

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In many respects the situation of refugees in Africa has changed significantly over the last three decades. While at the mid-century refugees were often well received in exile, today's refugees are subjected to increasingly drastic restrictions and sometimes untenable conditions. As the number of refugees in Africa has increased, voluntary repatriation has been singled out by governments, UNHCR and many NGOs as the best of the three durable solutions for refugees. At the same time, many African governments have often lost patience with refugees and have sought easy solutions to complex problems. The promotion of refugee repatriation as an ideal solution for refugees has sometimes been misused by some governments. Elsewhere, refugees have not had the luxury of receiving protection from host governments. When internal conflicts have directly involved or spilled over into refugee settlement areas, some refugees have been forced to return home when conditions were not ideal. The rise in the number of less-than-voluntary repatriations has led to the need for a more detailed vocabulary to describe and classify these migrations. The major thrust of the thesis has been to delimit the characteristics of these returnees.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the course of researching this thesis, every available source on African refugee repatriation has been identified and consulted (see bibliography). From the analysis of these varied sources, two major issues have emerged: the complexity of the refugee information and decision-making process and the increasing vulnerability of

refugees in Africa to all types of involuntary repatriation. These two major findings are in many cases closely linked to each other in the African context. While in an ideal situation, refugees should be able to determine whether returning home is the appropriate decision, the thesis has demonstrated that their freedom to exercise their choices is frequently constrained.

The theme of information and decision-making is not new or exclusive to this thesis; it has been explored in general terms by several researchers and by one individual in a detailed case study (Koser 1991; 1994). As has been noted, refugees themselves are usually in the best position to make appropriate repatriation decisions. As was demonstrated in Chapter Five, with the examples detailing returnees from Djibouti and Mozambique, the refugees were generally more aware of micro-level conditions at home than were government or NGO officials. These refugees were able to make the best decisions when to and when not to return home. The model of information and decision-making that is summarized in Figure 3.2 provides a general outline of how refugees receive information and how they make decisions. The importance of informal sources of information for refugees cannot be over-emphasized. Many refugees have access to several informal sources about conditions in home areas, through family members, friends and acquaintances. However in Africa, the increasing confinement of refugees in closed settlements reduces the likelihood that they will receive accurate and timely information. The information and decision-making model also includes a test of voluntariness. The quality of refugees' information networks and decision-making powers becomes irrelevant if they are not permitted a free choice to remain in exile.

Chapter Two provided evidence that there is an international and continental legislative framework for the protection of refugees and returnees. This framework guarantees that the decision to return home shall be made *voluntarily* by refugees on their own. When they are not allowed to decide for themselves, but are returned home

forcibly, then their repatriation is considered *involuntary*. This bipolar distinction between *voluntary* and *involuntary* repatriation is becoming less useful in describing refugees in the African context. As refugee migrations become larger and more widespread and as resources for those refugees become scarcer, different varieties of return migration are becoming apparent. When voluntary repatriation became the durable solution of choice in Africa, most refugees were returning to their homelands following liberation from a colonial power. More recently, as conflicts have had less relationship to the colonial era, many refugees have had their destinies controlled for them. The new typology, with its four categories, provides another level to describe these involuntary repatriations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The first recommendation is directly linked to the findings on refugee information and decision-making. As has been demonstrated in refugee situations in Zaire, Kenya and Zimbabwe, there is a growing tendency for governments not to provide refugees with land for agricultural settlement, but to confine them in camps. These refugees can be left out of the information system that is essential to make good decisions. In addition, these refugees are more susceptible to being misled by inaccurate or false information. There exists a need on behalf of these refugees to be accurately informed about changing conditions at home. In response to this, during several recent organized repatriation exercises, UNHCR has provided for the information needs of some refugees. For refugees considering returning without formal assistance, the need still exists for accurate information to facilitate the decision-making process. While each return migration is different, this is a role that NGOs can fill, particularly those with appropriate local experience.

As the roots of conflicts and refugee migrations in Africa have become more complex, the phenomenon of non-recognized entities (NRE) has emerged. NREs

consist of liberation fronts, internal factions and other similar groups that have taken control areas away from 'legitimate' governments. In some recent cases in Africa, refugees or returnees have migrated into areas controlled by NREs. When migrants do this, it can become difficult for the international system, in particular the UN to react effectively. Because they are supposed to operate on an inter-governmental level, agencies like UNHCR are not officially sanctioned to deal with NREs. Recently however there have been some cases, such as in northern Somalia (Somaliland), where UNHCR has had some success in operating outside the boundaries of its traditional relationships. Still, with respect to refugees and returnees, there remains the need to selectively broaden the mandate of international organizations when the situations warrant.

One additional recommendation concerns refugee data collection, reporting and citation. As described in Chapter Six, there are several constraints to collecting accurate statistics on refugee populations, particularly in Africa. The remoteness of many populations, the dynamic nature of refugee groups all complicate the enumeration or estimation process. As nations rely increasingly on international assistance to care for refugees, there exists the potential for the manipulation of refugee statistics. Because of the uncertainty of refugee statistics, care must be taken when referring to the data, particularly in academic literature. Ideally, researchers should comment on the manner in which the data they cite was obtained and perhaps comment on the likely quality of that data.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the knowledge base about refugee repatriation has improved significantly over the last ten years, several directions for future research emerge from the findings of this thesis. Chapter Six identified a number of return migrations in Africa that require additional investigation of their *contexts* in order to accurately classify them

according to the typology. In addition, the new typology presented compares the *social* and *external* contexts of refugees in Africa only. In the last decade alone there have been significant refugee return migrations outside of Africa. In order to verify the veracity of the thesis' typology of repatriation, similar studies could be undertaken on secondary sources about other repatriations. It is possible that the experiences of refugees elsewhere in the world could be different enough to significantly alter their *contexts* and therefore change and strengthen the typology of repatriation.

As noted previously, there is some additional research being undertaken about the refugee information and decision-making process. However, much remains conjectural or unknown in this important area. In order to improve the knowledge base, comparative studies of how different refugee groups get information about home areas are required. Also required are studies of refugees' differential use of formal and informal information sources. Another issue that is becoming more important is the intentional manipulation and suppression of information about home areas by liberation fronts and governments, in order to stop or force a return migration.

The thesis has concentrated on the return migrations of African refugees who were displaced outside their home countries. Because they have left their homelands and sought asylum in another country, these migrants are subject to certain protections described in Chapter Two, such as the right of *non-refoulement*. In Africa internally displaced people do not necessarily share the same rights and are often not afforded the same protection as 'official' refugees. With respect to the internally displaced, their decision-making process and *contexts* could be different than those outlined herein. While the quantity and quality of research literature on African repatriation has improved, gaps do remain with regard to return migration of internally displaced people. Comparative studies of the behaviour of internal and external returnees during a single return migration could prove especially enlightening.

One area of concern that is now receiving significant attention is the role of UNHCR in protecting refugees, especially those at risk of involuntary repatriation. While protection is one of UNHCR's primary roles, it is becoming clear that in some cases the international system, embodied in the UNHCR, is not sufficiently empowered to protect all refugees. The realization that moral or political persuasion sometimes have little meaning in complex conflicts has led to the creative use of some institutions, such as UN peacekeeping forces, in roles which they have not been accustomed. The success or failure of these attempts to enforce protection needs to be understood more clearly, particularly with respect to refugee repatriation. Case studies from such complex disasters as Somalia and Rwanda could provide additional insights about the dynamics of return migration.

In the final analysis, the academic knowledge base on refugee repatriation in Africa and elsewhere has increased greatly since the early attempts to understand the repatriation process began in the late 1970s. Recently, several significant studies have been presented about all aspects of refugee return migration. The challenge for the future is to improve the linkages between the academics who study repatriation and the people who work daily with refugees and returnees.