War Begins:

On the afternoon of 3 September 1939 the Cable Station heard that the United Kingdom had declared war on Germany. "The Governor" at Oceania House was informed. He assembled the people to tell them the news, "but they did not take any notice." (50) From the Home Islanders' point of view, there was nothing to get excited about. Their only experience of war had been when the Emden raided the "Stesen Kebel Welis" (Cable Station) and the Sydney had beaten the intruder. (51) Tuan Ross and the "orang putih" would protect them.

John Sidney left Cocos on 6 November 1939 for England. He took with him a list prepared by the Estate Secretary headed "Reminders for the Governor in London 1940." It includes among the items to be purchased: Caporal cigarettes, annual Cocos consumption, c.250,000; Koran in Romanised Malay; large quantities of cast-iron pots; rice-bowls, kettles, dessert spoons, scissors, combs, sun-spectacles, unbleached towelling, trouser-drill, short-drill, cotton-print sarong cloth, sail-cloth and spectacles for elderly Cocos Malays. (52) The need to buy large quantities of standard household utensils and basic clothing materials shows that the Kampong had slipped further into poverty.

In Singapore Clunies-Ross was asked for assistance in the construction of a direction-finding station for the Royal Navy on Cocos. He agreed to provide labour "at the usual rates of pay" (presumably Singapore or Malayan rates), with all money going to the Estate. The Cocos Malays received their usual

(48) Capt.P.G.Taylor: 'Report of Trans-Indian Ocean Survey Flight, June 1939', p.12. AA CRS A461. T314/1/4, Part 2.

(49) Ibid., p.13. The flight had defence implications.

(50) J.S.Clunies-Ross to The Daily Sketch, 19 April 1940.

(51) Nek Normie (Badrie bin Jamihan), d.1989, gave a graphic, historically accurate account of the battle in A3/8,9. Nek Normie could neither read nor write. Gibson-Hill(1948), pp.72, 99, wrote that many Emden artefacts survived till 1941.

(52) S.W.Rayment-Acton to W.T.Lee & Co., 1 November 1940 (copy of list given to J.S.Clunies-Ross). CR MSS 11/83.

"Toko" credits, while the Estate retained the difference between the value of the Islanders' credits and the wages paid by the Straits Government.(53)

On 30 May 1940, Ross's London Agent wrote to the Estate Secretary with advice from Tuan Ross that: "in view of the war, it will be impossible to ship goods out, so will you please advise the Islanders that they will have to go very easy with clothing until the war is over."(54) Once more Tuan Ross had failed to keep his side of the "social contract".

Back on Home Island:

By 1940, Kalwie, the son of a Bantamese labourer, was effectively running Home Island. His natural energy and ambition, allied to his prestige as Tuan Ross's pupil (John Sidney used to give him private tuition in Romanised Malay) made him a natural leader and spokesman, although in theory all four Headmen were equal. Rayment-Acton had given notice as Estate Secretary, and Ragelie was nearing retirement as "Toko" Manager. Hosman was increasingly taking responsibility for the paperwork and running the office.(55) Kalwie was at this time working within Tuan Ross's system, because he saw this as the best chance of advancement for himself and his family.

The more enterprising members of the community were leaving the Islands. During 1940, the largest single migration yet seen took place when 55 persons left. Two women had married Cable station Malays, and the other migrants were joining relatives already in Singapore.(56) Between 1936 and 1941, 186 Cocos Malays emigrated to Singapore, over 13% of the Home Island population at 31 December 1941. One of the effects was that by 1941, one of the four mosques had a following much larger than the other three, and one was much smaller.(57)

"Some Reformed Arrangement":

The Colonial Office had decided to get Clunies-Ross and the Anti-Slavery Society together in an attempt to jolt the old man into agreeing to reforms.

...we must do our very best to secure the goodwill and acquiescence of Mr Clunies-Ross in some reformed arrangement for the Cocos Islands and we are, to an

(53) Cypher Telegram from Governor of Straits Settlements to Secretary of State for the Colonies, No.190, 18 November 1939. File 50299/1939, CO 273/644. This system of "retained wages" was not challenged until after the War.

(54) W.T.Lee to S.W.Rayment-Acton, 30 May 1940. Ibid.

(55) Nek Bika: Letters, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 4 and 19 December 1988. Background about the Cocos Malays, pp.32-3, 38, 39.

(56) Population Figures for 1940, CR MSS 11/83. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988.

(57) Population Figures for 1936, 1938-41, Ibid. Gibson-Hill (1947), pp.176-177.

almost complete degree, dependent on him and his position in the Islands if we are to secure it.(56)

This was the dilemma that all Government attempts to introduce change into Cocos faced, right up to the 1970s. It was a dilemma brought about by the almost total economic and social control exerted over the Cocos Malays by the Clunies-Ross family. Only when the Cocos Malays looked beyond the family to a wider loyalty and a demonstrably superior way of life, would the Clunies-Rosses relinquish power.

On 12 March 1940, Ross went to the Colonial Office, accompanied by A.Hardy Bentley, his solicitor. G.E.Gent described the interview as a "fireside chat", and recorded his impressions of the Tuan:

(He) is a tall elderly man with very distinct traces of Eastern blood...He speaks English rather poorly...he did not understand the need for change and..he was very averse..to any steps which would formally involve him with the Governor of Straits Settlements.(56)

At a more formal conference on 19 March, the Colonial Office representatives put forward the suggestion of appointing Ross as a Magistrate by Straits Ordinance, the establishment of a Police Court and a District Court, and periodic visits of inspection from Singapore. Ross repeated his aversion to "interference from Singapore" and said that he "was afraid that the proposed measures might affect his prestige in the eyes of his local people." Bentley claimed that his client was supporting Cocos out of his own pocket, but that, because of the cost of educating his four children and increased income tax on his C.I.P.Co. shares, "he was finding it increasingly difficult to continue to do so."(57)

A month later Bentley informed the Colonial Office that the cost of chartering the Islander and feeding the population had caused Ross to be substantially overdrawn with his Singapore agents (this was apparently the "supporting Cocos out of his own pocket"). Bentley wrote that if a Government grant of L 5000 was not forthcoming, "I think that Mr Clunies-Ross in order to save further anxiety and difficulty must send the population to Singapore." "This is not very satisfactory," minuted an official, and a letter was sent back to Bentley seeking further details.(58)

(56) Colonial Office Minute Sheet, unsigned and undated, but probably June 1939. Ibid.

(56) G.E.Gent, Minute of 13 March 1940. File 50299/1940, CO 273/662.

(57) Note of Conference at the Colonial Office on the 19th March 1940. Ibid.

(58) A.Hardy Bentley to G.E.Gent, Colonial Office, 17 April 1940. Minute by J.M.Martin, 19 April 1940. G.E.Gent to A.Hardy Bentley, 30 April 1940. Ibid.

During the meeting with the Anti-Slavery Society, Ross answered their questions in a frank and unapologetic manner, but Bentley did offer the comment that "the present situation is to be looked upon as a transition stage."(59)

Financial details of the Estate were forwarded to the Colonial Office on 23 May 1940, covering the financial years 1937, 1938 and 1939. They show the following significant points:

- . income falling short of expenditure in 1937-39;
- . a cut-back in expenditure on food in 1939 and on clothing in 1938-39;
- . a consistently high consumption of tobacco relative to food and clothing - expenditure on tobacco doubled that on clothing over the period;
- . Tuan Ross's hotel bills charged against the Home Island operation;
- . no income from phosphate shares included, nor was the annual rental of Direction Island.(60)

Some money was being paid from Ross's London accounts to keep the Islands going, notably L 1000 to Caldbeck and McGregor in 1939 to reduce his Singapore overdraft, and payment of the Islander charter fee of L 500 for 1940.(61)

In March 1941, the Governor of Singapore offered Ross a \$25,000 interest-free loan without conditions, contrary to the Colonial Office strategy of linking financial assistance to reform.(62) The draft bill forwarded to Cocos in March 1941 included some amendments suggested by Ross himself. It provided for recognition of local customs, formal appointment of a "Kathi" (Muslim judge) to celebrate marriages, and appointment of four "Penghulu" (Headmen) and a Magistrate with the powers of an Assistant District Judge (Ross himself).(63)

(59) 'The Keeling (Cocos) Islands. Interview with Mr Clunies-Ross...24 April 1940.' Record dated 25 April in Anti-Slavery Society Papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

(60) The 1936 figures are in Webb: Op.Cit., Appendix IV. 1937-39 figures were sent to the Colonial Office by A.Hardy Bentley on 23 May 1940. File 50299/1940, CO 273/667.

(61) Letters from W.T.Lee to J.S.Clunies-Ross, 25 September 1939 and 28 December 1940. CR MSS 11/83.

(62) Governor of Straits Settlements to Colonial Office, Secret Telegrams No.151, 10 March 1941 and No.306 of 21 March 1941; Cypher Telegram No.149 of 31 March 1941. Colonial Office Minute by W.B.L.Manson, 12 March 1941; Secret Telegram, Colonial Office to Governor, No.306 of 14 March 1941; Confidential Telegram No.353 of 25 March 1941. All in File 50299/1941-43, CO 273/662.

(63) Governor of Straits Settlements to Colonial Office, Secret Telegram No.179 of 5 February 1941. Ibid.

Such a structure would mirror and legitimize the existing Home Island arrangements. It was by no means a programme for substantial change.

The next mail to Cocos brought a disturbing letter from Ross's Singapore agents, informing him that his outstanding debt for Cocos supplies now totalled Straits \$94,176.05.

In view of the fact that the charge on your Life Policy lodged with the Company as security is valued at L 3,300 only - approximately \$28,285 - I am instructed to inform you that the Company are not prepared to finance you any more until your account with us has been reduced to \$60,000/-. This must be considered the absolute maximum and even this amount must be regularly and considerably reduced...(64)

Rayment-Acton sent this letter to Messrs W.T.Lee and Co., Ross's London agents, with a covering letter, and stated:

I am to stress the point that this population will have no food at all if Caldbeck's refuse to send down supplies in December of this year; the indent will amount to about \$20,000.00. Will you urge the matter of the proposed Government grant to the Governor (Clunies-Ross) and cable him of progress and prospects.(65)

Bentley forwarded the two letters to the Colonial Office. But the old man in Oceania House was determined to hold on to his system. The Governor of Straits Settlements informed the Colonial Office on 8 August that:

Clunies-Ross refused loan mentioned in my telegram No. 151SS and still resists proposals to legislate stating that he cannot see how any useful purpose could be served by changing the system of Government. On the advice of the Executive Council, I now propose to offer the same sum of money as a gift, provided that he first agrees to the Bill sent to him....(66)

The Colonial Office suggested that only specific services - such as food and ship charter - should be paid for. The Governor, Sir Shenton Thomas replied that he would not make the gift of money unless that was the only way to ensure "continuance of supply to the Islanders."(67) Colonial Office officials also pointed out to Bentley that the Cocos Ordinance could be passed whether Ross wished it or not, but that they preferred to have his agreement. In response, Bentley and Lee

(64) Caldbeck, Macgregor and Co. to J.S.Clunies-Ross, 26 May 1941, enclosure, A.Hardy Bentley to G.E.Gent, 23 July 1941. Ibid.

(65) S.W.Rayment-Acton to W.T.Lee and Co., 9 June 1941. Ibid.

(66) Governor of Straits Settlements to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Secret Telegram No.546 of 8 August 1941. Ibid.

(67) Colonial Office to Governor, Confidential Telegram No.1258 of 23 August 1941. Governor to Secretary of State, Secret Telegram No.655 of 11 September 1941. Ibid.

asked that the Magistrate be Ross, with his son to succeed him in the post, and that no laws inappropriate to Cocos would be applied - in effect, legalization of the Clunies-Ross dynasty. These conditions were clearly impossible to embody in legislation, and the Cocos Bill was given its first reading in the Singapore Legislative Council on 13 October 1941. The second reading was postponed to meet Ross's request to consider a revised draft of the Bill. The second reading was scheduled to proceed on 8 December 1941.(73)

In the event, the Islander brought supplies to Home Island in November, the cash grant was never made, and the Cocos Islands Bill never had its second reading. On December 7 1941, Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbour, Hong Kong and Malaya. The "Taim Jepun" had begun. John Sidney's stubbornly believed that there was time to allow his son to grow up and take over the Islands. But John Sidney was 73 years old and his son was only thirteen.

Conclusion:

Neither John Sidney nor the Colonial Office ever considered asking the Cocos Malays for their views on what form of rule was in their best interests. If they had been asked, their reaction would probably have been one of bewilderment that the question had been asked at all. They were "orang pulu", and that meant that they belonged to the Islands, and, by extension, to Tuan Ross. It was as simple as that. Those who were dissatisfied with the standard of living available on Cocos had no means of remedying the situation whilst living in the Islands. Their only remedy was to leave the Islands and live elsewhere.

The Cocos Malays knew nothing of the controversy generated by Tuan Ross's remarks to the press in 1936, and were totally ignorant of the discussions between Ross, the Colonial Office and the Governor of Singapore. It seems that Tuan Ross concealed these important developments from the Headmen and the people because he feared that they would reflect adversely on his status as leader and provider on Home Island. If my assumption is correct (and Ross's remarks to the Colonial Office on 19 March 1940 suggest that it is - see p.66), then his behaviour was reminiscent of a Malay Raja. However it was precisely at the level of performing the material functions of providing adequate food and clothing for his people that Tuan Ross was failing in the latter half of the decade 1930-1940.

The Cocos Malay people themselves responded in passive Malay ways. The majority were prepared to stick to their Tuan, and put up with their growing poverty without overt complaint.

(73) Colonial Office Minute (unsigned) commenting on the Governor's telegram to Secretary of State No.872 of 17 November 1941. This telegram also advised that normal supplies would be sent to Cocos at the end of the month.

There was no prospect of better times. Their lives would be brightened by an occasional trip to North Keeling, a gift of cigarettes or a sarong from Direction Island, a "wayang" or "bangsawan" performance, a wedding or a circumcision. It was a way of life that could only survive in isolation and ignorance, two of the mainstays (let it be admitted) of Clunies-Ross authority. But a substantial number were prepared to take the other traditional option for Malays discontented with their ruler. They left Tuan Ross's domain forever and settled in Singapore, where they believed they could attain the level of provision and protection expected of a ruler who looked after his people.

Chapter 5 Taim Perang: The War Comes Nearer.

Introduction:

The Second World War did not touch the Cocos Malays until 1941, when a small number of military personnel arrived to garrison the Islands. The opportunities for social contact now open to the Islanders tested their obedience to Tuan John. The passivity of the years of "doing without" were replaced by clandestine barter with the newcomers. This enabled the Cocos Malays to obtain small additions to the limited range of goods available in the Estate Store. At the same time, the Home Island community remained intact and self-absorbed, believing Tuan Ross's assurances that they would be safe from harm by the Japanese. Dramatic attacks on the Islands from both sea and air shattered this illusion, and an unsuccessful mutiny by Ceylon garrison troops ended a period of trusting contact with outsiders. The death of their Tuan released the Cocos Malays from restraint, and they became active in changing the conditions of their lives in the Islands.

Home Island in 1941: A Community in Decline:

Carl Gibson-Hill served as Cable Station Doctor for the first ten and a half months of 1941. Each week he would visit Home Island to treat the population, whose main problems were chronic ulcers on the legs and feet, round worms and endemic amoebic dysentery. Generally, he later wrote, the level of health was high, but the importation of over-milled rice had brought some families to the brink of vitamin deficiency. There was evidence in some families of neglect of infant children.(1)

Gibson-Hill was given access to all the documents in the Estate Office, and spent all his spare time studying the local flora and fauna and the customs and history of the Cocos Malays. He learnt Cocos Malay and was a good observer, although he lived on Direction Island and did not have daily contact with the people.(2) His observations about life on Home Island in 1941 are however quite interesting.

(1) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.166-67. Factors contributing to these health problems included the lack of a sewerage system, the Islanders' custom of going barefoot and the "tradition" of neglect of small children noted by the early inspectors.

(2) Carl Gibson-Hill was born in 1911 and educated in England. He was medical officer on Christmas Island 1938-40. After serving in Cocos, he arrived in Singapore in late December 1941 and was a prisoner-of-war until 1945. He returned to England via the Antarctic, researched major studies of British birds, and returned to Singapore as Assistant Curator of Zoology at the Raffles Museum.. In 1947-63 he wrote many articles for JMBRAS (of which he became Editor) on a wide range of subjects, including a number about Christmas Island and Cocos. He died in 1963. G.Hodgson: 'C.A.Gibson-Hill', JMBRAS, Vol.38, Part 2, No.208, pp.1-16. K.Clark: 'Carl Gibson-Hill', Ibid., pp.17-21.

Most of the households were very poor in worldly goods. The older ones had lost them to the more enterprising families during the transition period (from prosperity to poverty, i.e. 1925-1941). The younger ones had never had a chance to acquire them. The widespread shortage had, in some respects, produced certain admirable qualities. There was practically no stealing, except for occasional raids on Clunies-Ross's orchard...There was no prostitution: there was so little to receive that those so inclined gave themselves solely from natural affection or desire. Any man who had a good catch of fish, or a present of cigarettes from a member of the cable station, distributed most of his surplus to his neighbours and friends. Not to have done so would have laid him open to the charge of being mean (sekikir), the worst epithet that could be applied to anyone...Income, residence, fuel, and in practice food, were assured to the people. It might be thought, as casual visitors often assumed, that their state must have been one of complete content. If it was the word needs qualification. The absence of all minor luxuries and all incentive to extra effort made it a colourless, listless content, from which the best would have escaped if they had dared. The factors that kept them back were the regulations forbidding their return, strong family ties, and an almost complete ignorance of the outside world...Times had been better, men had probably worked harder, there had been more rice and more clothes, but all that was in the past. In 1941 the mood of the people in the kampong was to take what was given to them, and do without what was not. The whole place had an aura of decay...The stores and even the owner's house seemed to be decaying quietly and unobtrusively...The settlement was an aged person, slowly slipping out of life, and nearly content to see it go.(3)

This picture of the Kampong in 1941 implicitly identifies the people's attitudes with Tuan Ross in his old age - passivity, decay, lack of hope. It suggests that some of the people took their cue from him in his declining years, as they had done in better times.(4) It is a picture of a community in which the social bonds are still intact, but in which change could only come from the outside.(5) A good number of the more

(3) Gibson-Hill(1947), pp.163-64. Gibson-Hill wrote that the feasts of "Sedekah Bumi", "Bancahan" and "Selamatan" had "largely disappeared" by his time, possibly because of Home Island poverty. Nek Bika (b.1913) and Nek Lee (b.1920) both recall these feasts as being common around 1930. Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 9 October 1988. "Bancahan" has died out.

(4) Examples of the community following Tuan Ross's lead in better times include the increase in copra production and sexual laxity (p.19, note 49 and pp.19, 43,n.86).

(5) Cf.A.C.Milner: Kerajaan, Op.Cit., p.104, describing nineteenth century Malay society as depicted in Hikayat Deli.

adventurous and dynamic residents had emigrated to Singapore in the previous five years; those who stayed had little to look forward to but continued poverty. They still put their trust in Tuan, both out of habit and because, under him, they had a sort of security. Only when forces from outside the Islands appeared and implicitly challenged the Clunies-Rosses' claim to be the sole providers of food and clothing, shelter and physical security, would a dynamic enter the lives of the Cocos Malays.

New Experiences:

From 1941 the War brought new experiences to the Home Islanders. Twelve Cocos Malays manned six flag-watch stations around the coast to report on passing ships.(6) A Direction Island direction-finding station had been established in 1940, and quarters for Royal Navy staff were constructed there.(7)

In March 1941, Colonel Duckworth of the British Army visited Cocos to seek John Sidney's co-operation in the occupation of Horsburgh Island for military purposes. Duckworth observed:

The system of administration is primitive, the Governor looks upon the whole population as his 'family' - though biologically this is only partly true - and accepts complete responsibility for satisfying all their wants....Allowing for the fact that he realized that many of his 'children' would be paid for some time by the Imperial Government and not by himself - a very great windfall at the present moment - he was definitely not happy at the prospect of the arrival of a garrison.(8)

Soon afterwards troops from Ceylon arrived. A company of light infantry was installed on Direction Island and an artillery unit on Horsburgh Island manned two 6 inch (150 mm.) guns to defend the entrances of the atoll from an Emden-type attack.(9) The 60 Ceylonese troops were young volunteers of Singhalese and Burgher (Ceylonese Eurasian) origin. Their commanding officer was British, Captain (later Major) George Gardner.(10) The Ceylonese became the first group of outsiders to really interact with the "orang pulu". Fishing trips, soccer matches (which the Islanders always won) and invitations to weddings were followed by weekends on Home

(6) File 50299/1941-43, CO 273/662. The Estate was paid Straits \$4 per man per week; the watchers were paid in "Toko" credits. The flag-watch system continued until February 1943.

(7) Lands Drawing No.L 634/48 in File 50757/1949, CO 537/4738.

(8) Colonel R.H.F.Duckworth: 'The Reconnaissance Report on the Cocos-Keeling Islands, March 1941', CR MSS 19/135.

(9) Bunce(1988), pp.55, 118.

(10) Nek Kette: J5/9. Bunce(1988), p.118. Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 22 June 1986 on recollections of Captain Morritt, Ceylon Garrison Artillery, on Cocos Feb.-Dec.1941.

Island.(11) [Illustration 18]

A barter trade now commenced, the terms of which throw light upon the needs of the Cocos Malays. Typical barter items were

- . one Ceylonese cigarette for one egg;
- . two Ceylonese cigarettes for a bottle of coconut toddy;
- . one pair of khaki shorts for a cooked chicken or a cooked fish.

Powder and soap were very much in demand - the Island girls would climb trees to fetch coconuts to trade.(12) The farm on Horsburgh Island was closed after continued theft by the Ceylonese,(13) although there may have been a motive of limiting Cocos Malay contact with the outsiders behind the decision. If so, it was unsuccessful. The Cocos Malays were coming into sustained contact with people from the outside world for the first time, and gaining confidence in their dealings with them. With the exception of the Doctor, the "orang putih" (the white men) came to Home Island only to play golf (14) or visit Tuan Ross - but these strangers mixed on equal terms with the "orang pulu". Neither Tuan Ross nor Tuan Young could stop the trade - one because of his age, the other because of laziness and advanced alcoholism.(15) The years of "doing without" had not killed the consumer instinct among the Cocos Malays. When the opportunity came to obtain goods, the possession of which spelt status in a deprived community, they were quick to respond. The barter trade eventually became a powerful factor for change through the disturbance of the economic relations between the community and the Estate.

Copra production continued at a high level, with 618 1/4 tons being produced in 1940 and 518 tons in 1941.(16) The Admiralty paid L 4 for each coconut tree cut down on Direction Island.(17) The income from the Military came at an opportune time for Ross, because income from phosphate shares ceased in the latter part of 1941, when Christmas Island sales to Japan ceased.(18)

(11) Bunce: Letter of 22 June 1986. Gibson-Hill says that "unfortunately" Ceylonese troops could stay overnight on Home Island. Perhaps some misbehaviour of a sexual nature took place. Compare statement by "Shane" (p.77 below).

(12) Bunce: Letter of 22 June 1986.

(13) Ibid. and Jessamine Report, 5 December 1944, Op.Cit p.18.

(14) A small 9-hole golf course was built at the back of Home Island by Cable Company personnel. Duckworth: Op.Cit.

(15) See below, p.78, and p.78,n.40 for Elton Young's alcoholism. Jessamine wrote, on 24 September 1944: "The last Secretary scarcely ever left the bungalow." CR MSS 19/135.

(16) Smith(1947), p.2.

(17) Ibid., pp.4,5. The other Armed Services did not accept this compensation figure for the large numbers of trees they cut down subsequently. This led to much wrangling post-War.

(18) Rose Clunies-Ross to McKerron, Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 10 February 1947. CR MSS 21/150.

On 20 January 1942 Tuan Ross cabled Singapore to advise that he could not meet his share of the cost of chartering the Islander. The Singapore Government agreed to pay, and subsequently the swift advance of Japanese troops into Malaya led the Colonial Office and the Military to take over full responsibility for supplying both the civil and military population of Cocos through the Ceylon Government from January 1942. There was however to be no interference with John Sidney's methods of running Home Island and the Estate.(19)

Although copra income continued to lag behind costs of running Home Island, Cocos now entered a comparatively prosperous period, with income from military contracts, and consequently food and clothing, guaranteed for the duration of the War.

Disillusionment:

The arrival of the Ceylonese and the fortification of Horsburgh Island gave the Cocos Malays a sense of security. Tuan Ross assured them that the Japanese would not attack Cocos because he was their friend. He had traded with them for many years; he had visited Japan and had been presented with the Sword of Friendship. The Home Islanders recalled the friendly Japanese sailors from the Yahagi, which visited Cocos after the "Taim Jerman". In true Islands style, both Tuan Ross and the Islanders believed that personal friendship meant institutional friendship.(20)

The military successes of the Japanese had not gone unnoticed on Horsburgh Island. Among the soldiers was a young Buddhist Marxist named Gratien Fernando whose hatred of racism led him to see the Japanese as an anti-colonial force that would liberate Asia from capitalism and European exploitation.(21)

During February 1942, Fernando and his supporters heard on Japanese English-language radio broadcasts that Singapore had fallen and that Java and Sumatra had been invaded. The Japanese bombing attacks on Christmas Island, only 530 miles (900 kilometres) away, were further cause for concern.(22)

At 8:00 p.m. on 3 March, a Japanese cruiser shelled Direction Island from close range. Some huts were set on fire, and Cable staff lit bonfires to destroy military codes and other documents. The fires lit up the entire atoll and the Home

(19) J.S.Clunies-Ross to Colonial Secretary, Singapore, 20 January 1942. Reply, 27 January. CR MSS 20/144. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Singapore, 2 November 1948, File 50757/1949, CO 537/4738.

(20) Jessamine: Report of 23 September 1944, p.1. Nek Bika: Letter, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988.

(21) Noel Cruz: 'The Cocos Islands Mutiny', Sydney Morning Herald, 31 May 1980, p.3.

(22) Cruz: Op.Cit., p.13. "Shane" [pseudonym for Henry Stephens]: 'What Really Happened on Cocos', The Observer, Colombo (no date, possibly 1977) gives a vivid description of the feelings of the Ceylonese at this time.

Islanders panicked and fled to their "pondok" on South Island. Tuan Ross was stunned and his people terrified by this unprecedented event. Their security in the Islands and their confidence in the guns of Horsburgh were gone. Tuan Ross's promises about the Japanese had proven false.(23)

After about an hour the Japanese ship sailed away, under the impression that the wireless and cable systems had been destroyed. A plain language wireless message sent by the British to Batavia said (deliberately misleadingly) that all Cocos facilities had been destroyed. The plan worked, and Cocos was not occupied by the Japanese, although there were some air attacks later in the War.(24)

Tuan Ross managed to persuade the Home Islanders to return to the Kampong by assuring them that his friends, the "orang Jepun" would never attack Home Island. Although badly shaken, they accepted his assurances and returned to work in the plantation and in the workshops.

The remaining Chinese at the Cable Station now left for Colombo, and the Estate was asked to provide four young Islanders for training. Those chosen were relatives of Kalwie and sons of "mandor".(25) The four were given English lessons and formal training in electrical fitting and telegraphy. They learned about the progress of the War and passed news on to the Kampong. The news that caused the greatest distress was that some former Cocos Malays had died in the fighting just before the fall of Singapore.(26)

Fernando and his supporters were now convinced that Japan would win the War. The surrender of Christmas Island by the Indian garrison at the end of March after a successful mutiny, and the bombing of Colombo on 6 April 1942, decided the issue. Fernando's group developed a plan to arrest Gardner, turn the guns against Direction Island, and surrender Cocos to the Japanese.(27)

During their visits to Home Island, they told the Cocos Malays that the Japanese would bring them tea, coffee and cigarettes,

(23) Bunce: Letter of 19 December 1988. Even today, Nek Bika cannot understand why the Japanese attacked Cocos.

(24) 'Brax' (Eardley) Horrocks: 'Cocos Island. Wartime Paradise' Transit (O.T.C. Veterans' Newsletter), September 1972, p.3. Horrocks served at the Cable Station 1943-44.

(25) Nek Dittie to J.G.Hunt, 17 January 1986. Those chosen were: Henry bin Kalwie; Dubney bin Bohin, son of a "mandore" and soon to marry Kalwie's youngest daughter; Ebeta bin Sanjac, youngest son of a headman, and Kalwie's nephew; and Nelson bin Elbie, son of a "mandore".(25)

(26) Bunce(1988), p.55, 105.

(27) J.Pettigrew: 'Christmas Island under Japanese Occupation'. Australian Territories, Vol.2, No.1, January 1964, pp.44-5. Crusz: Op.Cit., p.13.

although they did not reveal their own plans.(28) This was a shrewd appeal to the consumer instincts of the Home Islanders, and fitted in with Tuan Ross's assurances that the Japanese were their friends.

Gardner's discipline was now exerted to control fraternisation with the Cocos Malays.

Some went down and mixed with the population of Malaysians. The weaker side of camp life was found there. But Capt. Marriot [pseudonym for Gardner] was rather strict on the morals of the boys. Tissa [Fernando] believed that it was Lt. Jansz [Lieutenant Stephens] who called for a tightening of the ropes.(29)

On the night of 8-9 May 1942, Fernando's group attempted to take control of Horsburgh Island. One man was shot dead, another was wounded, but at the crucial moment the captured bren gun jammed, and Fernando surrendered.(30) At a hastily-convened court-martial, eleven men were found guilty of mutiny, and seven of them were sentenced to death. Three death sentences were confirmed, and the executions took place in Colombo.(31)

The mutiny was a big shock to the Cocos Malay people. Within a few days, they knew about the actual events on the night of May 8-9 with substantial accuracy.(32) But they thought that the people whom they had regarded as friends wanted to turn their guns on Home Island, intimidate them, take some Cocos Malay women and run away with them.(33) The real motives of the mutineers were too complex for the Cocos Malays, who could only see the mutiny in terms of themselves. Together with the Japanese attacks on the Islands, the mutiny contributed to a "loss of innocence" among the Cocos Islanders,(34) who had never known violence and betrayal on such a scale.

Tuan Ross had by now almost completely lost interest in the Estate, and left things to Elton Young and the Headmen. The fall of Singapore and Christmas Island, "his two main contacts with the outside world", plus old age, had sapped his

(28) Nek Dittie to J.G.Hunt, 17 January 1986.

(29) "Shane" Op.Cit.

(30) "Shane": Op.Cit. Janaka Pereka: 'The Mutiny' and 'Jammed bren-gun jolts the mutineers', articles in The Sunday Observer, Colombo, 1977. One of the mutineers who survived and the sister of one who was executed provided the material.

(31) Crusz: Op.Cit., pp.13-14.

(32) Nek Ewat: J6/9. Nek Dittie to R Linford, July 1977.

(33) Nek Bika. P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 19 December 1988. This explanation of the mutiny hints at some sexual component in the relationship between Islanders and Ceylonese. However, Nek Bika denies that any Ceylonese had intercourse with Cocos women. I am not so sure.

(34) The expression is Pauline Bunce's.

will.(35) 102 3/4 tons of copra were sold in Colombo in April 1942, but all the proceeds went to Rose and the children in Exeter, as did some money from the armed services.(36)

At fairly regular intervals, Japanese aircraft flew over Cocos, sometimes doing two or three low circuits over the lagoon. Just before Christmas of 1942, three of them arrived. The Home Islanders ran out, expecting the promised cigarettes to be dropped to them. Instead, the aeroplanes dropped bombs on Direction Island, damaging some buildings. Once more, the Home Islanders fled to South Island.(37)

Over the next eighteen months, new servicemen - Ceylonese, Indians, Australians and Englishmen - arrived in small numbers on Horsburgh and Direction Islands. The barter trade resumed, and coconut toddy and fish were exchanged for bully beef and other military rations. Soccer matches resulted in a string of wins to the Home Island team, and some Cocos Malays named their children after visitors.(38)

The communications value of Cocos was shown in March 1942 when three Dutch Catalinas landed en route to Ceylon. From mid-1943, Qantas operated a Catalina passenger service between Ceylon and Perth, while the R.A.F. used Cocos as a base and stopover for sea surveillance, mail and personnel movement.(39) Aeroplanes were now regular intrusions into Island life.

But the people of Home Island remained naively self-absorbed. On 19 October 1943 Elton Young died unexpectedly. The official cause of death was a heart attack; in fact he died of alcoholic poisoning.(40) The Home Islanders had a different explanation; because he left Cable & Wireless to work for Tuan Ross, the Cable Station people must have poisoned him.(41)

(35) Jessamine: Report of 23 September 1944, p.2.

(36) Note of sale and remittance, 30 April 1942. CR MSS 20/144. Rose Clunies-Ross to McKerron, Colonial Secretary, 10 February 1947. CR MSS 21/150. Totals were L 1,200 and L 4,000.

(37) Nek Dittie to J.G.Hunt, 17 January 1986. Nek Normie to P.Bunce, 14 January 1986.

(38) Nek Siti Rokayah (Anthoney bin Abah) to Alan Keeling, 6 and 23 January 1986. Nek Benson (Capstan bin Benjamin) to J.G.Hunt, 12 January 1986. Nek Benson named his son Olbio after a soldier.

(39) Eustis: Op.Cit., p.112. Ken Mullen: Op.Cit., pp.63-4. Bunce(1988),p.124.

(40) Official cause of death is in a note of 20 October 1943, Captain Ash to John Sidney Clunies-Ross. CR MSS 19/134. Alcoholic poisoning is mentioned by Brockman (1981), p.63 and Nek Ewat, conversation with J.G.Hunt, 31 January 1988. Elton Young left two children by his Cocos Malay mistress.

(41) Nek Dittie: L1/15. P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, quoting Cocos School tape, 4 December 1987.

Early in 1944 Japanese aerial reconnaissance was stepped up, culminating in a bomb being dropped on 15 March at a Qantas Catalina moored off Direction Island. It missed.(42) The strain of constant alarms from Japanese aircraft was beginning to affect the whole population. A large number of Cocos Malays were now living in "pondok" on South Island and travelling to work by "jukong" each day.(43) This was in effect 'internal migration' and a clear indication of loss of confidence in Tuan Ross's credibility. After Elton Young's death, Hosman and Ragelie, now 70 years old, tried to run the Office, but they were out of their depth, and Estate records were kept only in part.(44) There was no-one else with enough education to be trained to take over these clerical duties. Forty years' neglect of education was now exacting its price.

No new houses had been constructed since 1941, although the population had climbed by almost 200 in that time to 1600. Newly-married couples were forced to live in the homes of parents, with up to 18 people living in a house.(45)

In the middle of 1944, Intelligence Staff from the Eastern Fleet and South East Asia Command visited the Islands, met John Sidney, and reported to Ceylon that Cocos could be developed as a land-aircraft base. Very large numbers of engineers and troops would be required to construct and guard the airstrip, which would have both bombers and fighters.(46)

Before any of this activity could commence, there was one further dramatic event. At 9 am on August 5 1944, a single Japanese aeroplane appeared over Cocos and bombed Direction Island, then, to the horror of the people, it turned towards Home Island. Two bombs were dropped; the one aimed at Oceania House fell in the lagoon, and the other fell on Piccadilly, destroying several houses outright. Not satisfied with this, the aeroplane dumped fuel on the fire, which quickly spread to nearby houses. As the inhabitants grabbed their children and flocked to their "jukong" to escape, the warplane made a low-level pass, firing its machine-gun. Two people were killed and 27 houses were destroyed. The impossible had happened. Tuan Ross's friends, the "orang Jepun", had attacked Home Island.(47)

(42) Extract from War Diary No.IX, Commander-in Chief, Ceylon, 1 January-31 March 1944, CO 537/1526. Mullen: Op.Cit., pp.66-7.

(43) Bunce(1988), p.105.

(44) Jessamine: Report of 29 September 1944, pp.1,2.

Reynolds: Op.Cit., Appendix III.

(45) Jessamine: Report of 5 December 1944, pp.7,8. The houses were 20 feet wide (6.15 m) by 26 feet deep (8 m).

(46) 'Development of the Cocos Islands', undated Minute in CO 537/1526. Brockman(1981), pp.65, 119. P.Byrne: 'Coming back to Cocos'. Cocos Clarion, July, 1986.

(47) Nek Ewat: J6/2, 9. Bunce(1988), pp.105-6, 109-110. Nek Bika to P.Bunce, January 1986. Nek Dittie to J.G.Hunt, 16 November 1977.

On the morning after the raid, Tuan Ross emerged from Oceania House to inspect the now-almost-deserted Kampong. When he saw the extent of the damage, he dropped his head in total despair, unable to believe what had happened. He returned to his house in shock and refused to leave. His servants remained with him, and a constant watch was kept on him by the Headmen. His credibility as protector of his people was shattered. He refused to eat, and only took fluids, in spite of the advice of the Direction Island Doctor. Unable to walk, he took to his bed, and on 14 August 1944 he died.(48)

The feelings of the Home Island people were as follows:

Selepas perajar kita meninggal dunia, dia itu Tuan Ross - selepas itu, pulu itu tidak ada yang jaga dan juga kita sahingatan sayu kita jatuh miskin. Tidak ada makan, tidak tahu di mana mencari makan sebab Raja kita sudah meninggal dunia....dan kita punya Sekretery juga, Tuan Young, meninggal dunia.

[TRANSLATION] When our teacher passed away, that is, Lord Ross - when that happened, those islands had no-one to look after them and also at that time we were sad that we had fallen into poverty. We had no food, we didn't know where to look for it...because our King had passed away...and also our Secretary, Mr Young, had passed away."(49)

The end of August 1944 found Home Island virtually deserted, its population scattered through the islands from Pulu Ampang to the extreme southern end of South Island. "They were like a lost family with no-one to look to for protection".(50) Cocos had reached the lowest point in its history.

Conclusion:

All the elements that made up Tuan Ross's obligation toward the Home Island people - the provision of food, clothing, housing and protection - were deficient in some major respect in the last few years of his life. The Cocos people had found it necessary to supplement their normal sources of food by engaging in barter with the soldiers of Horsburgh and Direction Islands. Most serious of all, Tuan Ross's promises that the Japanese would not attack Home Island had been proved false. The literal cast of thought of the Cocos Malays interpreted this failure as a "lie" (compare p.137). Tuan Ross knew it, and it may have killed him. The Cocos Malays had endured fifteen years of slow decline as a people, during which time Tuan Ross took them from comparative affluence to poverty. Ironically, his death marked the opening of a new period of hope and prosperity.

(48) Nek Ewat; J6/2. Nek Bika: Letters, P.Bunce to J.G.Hunt, 29 and 30 December 1988. Jessamine: Report of 23 September 1944, p.1.

(49) Nek Dittie: J 2/1.

(50) Jessamine: Report of 23 September 1944, p.1.

Chapter 6Taim Mujur (Fortunate Time), 1944-1946.Introduction:

In 1941-44, the outside world had come to the Cocos people, first in benign form (the Ceylonese), but ultimately destructively. The outsiders (including the Japanese) had been seen through eyes that owed a great deal to the perception of Tuan Ross. With his death, the Cocos Malays were forced to deal with outsiders in a different way.

The outside world came to the Cocos Malays in 1944-46 in wave after wave of new experiences, unfiltered by the vision of Tuan. They saw immense technological power, great wealth, and men who could be dealt with, and even manipulated, by the "orang pulu" to further their own material and political ends. Previously, the ruling Clunies-Ross Tuan had always been the mediator between the "orang pulu" and outsiders.

The Cocos Malays had been "protected" by Tuan Ross for more than a generation. The latter half of that period had seen them gradually slide into poverty, sustained only by traditional loyalty and the vague hope that things would one day improve. Tuan's death and the arrival of "orang putih" from the outside meant that a new start could be made. This new beginning was led by the Headman Kalwie, the son of a Bantamese labourer, who moved into the power vacuum left by the death of Tuan Ross. For the first time, the Cocos Malays, under the leadership of Kalwie, became active players in determining the conditions of their life in the Islands.

Kalwie and Jessamine:

Just three days after Tuan Ross's death, Major J.E.B. Jessamine received orders in Colombo to assume duty as Military Administrator of Cocos. He was directed to "maintain the existing system of administration as far as possible" and to "safeguard the interests of the heirs of the late Mr S.W. [sic] Clunies-Ross". (1)

Jessamine was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, and arrived by ship on 1 September. The Fortress Commander and the Cable & Wireless Manager came out to the ship with Kalwie, who was introduced as "Chief Headman", his son (probably Boyd, b.1905) and his grandson. Jessamine had been a planter in Malaya before the War, and spoke to them in Malay.

It was with intense satisfaction and relief that I found that their spoken Malay was simple and fully understood by me. They have few colloquialisms and very little Javanese mixed up in their tongue. All were extremely glad that someone had been sent who spoke Malay and understood the people. (2)

(1) Admiral G Layton, Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon to Major J.E.B. Jessamine, I.A.O.C., 17 August 1944. CO 537/1526.

(2) Jessamine: Report, 23 September, 1944, p.1.

Kalwie took Jessamine straight to Home Island and installed him in the Secretary's bungalow, not, it should be noted, in Oceania House. Kalwie saw Jessamine as an Estate Secretary or Manager, not as a new "Tuan". The village was still deserted but Jessamine persuaded Kalwie and Hosman to get the people back from the "pondok", where they had been living since the attack of 5 August.

Right from the beginning, Kalwie manipulated Jessamine in the interests of the Cocos Malays and himself. Jessamine was very impressed by him:

He reads and writes Romanised Malay and has a little knowledge of English. He has a great personality and is looked up to by all the Malays...The other headmen under Kalwei [sic] are all excellent men but none have any education and all are over sixty years of age.(3)

By Sunday 3 September the population had returned to the Kampong and found 28 Royal Marines (who had arrived on Jessamine's ship) encamped just north of the copra-drying sheds, installing anti-aircraft guns.(4) [See Illustration 5]

Jessamine commenced his posting with a picture of an unspoilt community needing protection by a disinterested European authority (himself). He was determined to protect the Cocos Malays morally as well as physically by keeping them isolated, in the same manner as Tuan Ross. He introduced a system of passes for servicemen visiting the Kampong after dark (and then only on duty), and Islanders required passes signed by Jessamine or Hosman to visit Direction and Horsburgh Islands. No troops could land on Home Island without permission.

I gave a lecture to the Marines on the second day of their arrival on their moral responsibilities and conduct and issued strict orders which are being adhered to.(5)

Kalwie convinced Jessamine that flour, spices (chillies, coriander, tumeric and tamarind) and cigarettes were issued free by the Estate. This was untrue (at best, they were sold at cost), but, apart from the cigarettes, the "free issue" items no doubt helped improve Home Island health during the period of Military Administration.(6)

(3) *Ibid.*, p.2. Headmen Raglan, Laksana and Sanjac were 64, 62 and 57. Kalwie was 64. Probably all four men attended Ragelie's school in the 1890s, but Kalwie had received tutoring from Tuan Ross. Traditionally Headmen were equal. I suspect that Kalwie gave information to Jessamine that reinforced his own authority. The title "Chief Headman" appears to have been Kalwie's invention.

(4) *Ibid.*, pp.1,4. Alan de Groot: Aerial photo of Home Island, 1945, Home Island Museum.

(5) Jessamine Report, 23 September 1944, p.5.

(6) *Ibid.*, p.4. Brockman(1981), p.124, quoting an anonymous Cocos Malay, says that Kalwie "convinced" Jessamine on this.

Soon after his arrival, Jessamine wrote a Report recommending the establishment of a system of education; appointment of a District Officer, Secretary and Office staff from outside; the appointment of Hosman as Assistant Secretary; and appointment of Kalwie as Head "Penghulu" (Chief of Village). Only the last two appointments were agreed by Ceylon.(7) The other recommendations, especially an education system, if they had been implemented, would have brought outside influences into Home Island, and very likely pressures for change from within the Kampong would have followed. Colombo was however determined to protect the Clunies-Ross family's interests.

The Barter Trade:

Almost all the 350-odd Cocos military personnel (of at least four nationalities) were located on Horsburgh and Direction Islands.(8) Up till the end of October 1944, 140 of the 442 Home Island men of working age were in the employ of the Services, building gun sites, cookhouses, ablution blocks and other structures. A regular system of mail and water supplies to Direction Island gave opportunities for contact which quickly led to barter with the strangers. Soccer matches between Home Island and Services teams on the Home Island pitch were further opportunities for trade. The old Cable & Wireless barter system (a sarong or a few cigarettes for individual services), already under strain from the Ceylonese trade now collapsed completely. The Home Islanders had fresh food - cakes, tropical fruits, poultry, eggs - and the troops had large amounts of army stores - bully beef, butter, jam, biscuits and clothing. The market favoured the Cocos Malays, and trading boomed to the point where normal work was neglected and Islanders stole from each other to get their hands on the exotic food issued to the troops. The explosion of trade was due in part to the presence of increased military personnel being in the Islands from September 1944, but I suspect that the death of Tuan Ross was a potent signal that the restraints of the past could be ignored.(9)

On 29 September 1944, Jessamine introduced a system to control all Home Island supplies to the Forces. All Home Islanders were to submit their products to the Estate Office, and receive Estate credits in return. Sentries were to enforce the directive against illegal landing on Horsburgh and Direction Islands (proof that it was being disobeyed) and prevent the landing of Home Island barter merchandise.(10)

(7) Jessamine Report of 23 September 1944, p.6.

(8) Ibid., p.5. The units were: Horsburgh Island and Direction Island artillery and infantry (Ceylonese); East African Rifles, Direction Island; Royal Navy and R.A.F. Sea Search and Rescue on Direction Island; two U.S. Army liaison staff; and three Royal Marine platoons, including one on Home Island.

(9) Jessamine Report of 5 December 1944, pp.3, 4, 9. Jessamine Report of 23 September 1944, p.6. Nek Ewat: J6/2, 3.

(10) Lt-Col.J.E.B.Jessamine: Letter to Fortress Commander, Manager Cable & Wireless and Commanding Officer, R.N. 29 September 1944, in 5 December 1944 Report, p.3, Op.Cit.

The Home Islanders simply refused to co-operate. The supply of eggs and chickens disappeared and Jessamine's system was dead in a month. When the Royal Marines suggested a fixed-value bartering system, Jessamine agreed, and Home Island supplies suddenly reappeared. Personal services like the hire of "jukong" or help with fishing, and invitations to weddings in order to obtain gifts, were common alternatives used by Home Islanders to obtain military stores. Jessamine found out that his "unspoiled Malay family", whose vocabulary did not include the words "greed and gain" were as human and flawed as anyone else. (11)

The whole copra operation had been allowed to run down. Jessamine wrote:

On all islands, in the areas planted with coconuts, little upkeep work or cultivation has taken place for a long time. (12)

He put a large group of men to work burning fronds and husks and cutting back the undergrowth. Copra production resumed on 1 October after a three-month break, and by the end of November 300 tons were ready for export to Ceylon. (13)

Buildings and roads on Home Island were repaired. A medical survey by the Navy surgeon found amoebic dysentery among the population, so sea latrines on stilts were constructed. A large creche was built to allow babies to be looked after while their mothers were working. (14)

The Estate Regulations were slightly adapted by Jessamine. He presided over the Saturday Court, where the most common cases were petty theft, neglect of duty and the ever-recurring "making a girl pregnant". Flogging was abolished for this last offence, but the old penalties of immediate civil marriage and a 25-rupee fine were retained. Jessamine wrote:

No Emam [sic] is permitted to marry them until the woman has delivered the child and forty days elapse before she is declared 'clean'...Unfortunately, the late J.S.Clunies-Ross was not strict as regards adherence to religious precepts and this is now strictly observed. The shame of not being married by the Emam [sic], I feel, more than compensates for the lack of corporal punishment and is a greater deterrent

(11) Jessamine: Report of 5 December 1944, pp.2-4. Capt.Anderson to Cdr.G.M.L.Williams, R.N.V.R., 24 March 1945. CR MSS 19/135. Quotations are from Jessamine's 23 September Report, p.3. Idealizing the Cocos Malays is a very common European reaction after first meeting them. In my view it denies the Cocos Malays dignity, whilst fulfilling the visitor's emotional needs.

(12) Jessamine: Report of 5 December 1944.

(13) Ibid., pp.4-7 passim.

(14) Ibid., pp.7-9 passim.

to further disobedience. (15)

Jessamine's approval of the enforced delay of religious marriage in the case of pregnant brides put him (perhaps unwittingly) on the side of the two more orthodox imam, who split from the other two on precisely this issue. (16) It is possible that Kalwie, who had been an imam, saw in Jessamine a means of imposing his own view of religious orthodoxy. Truby, Jessamine's Secretary, drafted "a set of Laws and Regulations" based on Ross's rules, after discussions with Kalwie. Truby said that Kalwie "is in complete agreement that a general tightening of all regulations will be beneficial to all concerned." (17) "The Headmen have now a great control," Jessamine wrote, and went on to say that "mandore" and Headmen reported misdemeanours to the Imarat, and that Kalwie imposed fines. (18) In fact this was a centralization of control, eroding the powers of the Headmen of the four wards, who used to hold their own courts. (See p.32 above)

Apparently at the instigation of Kalwie and Hosman, Jessamine reviewed wage rates. The main beneficiaries were the most senior and most skilled members of the workforce; women and the unskilled received no increase, or had their wages reduced. Thus, at a stroke, the Military Administrator re-emphasized class distinctions in the Kampong. The old and new wage-rates (all in Cocos rupees) were:

1941 Category	Daily Rate	5/12/44 Category	Daily Rate
Kepala (Headman)	1.80-2.50	Chief Headman	3.50
		First Headman	2.40
		Second Headman	2.25
Mandore (Foreman)	0.90-1.80	Chief Carpenter	2.40
		Chief Sailmaker	2.40
		Chief Clerk #	7.50
Skilled Worker	1.20-1.80	Skilled Worker	0.65-1.20
		Office Retainer *	2.25
		Blacksmith	1.80
		Engineer	1.80
		Mason	1.20
		Dispenser	1.25
Dukun (Midwife)	0.60	Head Midwife	0.60
		Midwife	0.30
Unskilled Worker	0.50-0.80	Unskilled Worker	0.50-0.80
Apprentice (14-16 yo)	0.20	Apprentice (14-16 yo)	0.20
Woman Worker	0.30	Woman Worker	0.30
		Priest (extra to normal rate)	0.40
		# Hosman * Ragelie	(19)

(15) Jessamine Report of 5 December 1944, p.15.

(16) Ibid., p.15. R.MacLean: M11, says that two imam in his day (1950-51) had reverted to the tradition of marrying pregnant girls. The 40-day interval corresponds to the time of the hair-cutting ceremony (see p.42 and p 42, n.80).

(17) Capt.E.L.Truby, R.E.: Note to Jessamine, p.7, undated, but probably October 1944. CR MSS 19/134.

(18) Jessamine: Report of 5 December 1944, pp.16, 17.

(19) 1941 figures in Brockman(1981), p.73, converted from weekly rate. 5 December 1944 figures, Jessamine Report, p.14.

The 5 December 1944 Report ends with this picture of the Home Islanders:

They have a higher standard of living than any Asiatic labour class I have seen. Their houses are beautifully clean - beds, tables, chairs, forks, knives, spoons, etc. It is a treat to see them going to work, especially on Monday mornings, when all are dressed in newly starched laundered clothes..The very sad point is that the whole population is illiterate...They have no sense of money values and they would be easy prey to all the unscrupulous (if transferred elsewhere)...(20)

Commander Williams of the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve was Military Administrator between 18 February and 31 May 1945. He was a much more hard-headed customer than Jessamine, and made some very critical remarks about what he called a "sort of hegemony of Kalwie, ruling almost as a Ross", a hegemony he dated quite correctly as commencing in the closing years of Tuan Ross's life. He also criticized Kalwie's practice of promoting his relatives and ensuring that the "official class" always occupied the new houses. However, Williams shrank from challenging Kalwie's authority, and even brought Henry from Direction Island to act as his father's General Deputy.(21)

In contrast to the "official class" was the "working class":

...a large body of fine strong men used for heavy work, men tanned dark in the sun and on whom we have to depend for all strenuous labour.(22)

The increased contact with the outside world exacted a heavy price early in 1945. The supply-ship H.M.S. Sonavati brought measles to Cocos when a number of Home Island women visited the ship on 14 January. Up to 240 Islanders fell sick with measles, and 30 deaths, mostly still-born babies, very young children and the elderly, had been recorded by mid-March.(23) Except for work purposes, visits to ships by Cocos Malays never occurred in Tuan Ross's time.

The third Military Administrator was Lieutenant-Colonel J.A.Harvey, a pre-War member of the Malayan Civil Service, and now a member of the Malayan Planning Unit.(24) His orders were:

(20) Ibid., p.22.

(21) A/g Cdr G.M.L.Williams: Letter to Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, 19 April 1945, p.4. CR MSS 19/136.

(22) Ibid., p.4.

(23) A/g Cdr Williams to Commander-in-Chief, Colombo, 20 March 1945. CR MSS 19/136.

(24) Minute by G.E.Gent, 24 February 1945, CO 537/1526 Part 1. The Malayan Planning Unit was set up in the Civil Affairs Directorate of the War Office, and was dominated by Colonial Office and ex-Federated Malay States staff. Its task was to plan for the post-War civil administration of Malaya.