INTRODUCTION

The last four decades have seen many changes in both the size and distribution of the African population. During the post-colonial era, the continent's population has risen from 180 million in 1950, to 720 million in 1995 (Population Reference Bureau 1995). At the same time, the proportion of Africans who live in urban areas has increased to thirty-one percent as cities become the focus of national economies. While there have been some regional reductions, birth rates in Africa remain the highest in the world and show little sign of slowing. With respect to the demographic transition, while there has been limited change in some parts of Africa, most countries have not yet progressed far into the stage of fertility reduction, where birth-rates decline significantly and population growth slows (Johnson 1994, p. 227). The varied socio-political changes that have occurred in Africa have also led to a large number of regional conflicts and civil-wars. These conflicts have displaced millions of people, both within and outside their home countries. By 1995, some 5.8 million Africans were displaced outside their home countries escaping famine, violence or for fear of persecution on ethnic, political or religious grounds (US Committee for Refugees 1995, p. 42). While the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) provisionally estimates that a further 1.9 million Africans were internally displaced (Crisp 1995, p. 254), the actual number is probably much greater.

The reactions of the governments of countries that have become host to refugees have not been uniform across the continent. In some cases, where the refugee populations are small and the refugees themselves have kin in the country of asylum, they have been welcomed as guests. During the anti-colonial era in Africa, refugees

were often perceived as comrades in the struggle against oppression (Holborn 1975, p. 843). In more contemporary refugee migrations however, this welcome has not been so strong. Where refugees greatly outnumber the local population, are from different ethnic or religious backgrounds, or settle for long periods of time, a great strain can be placed on any welcome that they might receive (Rogge 1991, p. 7). Much of the time, refugees in Africa settle themselves spontaneously, or in organized camps in the thinly populated frontier regions that abound on the continent. These migrants seldom receive any assistance from African governments to help re-establish themselves following their flight. For the most part, the international community is left to deal with the refugees' welfare.

Academics and practitioners have identified three durable solutions to refugee situations. These solutions are: resettlement to a third country, local integration and voluntary repatriation (Goodwin-Gill 1989, p. 255). Since the early 1980s, voluntary repatriation has increasingly become the solution of choice for governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies. This increased emphasis and promotion of repatriation as the *ideal solution* for African refugees has not been without controversy. While some academics have criticized the motivations and practices of agencies that promote repatriation (Harrell-Bond 1989; Kibreab 1991); others have sought to improve the understanding of the process of repatriation for those refugees who have decided to return home, despite the reservations of some critics (Stein and Cuny 1992b; Crisp 1984c).

Ideally, decisions regarding the resolution of any refugee situation should be made by the refugees themselves. Through international instruments such as the UN *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* as well as national legislation, refugees are guaranteed the right to remain in exile while they fear that their lives might be in danger should they return home. In the past, many African refugee situations were ended by voluntary repatriation when the initial causes of the migration, such as anti-

colonial conflict, were resolved (Koehn 1995, p. 97). However, the reality in many African states today is that the internal conflicts causing refugee outflows do not have simple solutions, or definite end-points, that would allow refugees to feel safe enough to return home. While previously, the international community could promote voluntary repatriation to a safe homeland as the best solution for refugee situations, more recent repatriations have called into question how *voluntary* some repatriation programs really are. Reduced UN and NGO budgets combined with impoverished, increasingly hostile and occasionally violent host countries, have all contributed to the erosion of the right of refugees to determine for themselves whether or not they should return home (Winter 1995, p. 162).

THE STUDY OF REPATRIATION

During the first half of this century, repatriation was not emphasized as an important durable solution for refugees. Until more recently, the displacement of refugees was generally considered permanent (Rogge 1991, p. 10). Some early refugee theorists suggested that repatriation was unlikely to have an important role in the solution of refugee migrations, particularly those in Europe (Simpson 1939; Holborn 1975, p. 325). However in the post-colonial era, the frequency and magnitude of repatriations in Africa has defied the postulations of these early researchers. Since the early 1960s, repatriation has been emphasized as being the best solution for African refugees.

Many of the assumptions made regarding refugee repatriation are based on ideas that come from the immediate post-colonial era in African history. Following the resolution of anti-colonial conflicts and wars, many refugees who had fled during the conflict with the European power enthusiastically returned home to their new nations to resume their old lives. During this period, some refugee theorists and international policy makers assumed that because the majority of African refugees do voluntarily

return home, that repatriation was somehow the 'natural' outcome to a refugee crisis (Rogge 1991, p. 7).

Subsequent to these early repatriations, new conflicts have emerged in many African states that have little or no direct relation to the problems of the colonial era. These conflicts are rooted in the internal social, economic and political rivalries within and between African states (Bakwesegha 1995, p. 17). In some cases, the refugees generated by these conflicts do not share the desire to return home that their predecessors did. Elsewhere in Africa, the more recent phenomenon has emerged of refugees returning home to areas still at conflict. These returns are often motivated by deteriorating conditions in the country of asylum, rather than a strong desire on the refugees' part to return home (Stein and Cuny 1995, p. 5). The increasing involvement of UN agencies and their partner NGOs in the management of complex disaster situations has also affected the repatriation process in Africa. New linkages are being made between returning refugees, the internally displaced and aid and development programs. Because of this, future repatriations will increasingly be undertaken with the financing and supervision of these external agencies.

The growth in the number and size of refugee populations in Africa, as well as the complexity of the situations that generate refugees, have posed problems for the advocates of repatriation. While there is a growing understanding that repatriation is often the best solution for refugees, it is by no means an easy undertaking. Repatriates undergo changes in lifestyle that can be as, or more, severe than those changes experienced when they first became refugees. There may be expectations about home areas that can not be fulfilled in the short to medium-term. While political agreements may signal the official end of a conflict, the physical manifestations of these agreements, such as security or development aid, might not be available immediately for returnees.

The use of repatriation as a solution to refugee situations without the consent and/or understanding of the refugees themselves has become more common. In some cases, the entire concept of *voluntary* repatriation has been manipulated to achieve political agendas. When NGOs or the UN become a party to these less voluntary repatriations, even when these agencies are left with few options, the entire refugee-support system can come into disrepute. Finally, when the refugees do return home, their successful reintegration may depend on some complex adaptations learned while they were refugees, or something as simple as the timing of their return relative to the regional agricultural cycle.

PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

In some of his earlier writing Kibreab (1985, p. 9), a noted Africanist in refugee studies, commented that the quality and quantity of research on the African refugee problem was sadly lacking. While some preliminary work into migration patterns and refugee theories had been undertaken in the 1970s, detailed surveys of African refugee populations, examining their composition and motivation were rare. The succeeding decades brought about a change in this state of affairs. Social scientists began in-depth studies of refugee populations across the continent. Governments, NGOs, UN agencies and universities have all sponsored research into a wide range of refugee issues, including voluntary repatriation. Initially, the limited return migration that did occur in the 1960s and 1970s went largely unmonitored, with the repatriations to Algeria in 1968-69 (Bouhouche 1991) and Sudan in 1972-74 (Akol 1986; 1988) being notable exceptions. With the massive voluntary repatriation to the newly independent Zimbabwe in 1980, a new interest in the dynamics of refugee return migration was sparked (Makanya 1991; Jackson 1991).

During the last ten years a significant number of studies, many of them unpublished, have concentrated specifically on the repatriation of African refugees.

Recently, some more widely available published studies have broadened the scope of material about African refugee repatriation (Allen and Morsink 1994; Stein, Cuny and Reed 1995). The many individual case studies that have appeared, tend to focus on individual refugee return migrations, rather then the larger issue of repatriation, although this is changing. One of the major concerns generated by all these studies is the exact nature of *voluntary* repatriation. As noted previously, several examples have emerged where refugees have been forced into returning home when they might not have been willing to do so.

In considering these recent changes in the character of repatriation in Africa, the purpose of this thesis is threefold:

- First, to provide a model of refugee information systems and how they affect the repatriation and decision-making process.
- Second, to develop a typology of repatriation based upon how *voluntary* the refugees' decisions really are. The typology will be tested against selected case studies of African repatriations.
- Third, a review of the *voluntariness* of large-scale repatriations in Africa over the last twenty-five years will be provided.

In order to make informed decisions about returning home, refugees require access to accurate information about their home areas. An extensive search of the literature on African repatriation reveals that a variety of factors can influence the decision to return home. Some refugees decide to repatriate quickly following the cessation of active hostilities, while others linger as refugees for years. Increasingly however, refugees are required to repatriate into areas where conflict is ongoing, sometimes because conditions in exile have badly deteriorated, or because conflict has lessened in their home areas. The manner in which refuges receive and interpret information about their home areas is central to any discussion of voluntary repatriation (Koser 1993, p. 175). The processes through which information regarding security and resource availability is transmitted from home areas to the potential repatriates is

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central to understanding the entire voluntary repatriation process. Included in this thesis is a study of how information about home areas is gathered and transmitted to refugees and how they use such information in their decision to repatriate or to remain in exile. In order to impel repatriation, information is sometimes manipulated by governments, political fronts or other actors involved with the refugees. This manipulation of information is examined and integrated into the new Information and Decision-making model.

The development of a typology of voluntary repatriation forms the theoretical basis for this thesis. Because examples of completely voluntary repatriation are becoming less frequent in Africa, a more detailed tool of analysis is required to determine whether refugees have had a clear choice in their repatriation decision. Using the model of refugee information and decision-making as its foundation, the typology will classify repatriations based upon their voluntariness. The typology delimits two contexts that affect the voluntary nature of refugees' decisions to return home. The first of these is the refugees' *social context*, which includes such components as the refugees' economic status, their security situation in exile and at home and their membership in one or more vulnerable groups.

The second context delimits issues not directly controlled by, or external to the refugees. These *external contexts* include the policies and activities of such groups as: host and home governments, political fronts, NGOs and the United Nations. Other factors such as environmental degradation, food or resource shortages in exile or at home are included as a component of the external context. It is suggested that the interplay between refugees' *social* and *external contexts* determines the degree to which a repatriation is truly voluntary. As noted previously, external forces are increasingly controlling the timing and operation of repatriations, leading to an erosion in *voluntary* repatriation.

Using the typology, the thesis will interpret the findings of the many case-studies of African repatriations, both from the anti-colonial era, as well as more contemporary studies. In the first instance, the intention is to provide an understanding of how and why the process of repatriation has changed in Africa from the early post-colonial era to today. The most obvious of these changes is the increase in the number of refugees returning to areas under conflict, which calls into question the voluntariness of these returns. The typology should provide an insight into how refugees make their own decision to return home, or to what extent these decisions are now dominated by external forces.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

The second chapter begins with a review of the literature regarding forced migration and refugees. Theories of forced migration are presented, with the emphasis placed on the extent to which refugees have a choice during their flight. Central to the issue of repatriation in Africa are several international legal instruments. These are introduced and discussed with respect to the rights of refugees and the responsibilities of national and international organizations.

Chapter Three initiates the discussion of how return migration occurs in Africa. Before refugees make the decision to repatriate, information from a number of sources must be identified and analyzed. In many cases, the means by which information about home areas is transmitted to refugees in Africa is subject to distortion. Home governments, as well as host governments, political fronts and international organizations can all control how and when refugees receive information. In addition to these formal sources of information, refugees always make use of informal networks to gain knowledge about their homes. Information about home areas marks only half of the decision-making process. Conditions experienced by refugees in exile also affect the decision on whether or not to return home. The entire information-decision-making

process is discussed with reference to the possibility of continued conflict in home areas. A model of refugee decision-making is presented that links the decision-making process to the *voluntariness* of return migration.

The typology of repatriation is presented in Chapter Four, which begins with a general analysis of refugees' *social contexts* and their *external contexts*. The interplay between these two contexts forms the backdrop for the typology of repatriation. Four distinct types of repatriation are presented in the new typology, which separates repatriations into categories based upon the extent to which the refugees' contexts are *free* or *controlled*. Because they expand upon the bipolar notions of 'voluntary' and 'involuntary', the four new types of repatriation provide a broader vocabulary for describing repatriations in Africa and elsewhere.

The fifth chapter provides a detailed analysis of several African repatriations using the typology. Cases are drawn from one early refugee 'voluntary' repatriation program, as well as more recent examples from today's more complex conflicts. Before applying the typology to each case, the information flows and decision-making processes are examined. The case studies then examine the refugees' particular *social* and *external* contexts before the repatriation. The repatriations are then classified according to the typology.

There have been a large number of repatriations in Africa during the last twenty-five years. While recently there have been many detailed surveys of contemporary repatriation, many older repatriation exercises merit only a passing mention in the literature. Chapter Six provides a survey of repatriations in Africa. Following a commentary on the validity of refugee statistics, the chapter contains a statistical review of all notable African repatriations. Where possible the validity of the data is examined. Finally, the individual repatriations where voluntariness might be in question are identified.

The concluding chapter discusses the validity of the typology of repatriation and provides recommendations for further research as well as practical suggestions for those involved in repatriation exercises in Africa.