

CHAPTER VI

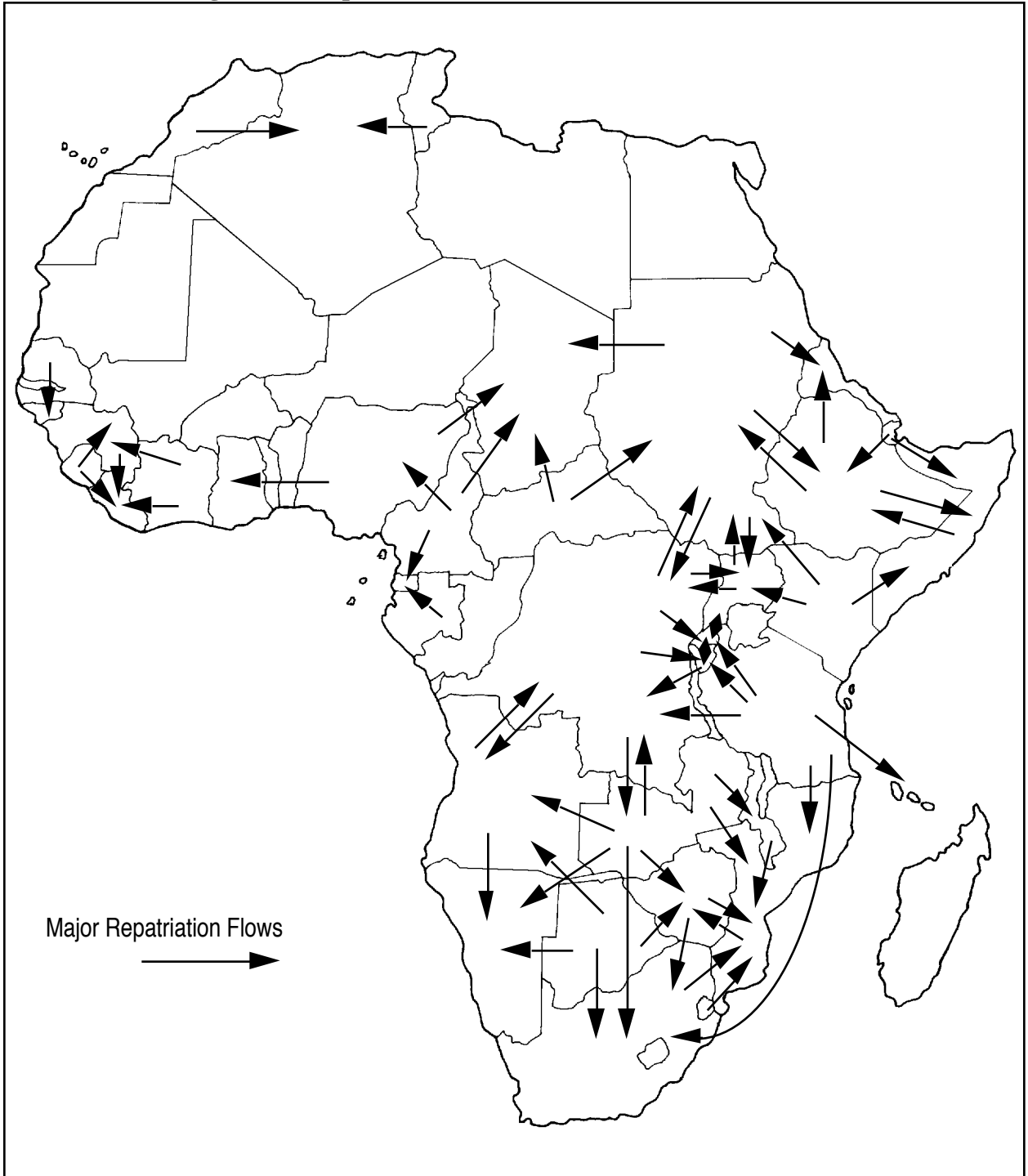
SURVEY OF REFUGEE REPATRIATION IN AFRICA

NOTES ON REFUGEE DATA COLLECTION

The significance of repatriation in resolving the African refugee problem can be summarized by the fact that up to seven million refugees have returned to their homes since the early 1970s (UNHCR, see Figure 6.2). The number and scale of return migrations proves that voluntary repatriation is the most widespread durable solution in the African context. Figure 6.1 provides an indication of the number and direction of significant repatriation flows in Africa since 1960. For the sake of clarity, two or more return migrations between two countries are indicated by a single arrow.

Collecting accurate statistics about refugee migrations is problematic. A cursory scan of academic reports and field surveys on any one refugee migration can yield a variety of different opinions about the numbers of migrants involved. Refugee populations are by their very nature dynamic and enumerating them accurately can defy the most experienced specialists (Crisp 1995, p. 245). Outside the academic world, this lack of accuracy can lead to problems when international agencies attempt to provide assistance to refugees or repatriates. As these agencies have sometimes not conducted extensive enumerations of their own, their data can be prone to inaccuracies, to the detriment of the implementation of relief programs. Within the academic realm, the inaccuracy of data is cause for concern. In many cases field surveys use data that has not been specifically collected for the survey itself. The authors rely on data provided by UNHCR or other unofficial sources. The question remains, should data that is known to be inaccurate be quoted? Is an estimate that is probably incorrect better than

Figure 6.1 Repatriation Flows in Africa Since 1960



Sources: Coles 1985; UNHCR 1986-1995

no estimate at all? There is insufficient discussion about the quality of refugee data in academic circles. However, the commentaries that do exist identify three general problems in determining the number of refugees or repatriates: differing definitions of who is a refugee, difficulties in identifying spontaneously settled refugees and repatriates and the intentional manipulation of data.

Refugee Definitions

In much of Africa, the scale of refugee migrations precludes the claiming of refugee status by individuals (Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo 1989, p. 26). As was intended in the OAU *Convention* on refugees, nations can provide official refugee status to entire groups of refugees who settle spontaneously. While in certain other situations, particularly when refugees are confined in camps, individual refugees are registered by governments. Information for refugee statistics is derived from these registrations. However, even the most detailed registration of refugees can be inaccurate. Some refugees register twice in order to receive double rations, thereby inflating figures. On the other hand, refugees that are relatively self-sufficient, many may not register for assistance at all. A major problem exists in that UNHCR is not specifically empowered to enumerate refugees in every case. Because of this, UNHCR frequently relies on national governments to provide it with information on refugee settlement (Harrell-Bond, Voutira and Leopold 1992, p. 212).

In the absence of an enumeration, the number of refugees is sometimes determined by the number of people claiming assistance using UNHCR or government-issued ration cards. The value of these ration cards to the refugees as a source of food leads to a large number of refugees, or their families, having more than one ration card. Ryle (1992, p. 163) notes that in the Hartisheikh area of Ethiopia, seventy per-cent of Somali refugee families had more than one ration card. The camps in the area were administered for UNHCR by the Ethiopian government's Administration for Refugee

Affairs, which took into account the duplication of cards by reducing its estimates of the refugee population. At the same time, UNHCR quoted the inaccurate and inflated number in all its planning figures (Ryle 1992, p. 164). The repatriation program planned by UNHCR for 1993 called for rations to be provided to 430,000 people returning to northern Somalia, a figure greatly in excess of the number actually returning. In cases such as this, care must be taken to verify the accuracy of statistics that are drawn from ration cards.

In some refugee migrations, there is the possibility that some of the migrants are taking advantage of the refugee situation in order to better themselves economically. The line between who is an economic migrant and who is a refugee can become blurred in the course of a complex emergency. While most African nations have signed the OAU's *Charter* on refugees and have accepted the broader definition of 'refugee' as embodied in the document, only a few have altered national legislation to bring it into line with international instruments (Onyango 1986, p. 9). These inconsistencies in law can provide governments with the opportunity to deny or remove refugee status from groups of refugees, or individual refugees. Governments that deny refugee status to certain displacees can use this as an excuse for the refoulement of refugees and lead to further inaccuracies in the data.

Identifying Refugees and Repatriates

When refugees settle or repatriate into rural areas, they can become invisible to the data collection systems employed by governments, or as noted previously, the UNHCR. Refugees who do not require or want assistance may not register with NGOs, international agencies or governments. Because in any refugee migration, upwards of sixty percent of refugees are unassisted (Harrell-Bond 1990, p. 123), keeping an accurate count of refugees can be problematic. Although UNHCR statistics take into account unassisted refugees and returnees in their estimates, the large proportion of

unassisted refugees makes accurate estimates difficult. In 1986, returnees to northern Uganda crossed the border together with some Sudanese refugees fleeing the conflict in southern Sudan. During the flight, many children registered with several families in order to obtain extra rations. This led to the official count of returnees being highly inflated (Allen 1991, p. 13). In this and other refugee situations, members of the local population sometimes register as refugees in order to take advantage of relief aid intended for refugees. Locals who speak the same language, or have a similar ethnicity to refugees can be difficult to differentiate, causing further misrepresentation in the statistics.

Refugees who repatriate into urban areas can also provide problems for the refugee data collector. Many repatriation programs target rural areas as the destination for returnees. However, refugees who have become urbanized during their exile, as well as others seeking to leave their rural homes, may choose to repatriate directly to cities. There they can easily merge with the population in the shanty towns that characterize every large African city.

Manipulation of Refugee Data

Perhaps the most frequently cited reason for the inaccuracy of refugee statistics is the manipulation of the data by both host and home governments. The enumeration of several refugee populations have been characterized by the intentional misrepresentation of the size of the population in order to gain political or material advantage. On one hand, refugees are a symbol of failure to the government of the country they have fled. The existence of a large number of refugees who have fled a nation do not provide a show of confidence about the government to the international community (UNHCR 1993c, p. 147). On the other hand, host countries are often burdened by refugees and sometimes exaggerate the number of refugees in order to

attract extra aid for refugees and locals in the refugee settlement areas (Harrell-Bond, Voutira and Leopold 1992, p. 212).

Repatriation exercises are not immune to this kind of statistical manipulation. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, up to 350,000 refugees fled the Ugandan civil war and settled in southern Sudan (Crisp 1986a, p. 165). By 1984, the refugees became a considerable embarrassment to the government of Milton Obote, which was trying to prove to the world at large that Uganda was once again a stable country. Despite amnesties and continued assurances of safety, few refugees were willing to return to the insecurity of Uganda. The Ugandan government, eager to show a wave of repatriation, cited erroneous statistics provided by UNHCR headquarters in Geneva that claimed that up to 300,000 refugees had returned home. The government took the UNHCR's figures as correct, because they suited their political needs at the time. The inflated statistics helped attract foreign aid to Uganda, while at the same time providing the illusion of a return to normality. At this time, United Nations personnel supervising the repatriation program in Sudan and Uganda indicated that fewer than 2,000 refugees had availed themselves of official transportation and repatriation aid programs. The World Food Programme project manager in Uganda indicated that only 50,000 returnees, mostly spontaneous, were receiving food aid at the time (Crisp 1986a, p. 169). Even allowing for a large proportion of self-supporting returnees not receiving food aid, the figures used by the Ugandans were an obviously incorrect (Crisp and Ayling 1985, p. 8; Harrell-Bond 1986, p. 188).

Political fronts have inflated the number of refugees who were eligible for repatriation in order to increase their power base after the resolution of a conflict. In Zimbabwe, following the Lancaster House agreement, an election was scheduled to take place soon after the repatriation process began. The competing political fronts ZANU and ZAPU (now political parties) needed to return as many of their supporters of voting age in advance of the impending election. Both fronts inflated the number of

potential repatriates in order to attract as much repatriation assistance as possible (Jackson 1991, p. 41). Elsewhere, the Namibian liberation front SWAPO, chronically overestimated the number of Namibian displacees. The front claimed that 90,000 Namibians were refugees around the world. After the repatriation exercise was over, only about 45,000 of the 90,000 refugees claimed by SWAPO ever returned home (Simon and Preston 1993, p. 54). While some of the refugees had undoubtedly settled permanently in their new countries, the number of refugees claimed by SWAPO was a deliberate exaggeration.

The Value of Refugee Statistics

Despite all the faults described above, the refugee statistics collected and published by UNHCR remain one of the few sources of refugee data. While other agencies, like the United States Committee for Refugees do publish statistics, UNHCR data remains the most widely reported in the literature. The fact remains that few governments, agencies or researchers have the time, or the resources, to obtain a demographic profile of any refugee migration. Some researches, such as Kibreab (1991, p. 18) continue to lament the quality of refugee data and the extent to which researchers rely without question on the United Nations for their statistics. The continued verbatim citation of UNHCR statistics, without reference to the reality in the field can harm the credibility of some refugee research. When knowingly incorrect or suspect statistics are quoted by agencies or researchers, it is essential that this be clearly noted. Providing some indication of how and by whom the data was collected can provide some indication of the quality of the data. When no information is available on the veracity of refugee statistics, this too should be noted.

In the final analysis, however unreliable some of the data might be, it is necessary for this thesis to provide some indication of the scale of refugee repatriation in Africa, in order to identify those migrations that might be involuntary. While in some individual cases the data may be suspect, Figure 6.2, which contains data taken mostly

from UNHCR's annual *Activities Financed by Voluntary Funds* reports for the years 1971 to 1995, provides a general outline of African repatriation over the last twenty-five years. In certain cases some additional return migrations, particularly those that could be classified as *involuntary*, have been added where they have been left out of UNHCR's reports. The table does not seek to classify each return migration according to the typology, because detailed information regarding *contexts* is frequently unavailable. Where appropriate, repatriations that appear to have controlled *contexts* are noted as possibly being involuntary, but these require further investigation. These classifications are made with reference to three major sources in the literature. The first is UNHCR's annual reports. The second major source for the years following 1981 is the US Committee for Refugees annual *World Refugee Survey*. The final major source is Coles' (1985) detailed summary of voluntary repatriation. In individual cases, additional sources have been used to confirm the accuracy of the classification.

Figure 6.2 Repatriation in Africa 1971-1995

Year	To	From	Total
1971-72	Zaire	Burundi	7,000
		Sudan	1,068
		Zambia	9,250
			17,318
1972-73	Zaire	Burundi	20,000
		Central African Republic	17,000
			37,000
	Malawi	Zambia	20,000
	Sudan	Ethiopia	7,400
		Uganda	25,600
		Zaire	21,000
	54,000		

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total
1973-74	Sudan	Ethiopia	14,216
		Central African Republic	16,000
		Uganda	53,000
	Burundi	Rwanda	4,000
1974-75	Guinea Bissau	Senegal	40,000
	Mozambique	Tanzania	2,000
	Angola	Zaire	300,000
	Zaire	Tanzania	4,700
1975-76	Guinea Bissau	Senegal	74,000
	Mozambique	Tanzania	37,000
		Zambia	4,000
1976-77	Guinea Bissau	Senegal	10,000
1977-78	Burundi	Zaire	6,000
1978-79	Zaire	Angola	150,000
		Burundi	36,000
	Angola	Zambia	3,000
		Portugal	1,000
1979-80	Zaire	Angola	2,000
		Burundi	35,000
	Zimbabwe	Botswana	19,900
		Mozambique	11,000
		Zambia	20,000

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total	
1979-80 <i>continued</i>	Equatorial Guinea	Cameroon Gabon	20,000 15,000	35,000
	Uganda	Tanzania		4,000
1980-81	Zimbabwe	Botswana Mozambique Zambia	22,000 72,000 21,000	115,000
	Angola	Zaire		50,000
1981-82	Zaire	Burundi		20,650
	Chad	Cameroon Sudan Other States	67,500 13,000 69,500	150,000
	Angola	Zaire		46,000
	Ethiopia	Various States		110,000
1982-83	Chad	Nigeria Sudan	3,500 2,000	5,500
	Uganda	Zaire		15,000
	Ethiopia	Various States		126,000
1983-84	Zaire	Burundi		2,062
	Ethiopia	Djibouti		35,000
	Chad	Sudan		1,000
	Uganda	Zaire & Sudan		200,000
1984-85	Zaire	Angola		6,800
	Ethiopia	Djibouti Sudan	6,200 170,000	176,200

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total
1984-85 <i>continued</i>	Uganda	Sudan Zaire	5,833 14,800 20,633
1985-86	Zaire	Angola	6,800
	Ethiopia	Djibouti Sudan	7,475 121,000 128,475
	Rwanda	Tanzania	2,000
	Uganda	Sudan Zaire	3,353 14,798 18,151
1986-87	Chad	Central African Republic	19,775
	Ethiopia	Sudan	150,000
	Uganda	Kenya Rwanda Sudan Zaire	2,600 30,400 33,000 16,740 82,740
1987-88	Chad	Central African Republic Sudan	16,932 15,000 31,932
	Ethiopia	Djibouti Somalia Sudan	3,223 80,000 65,000 148,223
	Sudan	Kenya	1,400
	Uganda	Sudan Zaire Kenya	100,000 6,000 1,000 107,000

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total	
1988-89	Burundi	Rwanda	53,000	109,000
		Zaire	56,000	
	Chad	Cameroon	5,022	16,848
		Central African Republic	1,326	
		Sudan	10,500	
	Ethiopia	Djibouti	5,671	14,509
		Somalia	8,838	
	Mozambique	Malawi	4,000	150,000
		South Africa	20,000	
		Zimbabwe	10,000	
Other States		116,000		
Angola	Zambia	1,677	5,916	
	Zaire	4,239		
Uganda	Sudan	97,646	98,850	
	Zaire	1,204		
Zimbabwe	Botswana		3,151	
Namibia	Angola	34,765	37,461	
	Zambia	2,696		
1989-90	Angola	Zaire		6,213
	Chad	Cameroon		3,312
	Ethiopia	Somalia	1,544	4,375
		Kenya	2,831	
	Mozambique	Malawi	3,520	214,520
Zimbabwe		3,000		
Other States		208,000		

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total	
1989-90 <i>continued</i>	Namibia	Zambia Other States	3,841 3,993	7,834
	Uganda	Kenya Sudan	6,047 226,000	232,047
	Rwanda	Kenya		1,966
	Zaire	Angola		3,036
1990-91	Chad	Cameroon Central African Republic	2,825 1,330	4,155
	Uganda	Kenya		1,000
	Ethiopia	Djibouti Somalia	800 13,232	14,032
	Liberia	Sierra Leone		55,000
	Mozambique	South Africa Zimbabwe	36,000 2,000	38,000
	Angola	Zaire		1,200
1991-92	Chad	Cameroon Sudan	3,775 3,000	6,775
	Liberia	Cote d'Ivoire Guinea Sierra Leone Other States	681 10,000 3,000 50,000	63,681
	Ethiopia	Djibouti Kenya Somalia Sudan	4,700 784 400,000 50,945	456,429

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total
1991-92 <i>continued</i>	Uganda	Sudan	2,709
	Angola	Zaire	30,000
1992-93	Burundi	Tanzania	6,585
		Rwanda	9,684
		Zaire	26,514
	Chad	Cameroon	1,300
		Sudan	2,700
	Somalia	Kenya	40,000
		Ethiopia	100,000
	Ethiopia	Kenya	56,819
		Sudan	50,000
		Other States	12,146
	Mozambique	Malawi	450,000
		South Africa	61,000
South Africa	Mozambique	692	
	Zimbabwe	804	
Liberia	Guinea	15,000	
	Sierra Leone	5,049	
Uganda	Sudan	50,000	
1993-94	Eritrea	Sudan	10,000
	Chad	Sudan	11,000
	Mali	Various States	5,000
	Ethiopia	Sudan	13,000
Kenya		56,000	

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

continued...

Year	To	From	Total
1993-94 <i>continued</i>	Rwanda	Burundi	400,000
	Mozambique	Malawi and Zimbabwe	500,000
	Somalia	Kenya	50,000
	Liberia		77,000
		Ghana	7,000
		Guinea	20,000
	Côte d'Ivoire	50,000	
	Uganda	Kenya	1,000
1994-95	Eritrea		60,000
		Sudan	41,000
		Other States	19,000
	Mozambique	Malawi and Zambia	750,000
	Rwanda	Burundi, Uganda and Others	600,000
	Burundi	Tanzania and Rwanda	400,000
	Ethiopia		35,000
		Sudan	15,000
		Kenya	13,000
		Djibouti	7,000
	Uganda	Zaire	5,000
	Togo	Benin	50,000
	Somalia	Kenya	60,000

Indicates possible involuntary repatriation

TRENDS IN AFRICAN REPATRIATION

As is demonstrated by Figure 6.2, the great majority of African repatriations could be classified as *voluntary*. Particularly in the 1970s, refugees returned home of their own free will, without external pressure. However, beginning in the early 1980s, there began a series of repatriations that could be classified under one of the three *involuntary* types. While most of this *involuntary* repatriation has occurred during the last fifteen years, the roots of *voluntary* repatriation in Africa can be traced to the resolution of the Algerian war of liberation from France in 1962. The repatriation that followed was the first in a series of return migrations that followed the end of direct European influence in African governments.

Prior to 1962, over 200,000 Algerians had fled to Morocco and Tunisia (Coles 1985, p. 63). An agreement to facilitate the repatriation of these refugees was brokered by the United Nations and implemented by UNHCR, Algeria, France and the two host nations: Morocco and Tunisia. In Algeria UNHCR established a pattern by negotiating a repatriation agreement between itself and the nations directly concerned with the refugees' safe return. Since then, the tripartite agreement for repatriation has become the omnibus tool used to facilitate voluntary repatriation in Africa (UNHCR 1993c, p. 42). Many early African repatriations were characterized by the eagerness of the displaced populations to return home to their newly independent nations. Much of the international community's refugee and repatriation policy developed during this period was based on the assumption that refugees were always willing participants in their repatriation. As noted previously, it was during this period that the Organization for African Unity developed a refugee policy that culminated in the OAU *Convention* on Refugees. This *Convention* recognized voluntary repatriation as the ideal solution to Africa's refugee problems (Goodwin-Gill 1989, p. 263).

The 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s in Africa were characterized by the majority of colonies gaining independence from their European colonial masters. In 1974,

political changes in Portugal brought about independence for its African colonies. While in the cases of Mozambique and Guinea Bissau, large numbers of refugees repatriated in an orderly manner, the same was not true in Angola. Although agreements to repatriate Angolan refugees in Zaire and Zambia were brokered by the United Nations, the civil war that followed independence precluded any immediate large-scale repatriation (Coles 1985, p. 106). Two decades later the same civil war, with a brief interlude, continues to produce refugees and preclude repatriation. The problem of refugees who fear the internal security of their homelands and refuse to repatriate became a more prevalent problem during this period. Other significant return migrations during the 1970s include Sudanese refugees from Uganda, Zaire and the Central African Republic during 1973 and 1974, as well as Zairean repatriates from Angola and Burundi in 1979.

Voluntary repatriation for refugees became the primary solution for the increasing number of African refugees during the 1980s. While some post-colonial repatriations still occurred, most notably to the new Zimbabwe in 1980, increasingly the conflicts that produced refugees in Africa had internal sources, but few internal solutions. Refugees from Ethiopia and Uganda, for example, found themselves in situations where the conflict that forced them to flee did not end satisfactorily. Governments and international agencies made plans for repatriation exercises with little consultation with the refugees. The uncertain internal security situation in these nations was well known to the refugees, who were generally unwilling to risk returning home. The repatriations that did occur to Ethiopia and Uganda during the middle of the decade were precipitated to a great extent by unrest in the country of asylum, rather than any overwhelming desire of the refugees to return home. The voluntary nature of these return migrations is very much in doubt. By the end of the decade however, solutions to the internal conflicts, especially in Uganda had brought about significant refugee repatriations (Allen 1991, p. 1).

Later in the decade, repatriations to Namibia and Mozambique characterized the complex state of refugee affairs in Africa. On the one hand as described in the previous chapter, Namibian returnees numbered among the last of the post-colonial refugees to return home. Further east, however significant repatriations occurred to Mozambique while that country was still in the midst of a civil war. The variety of repatriation during the decade, in Africa and elsewhere, produced an acceleration of academic interest in the dynamics of repatriation. Most repatriations during this decade were documented by academics or NGOs.

The present decade has brought about fresh civil wars and internal disputes across Africa. From Liberia to Rwanda to Somalia to Angola (again), tens of thousands of refugees have sought asylum in neighbouring countries. By now UNHCR, governments and international agencies consider repatriation as their primary response to refugee flight. Pressures from host governments to find expedient solutions to refugee migrations has led to increasing repatriation into areas still under conflict. (Stein, Cuny and Reed 1995, p. 5). Repatriations to Liberia and Mozambique during the early 1990s are examples of this new trend. In the Liberian experience, with the opposing parties entrenched, the conflict continues today with little sign of long-term solution. The ongoing conflict in Rwanda has led to large-scale refugee migrations and subsequent repatriations, without a clear sign of the conflict being resolved. Since late 1993, refugees have returned to Somalia, without a resolution in the conflict that displaced them. One of the largest repatriations ever occurred in 1994 when Mozambican refugees spontaneously returned home from Zimbabwe and Malawi.

As to the future of repatriation in Africa, it appears likely to remain the durable solution of choice for refugees in Africa. As of the end of 1995 there were nearly six million refugees still living outside their homelands in Africa (Crisp 1995, p. 249) and a further two million internally displaced (Crisp 1995, p. 247). It is unlikely that African refugees will be admitted in significant numbers for resettlement in Europe or North

America. Owing to the pressures increasingly being placed upon refugees in Africa, it is hoped that the majority of these refugees will be permitted the opportunity to decide for themselves when and how they will return home.