



Above: Kili Island's two hundred acres, viewed from the south-west at 1,000 feet altitude, are ringed by unbroken reef. The village is located near the shore at left centre. Cleared area inland is planted with taro. Right: Juda, 54-year-old head of the ranking kin group on Kili, serves as elected magistrate (mayor). His quiet leadership and innovative genius have speeded the islanders' adaptation to a new life on Kili.

## Kili Community In Transition

IN 1948 the reef-ringed island of Kili lay abandoned, its thirty years' development as a copra plantation in the southern Marshalls ended by the misfortune of war, its contract labour population returned to island homes, its groves of carefully-spaced trees urgently requiring care. Now, ten years later, Kili's resources support a community of 250 Marshallese who combine copra export and importation of rice, flour, sugar, and tinned meats with the more direct use of abundant coconut reserves, newly-planted stocks of pandanus, banana, taro, and breadfruit, and a limited sea-food supply.

The present population derives from Bikini expatriates who in 1946 were evacuated from that northern Marshalls atoll to make way for nuclear weapons testing by United States agencies. When, after two unfortunate years of residence on inadequate Rongerik Atoll, these displaced people were permanently resettled on Kili Island, they brought with them a way of living that was well adapted to the drier, less productive habitat of their Bikini origin.

Plant food on the northern atoll had been limited to coconut, arrowroot, and pandanus, supplemented by negligible husbandry of pigs and poultry and by trapping of wild birds. The islanders had avoided extreme want only by turning to the more abundant resources of Bikini's reef and lagoon. This subsistence economy, only slightly modified by visits

*In 1948, a small community of two hundred and fifty people from the northern Marshalls was settled on the island of Kili, in the southern Marshall Group. This study of the resulting social and economic changes that have occurred was contributed by...*

LEONARD MASON\*

from itinerant traders, was tied to a system of land tenure in which matrilineage membership determined each person's rights in use and inheritance. Each matrilineage was composed of persons closely related through the female line. Male heads of these ranked kin groups acted in concert to provide the socio-political leadership needed for stable community organization. Under American administration after 1944 this leadership was formalized as a council with an elected magistrate as its head.

The isolated island of Kili (thirty miles of open water separate it from the nearest atoll, Jaluit) lacks the finny treasure of Bikini's lagoon. Kili's 200 acres of land equal less than one-sixth the area of Bikini's twenty-five islets. Such shortcomings have been surmounted to some degree by the community's experiments with the wider variety of food plants that commonly thrive in the rain-drenched and fertile soils of the southern Marshalls. In this respect the United States Trust Territory Administration has rendered aid through its Kili Development Project, initiated in 1953 with

project manager James Milne, a native of Ebon Atoll, and continued in 1955 by his successor Konto Sandbergen of Jaluit Atoll. Both men had been prepared for their assignment by special training at the University of Hawaii.

Eight years of trial and error have led ex-Bikinians and their Kili-born descendants to a generally successful adaptation to the land. Remarkable changes have occurred in economic and family organization as well as in technology. The individual is emerging more prominently in community affairs though he continues to be identified primarily with his kin group. Some features of the old matrilineal organization seem to be yielding to structural and functional traits more reminiscent of the Euro-american family system.

### Land Division

Kili's land and trees are now owned and managed by some twenty of these kin-groups-in-transition. Allocation of real property was conceived and executed in 1954 by the community's own leader.

\* Professor of Anthropology, University of Hawaii.



Above: At the village limits begin extensive coconut plantings of pre-war years, when Kili was managed commercially by Japanese Nanyo Boeki Kaisha. When ex-Bikinians arrived in 1948 the groves needed much thinning. Right: Women of Kili process pandanus leaf for floor and sleeping mats and for saleable handicraft. Pandanus supplies were scarce on Kili in 1948, but intensive planting has since remedied this lack.

For several months the project manager had urged the island Council to tackle the problem of land division before extending rehabilitation work into uncleared areas beyond the village limits. But the Council had postponed action principally because of unresolved issues relating to inequities in tenure on Bikini, where some lineages had controlled far more land than size of membership now seemed to merit.

Finally Juda, elected magistrate of the community as well as hereditary leader, devised a plan for assigning Kili's land according to the number of individuals in each of twenty households, the kin-groups-in-transition. This he presented informally to several lineage heads whose holdings on Bikini had been disproportionately large. When these men agreed to support his proposal he took the matter before the Council. Discussion resulted in unanimous approval of Juda's plan.

The well-ordered rows of coconut trees that cover most of the island provided a convenient measure of acreage, and were tallied against the actual number of residents in each household group, beginning at the west end of the village. Absentee members were counted as if present, and the scribe (Council secretary) recorded the names of those assigned to each of twenty parcels of land. The village area, where all dwellings are located, was reserved as communal property.

#### Family Relationships

The composition of the new land-holding groups is no longer entirely consistent with the rule of matrilineality (in which a man's wife and children are not part of his linear kin group), but neither does it accord completely with any other rule.

For example, kin group "X" (Kilians refer to the presently ambiguous social unit as a *bamle*, this being their rendition of the English word "family") comprises three sisters and their children (also the sisters' husbands!) and two brothers; the younger of whom found a wife on a nearby atoll where he lives with her and their children (but only *he* is included in the Kili *bamle*), while the older brother, accompanied by his wife and children, resides with the rest of the *bamle* and all of them share in the group's land. Here the brother and sister bond is still strong but operates in combination with the factor of common residence (this household is made up of four dwelling groups living side by side in one corner of the village). In every *bamle* the Kili residents commonly cook and eat together and co-operate in production of copra and in other activities.

Then, too, there is *bamle* "Y" which appears to abandon the rule of matrilineality though retaining a sense of lineality in combination with a recognition of residence: thus, a man, his wife, an unwed daughter with two children, a married son with wife and children, and a widowed brother and his son. Although land allocation on Kili was decided in terms of residential affiliation on a certain date, the existing residence had been determined previously by a combination of linear and bilateral relationships, the precise arrangement within any *bamle* having resulted from personal considerations of necessity and convenience.

#### Council Representation

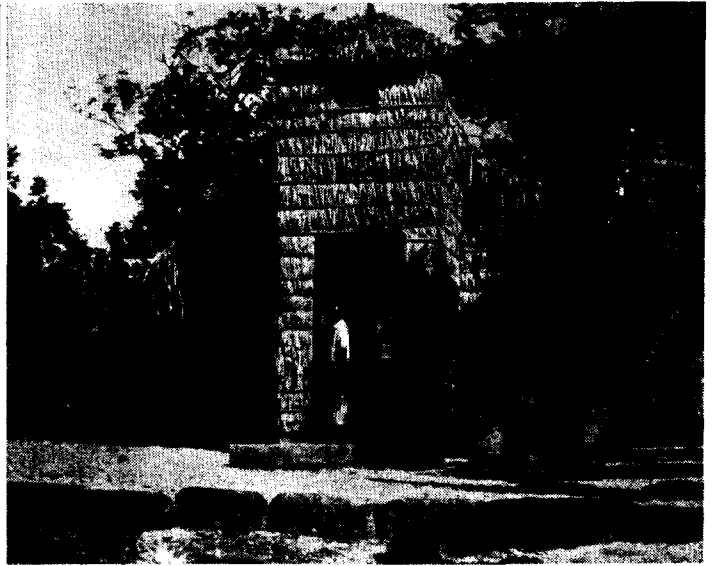
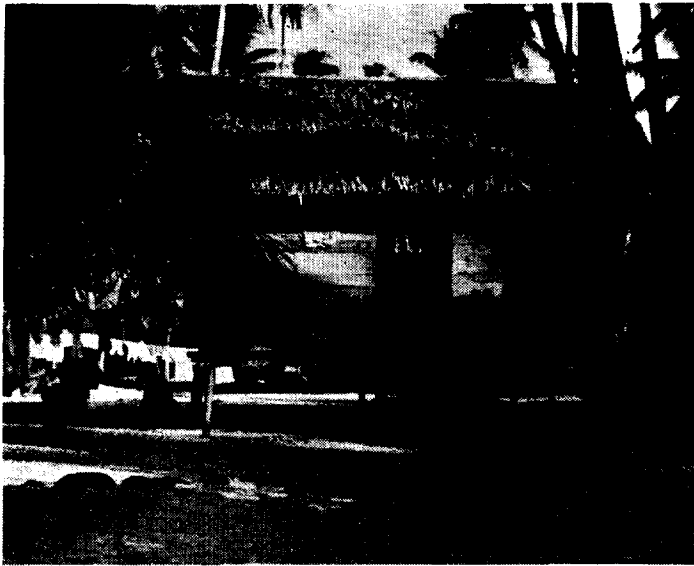
Each kin group on Kili, following the Bikinian tradition, has its male head, the *alab*. *Bamle* members respect the right of their headman to one-quarter of the money income from every bag of copra produced on the group's land and

sold to the Kili store. This *alab* share is set aside as a reserve to be drawn upon as needed for emergency by individual or group if the *alab* approves. Periodic contributions required of each *bamle* by the Kili Council for community projects are ordinarily paid from this fund. No instance was observed by the writer in which the headman employed the *alab* share to personal advantage.

Not all *bamle* headmen are represented on the Council at Kili, membership in the governing body having been held to the ten lineage heads who served on Bikini. The same men (except two who died and were replaced) continue in office, although the groups they represent have changed in composition.

Nine new headships have been created in the present socio-economic organization (one additional position is associated with land reserved for the use of the native pastor who sometimes comes from another island in the Marshalls and is appointed for a two-year term). Most of these new positions are filled by younger brothers of Bikini *alabs*. This fractionation of kin groups in the course of the 1954 land allocation without some alteration of the Council membership leaves segments of the Kili population without direct voice in community affairs, a situation that is fraught with potential unrest, some of which is beginning to be realized. Land ownership in the Marshalls has traditionally been associated with the privilege of political participation.

The blurred nature of changing social patterns on Kili is further evidenced by the manner in which the two deceased councillors were succeeded by their own sons rather than by younger brothers or by sons of their sisters, as would have been the case on Bikini. Still another matter on which Kilians re-



Above: When ex-Bikinians came to Kili in 1948 they built a new village under supervision, mainly using materials supplied by the Administration. This dwelling is one of thirty on Kili re-built from salvaged lumber and thatched with local pandanus. Street in foreground is sanded, rest of living area is covered with coral pebbles. Right: The Protestant church on Kili is supported by the entire island population, whose ancestors on Bikini Atoll in 1908 were the last Marshallese to be converted by American mission workers from New England.

main undecided is the basis for recognizing new members of a *bamle*, whether these should be own children or sisters' children or some combination of these and still other relatives—another point of potential conflict of interest within the community.

#### Compensation For Rights In Bikini

In 1956 the Trust Territory Administration reached an agreement with the Kili Council whereby those persons with land rights in Bikini would be compensated for indefinite use of that atoll by United States agencies. In November 1956 an initial payment of \$25,000 in cash was distributed by the Kili Council among some 330 men, women, and children who were regarded as legitimate participants in the settlement.

The councillors, with assistance from younger men who possessed more experience in arithmetical calculation, quickly arrived at a classification of individuals for the purpose of computing the amount to be paid to each kin group. It was decided that every person on Kili in November was to receive \$79; each member of the Kili community who was temporarily absent was allotted \$75; and each individual who was matrilineally related to a Bikinian lineage but who had made permanent residence elsewhere in the Marshalls was limited to \$50, as was also his or her spouse and each of their children.

All payments were made to headmen or their representatives, further distribution among members of the landholding kin groups on Kili being left to the headmen. No *alab* is known to have tried to withhold funds from his group, although shares of children under fifteen

years or thereabouts were retained by their parents.

An additional \$300,000 was established by the Trust Territory Administration as a trust fund with semi-annual interest payments. The first of these, nearly \$5,000, was made at Kili on July 4 1957, when the Council again accepted responsibility for distribution. Past experience, however, had suggested to councillors that another basis of classification might be more desirable. The distinguishing categories were reduced from three to two—(i) each person present on that date on the island was to get \$16.75, and (ii), any of the 330 November recipients who was absent from Kili on July 4 would be given \$10.25.

It should be noted that in November, and again in July, the Council first computed payments in terms of the individual, but then handed the money over to the headman of the kin group to which the individual belonged. This was the same approach adopted by the Council in its 1954 allocation of Kili land. Recent comments on Kili about alternative ways to classify individuals and what amount each should receive suggest that further modification of Council procedures may be expected when the next interest payment is received on Kili. In other words, although every landholding kin group on the island is not directly represented on the Council (kinship ties resulting from considerable inbreeding tend to provide some indirect representation), the local governing body is not entirely deaf to criticism levelled at it by dissenting groups and individuals in the community.

#### Council Store

At the project manager's suggestion a Council-sponsored store was inaugurated on Kili in 1954 to meet the need for a central receiving and distributing facility. With no capital but a small building, Council and manager embarked on a programme to produce coconut syrup, sennit, and handcrafts from Kili's surplus coconut materials. A ready market for their sale was found among other Marshallese and at the naval air base on Kwajalein.

All profits stayed with the store after each producer had been compensated. Later, all island copra was handled by the store as broker, with sales to various buyers who visited Kili from time to time. Before long the store could buy trade goods for re-sale at a reasonable mark-up to island consumers.

Within less than two years the project manager reported the store's worth at approximately \$5,000. More recently the store has entered the wholesale field, and supplies goods to eight or nine modest retail outlets on Kili.

Kilians assert that the store belongs to the Council, by which they mean the community. Although in this sense the people are all shareholders, no dividends have ever been paid—all profits continue to remain with the store. One man did present to the Council a strong demand for payment of his "share", but met with a firm refusal.

Some years back the Kili Council had been keenly embarrassed in a like situation: islanders who had at that time contributed cash to establish a Kili co-operative under Council management later asked for return of their money and



Above: At end of five hours' sailing to cover the thirty miles from Jaluit Atoll, the schooner "Libra" makes her landfall at the north-east end of Kili. "Libra" serves as a lifeline for Kilians, bringing supplies and taking away copra. Right: Kili's single street today is lined with thriving banana, pandanus, and coconut. On the right in the distance are island's dispensary, council house, and store.

all profits, leaving the store without capital for further operation.

Another reason for the Council's present hesitancy to define a share system is that some members wish to limit all benefits to those Kilians who took part in the store's development but others refuse to exclude their absentee kinsmen, many of whom have never set foot upon Kili's rugged shores.

Although Council expression on the matter is yet lacking, it is conceivable that procedures already adopted for land allocation and for distribution of recent settlement funds may suggest a way to solve the problem of the store's ownership, i.e., issuance of shares to kin groups in proportion to size of membership, delegating to each *bamle* the determination of individuals' rights in the store (it is not likely that an entire *bamle* will now withdraw its support from the venture which has proven so vital to the island's economy).

Question has recently been raised by Trust Territory officials about the legal right of the Council to incur debts in its importing of trade goods: while the Council is popularly viewed as synonymous with community it does not truly represent the existing island population insofar as some *bamle* heads are not councillors. Neither is the concept of community well defined with respect to the status of off-island members.

#### Inter-Island Communication

Communications between Kili and the rest of the Marshalls are hampered by the coral reef that marches unbroken around the little island. From November to May only occasional breaks in the blustery weather permit boat landings from a ship, or canoe launchings through the rough surf, without considerable danger to life and property. This was well realized as a serious problem when ex-Bikinians first settled on Kili, but

other favourable features associated with the site tended to obscure the presence of this handicap.

Trust Territory officials have since taken measures to reduce this disadvantage of the reef. Properties on thirty-mile-distant Jaluit Atoll were reserved from Japanese pre-war holdings to provide a lagoon-sheltered site for a small colony of Kilians, and a fifty-foot schooner with auxiliary engine was re-conditioned for inclusion in the Kili Development Project with intent that Kilians will eventually take over its operation.

Although weather conditions during winter months are such that wind and sea abate enough at intervals to permit safe anchorage off the Kili reef, commercial vessels originating at Majuro or Kwajalein and following carefully scheduled runs throughout the southwestern Marshalls frequently arrive off Kili in adverse weather, and must perforce continue on to the next stop. Difficulty in serving Kili has been a constant threat to the island's economy; local food production, when not supplemented by trade imports, is still insufficient to meet the community's entire needs.

As part of its development project the Administration has constructed six living units on the Jaluit property and has employed three families from Kili to clear and plant the area.

During the past eighteen months the project ship *Libra*, based at Jaluit and manned by Kilian trainees, has been a welcome innovation in the islanders' view. Radio contact between Kili and Jaluit permits relay of weather data and notice of projected sailings. When conditions are favourable the *Libra* undertakes a quick round trip, delivering trade supplies from a depot on Jaluit and returning with Kili copra.

Some doubt has arisen regarding the feasibility of independent operation of

the vessel by the Kili Council unless government subsidy is continued. If the *Libra* or its equivalent is restricted to the Jaluit-Kili trade, as administrative policy now decrees, the island's economy is not broad enough to support the venture unaided. It has been considered to enter the ship into commerce within the southern Marshalls in order to expand the basis of potential revenue, since the *Libra* has not been in uninterrupted operation between Jaluit and Kili. Such procedure, however, would tend to restrict the immediate availability of the vessel for use during the unpredictable breaks in the rougher winter weather. Recent reports of the *Libra's* loss off Kili in a tropical storm may render this an academic question, but in any case no completely satisfactory answer to the Kili reef has yet been proposed.

#### Integration Within Marshall Islands Society

In the overall view, possibly the most significant aspect of Kili in transition is the progress Kilians are making toward integration within the larger Marshall Islands society. For generations prior to their removal from Bikini, these people as a community experienced more social isolation than other Marshallese because of their marginal geographic location and a traditional preference for marriage within the local group. Even now many Marshallese perceive the ex-Bikinians as different in dialect and other mannerisms.

Kilians, for their part, are reluctant to engage in social intercourse with other Marshallese and timidly admit a cultural inferiority with which they are often charged.

Nonetheless, this socio-cultural insularity has been breached in the last few years. Channels exist by means of which Kilians may in time achieve a more

satisfactory relationship with other islanders.

For example, the Kili Church, which is actively supported by the entire resident community, participates in the Association of Marshall Islands Churches, an indigenous society that carries on the work initiated a century ago by Protestant missionaries from Boston and Honolulu.

Meetings of the Marshall Islands Congress on Majuro are attended each year by the Kili magistrate and an associate, where they join with other delegations in debate on policy recommendations to the Trust Territory Administration.

Advanced schools on Majuro and Jaluit receive annually certain youth of Kili who are spiritually and financially

aided by Kili's Church and Council.

Natives of Jaluit report that the Kilians who have been working on the colony site on that atoll are fitting well into the local population, especially in church activities.

As noted earlier, many residents of the island regard their kinsmen on other islands as part of the Kili community. Such absentee members constitute another link with Marshallese society; they guarantee some security to Kilians visiting away from home, and introduce new ideas and practices to the parent community through established kin ties.

Kilians of today, both councillors and laymen, have broken through the shell in which they were living, and are groping

tentatively and hesitantly for a wider outlook and for richer experiences. If they can learn to think of themselves as Marshallese, not as ex-Bikinians, they should find it easier to dispel some of their present anxieties and to seek more objectively the solutions to those problems which remain from a decade of having to adapt a traditional way of life to a strange physical and social environment.

*Note:* Field research during the summer of 1957 on Kili Island, on which this progress report is based, was undertaken by the writer while on leave from the University of Hawaii as a Senior Post-doctoral Fellow of the National Science Foundation and with the aid of a grant from the Tri-Institutional Pacific Program.