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### **Population Relocations and their Impacts among the Marshallese: A Collection of Accounts and My Explorations while Researching this Topic.**

The geologic makeup of the Marshall Islands is unique and I believe one of the major components influencing the issues surrounding the frequent relocations of Marshallese peoples. The atolls and islets that consist of the Marshalls are scattered over 200,00 – 300,000 square miles of the Pacific Ocean in an area referred to as Micronesia. (Niedenthal, 2001). The Marshalls likely began forming some 25-30 million years ago. Volcanic islands existed in what are now the lagoon centers of the atolls. A movie depicting this formation as it is theorized can be found at NOAA's National Ocean Service: Animation of coral atoll formation web site (NOAA, 2003). The volcanic island gradually began sinking pushing coral beds on the fringe higher and higher. Eventually these coral reefs grew above sea level forming a ring of coral around the former site of the volcanic island. Kwajelein, located within the Marshall Islands is the one of the world's largest atolls. "Atolls can be up to 63 miles across, but the width of dry land is usually only 600-13,000 feet from inner to outer beach." (Valencic, 2001) The lack of dry land has been a significant factor in the survival of the Marshallese people as they endured migrations within this chain of atolls. This will be explained in greater detail and more specifically with the migration of the Bikini people from a habitable atoll (Bikini) to an atoll strained of resources (Ronterik) and eventually jammed onto an island with much less potential for sustainability (Kili).

What's also interesting is that these atolls are currently evolving and this evolution is being affected by global warming. The changing of Earth's global climate and the rapidly increasing depth of the oceans is jeopardizing several of these islands (as well as others). This is largely due to the low elevation on the rims of these islands. The Marshalls have a maximum elevation of about 7-10 meters. This environmental struggle is in addition to radiological struggles within the region.

During the ten year period of testing involving 66 nuclear tests the people of Enewatak, Rongelap, Wotho, Bikini, and Utrik were moved (and in some cases moved several times) from their atolls (or temporary atolls) to surrounding atolls and islands. Some of these moves involved people traveling several hundreds of miles away to begin a new life on a smaller, less habitable atoll or islet. A comprehensive Chronology Marshall Islands over the years 1944 to 1990 is available in an online format submitted to the U.S. Department of Energy (Deines, 1990). Notably the islands that make up these atolls are located in the northern end of the Marshall Islands which is typically a drier and more temperate climate.

[SOON TO BE INCLUDED: Social and Population Impact. Interviews from elders and others who experienced the relocations]

- Social impacts
  - People that were on atolls that were evacuated were relocated to other populated islands. Were they viewed differently by the indigenous population?
  - Are/were there any custom and language differences and similarities? Have their traditions changed from additional cultural influences? [They have managed to retain their tribal organization throughout the islands]
- Population dynamics and physical resources

- How did the influx of people impact resource availability on the atolls? [Housing and food became major issues as relocated Marshallese were stuffed into Shanty-towns as native Marshallese had already claimed available adequate land for housing.]
- Notably, the availability and acquisition of food. [I discovered this to be a major issue while reading about the history of the Bikinians.]
- Had the islanders that were moved visited the other atolls?
- What happened during repopulation when islanders discovered islands that may have had diminished or destroyed resources? [Information on this topic is explained by the Bikinians as well as US government documentation]
- Communication. How is communication conducted between and among islands? How has communication changed due to population shifts? [Mostly through the use of radios]
- Current emigration issues may be related to this shifting and moving of populations?
- Families split among other atolls. Is this largely due to the emigration during the time of testing? How does this affect the family dynamic compared to that which existed 50 years ago? [Displacement throughout the world is very common among Marshallese history. This is evident by a large population located in the US in Arkansas.]
- The relationship with the US is being tested due to these large migrations there are compacts being voted on very soon.

### **Bikini: A Case Study**

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The story of the Bikinian's relocations is probably the most notable as these people of the Bikini atoll have endured several moves since 1946 and still have not been returned to their homeland.



(Niedenthal, 2002)

The close resemblance of the Bikinians flag to the flag of the United States is to remind the people and the government of America that a great debt is still owed by them to the people of Bikini. (Niedenthal, 2002) This debt is described in great detail in several documents.

I include the flag to illustrate a brief tale of the Bikinians. The 23 white stars in the field of blue in the upper left hand corner of the flag represent the islets that make up the Bikini Atoll. The three black stars in the upper right of the flag represent the three islands that were vaporized by the March 1, 1954, 15 megaton hydrogen bomb blast, code named Bravo. These three islands were Bokonijien, Aerokokil, and Nam. (Niedenthal, 2001). The tale of relocations of the Bikinians is included below from the Marshall Island Chronology (Deines, 1990)

- **March 07, 1946:** The U.S. Navy evacuates Bikini Atoll inhabitants to Rongerik Atoll.
- **August 1947:** An official investigating board recommends removal of the Bikini Islanders from Rongerik because of insufficient food and water.
  - Interview with Lore Kessibuki (Niedenthal, 2001):  
*“While on Rongerik there were of course many problems for us to deal with as leaders.*

*But the crisis in particular that stands out in my mind, even today after the many years have gone by, is the illness that many of us came down with as starvation became prolonged and excruciatingly painful."*

- **March 14 1948:** The Bikini evacuees are moved to a temporary camp on the Kwajalein Navy base.
  - Interview with Kilon Bauno (Niedenthal, 2001):  
*"We were frustrated by the small amount of space in which we were permitted to move around. We had to depend on the US military for everything. We were afraid of this alien environment and almost from the day we got there we began thinking about other places to live."*
- **November 2, 1948:** After Bikini leaders select Kili Island for a settlement, the Navy moves the Bikini community of 184 people to Kili, which lacks a lagoon and protected anchorage.
- **1952:** A delegation, including former Sen. Elbert Thomas, high commissioner of the T.T., discusses the plight of the Bikinians with AEC Chairman Gordon Dean. The delegation seeks a better place for the Bikinians to live because Kili lacks fishing opportunities and cannot receive supplies during at least four months of the year. The AEC concludes tentatively that the natives now living on Kili cannot be moved to Bikini because although Bikini "is in all probability quite inhabitable from the radiological point of view," the atoll satisfies operational requirements for a possible supplementary site.
- **September 1954:** K. D. Nichols, the AEC general manager, informs the JCAE that the DOI and the Navy Department are currently taking steps to settle claims with inhabitants of Bikini and Enewetak atolls for the use of their lands. According to the AEC, the amount of radioactivity in Bikini and Enewetak lagoons makes fish there unsuitable for human consumption. The AEC also reports that radiological damage to Bikini and Enewetak includes high radioactive contamination levels that will require passage of several years before humans can inhabit these lands.
- **1967:** An anthropological study of the Bikinians and their leaders reveals that most are dissatisfied with Kili and wish to return to Bikini.
- **1968:** President Johnson publicly announces the decision to resettle the Bikinians. Tommy F. McCraw, a health physicist of the AEC/DOS tells the Bikinians that the food from the Bikini Atoll lagoon and Eneu Island is safe to eat but that villages will be built only on Bikini and Eneu Islands.
- **1969:** The DOD begins its cleanup of the islands of Bikini and Eneu and projects that completion will require six months. The AEC certifies that the Bikini cleanup project has been "satisfactorily completed." The Bikinians petition the T.T. high commissioner for their immediate return to Bikini and \$100,000 in further compensation for damages to their atoll and the discomforts they suffered from relocation.

- **1972:** Three Bikini families move back to Bikini with approximately 50 Marshallese construction and maintenance workers.
- **1974:** A group of Bikini people refuse to return to the atoll on 25 May 1974 until they receive appropriate compensation for the past 25 years.
- **1978:** Relocation of Bikini residents to Kili Island begins.
- **1984:** The people of Bikini file a class action suit against the executive branch of the U.S. government. The plaintiffs seek declaratory and equitable relief, the radiological cleanup of Bikini Atoll, the restoration of the atoll to its former condition, and speedy resettlement of the Bikini people to their atoll.
- **1990s:** Tourism push and infrastructure development



The two black stars of the flag in the lower-right hand corner represent where the Bikinians live now, Kili Island, 425 miles to the south of Bikini Atoll, and Ejit Island of the Majuro Atoll. These two stars are symbolically far away from Bikini's stars on the flag as the islands are in real life (both in distance and quality of life). (Niedenthal, 2002) The distance and quality of life are mentioned due to the fact that the Bikini Atoll had a total land area of 3.4 square miles vs. Kili Island with a total land area of 0.36 square miles. (Niedenthal, 2001) this decrease in land area forced the Bikinians into crowded housing with a decreasing food shortage

The Marshallese words across the bottom of the flag, "MEN OTEMJEJ REJ ILO BEIN ANIJ" [Translation: "Everything is in the hands of God."], represent the words spoken in 1946 by the Bikinian

leader, Juda, to U.S. Commodore Ben Wyatt “when the American went to Bikini to ask the islanders--on a Sunday after church--to give up their islands ‘For the good of mankind and to end all world wars’ (Niedenthal, 2002) so that the U.S. could test nuclear weapons. “In February 1946 The military governor of the Marshall Islands obtains the consent of a Bikini chief to relocate his people so that Bikini can be used for nuclear weapon tests.” (Deines, 1990)

## Annotated Bibliography

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### Historical and Social Documents

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Ann C. Deines, D. I. G., Ruth R. Harris, & Laura J. Kells. (1990). Marshall Islands Chronology: 1944 to 1990. Retrieved October 15, 2003, from <http://worf.eh.doe.gov/ihp/chron/>

*Presents a chronological account of the relocation of the people of the Marshall Islands over the years from 1946-1990. Presents medical needs to move citizens and well as military exercises. Data is prepared for the U.S. Department of Energy Under Contract No. DE-AC08-87 NIO594*

Bikinians. (2003). The Bikini Atoll Web Site. Retrieved October 17, 2003, from [www.bikiniatoll.com](http://www.bikiniatoll.com)

*Traces the unique history of the island, nuclear testing, and the status of the Bikini people and their land today. Includes a Resource Page--with references to documents, books, magazine articles, films and interviews about Bikini. A look at the ongoing steps that have been taken to make the atoll safe for habitation and outlines some future plans for Bikini. An in-depth analysis of the relocation and resettlement program for the Bikinian people. A Presentation of educational opportunities with Dartmouth College.*

The Government Of The Republic Of The Marshall Islands. (2000). Petition Presented To The Congress Of The United States Of America Regarding Changed Circumstances Arising From U.S. Nuclear Testing In The Marshall Islands. Retrieved October 17, 2003, from <http://www.bikiniatoll.com/petition.html>

*Presents the petition to the US for payments to the Bikini people.*

Mander, J. (1991). In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

*Jerry Mander presents his view of technology and corporations and their negative relationship with native cultures. He mentions his visit to the islands in the greater area of Micronesia. He specifically describes the role of "brutal" technology and its impact on the Marshall Islands on pages 345-347.*

Niedenthal, J. (2001). For the Good of Mankind: A History of the People of Bikini and Their Islands. Majuro, Marshall Islands: Micronitor Publishing.

*"For the good of mankind and to end all world wars" - Commodore Ben Wyatt 1946. A Series of stories from Bikini elders on the island of Kili. Describes the struggles that the Bikinians have undergone to retain their heritage. The title is taken from a famous speech in 1946 when an American entourage with Commodore Ben Wyatt visited Bikini and met with Bikinians and King Juda. This meeting prompted deliberations on allowing the use of Bikini as a military testing ground for nuclear weaponry.*

Niedenthal, J. (2001, 2001). The Cultural Journey of the People of Bikini. Retrieved October 20, 2003, from <http://www.bikiniatoll.com/Culture.html>

*Interviews with Bikinian islanders recollecting various tales of their history from ancient to modern times*

Spennemann, D. (2000). The Marshall Islands An Electronic Library & Archive of Primary Sources. Retrieved October 20, 2003, from <http://marshall.csu.edu.au/>

Spennemann, D. (1998, 1998). Essays on the Marshallese Past. Retrieved October 18, 2003, from <http://marshall.csu.edu.au/html/essays/essays2.html>

*Dirk Spennemann has created a wonderful collection of materials for exploring the history of the Marshallese peoples through essays, stories, interviews, as well as historical studies.*

### **Educational Documents**

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Dartmouth College (2001). Marshall Islands Teaching Internships for Undergraduates and Graduates. Retrieved 10-20-03, 2003, from <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~educ/marshall.html>

*The connection between Dartmouth College and the Republic of the Marshall Islands is in its fifth year. Dartmouth undergraduates and graduates travel to the Marshall Islands each year to participate in the struggling public education system of the Marshalls. The eventual aim of this program is for the Marshallese citizenry to maintain independence from US presence.*

Dibblin, J. (1988). Day of Two Suns: US Nuclear Testing and the Pacific Islanders. New York: New Amsterdam Press.

*"There are only 90,000 people out there. Who gives a damn." - Henry Kissinger 1969.  
"For the good of mankind and to end all world wars" - Commodore Ben Wyatt 1946.  
Dibblin presents the trials and tribulations that the nuclear arms race has brought to the Marshall Islands. Stories from the perspectives of the islanders are presented as well as historical and political perspectives. This volume also sheds significant light on the aspects of the Marshallese matrilineal society, especially concerning land-ownership.*

### **Exploration of Atolls**

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Encyclopedia. (1999). Philip's Millenium Encyclopedia & World Atlas. In S. Luck (Ed.), Philip's Millenium Encyclopedia & World Atlas (pp. 744). London: George Philip Limited.

*Atoll: Ring-shaped reef of coral enclosing a shallow lagoon. An atoll begins as a reef surrounding a slowly subsiding island, usually volcanic. As the island sinks the coral continues to grow upward until eventually the island is below sea level and only a ring of coral is left at the surface.*

NOAA. (2003). NOAA's National Ocean Service Animation of Coral Atoll Formation, from [www.nos.noaa.gov/education/corals/media/supp\\_coral04a.html](http://www.nos.noaa.gov/education/corals/media/supp_coral04a.html)

NOAA. (2003). NOAA's National Ocean Service: How Do Coral Reefs Form. Retrieved October 15, 2003, from [http://www.nos.noaa.gov/education/corals/coral04\\_reefs.html](http://www.nos.noaa.gov/education/corals/coral04_reefs.html)

*These sites describe how coral begins to settle and grow around an oceanic island forming a fringing reef. It can take as long as 10,000 years for a fringing reef to form. Over the next 100,000 years, if conditions are favorable, the reef will continue to expand. As the reef expands, the interior island usually begins to sink and the fringing reef turns into a barrier reef. When the island completely subsides beneath the water leaving a ring of growing coral with an open lagoon in its center, it is called an atoll. This process of atoll*

*formation may take as long as 30,000,000 years to occur.*

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