RSC Working Paper No. 16

**When Forced Migrants Return 'Home':
The Psychosocial Difficulties Returnees
Encounter in the Reintegration Process**

Tania Ghanem

October 2003

Working Paper Series

Queen Elizabeth House
International Development Centre
University of Oxford.

ABSTRACT

Since the 1980s onwards, voluntary repatriation has been promoted by governments, NGOs and UN agencies as the ultimate solution to refugees' displacement. Policy makers, donor countries, practitioners and researchers have typically disregarded, or at least overlooked, the meaning of repatriation from the returnees' point of view. It is assumed that beyond the technical aspects of repatriation, the return of forced migrants to their country of origin does not raise any particular challenge to those concerned. A returnee is perceived as the reverse condition of a refugee. While refugees are seen as *up*rooted and *dis*placed, returnees are considered to be naturally 're-rooted' and placed back in the right order of things. This assumption, which insinuates that return to the 'homeland' necessarily means a return *home* and thus the end of the refugee cycle, is highly problematic. How are returnees expected to 're-connect' with 'home' after the experience of life-threatening situations in their country of origin, years of exile in a different social environment and the return to a changed country? The urgency and the blatancy of the material dimensions of reintegration should not overshadow the short and long-term emotional problems refugees experience upon return. The purpose of this paper is to draw attention to some of the psychosocial difficulties returnees encounter. I argue that forced migrants' notion of home is continuously challenged and transformed from the time of the events that lead to one's flight, up until one's return. The way returnees perceive 'home' and the way they define their identity will impact their reintegration process. The objective of this study is not to provide a typology of the meaning of returning home but a hint of its complexity.

"This is our home … but does it exist outside your memory? (…) Or, if the country remains the same, will you find yourself so changed and uprooted that it refuses to take you back, to reincorporate you into its common life?"
(Cowley in Storti 2001: 179)

"Refugees involved in voluntary repatriation are not returning home. They are, in fact, returning to their country of origin, but no more."
(Warner 1994: 19)

I. INTRODUCTION

"The point can never be too strongly stressed: refugee movements are a contemporary *scourge* which spare no continent. (…) [T]he most *natural* solution is still voluntary repatriation, for it enables refugees to *rediscover their social and cultural roots*, which give them the *comforting feeling of belonging* to their country of origin. (…) We enter 1989 with a renewed hope that more refugees will be granted their wish to return to their homeland." (emphasis added)

(Hocké in Refugees, UNHCR 1989: 5)

Although the above editorial was written by the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees in 1988, there is good reason to believe that the underlying assumptions around the voluntary repatriation of forced migrants still pervade the outlook of today's practitioners and policy makers. Voluntary repatriation is seen as such a 'natural' process that governments, policy makers, donor countries, practitioners and researchers, have typically disregarded, or at least overlooked, the meaning of repatriation *from the returnees' point of view*. It is assumed that beyond the technical aspects of reintegration, such as physical, legal and material safety as well as socio-economic development, the return of forced migrants to their country of origin does not raise any particular challenge to those concerned. After all, doesn't repatriation represent the end of the refugee[1] cycle, whereby uprooted people are re-rooted in their original environment?

This assumption is, of course, highly problematic. How are returnees expected to 're-connect' with 'home' after the experience of life-threatening situations in their country of origin, years of exile in a different social environment, and the return to a changed country? The purpose of this paper is not to discuss the practice of repatriation as such – that is, whether refugees should be repatriated or not – nor to undervalue the importance of first

---

[1] In this dissertation, the terms 'refugee' and 'forced migrant' will be used interchangeably to denote any person who is *outside* his/her country of origin and who has fled his/her home country because of life-threatening circumstances. It thus includes refugees fleeing civil war for example, but excludes internally displaced persons. This is due to the focus of this study on repatriation.

addressing the most urgent primary survival necessities of returnees upon repatriation, such as shelter and physical protection. Rather, the aim of the following dissertation is to draw attention to the psychosocial difficulties some forced migrants encounter upon return to their home country. To be more specific, this paper argues that the way returnees perceive 'home' and the way they define their identity influences their reintegration process. Unlike what various actors of the international refugee regime might believe, these perceptions are not static and are "far more complex than just a simplistic association of an individual with a group and with a particular physical place" (Habib 1996: 96). Not only do these perceptions evolve with time, but they also develop through the interactions that take place between refugees and the different social settings they are plunged into. The understanding of these mechanisms is critical to fully grasping the reintegration experience of returnees.

After a brief explanation of the framework and of the approach adopted throughout the dissertation, an overview of the historical, political and ideological development of voluntary repatriation is presented. An outline of the practice of voluntary repatriation over the last fifty years not only explains the slow and still deficient concern in the psychosocial difficulties that forced migrants experience upon return to their country of origin, but also accounts for the underlying assumptions held by governments and the international aid community with regard to reintegration. These assumptions, which insinuate that return to the 'homeland' (the specific geographical location that one has been displaced from) necessarily means a return *home* and thus the end of the refugee cycle, will then be put into question through a psychosocial analysis of voluntary repatriation. The latter will demonstrate that the forced migrant's notion of home is continuously challenged and transformed from the time of the events leading to one's flight, up until one's return, in such a way that reintegration into one's 'home' country may prove to be problematic from the

refugee's point of view. As a final point, I will conclude with a synthesis of the implications of the arguments put forward in this dissertation.

II. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation will only focus on the psychosocial difficulties following *voluntary* repatriation. This is not to suggest that voluntary and involuntary returnees necessarily experience their repatriation differently. However, apart from the fact that the practice of involuntary repatriation is a contentious issue in itself, forced returnees are excluded from this study since there is a high probability that they will have an antagonistic attitude towards their home country upon repatriation. As they have no desire to return there in the first place, it cannot be expected that they will easily reintegrate and view their country of origin as their 'home', especially if their lives are still threatened. On the other hand, as will be demonstrated in the following section, it is assumed among governments and the international aid community that for those refugees that have chosen to return to their home country of their own free will, reintegration does not represent any particular challenge to returnees beyond the material and security aspects. The fact that they might feel alienated from their country of origin is not recognised, and it is precisely what the following dissertation intends to highlight by prioritising, to the extent possible, the returnees' points of view at the individual level.

The approach adopted is a psychosocial one, as it recognises that an individual's mind and behaviour are subject to the influences of the social world around him/her. In the context of returnees and their concept of 'home', it would hence be a mistake to focus only on the returnee's psyche, or alternatively solely on the social world in which one is embedded, as these two elements are in a constant and dynamic dialectic. When a forced migrant settles in an asylum country, he/she does not enter a vacuum. The same applies when one goes back to one's own country of origin. It is the interplay between the returnee's personality and the different social settings in which he/she lives that is important, as it will impact one's

construction of the notion of 'home', the latter in turn influencing the returnee's reintegration in his/her country of origin. The psychosocial approach therefore highlights the fact that the returnee's perception of 'home' and belonging does not only change through time, but also according to the different social environments in which he/she finds himself.

Lastly, the reasons why this dissertation *does not* focus on one particular region of the world where voluntary repatriation has taken place, or one specific group of returnees, are twofold. The first explanation is of a practical nature, namely the paucity of literature on the psychosocial difficulties returnees encounter during the reintegration process, and more specifically on how returnees' perception of 'home' and sense of identity impact their reintegration process. Consequently, in order to obtain as much insight as possible, it was necessary to gather any source of literature on the topic, regardless of the region and people discussed. The reasons for this gap in the literature are given in the following section. Secondly, taking into consideration the accounts of a broad variety of returnees allows us to underline the diversity of their experiences. 'The' experience of voluntary repatriation cannot be generalised. The objective of this study is not to provide a typology of the meaning of returning home but a hint of its complexity.

III. HISTORICAL, POLITICAL AND IDEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND ON VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION

To understand why, until recently, the psychosocial dimensions of reintegration has been overlooked, it is useful to take a quick overview of the last fifty years. This will reveal that, although return movements of refugees have always existed on an ad hoc basis, the institutionalisation of voluntary repatriation as a practice is a fairly recent phenomenon. As such, it is not until the 1980s, by which time repatriation was proclaimed to be the best solution to the refugee situation and UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) was starting to elaborate more systematic guidelines for it, that scholars, researchers and practitioners started paying attention to the after-effects of return among former refugees. Although the recognition that the plight of refugees does not disappear as soon as they re-set foot in their home country is a positive and important step towards a better understanding of the complexities of repatriation, the concern has nevertheless seldom gone beyond issues of legal, material and physical security. As will be demonstrated below, the persistent lack of attention towards the psychosocial dimensions of reintegration is mainly due to the assumptions regarding 'return' and 'home' predominant among the actors of the international refugee regime.

1) Historical and political development of voluntary repatriation as the best durable solution to refugees' displacement

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the return of millions of refugees to their homes in Europe brought, for the first time, the question of voluntary repatriation to the attention of Western governments and international organisations. From that point onwards, three historical phases can be distinguished in the international community's attitude towards voluntary repatriation (Amore 2002).

Following Katia Amore's framework, the first phase, dominated by the Cold War, spans from 1947 to the 1970s (ibid.: 161). During this period, return movements were taking place in Third World countries following the end of independence movements and decolonisation. In the West however, despite the fact that voluntary repatriation was considered the preferred solution to the refugee problem *in principle* (as testified in the early United Nations resolutions), *in practice*, refugees were strongly encouraged to settle and integrate in the countries in which they had sought asylum. Indeed, as a result of Cold War politics, people fleeing communist countries and taking refuge in the Western bloc were seen as "voting with their feet", thereby delegitimising the Eastern bloc (ibid.: 161; Chimni 1998: 355-356; Chimni 1999: 2-3; Allen and Morsink 1994: 3). At the same time, Western powers felt protected from potential mass influxes of refugees since Eastern European governments obstructed nationals from leaving the country (Gallagher in Amore 2002: 162). Chimni also highlights the economic value of the refugees fleeing communism, as they provided a valuable source of labour force for the reconstruction of Europe following the Second World War (Chimni 1999: 2).

Towards the end of the Cold War however, refugees stopped holding any ideological or geopolitical value, and the previous need for large numbers of immigrant workers for the reconstruction of post-war Europe had disappeared. When the Western states entered a period of economic recession in the 1970s and 1980s, and as the make-up of refugees changed from white male anti-communists to Third World refugees fleeing civil wars, Western states enforced their restrictive measures and revived voluntary repatriation as the preferred solution to refugees' displacement (Chimni 1998: 357), "turning repatriation from a possible solution in principle to a feasible one in practice" (Amore 2002: 164). Therefore, the 1980s constituted the turning point from a policy of integration whereby Western

governments encouraged permanent residency, to a policy of repatriation whereby refugees were now granted 'temporary protection'. Coinciding with the new changes taking place in the international arena, the mass returns occurring in Africa and Asia in the 1970s following the end of a number of wars in the region placed voluntary repatriation at the forefront of UNHCR's agenda (Allen and Morsink 1994: 3). In 1980, UNHCR's Executive Committee concluded that voluntary repatriation offered the best durable solution to the refugee problem and that the organisation should therefore facilitate repatriation for those who wished to return to their home country (Amore 2002: 158). In 1985, it took a step further during the San Remo Round Table on Voluntary Repatriation and proclaimed that UNHCR has a leading role not only in assisting voluntary repatriation but actively promoting it (UNHCR 1996: 4).

From the late 1980s onwards, the number of refugees seeking asylum continued to increase as the disintegration of the super powers' rivalries at the end of the Cold War produced a number of new refugee-generating conflicts (Amore 2002: 166), such as in the case of former Yugoslavia between 1989 and 1991. In the eyes of many industrialised countries, providing asylum to refugees was now seen to constitute a burden on the local economy and a potential threat to national security (Allen and Morsink 1994: 5). The propensity for restrictive policies in the 1980s intensified in the 1990s leading the way to a new era of protectionism. At the same time, the end of the Cold War made direct humanitarian intervention in refugee-producing countries less problematic and more feasible (ibid.: 167), facilitating the international community's involvement in the practice of voluntary repatriation. At the 1991 Executive Committee Meeting, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata declared 1992 to be the opening year of the decade for voluntary repatriation (ibid.: 1). Correspondingly, from the year 1992 onwards,

the annual rate of refugee return movements has often surpassed the annual rate of refugee arrivals in host countries (Appendix E). Moreover the figure in Appendix D clearly highlights the upsurge of refugee returns going from roughly 200 thousand returnees in 1990 to about 2,2 million returnees in 1991.

2) Practical and operational limitations to the study on repatriation and the emergence of post-return assistance

Today, for all the reasons mentioned above, governments, NGOs (non-governmental organisation) and UN agencies look at voluntary repatriation as the top choice among the three durable solutions to refugees' displacement, the two others being integration and resettlement. The rising interest and involvement of UNHCR in voluntary repatriation cannot only be explained by the reluctance of industrialized Western states to open their borders to refugees since the end of the Cold War, but also by the increase of return movements occurring between poorer countries (Appendices A, B, C, F, G).

However, what is disquieting in today's era of voluntary repatriation is that because it is seen as the optimum cure to refugees' problems, it is assumed that it is also the least problematic solution. As highlighted by Hammond, there is an "assumption that refugees represent 'matter out of place' and thus that returnees should be put back into that place" (Hammond 1999: 288) or in Kjertum's words, "that once the refugee has returned 'home', things are back 'in their right order'." (Kjertum 1998: 4) However, as Kjertum rightly points out, repatriation is not the 'end' of the 'refugee cycle but "the beginning of a new cycle comprising the social, political, and economic reintegration in the home country." (Kjertum 1998: 3)

In 1985, Coles notes in his report that the elevation of voluntary repatriation to the level of preferred durable solution has not been accompanied by any in-depth research on the matter (Coles in Allen and Morsink 1994: 1). After a thorough review of the literature on repatriation in 1987, Crisp further develops Coles' remark by observing that the existing literature on repatriation only focuses on its legal, political and logistical implications while completely disregarding the experience of refugees once they are back in their country of origin (Crisp in Allen and Morsink 1994: 2).

To be fair, some of the reasons accountable for such a gap in the literature are of a practical nature. Firstly, returnees are more difficult to study than refugees because, once they return to their country they are less visible, as they officially lose their refugee status and become part of the population again (Allen and Morsink 1994: 2). Secondly, long-term monitoring of former refugees, who are now back under the responsibility of their home government, could be perceived by the latter as an encroachment on its national sovereignty, especially if the home country is a former colony (ibid.: 5). Thirdly, returnees can be difficult to keep track of when they travel back and forth between their home country and their previous host country, which often happens when they are geographically adjacent to one another. Some also take this opportunity to try registering a second time into the official repatriation programme so as to receive more material benefits, thereby skewing the data available on returnees (ibid.: 8). Fourthly, the majority of refugees' return movements occur in the form of spontaneous/self-repatriation (Rogge 1994: 29), as opposed to official/organised repatriation, which further complicates the monitoring process. Allen and Morsink also point out that, because a fair number of refugees return to their country while the latter is still under conflict or at the least unstable, the conditions are sometimes too dangerous for scholars to conduct research (Allen and Morsink 1994: 2).

Notwithstanding these difficulties, following a series of decisions taken by the international community between 1983 and 1984 on the need for a development-oriented approach (Stein 1994: 57), UNHCR started recognizing that assisting returnees by merely helping them return to their home country and then disappearing once they arrived to destination, was not sufficient. In 1985, the Executive Committee acknowledged the need to pay more attention to the after-effects of repatriation and to broaden UNHCR's mandate to meet that requirement (Allen and Morsink 1994: 5). As stated in the UNHCR Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation:

> "the mandate of UNHCR has been refined and extended, from the initial consideration that UNHCR's responsibility ended when repatriants crossed the border back into their home country, to a substantive involvement with regard to securing protection and providing assistance in the country of origin." (UNHCR 1996: 5)

3) Underlying assumptions and implications of the international community's current attitudes towards voluntary repatriation

Despite the growing interest among actors of the refugee regime in the later stages of repatriation and in the implications of returnees' reintegration, research on the psychosocial dimension of repatriation is very scarce. As several authors have rightly pointed out, there has been a virtual neglect of studies addressing the issue of how refugees adapt to returning home and how *they* perceive their reintegration (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 178; Rogge 1994: 15; Warner 1994: 1-2; Majodina 1995: 210, Kjertum 1998: 27, Cornish *et al.* 1999: 265; Hammond 1999: 227-228; Kibreab 2002: 55). Instead, past and current writings have either focused on the legal, political and logistic parameters of repatriation (Rogge 1994: 15) or on the socio-economic aspects of reintegration (Stamou 2000: 15). The inclination among academics towards the physical well-being of returnees rather than their psychological

welfare is echoed as well in UNHCR's practices. To be sure, it was asserted in the 2002

UNHCR Executive Committee on Voluntary Repatriation that:

> "From UNHCR's perspective, the core of voluntary repatriation is return in and to conditions of physical, legal and material safety, with full restoration of national protection as the end product." (UNHCR 2002: 4)

The reason for this bias can chiefly be explained by the international aid community and governments' preconceived notions about 'place', 'return', and 'home', which insinuate that "for its subject, repatriation is a return to a way of life and an association between identity and place that is familiar" (Hammond 1999: 229). As noted by Hammond, the terminology used by social scientists to describe post-repatriation social change explicitly highlights this bias:

> "Terms to be found in the discourse of repatriation include: *reintegration, rehabilitation, reconstruction, rebuilding, readjustment, readaptation, reacculturation, reassimilation, reinsertion, reintroduction, recovery* and *re-establishment*. (…) Among the most problematic terms of the repatriation canon are the very words *return* and *returnee*, which imply that by re-entering one's native country a person is necessarily returning to something familiar. These terms are riddled with value judgments that reflect a segmentary, sedentary idea of how people ought to live, what their relation to their 'homeland' should be, and ultimately how they should go about constructing their lives once the period of exile ends." (Hammond 1999: 230)

Therefore, a returnee is seen as the reverse condition of a refugee. While refugees are perceived as *up*rooted and *dis*placed, returnees are considered to be naturally '*re*-rooted' and placed back in the right order of things as soon as they are 'back home'. The aim of this dissertation is to challenge this static and, as I will argue, unrealistic "repatriation = homecoming model" (ibid.: 229).

To be fair, it should be mentioned that UNRISD (United Nations Research Institute for Social Development) initiated in-depth field research on the social and economic aspects of various mass repatriations which had occurred in Africa, and organised three regional symposia between 1991 and 1992, where several African governmental organisations and

NGOs, as well as donor countries, planners and researchers, were invited to participate and share their findings (Allen and Morsink 1994: 6; Allen and Turton 1996: 4). The symposia are worth mentioning as they explicitly put into question the notion of returning *home* from the returnees' perspective. Indeed, one of the report's statements is that:

> "The phrase 'population displacement' contains the implicit assumption that a given population has its own proper 'place', territory or homeland. This assumption is deeply embedded in the European political theory of nationalism, according to which there is a natural identity between people and place and the world is naturally made up of clearly bounded politico-territorial entities – sovereign states." (UNRISD 1992: 7)

However, as the research was based on return movements in the Horn of Africa, the papers only focused on peoples who already had a history of displacement or geographical mobility, and who constructed their sense of collective identity around their ethnic affiliations as opposed to the territorial and political demarcations imposed by colonialism. The emphasis was therefore placed on the pointlessness of the labels 'returnee' and 'refugee' since, from the viewpoint of the respondents under study, they did not perceive themselves as bound to a particular place. The report concludes that it would be more accurate to view the groups studied as mere migrants, as "for these people, making a new home in a new area may be perfectly consistent with their history and with their view of themselves as a distinct group." (UNRISD 1992: 10)

Although the symposia represented a positive shift away from the static preconceptions around the notion of 'home' as a place from which one comes from and must eventually return to, studies which seek to deconstruct 'territorialist' theories tend to standardise displacement by viewing it as a normal trait of the human condition in today's era of globalisation (Hudspeth 1998; Malkki 1992; Rogge 1994; Warner 1994; Black and Koser 1999; Hammond 1999), whereby we are all "citizens of a deterritorialised global world" (Kibreab 1999: 385). Nevertheless, as Kibreab correctly points out:

"At a time when spaces are more territorialised than ever before, to speak of the deterritorialisation of identity does not make any sense. There can be no deterritorialised identity in a territorialized space (…). "Fortress Europe' is the culmination of the territorialization process." (ibid.: 387)

The emergence of ethnic civil conflicts in the developing world and the magnitude of spontaneous repatriations taking place even amidst strife in the country of origin are, sufficient proof that a vast number of people still see territory, nation and home as intrinsically linked, even in Africa:

"Not only do most African refugees perceive their involuntary displacement as temporary but also return is considered as a great success. Return to the place one has been violently uprooted from is an overriding preoccupation, bordering obsession, of most refugee populations in Africa. This is not only true in Africa." (ibid.: 405)

For these people, some of whom have been in exile for more than ten to thirty years, what does 'returning home' mean? How do they experience it? What are the main difficulties they encounter? The following section will attempt to answer these questions.

IV. PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION: PRE-FLIGHT AND EXILE EXPERIENCES

1) Introduction: biographical factors

Before going any further, it is important to reiterate that there is no such thing as *the* refugee experience. Likewise, the returnee's experience of repatriation cannot and should not be generalised. Each forced migrant will experience his/her flight, his/her exile and his/her return differently, and as such, the evolution of one's perception of 'home' and one's relationship to one's country of origin will vary from one individual to the other. This is not only due to the fact that forced migrants are subject to different events and navigate in different social settings, but also because the dynamic between an individual's dispositions and his/her environmental determinants is unique to each person.

For instance, the psychodynamic approach (van der Veer 1998: 46) as well as the family therapy perspective (ibid.: 50) in modern psychiatry both highlight the fact that an individual's reaction to a distressing event or environment will depend on his/her upbringing, past experiences and cultural background. Therefore, individuals might react differently to the same events, as the different coping mechanisms they have developed through their upbringing and socialisation will influence how they interpret and give meaning to the external world around them. For example, a particular event can be experienced as distressful primarily because it reactivated emotional problems that had been hidden in the person's past, rather than because of the event in itself. Conversely, a terrifying physical ordeal that was considered traumatic in one cultural and social setting might be appraised as a rite of passage in another (Friedman and Marsella 1996: 24). As stated by Majodina: "The extent to which returning exiles experience difficulties depends not only on the extent of these

difficulties but on the social support they receive and the strategies they use to cope." (Majodina 1995: 202)

Age, gender, marital status, and socio-economic background are other factors which affect the refugee's experience of flight, exile and return. In a recent and unique study on the reintegration of Guatemalan refugees, Ackermann highlights in a remarkable way how reintegration is lived and experienced differently by the individual returnees (Ackermann 2003). By adopting a biographical approach, she demonstrates that the reintegration process is profoundly related to the past of each individual. The experience of return of her three respondents varied, among other factors, according to the interaction between their personal experience of domestic and collective violence before and during armed conflict, as well as their individual coping resources and cultural strategies. In the case of Inés' life history, her feeling of helplessness in witnessing the devaluation of her mother by her father during her childhood gave her the impulse for a self-determined life as an educated and politically-involved woman. Her displacement to Mexico gave her the opportunity to become literate and fluent in Spanish, thus enabling her to acquire a stronger self-esteem in the public domain. Upon return to Guatemala, she became deeply rooted in the returnee village through her political engagement for the empowerment of women. Therefore, her flight and her return allowed her to repair the wounds of her childhood and fight on behalf of her mother. Ackermann calls her the "rooted activist" (ibid.: 239). Her life history can be contrasted to the case of Nino, who had a different experience of his childhood and of the different stages of his migration trajectory. He fled domestic violence as a child and, in order to overcome his feeling of abandonment and his yearning for belonging, joined guerrilla forces at age ten. They constituted his new family. However, the killing of an innocent child made him quit after ten years. In his case, he felt unable to settle in the returnee community as, each time his wife gave birth, he left the village in order to prevent his emotional distress breaking out.

Because he adopted a pattern of transnational migration, Ackermann calls him the 'constant itinerant' (ibid.: 240). These two life histories demonstrate that each returnee will experience his/her repatriation differently, due to their different biographies and coping strategies. The first respondent is deeply rooted in the returnee community while the second chooses to leave again; one perceives her return as a constructive event, while the other experiences his return as a painful event. Ackermann's study not only underlines the multiplicity of return experiences, but also the impossibility of explaining these variations by just looking at the events in the return phase. In order to understand the experience of returning home, one must not only look at the return stage, but all the stages of the refugee's migration trajectory.

A *psychosocial* analysis of the reintegration difficulties encountered by refugees upon repatriation thus provides us with a useful framework in examining how exiles experience their return, as it makes allowances for both the identification of the various stages in which the notion of 'home' is challenged, and the acknowledgment of the variations between returnees' individual experiences. Therefore, the following sections should not be seen to represent a typology of the experience of return. Rather, the following division of the forced migrant's experience is meant to highlight some of the different factors that *can* influence and change his/her perception of 'home', thereby affecting his/her experience of reintegration. Some of these characteristics are inherent in the process of return, such as the fact that exiles are returning to a country that has changed during their absence; other characteristics such as emotional disturbances and family disintegration may or may not arise, depending on the interplay of personal experiences in the individual's life history and the larger macro-environment in which he/she navigates.

2) Psychosocial implications of pre-flight experiences during reintegration

In the 1951 Geneva Convention, a refugee is defined as a person who flees his/her country of former habitual residence because he or she has a well-founded fear of being persecuted and is unable to avail him/herself of the protection of his/her government. Therefore, refugees distinguish themselves from 'regular' migrants in that they leave their country mainly due to push factors rather than pull factors. Before being forced *immigrants*, refugees are first and foremost forced *emigrants*; before being asylum-*seekers*, they are home-*escapees*; before fleeing *to* safety, they are fleeing *from* life-threatening circumstances. In other words, if forced migrants leave their home country, it is because the bond of trust between them and their country/government has been severed.

Although the above seems fairly obvious, the implications of it are often completely disregarded in the literature on the psychosocial reintegration of returnees; yet it is essential. How can it be assumed that refugees are returning 'home' when the very reasons they left were that they did not feel 'at home' anymore? Storti defines 'home' as:

> "the place where you are known and trusted, and where you know and trust others, a place of rituals and routine interactions, of entirely predictable events and people, a place where you belong and feel safe and secure, a place where you can relax and be yourself, in short, where you feel 'at home'." (Storti 2001: 3)

When one bears in mind that the bulk of today's forced migrants originate from war-torn countries and life-threatening environments, it is reasonable to infer with certain confidence that the traumatising events they have most probably been exposed to has indubitably redefined their perception of, and their relationship to, their home country, as the characteristics of home defined by Storti cease to exist prior to flight.

This is particularly true in the context of civil wars, ethnic and religious conflicts, where psychological warfare and terror is used to demoralize the population by destroying everything it believes in. In such cases, neighbours and friends can become your most feared enemy (as in former Yugoslavia or Rwanda), the government that is supposed to protect you can become your perpetrator (as in Chile), and the places of rituals in which you sought comfort can become your death bed (as in Guatemala where indigenous communities were locked up in churches which would then be set fire to). Therefore, the intrinsic characteristics of 'home' and its meaning are already cast into doubt by the forced migrant before his/her departure. In fact, in a psychosocial study of twenty-five Chilean returning families, it was found that the onset of the patients' emotional disturbances started for the most part before exile (FASIC 1981: 38). More specifically, 47 percent of the patients were already experiencing feelings of personal disintegration and symptoms of disorganised behaviour, as well as depressive states and psycho-somatic disturbances *before* exile, whereas only 15 percent of the patients stated that the onset of their emotional distress started *after* return (ibid.).

In the case of Zarzosa for example, a Chilean refugee, her exile started long before she was actually forced to leave her country. In her own words: "One can become an exile even while remaining on one's own soil." (Zarzosa 1998: 189). After the coup d'Etat in 1973, everything she and her *compañeros* believed in was shattered. Her alienation was so great that she even felt estranged from the physical environment around her:

> "Almost all that I identified with was destroyed. Even space ceased to have meaning for me as it became *their* domain for their repressive practices. I was scared of the 'soil' (streets, beautiful countryside, rivers and sea) as there were always people being arrested, tortured or even killed there." (Zarzosa 1998: 190)

As such, Zarzosa felt "[her] life straddled between (…) two Chiles" (ibid.) since, whereas her life in the public sphere was continuously threatened, as the wife of a political prisoner, her role in supporting her imprisoned husband was socially recognised among the marginalized society. Therefore, her identity as a Chilean was split into two before even leaving her home country.

Habib's testimony of her life before she left Lebanon during the civil war reveals a similar experience. In her case, her feeling of estrangement was heightened by the fact that the country was torn by a protracted civil war where the population gradually became fragmented along religious lines. Here, it is worth quoting Habib at length:

> "An enemy is seen to be devoid of humanity, and therefore distanced from 'us' as he represents Evil. But in the Lebanese war, this separation became impossible. (…) The therapeutic function of allocating responsibility and blame to the enemy was not available in the context of civil war. A man shot his cousin or neighbour and rushed him into hospital screaming and crying. My brother was kidnapped, and his abductor became his protector. (…) Not being able to identify with the different factions at war that were constantly forming and changing, or to unite against a common enemy, made me question my own identity (…) The usual alignment attaching one's identity to a place, a country and a group, was challenged by the breakdown of all references, moral and physical. Each party claimed a different past to justify the present. We had to choose between different heritages." (Habib 1996: 98)

Hence, one's alienation from one's homeland can start well before the actual flight. In fact, many forced migrants leave their home country *because* it has become a foreign land to them (Graham and Khosravi 1997: 125). The following comments of an Iranian exile corroborate this argument:

> "My exile did not begin when I crossed the border of Pakistan on foot on a cool night in March 1987, but long before that night. My exile had begun in my own country when I did not recognize Iran under the Islamic rules." (ibid.: 126)

Even if, at a later stage, the external conditions of peace and security are restored in the home country, it cannot be taken for granted that upon return the returnee will have forgotten the cause of his flight and exile, and go back to the same blithe existence that characterised his/her life before the events that caused him/her to flee. In fact, in FASIC's

study of twenty-five Chilean returning families, it observed that the patients' return to Chile triggered a sudden emergence of painful past experiences they had accumulated in their sub-conscious:

> "The tension and the processes involved in reintegration act principally in *weakening the defence mechanisms* which had prevented long ingrown conflicts and latent emotions from erupting to the surface of consciousness, exacerbating an earlier pathology originating before or during exile and acting as *triggers* for the disorganized expression of ambivalences and contradictions." (FASIC 1981: 38)

Therefore, we can expect a returnee to feel fairly ambiguous about his/her country of origin, at least in the initial stages of repatriation, since the joy of returning to one's home country is tampered by the recollection of the events and trauma that led to one's flight (Kjertum 1998: 43). While exile allowed the forced migrant to escape his past, return compels him/her to deal and come to terms with it. During that time, the reconstruction of one's links to 'home' is seldom a straightforward, spontaneous and effortless process. Through a Swedish project which provided for the short-term return of Somalian and Eritrean unaccompanied minors to their home country, the researchers noticed that to return home meant for these adolescents to return to a context of fear and terror. Their experience is compared to a person who has undergone a severe car accident. When one takes the driver's seat again, all the feelings and emotions from the accident come to surface once more (Olsson *et al.* 1998: 10-11).

3) Renegotiating identity and 'home' in exile: the myth of return

a. Identities challenged

Personal profile (personality, age, sex, socio-economic background, marital status etc), pre-flight experiences, forms of displacement (individual or mass flight), cultural compatibility with the host country (language, values, religion etc), geographical location of the country of asylum (compared to country of origin), degree of contact with the home

country, length of time in exile, living conditions in exile (self-settled, in a refugee camp etc), degree of integration in the country of asylum (employment, marriage with local person etc), social attitudes of the host population towards refugees (assimilationist, integrationist etc), population policies of the host country (in need of man-power or self-sufficient), all of the above are factors which will influence how forced migrants experience their exile, and the evolution of the meaning they attribute to the home they have left behind (Kunz 1981; Hvidt and Kjertum 1999; Dona and Berry 1999). To discuss all these variables and how they interrelate to one another would be beyond the scope of this study. However, it can be assumed that for the majority of the refugees who had to leave their country against their will and who suddenly find themselves in a new environment, their exile presents a challenge to their relationship with their home country, as well as to their identity. It can be expected that their experience in the host country, and the way each one of them interprets it, will alter their notion of 'home' and belonging, and consequently affect their reintegration upon return.

As formulated by Said:

"just beyond the frontier between 'us' and 'the outsiders' is the perilous territory of not-belonging: this is to where in a primitive time peoples were banished, and where in the modern era immense aggregates of humanity loiter as refugees and displaced persons." (Said 2002: 177)

In an attempt to escape the hazards and the torments of the 'territory of not-belonging', exiles are forced to either integrate in the host society (which they can never be fully part of) or continue situating themselves in relation to their home country (to which they cannot return). It is the continual dialectic between the two which renders the meaning of 'home' problematic for the refugee. When Habib fled Lebanon during the civil war and found herself staying in France with family friends, she first suffered from a feeling of estrangement and isolation. To borrow her own words, "home was nowhere to be found in a cold and unfriendly environment" (Habib 1996: 100). Consequently, she started to wander in

different countries, "from France to Cyprus to Greece, back to Lebanon, to France again, to the United States, to Switzerland and elsewhere" (ibid.), in a perpetual search for 'home'. Eventually, she started developing certain ties to different places: the people, the Mediterranean and the light in Greece reminded her of Lebanon, and so she very quickly felt 'at home' there, while the culture in France (language, literature, philosophy) restored to her the familiarity of the tongue. Yet, she felt like she was "between cultures and into none." (ibid.). Fearing her Lebanese roots were fading, she endeavoured to 'rediscover' her culture, by learning more about Lebanese history, poets and music, and by spending more time with Lebanese friends. Her experience as a forced migrant seems to support Rushdie's testimony of exile: "Our [the exiles'] identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools." (Rushdie 1991: 15)

Conversely, whereas one's feeling of alienation and the disintegration of one's collective identity can often begin prior to flight (as demonstrated in the previous section), exile can serve to restore or rather, to unify one's previous fragmented identity, through its opposition to the host country's culture. For example, whereas a person might have identified him/herself as a Serb during the Balkan's ethnic conflict, once in exile, he/she might define him/herself as a Yugoslavian. If we carry on with Habib's testimony, we can found a similar experience:

> "Ironically, it was exile that allowed me to preserve a whole and less fractioned identity since the articulation of 'us/them' was more evident. I was Lebanese in a foreign country, and I was preserving Lebanon from disintegration."(Habib 1996: 99)

The reaffirmation of her Lebanese identity allowed her to cling to her past, thereby giving meaning and steadiness to her current life in exile. However, it also had the reverse effect of preventing her from developing some new roots and building a future, since to fully integrate in a host country entailed in her eyes that she was turning her back on her past, her

childhood, her family and her culture, in sum to everything that defined her and from which she was forcibly taken away. As she herself acknowledges:

> "I resisted anything that looked permanent while constantly yearning for stability. Like most exiles I insisted on 'my right to refuse to belong' (…). My future lay somewhere behind me in an idealized past." (ibid.: 101)

Habib's emotional experiences and identity questions in exile are certainly not unfamiliar to other forced migrants. Even if the association of 'home' with 'home country' is cast into doubt during pre-flight events, the irony of exile is that the geographical distance from one's country of origin often brings the forced migrant emotionally closer to it, sometimes even closer than before his/her flight. Nationalism is an extreme manifestation of this tendency and often originates from a condition of estrangement in the host country. To quote Said once more: "Nationalism is an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a people, a heritage. It affirms the home created by a community of language, culture, and customs; and, by so doing, it fends off exile, fights to prevent its ravages." (Said 2002: 176) The cultivation of what researchers call 'the myth of return' is another manifestation of exiles' desire to suspend their total immersion in the host country yet longing to be anchored. In this case, they highlight that their exile is temporary and focus on the recovery of pre-flight conditions. As Al-Rasheed simply puts it, "the myth is (…) a pragmatic solution to the dilemma of being part of two contexts, two countries and two sets of norms and values, which may not only be different, but in most cases, contradictory." (Al-Rasheed 1994: 200)

b. Restoring continuity with the past: the myth of return

Certainly, the relationship a refugee has with his/her home country during exile differs from individual to individual and cannot be generalised. As Hammond justly remarks, "it is a mistake to assume that the experience of becoming a refugee is necessarily

experienced as deculturing, deterritorialising, and dehistoricising. Links may be recreated and shaped in new ways." (Hammond 1999: 232) Some will dedicate their exile to cherishing the 'home' they have left behind, while others will devote their energy to constructing a niche in their new country of asylum. Notwithstanding the variety of experiences, research has shown that most refugees continue to view their stay in the country of asylum as temporary, even after many years in exile (Al-Rasheed 1994: 200). Thus, for those who eventually repatriate to the country they have fled from, the different ways in which they have cultivated their notion of 'home' during exile will influence the psychosocial dimension of their reintegration upon return.

According to Zetter, there are roughly two strategies by which refugees make sense of "the meaning of protracted exile, the dilemmas of their status, the meaning of home and (…) perceptions of return" (Zetter 2000: 1). In order to explain these two processes, he uses the metaphor of a triangle whereby the points at each intersection represent the past, the present and the future. When refugees are forced to leave their homes, one of the parameters of the triangle, the past, is removed, or fractured. The triangle is broken and forced migrants are deprived from their past. That is why exiles need to somehow restore continuity with their earlier lives, and they do this either by reproducing an idealised past or by investing in the future of their present social context; in Zetter's view, psychological stress is created by the tensions between the two strategies, as the forced migrant constantly asks him/herself: "[Should I] invest in the future? Or in the mythologized past which might become a reality?" (Zetter 2000: 16). The strategy a refugee will choose to adopt will depend on how important the different parts of the triangle are to him/her (ibid.: 13).

It is precisely this fracture that distinguishes forced migrants from their hosts and from ordinary immigrants (ibid.: 9). One could indeed contend that everyone is subject to the

rules of the past, that is, the loss of something left behind forever, such as one's childhood for example. However, as Rushdie rightfully observes, although "it may be argued that the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity (…), the [forced migrant] who is out-of-country and out-of-language may experience this loss in an intensified form" (Rushdie 1991: 12). Even the immigrant does not share the intensity of this loss, as he/she usually continues to be part of the society he/she has left behind, whereas the relationship between the refugee and his/her country of origin has often been abruptly severed. Indeed, it can be argued that the way in which forced migrants leave their country accentuates their feeling of dislocation. Due to a situation which they perceive to be intolerable and life-threatening, they typically flee their home country hastily and in extreme conditions, rendering the customary practice around leaving, such as the symbolic rituals of farewell, unfeasible. The refugee, who does not know when or if he/she will see his/her loved ones again, leaves without being able to say good-bye to family and friends, of whom some are dead or missing (Maletta *et al..,* 1989: 196). To be sure, Loizos states that once in exile, refugees might display similar feelings to the ones of those who have lost a loved one (Loizos in Jamal 1998: 3). However, Jamal adds:

> "whereas those mourning a human loss are able to rely on well-established rituals to help ease their pain, there is no such clear-cut mechanism to deal with the loss of a homeland. A dead body is a cold, irrevocable fact; a lost homeland, even if changed beyond recognition, dangles the possibility of eventual return." (Jamal 1998: 3)

Zetter's analysis of the Greek-Cypriot refugees who fled the North of Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish invasion and took refuge with their co-ethnic hosts in the South of the island, reveals that more than two decades after the diaspora, they have retained the conviction, albeit to a varying degree, that their exile is temporary and that they will eventually return home (ibid.: 3). For the Greek-Cypriot, 'home' is both physical (their house, their fields, their cemetery) and metaphorical, as the family graves "symbolise both a union with the roots of

the past but also, through the process of inheritance, continuity with the present and the future" (ibid.: 11). Moreover, "the acquisition, ownership and disposal of land symbolis[e] social status and material wealth and, especially through the dowry system, the continuity of the line" (ibid.: 12). As such, they often referred to the government housing in which they currently lived as their 'second homes'. At the two ends of the continuum, the researcher detects those who have responded progressively to their current situation, and those who remain locked in a closed and mythologized past. The former accept the need for transition and place greater emphasis on the integration of past values in their present and future lives, by investing in their children's education for example, or by attending funerals and weddings of former co-villagers. They *hope* for a return but do not *believe* in it, so they devote their energy in their future and in their current social setting. Conversely, the latter cultivate images that invoke a mythologized past, such as the display of photographs of the previous house or the installation in the new refugee house of an exact replica of the fireplace that existed 'back home', in such a way that their past overwhelms the present. They cultivate an almost pathological belief that they will return and so invest all their energy in reproducing the triangle of pre-exile times. As Zarzosa testifies, the "nostalgic notion of home is only maintained as a strategy to survive in exile, particularly during the period of rejecting the host society." (Zarzosa 1998: 193)

c. Majority-identified and event-alienated refugees: different myths

Although Zetter's study is very useful in conveying refugees' feeling of severance from their past and from their home during exile, as well as noting the different ways in which they react to their displacement and redefine the meaning of 'home' from a psychosocial perspective, it fails to explain *why* the myth of return varies in intensity from household to household, or individual to individual, *why* "it ranges from remembrance of a

distant homeland and a desire to return to it one day, to a severe and deeply rooted obsession which can paralyse the person's willingness to engage in activities and daily life in general" (Al-Rasheed 1994: 201). Al-Rasheed on the other hand, inspired by Kunz's classification of refugees according to the nature of their identification with their home country (Kunz 1981: 43), contends that the development of the myth of return is dependent on past refugees' experiences, more particularly on the refugee group's relationship with its country of origin prior to flight and on their degree of marginality in regards to the society they have left behind. To illustrate her argument, she carries out a comparative study of the Iraqi Arab and the Iraqi Assyrian refugees settled in London, two groups who share the same cultural traditions, the same written language and the same experience of flight, displacement and uprooting. Yet, one important aspect differentiates them: their relationship with their home country.

Al-Rasheed places the Iraqi Arabs in the category Kunz calls 'majority-identified refugees'. According to Kunz, this group of persons "identify themselves enthusiastically with the nation, though not with its government" and hold a firm conviction that "their opposition to the events [that led to their flight] is shared by the majority of their compatriots." (ibid.: 43) Correspondingly, Al-Rasheed describes the Iraqi Arabs as belonging to the mainstream population of Iraq who fled their country of origin due to their political opposition to the Iraqi regime. They refer to their exile as a 'noble experience' and consider their flight:

> "not as a collective fate inflicted upon the individual himself, but as a collective fate inflicted upon a group of people who share similar ideological and political persuasions. Flight is thus accepted as a communal strategy to save political ideals (…) for the salvation of the whole nation." (Al-Rasheed 1994: 210)

Accordingly, they regularly meet at clubs or community centres to discuss the latest developments of the political situation taking place 'at home', in Iraq. Although they are

against the Iraqi regime, comments such as, "[it] was a coincidence that I ended up here. I cannot live here forever. One day I will go back to where my roots are" (ibid.) or "I know that my exile will not last forever. It is a passing moment in my life. I will return to my country, to where I belong" (ibid.) demonstrate that Iraqi Arabs refugees, even after numerous years in exile, consider Iraq as their homeland and have every intention of returning once the desired political changes take place. In other words, they firmly believe in the 'myth of return' and because they see their exile as temporary, they are reluctant to get too deeply involved in the British society. As one respondent explains, "[w]e cannot be bothered to go out and build bridges with English people, we are going to be here for a short time anyway." (ibid.: 212)

In contrast, the Iraqi Assyrians fit the category Kunz calls 'event-alienated refugees', that is, persons who are ambivalent or resentful in their attitude towards the homeland population. Their original desire to be identified with the nation having been put off by their fellow citizens' rejection of them, they feel permanently estranged from their homeland (Kunz 1981: 43). In the case of the Iraqi Assyrians, a small ethnic and religious minority, they found themselves in a situation of marginality in Iraq and thus claimed refugee status in Britain on the grounds that they were being persecuted. They adapted quickly to their country of asylum as there was already a well-established Assyrian community in London and an extensive kinship network. Towards Arab Iraqis, they are embittered, and have thus severed all contacts with Iraq since their arrival. Although many would like to visit Iraq, they see their exile as permanent. In the following quote, Al-Rasheed summarises the distinction between the two groups: "Among Iraqi Arabs, a refugee is someone who 'cannot go back home'. Whereas among Assyrians, one is a refugee if 'one does not have a home'." (Al-Rasheed 1994: 204)

The same dichotomy can be found in Graham and Khosravi's description of refugees settled in Sweden, more particularly the Armenians and Baha'Is from Iran on one hand, and the Iranian political refugees on the other (Graham and Khosravi 1997). Because the two former minorities experienced severe persecution in Iran, they do not see any future in repatriation nor do they idealise their former home country, whereas the political activism of the latter group denotes their strong desire to return to Iran, even after seventeen years of exile. In the case of the event-alienated refugees, their sense of home is construed around complex social networks and a sense of community; in the case of the majority-identified refugees, their sense of home revolves around the specific geographical location one has been displaced from.

From the case studies of Graham and Khosravi, as well as the one of Al-Rasheed, what should hold the reader's attention is not so much the fact that some refugees choose to integrate in their host country while others would rather go back to their homeland, but more importantly the fact that, during exile, each forced migrant conceives his/her eventual return with varying intensities because of the nature of the relationship he/she shares with his/her country of origin. This will in turn shape the different attitudes one displays towards repatriation and the image of home one constructs during the time of exile. Therefore, Kunz's model not only allows some degree of prediction regarding the difficulties refugees might encounter during their integration in the host society, but by extension, the refugee's level of marginality or identification with the home country they have left behind also gives us some insight on the problems returnees might experience after repatriation. One might conclude from the above that those who have a positive attitude towards their country of origin and have been dreaming of returning to their homeland during all these years of exile will be the

ones to reintegrate with the least difficulties upon repatriation. The following chapter will demonstrate that this is seldom the case.

V. FOLLOWING REPATRIATION: THE BEGINNING OF HOMELESSNESS

1) Introduction

Without any doubt, there is quite a long way to go from contemplating the myth of return to actually making the transition of returning permanently to one's country of origin. The reasons why some refugees decide to repatriate, aside from the fact that the conditions which led to their flight may have ceased, are manifold and complex, and often involve a combination of pull and push factors. To name the most common ones, forced migrants return to their homeland to trace or join relatives, check the state of their property, re-bury a relative, make use of the skills they have acquired during exile in the reconstruction of their country (Appendix I), regain control of their land (Kjertum 1998), participate in the elections of their country (Mayanka 1994), take care of elderly parents, educate their children in their home country's culture and values, or alternatively, because the conditions in exile are too harsh or dangerous (Campher and Morgan 1991, Kjertum 1998: 32, Dona and Berry 1999: 183, Appendix I). On a more personal and emotional level however, another significant reason to repatriate is the mere desire to return 'home'. Indeed, in a survey conducted by the Scottish Refugee Council enquiring into the Kosovo Albanian refugees' motives to repatriate, the main reason expressed by the respondents out of the ten given was their longing to "return to their homeland" (Appendix I). Although 65 percent of the respondents had no jobs to go back to, and 60 percent had their homes partially or totally damaged, their determination to return 'home' was not diminished (ibid.). Similarly, Maletta *et al.*'s study on Argentinean returnees indicates that "the basic reasons for returning to Argentina involved the need of émigrés to rediscover the country and their own identities" (Maletta *et al.,* 1989: 180). The majority of the interviewees knew beforehand the economic problems Argentina was facing and expected to enjoy a lower standard of living than the one they had in exile,

yet it did not reduce their will to return. The following quote from a Guatemalan repatriate exemplifies the similar kind of sacrifice a returnee is willing to make in exchange for the emotional gratification he/she derives from being back in his/her home country: "There [in Mexico], we had roads, electricity, everything – here we have nothing but mud and rain! – But our land is here, so here we will stay!" (Kjertum 1998: 108)

The above illustrates two important points: 1) one of the chief incentives why refugees return to their country of origin is to recover the sense of 'feeling at home' which they believe can only be achieved in their homeland, 2) the returnees are usually aware of the material difficulties they will have to face upon return. In fact, these material difficulties are recognised by the international refugee regime as well, which is why many post-repatriation development programmes are aimed at rebuilding war-devastated and dislocated economies, clearing land mines, ensuring physical security, supervising land and property claims, providing basic services such as potable water, health and education facilities (UNHCR 2002). From the display of these urgent primary needs, it may perhaps seem superfluous to dwell on the psychosocial problems of reintegration. To be sure, this study does not contend that the physical and practical aspects of reintegration are not important. It argues instead that the urgency and the blatancy of the material dimensions of reintegration should not overshadow the short and long-term emotional problems refugees experience upon return. In fact, the material and psychosocial difficulties that accompany reintegration are extremely intertwined and should not be separated; landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, food insecurity etc. all impact on the psychological well-being of the returnee. Nonetheless, the meaning of returning 'home' and its psychosocial implications are persistently overlooked by the international refugee regime which assumes that, apart from the obvious material difficulties accompanying reintegration, returnees will naturally 're-connect' with their homeland and recover the feeling of well-being they enjoyed before the events leading to

their flight. The problem is not only that this belief is wrong, but that it is also shared by the returnees themselves. Therefore, the psychosocial difficulties of reintegration do not lie so much in the fact that the country of origin has changed during their protracted absence, but rather in the returnee's *expectations* that he/she and the home country have remained the same during the time spent in exile. The returnee believes that "[while] the approaching stranger has to anticipate in a more or less empty way what he will find, the homecomer has just to [return] to the memories of his past." (The Odyssey in Storti 2001: 16)

2) Pre-departure: idealisation of the homeland and decision to return

In the case of a protracted exile, the first effect of being unable to return to one's home country is that it freezes one's picture of 'home' and of the loved ones who remained behind. After interviewing Iranian refugees in Sweden, Graham and Khosavri remarked that the image they had of Iran was associated with "the 'good old days', formative years, youth, and the absence of adult responsibilities." (Graham and Khosravi 1997: 126) This is especially true if the refugee was forced out of his/her country during adolescence or early adulthood. Needless to say, the level of information forced migrants have about their home country during their exile and the possibility of verifying knowledge through occasional visits (when the country of asylum is geographically close to the one they have fled, for example) can contribute in sustaining a more realistic picture of their home country (Rogge 1994: 32; Sorensen 1996: 9; Maletta *et al.* 1989: 188). The second consequence of forced migrants' sudden flight outside the boundaries of their country is their encounter with other cultures, which amplifies the awareness of their own values. In the context of mass migrations in particular, the fact that people are fleeing together for the same reasons and thereafter live together in self-settlements or refugee camps, "creates conditions for a rediscovery and articulation of cultural issues not highlighted in the home country." (Dona

and Berry 1999: 184) After a while, a nostalgia for 'home' often develops and the latter inevitably comes to be distorted by memory. The following quote, in which Rushdie shares his own experience of exile, eloquently transcribes this process:

> "It was precisely the partial nature of these memories, their fragmentation, that made them so evocative for me. The shards of memory acquired greater status, greater resonance, because they were *remains*; fragmentation made trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquired numinous qualities. There is an obvious parallel here with archaeology. The broken pots of antiquity, from which the past can sometimes, but always provisionally, be reconstructed, are exciting to discover, even if they are pieces of the most quotidian objects. (Rushdie 1991: 12)

Therefore, the 'home' which is cherished is not the home forced migrants have fled but rather a transformed and idealised image of its past. In the case of the Argentinean refugees in the study of Maletta *et al.* the years of exile they spent in a foreign culture which they considered particularly individualistic, heightened their idealisation of the values of solidarity, hospitality and generosity they expected to found upon their return (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 191).

When the time to repatriate finally comes, the refugee often feels a mixture of excitement, hope, fear and sadness. On one hand, the decision to return raises anxieties even for those who have been dreaming of their homecoming for many years. In spite of everything, ties have been created during exile. To leave, even if it means to return to one's home country, represents yet another uprooting and the loss of one's social networks. Moreover, the decision to return sometimes generates conflicts within the family as some members want to stay in the country of asylum. This is especially the case when the refugee has married someone from another nationality during exile, or his/her children grew up or were born in the country of asylum. The following quote, from a Chilean refugee who experienced a first divorce upon his arrival in Canada and subsequently remarried a Canadian, testifies the moral dilemma a returnee might face before repatriation: "I didn't want to have to get another divorce to be able to live in my country." (Wright *et al.* 1998:

206) In the study by Maletta *et al.* 26 percent of the couples interviewed said their decision to return created tensions and disputes, between spouses as well as with children (Maletta *et al.*1989: 184). Sometimes, these quandaries end up in divorces or in the splitting up of the family. Indeed, among the returnees of one study, a family was divided, with three children remaining abroad with the father, while the three other children had returned with the mother (FASIC 1981: 36). On the other hand, the forced migrant feels joy at the idea of returning "to what is familiar, secure, stable, one's own" (ibid.: 38) and also being reunited with family members and friends. In fact, Argentinean refugees mentioned the prospect of living near friends and loved ones as a significant incentive for repatriating (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 186). Therefore, from an emotional perspective, leave-taking is often a bitter-sweet time for the refugee, as he/she begins to disengage from his/her host country and starts anticipating how good it is going to feel like to be back 'home', rehearsing certain encounters with loved ones and recollecting the things he/she has missed and will be happy to revisit (Storti 2001: 48).

3) Return: the end of the myth

The initial stage following repatriation is emotionally overwhelming. As this sixty year-old man remarks:

> "Here in Argentina I began to recognize my entire life, which I recognize in small conversations, in the street, in the way of living, in the market, on the bus. With time, everything that had been cut off was being reconstructed."(Maletta *et al.* 1989: 194)

Repatriation means the end of exile and the fulfilment of the wish to return, of being in one's own homeland. The returnee is reunited with relatives and close friends (those who are still alive), and has the impression of regaining his/her sense of belonging, as he/she is not a foreigner any longer. One returnee testifies: "Those who have not experienced being chased away, living as refugees and returning, just cannot know the feeling. It's like being born

again." (UNHCR 1998: 23) In fact, the mere experience of regaining legal status can bring comfort to one's self-worth and wounded identity. As explained by one Argentinean returnee:

> "The idea of recovering one's legal status is important, for in Brazil we recovered freedom without legality. (…) Here [in Argentina], I feel recognition, although it is anonymous, for I have papers, a social security number, etc. (…) When I get my salary and I see my social security number, I really get emotional." (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 195)

Nevertheless, the initial period of joy starts to fade and unanticipated difficulties arise to the forefront, as the expectations invested in the country of origin during all those years of exile start to crumble. The returnee gradually realises that the people who remained behind have changed during his/her absence and that he/she him/herself has changed, in such a way that the contrast between the returnee and the stayee becomes obvious. As stated by Maletta *et al.* "one returns to the familiar, the things that are known, but at the same time everything is different in a spatial environment that is not the same, just like the migrant who returns is not the same anymore." (ibid.: 200)

The experience of an altered home is accepted with resistance by the returnee as he/she assumed that once back home, life would go back to normal again. Nothing can be further from the truth. At the macro-social level, refugees often return to countries that have undergone profound economic, political, social and cultural changes following a civil war or socio-political upheavals. Economic transformations are felt with even greater intensity when refugees are repatriating from a relatively developed country to one that is devastated by war or is in transition. In terms of social changes, the repression in Argentina for instance, which produced a fear of any sort of association or gathering of people, had the effect of reducing the occurrence of social interactions, even after the fall of the dictatorship. This was compounded by the fact that the contraction of the labour market forced many people to take on two jobs, thereby reducing opportunities for leisure or friendships (ibid.: 198). In the case

of Zarzosa, when she came back to Chile, she felt that the ideology of authoritarianism instilled by seventeen years of dictatorship permeated the whole society, all the way to the Chilean school system in which she had placed her children (Zarzosa 1998: 194). All of these factors make identification with one's home country difficult for the returnee. For political refugees in particular, the realisation that their country has been irreversibly scarred by the events that led to their flight, might lead to a disappointing homecoming:

> "These are people who believed at the time of going that the country they left behind could be a better place for all. Nevertheless, encountering the changed society, different from the one left behind and not being the ideal place they had envisaged, presented a big challenge." (Majodina 1995: 223)

Likewise, the changes perceived in one's immediate context, such as in the status of one's former house, in people's behaviour, or in more trivial things such as the emergence of new streets and buildings, even changes in colloquial expressions, may cause strong emotional reactions in the returnee as it tarnishes the image he/she had constructed during exile. For instance, Somalian returnees found their houses turned into hotels, drinking houses and brothels after the passage of the Ethiopian army (Kibreab 2002: 58-59). A less dramatic example, yet still unsettling, is the experience of an Iranian refugee in Canada who, during a return visit to Iran, could not recognise his fellow countrymen as their physical appearance had changed so much during his ten years of exile:

> "You do not believe me, but I met more Iranians in the Eaton Mall than in Tehran… You know people were very strange to me there [back in Iran], their clothes and behaviour for example. It was not the same Tehran I knew." (Graham and Khosravi 1997: 126)

The family and close social circles are where transformations are the most perceptible: some relatives or friends may have died, others changed their marital status or gotten children (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 199). In the case of this young Argentinean, the realisation that she and her spouse had come back to an empty social space led to their subsequent return to their country of asylum:

"We were nobody here in Argentina (…); groups of friends, political activities – all of this did not exist anymore because people had left or were dead … Nor do we have an identity here at this time, except for the family and a few things that one identifies with the country." (ibid.: 193)

Another expectation is that the people who stayed behind have not changed perceptibly. As expressed by this Chilean returnee however, after a long period of absence in exile, old friendships might have faded: "I always said that I had a million friends in Chile – when you go back you realize that there are very few." (Wright *et al.* 1998: 205) In fact, the experience of the returnee is somewhat similar to the culture shock one might undergo when entering a foreign land. An important factor that contributes to one's feeling of belonging and well-being is the presence of a familiar physical and social environment. However, the changes at the macro-social as well as the micro-social levels might be so important that the returnee loses all familiar references of social intercourse and feels like a stranger in his/her own country (see also Cornish *et al.*'s case study (1999) regarding children returnees). To quote Maletta *et al.*:

"Not only have things continued to happen, but they have modified reality. Upon returning, the exile finds a different country to whose changes he or she is foreign. The country is no longer his or hers since the exile was not present, did not influence, nor was affected by the events as they occurred." (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 197)

Needless to say, the reason why the returnee perceives his/her home country as a different place is also due to the fact that he/she him/herself has changed. After a long absence in exile and numerous life-changing experiences, the forced migrant realises that there are many factors which differentiate him/her from his/her compatriots. The returnee looks at his/her homeland with different eyes and becomes more aware or critical of its weaknesses. His/her perception of family, politics or profession might have changed. As noted by Maletta *et al.,* "[m]igrating is in a sense the 'end of innocence', the end of an immediacy with one's country that will never be attainable again by the returning migrant." (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 200) For returnees that were rural farmers before their flight, even their

42

attachment to the land as a source of identity might have changed (Kibreab 2002; Hammond 1999). Moreover, many events happened to the refugee during exile. Many divorced, married or re-married with foreign spouses, formed free unions and had new children abroad. Moreover, some refugees pursued a higher education level during exile, acquired a new profession or developed new skills. Returnees also come back with different accents, changed diets and new habits. For example, the Guatemalan returnees studied by Dona and Berry are described to have adopted the Mexican style of dressing and other Mexican customs acquired in exile (Dona and Berry 1999: 188). Changes in gender roles are an illustration of more important transformations in the returnee value system. Women's traditional roles are often dramatically altered by forced migration, especially when the separation from husband and kin entails new decision-making positions. As one woman Guatemalan returnee testifies: "When I arrived here [in the camp], all I knew was how to make children and tortillas. Now, I have worked as a teacher, a nurse, and have been a camp organizer for six years' (Campher *et al.* 1991: 43).

Therefore, because the returnee and the home country he/she is returning to has changed considerably during his/her long period of absence, and because the returnee does not expect these changes, he/she can often experience a heightened version of what is called 'reverse culture shock'. Of course, the phenomenon of reverse culture shock is not restricted to refugee returnees. It has already been recognised among returning expatriates or students (Storti 2001). It can, however, be particularly traumatising for refugees who have lived in exile for a considerable length of time, for the idealisation of their homeland during exile helped in easing the pain and distress generated from the displacement they suffered when they fled their country. As a result, not only does the refugee come back to his/her home country with a more distorted image of his/her homeland, but the meaning of returning home is laden with greater emotional significance. To feel 'out of place' upon return when the

craving to belong dominated the forced migrant's time in exile can therefore be a troubling experience. The difficulty in accepting these changes is reinforced by the realisation that a new learning process will be necessary in order to feel 'at home' again. Indeed, while flight is often experienced as a severance from one's homeland, "[r]eturn implies another breakdown in the daily routine, this time related to the need to pick up the threads of a former life and refamiliarise old patterns of reference." (FASIC 1981: 39)

4) The relationship between returnees and stayees

In order to fully understand what the returnee experiences upon repatriation, it is necessary to examine the relationship between the returnee and the people that have remained in the country during the refugee's absence, and how they subsequently perceive and react to one another.

If we begin with the returnees' perceptions and attitudes towards his/her home population, one of the most common feeling experienced is the 'survival guilt', the guilt of having abandoned their relatives and friends at home in their hours of need. When one returns to the country one has fled, the feeling of guilt might not have disappeared. The refugee might be scared of being accused of having deserted or enjoyed a golden exile while those who stayed suffered. Faced with anxiety, he/she may choose to hide his/her condition and attempt to submerge him/herself in the mainstream population (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 204), as did this refugee who returned to Iran after nine years of exile:

> "I felt guilty when I met my friends whom I had left behind in a crisis and for an uncertain future. I tried to dress like them and avoid revealing that I came from abroad. On some occasions, I could not tell people that I fled during the war, but instead, said I was born abroad, just to escape the feelings of shame and guilt." (Graham and Khosravi 1997: 118)

At the other end of the spectrum are the returnees who feel that the skills and experience they have acquired abroad set them apart from those who stayed. In Dona and Berry's case study

of Guatemalan *retornados*, the authors note that the returnee community considered itself 'more developed' than the stayees (Dona and Berry 1999: 189). Kjertum notes a similar trend among the Guatemalan returnees of Monte Bello (Kjertum 1998). She explains that their experience as refugees in Mexico allowed them to learn how to organise themselves, engage in collective work, and operate the donor system to obtain projects. Upon repatriation, due to the rise of their political awareness and organising skills, they perceived themselves as different from the surrounding villages and consequently formed their own returnee villages. Their feeling of superiority is best exemplified in the following quote: "We [the returnees] have learned many things in Mexico – Among other things to organise ourselves – There are many of the villages here which cannot do that!" (ibid.: 127) Cornish *et al.*'s study of young Malawian returnees reveals the same attitude. Their informants believed that "returnees are cleverer than Malawians", "us [returnees], we are cool, but Malawians are too talkative." (Cornish et al. 1999: 275)

For those who return individually and try to fit back in the mainstream society however, their feeling of estrangement from other fellow citizens can be a source of psychological stress. Many return with the anticipation that the skills they have acquired abroad will give them the opportunity to contribute to the development or reconstruction of their country (Zarzosa 1998: 193; Maletta *et al.* 1989: 201). Instead, the returnee's enthusiasm is received by the home population with cold indifference or rejection. As explained by Maletta *et al.* "offering a contribution is interpreted by others as a request or a demand rather than giving and sharing" (ibid.). The authors refer to the experience of one of their respondents who rang an old colleague to catch up on lost time, but was interrupted by the latter who told him: "Before anything, I want to say that I cannot offer you a job here." (ibid.). It is recurring moments like these that give returnees the feeling that they are not

welcomed 'home', that they are seen as intruders rather than natives. This is felt with particular intensity in the employment arena where the exile's difficult reinsertion in the labour market only reinforces his/her sense of emptiness and insecurity. For refugees who remember the strong solidarity and camaraderie that existed prior to flight and then during exile, such a response from 'their' people leads them as returnees to perceive their home society as individualistic, aggressive and self-centred (ibid.: 186; FASIC 1981: 204, 210; Zarzosa 1998: 196). Even old friendships like those with whom returnees used to share political ideals and principles in the past come to be eroded. The testimony of this returnee demonstrates his difficulty in accepting that Chileans have traded their political activism for consumerism, as it requires him to change the status of his identity from one that was clearly political to one less well-defined:

> "We live in cultural mediocrity. (…) I cannot understand the calmness with which people accept or don't talk about so many shameful situations. (…) I had a very interesting family and they were all active in political parties until 1973. Now, they are people concerned only with getting together money to go to Iquique to buy things." (FASIC 1981: 210-211)

Another upsetting aspect of repatriation is the lack of interest kin, friends and colleagues display towards forced migrants' experiences during exile. The following quote from this Chilean returnee illustrates that despite one's fixation on returning 'home' during the exile period, once repatriated, the refugee realises that not only his/her experience abroad has irreversibly altered him/her, but also that he/she is strongly attached to the personal and professional growth he/she has undergone in the asylum country:

> "It is as if there were a collective conspiracy to say that those years that you lived in another country (…) didn't exist for you (…). Abroad, I got divorced, I got married, I had another son, I adopted a Canadian daughter. I spent fifteen years there, I spent my whole life there, and there is no one that will ask you, 'What did you do? What was your life like? What happened to you?' (…) It seems to me that those ten years or fifteen years can't just be tossed out as if they had never existed for you and your family." (ibid.: 204-205)

Naturally, the analysis of the refugees' reintegration process would be incomplete if it were not to take into account the point of view of the home population towards returnees. The later can represent an additional strain on the scarce resources of the home population,

especially if the country itself is recovering from political or socio-economic turbulences[2]. Returnees might cause a potential threat to the livelihoods of stayees if they come back to claim occupied land or property, thereby dispossessing the new occupants. Stayee populations may also view repatriates as a burden as their return might increase competition in the labour market. Moreover, returnees often do not have a home of their own and must settle with kin and friends during the initial stages after repatriation (Appendix I, FASIC 1981: 36; Maletta *et al.* 1989: 185). As the months (sometimes years) pass by and their accommodation problems remain unsolved, tensions start to surface with those sheltering them. As one returnee explains, "the first week, the entire family is happy to have you back, but after a week, 'Well, and how long are we going to have them here?'" (Wright *et al.* 1998: 202) Similarly, it is hard for returnees, especially women who have gained greater autonomy and independence during exile, to return live with parents (ibid.; FASIC 1981: 39). The tensions created by returnees' accommodation situation contribute to the deterioration of their social relationships, further estranging them from the 'home' they imagined to be coming back to. Only 57 percent of the returnee sample in Maletta *et al.*'s study stated they had maintained good relations with their family in Argentina; only one fourth indicated they had retained close relationships with friends they had before migrating (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 186). Relationships with loved ones can further degenerate if the latter do not approve of the new value system and behaviours observed in returnees. For example, community elders in Namibia did not approve of the liberal attitudes of young returnees, especially women, as they interpreted it as a loss of respect for local culture (Tapscott in Kibreab 2002: 55).

Returnees can also suffer stigma because they might represent a political threat. They may not be welcomed for fear of the opposition they might create. This wariness can be

---

[2] In his study of the reintegration of Eritrean refugees, Kibreab explains that the unusual amiable relationship noted between returnees and stayees is due to the fact "the latter perceived returnees as being harbingers of opportunities and prosperity rather than the cause of economic hardship and poverty." (Kibreab 2002: 69)

found not only in the government's attitude towards returnees but also in other spheres such as the employment realm. Indeed, "an exile can be seen as potentially dangerous by the personnel manager of a private company who tries not to hire troublesome persons, agitators, or subversives." (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 202) For other stayees, the repatriation of forced migrants also symbolises the return of the painful past which led to their flight. Because the presence of returnees may bring back traumatic memories, people pretend to have forgotten the circumstances which caused the returnee to leave the country (ibid.: 199). When Habib returned to Lebanon after a prolonged exile, she notes: "We were all supposed to 'forget all about it' and go back to 1975, as if nothing had happened." (Habib 1996: 100) Hence, the returnee feels that he/she is "a voice from the past, incomprehensible and annoying for those who remained behind." (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 199) For some, the home population's denial of the pre-flight events is disconcerting as it disclaims the plight they endured and the rationalisation of their long years in exile. Such was the experience of Zarzosa when she came back to Chile: "It was necessary to conform and not to disturb the fragile democracy by remembering the past. (…) I could not accept that because I was seriously affected by military rule." (Zarzosa 1998: 196)

Conversely, the fact that stayees avoid mentioning the past does not imply that they have forgotten about it. On the contrary, stayees often believe refugees have enjoyed a golden exile while they stayed behind. As Habib recounts:

> "Those who had remained through the war saw me as an outsider. The 'Parisian', as they called me, had not shared their lives and, they thought, had not suffered like them, if at all. (…) The transformative powers of war and exile had split the people along additional 'demarcation lines', there now was the culture of the war and the culture of exile, and they did not recognize each other." (Habib 1996: 101)

As a consequence, it has been found in various case studies that returnees' social circles tend to be predominantly composed of other repatriates whom they met abroad or after their return

(Maletta *et al.* 1989: 186; Wright *et al.* 1998: 205), as they feel they can relate to one another, unlike stayees from whom they feel alienated or ostracised. For others, the experience of exile has given refugees the opportunity to forge new bonds and strengthen a common collective identity through shared circumstances. Upon return, these social networks carry on and sometimes develop into closely-knit returnee communities (Kibreab 2002; Dona and Berry 1999; Kjertum 1998, Mayanka 1994).

VI. SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION: WHEN DOES ONE CEASE TO BE A 'RETURNEE'?

In this dissertation, we have seen that since the 1980s onwards, voluntary repatriation has been promoted by governments, NGOs and UN agencies as the ultimate solution to refugees' displacements. However, it is assumed within the international refugee regime that once the infrastructural assistance and material aspect of repatriation has been dealt with, the rest will follow naturally. This study has aimed to demonstrate that 'the rest', that is psychosocial reintegration, does not follow 'naturally'. In fact, "no return is only a return; it is a new migration, with all the losses, fears, and hopes that are inherent in it." (Grinberg and Grinberg in Maletta *et al.* 1989: 251) I contend that returnees' full reintegration will vary according to the developments of the individual's relationship to his/her home country and his/her degree of identification with it.

Returning from a long absence in exile gives rise to many contradictions and ambivalences. Returnees finally accomplish their desire to repatriate, to "be back home". Nevertheless, their understanding of their home country has been imperceptibly yet irreversibly transformed by their exile experience, just as the passage of time and local events have changed the stayees. The feeling of well-being they expected to experience upon return and the idealisation of the home country which allowed them to cope with the anxieties of exile, crumble following the realisation that the home social environment appears to have changed, not only because the country has indeed been subject to tremendous changes, but also due to the transformations they themselves have undergone during a protracted exile. As stated by Warner, "[r]efugees return but they don't return. Refugees go back to their country of origin, but they are not the same, nor are the people in the country of origin." (Warner 1994: 22) The reverse culture shock refugee returnees experience is felt with all the more

intensity since the recognition of the magnitude of one's altered 'home' and altered 'self' is not realised until after repatriation. Although it was expected that living in the country of asylum was going to require a degree of adjustment, the forced migrant does not expect that the process of "returning home" would create any major problem aside from the material aspect of reintegration. In fact, the returnee expects quite the opposite experience, that coming home will be natural. Therefore, "to reenter, it turns out, is to be temporarily homeless." (Storti 2001: 19) This feeling can be particularly distressing for refugees, as they had already experienced two partings: the original severance from the home country at the time of fleeing, and the loss of the emotional attachments developed in the host country during exile. Returnees believed that their repatriation would allow them to re-achieve the feelings of belonging they lost subsequent to their flight; yet their return results in a third loss, this time experienced in their own home country. One returnee explains:

> "A very ambivalent sensation: that of having recovered something I desired for a long time and only to have lost it at the moment I recovered it. (…) I do not even have here what I had abroad: hope… It's like a mirage that disappears when you touch it." (Maletta *et al.* 1989 : 197)

This leads us to the following question: when does one cease to be a returnee? Because forced migrants are composed of heterogeneous individuals, the psychosocial reintegration of forced migrants in their home country cannot be generalised. It will depend on their personal experiences of pre-flight circumstances, exile and return, as well as their own personality and coping strategies. Nevertheless, from the case studies examined in this dissertation, it seems fair to conclude that those who repatriate permanently will experience psychosocial stress in the initial stages of their return, albeit to different degrees. On one end of the spectrum, there are those for whom the shock or disappointment following their return inhibits their full reintegration, resulting in a second migration from the home country. In Maletta *et al.*'s study for example, 40 percent of the respondents expressed the desire or

intention to emigrate again when the opportunity presents itself (Maletta *et al.* 1989: 186). In the case of Zarzosa and Habib, both their life histories finish off with a second flight as well. They conclude respectively:

> "There was no alternative but to think about leaving Chile. After four years to belong, I could not find acceptance (…) As a returnee (…), I felt like an outsider with almost no role to play. (…) I also realised that not even the restricted meanings of 'home' were there and even the language and the landscape had changed. (…) Chile was a different country altogether." (Zarzosa 1998: 196)

> "It made my homecoming as traumatic as my flight. I understood, and I had to face for the first time, that there was no returning home. Home was lost as a physical and emotional place, and all roots seemed severed. (…) I had been able to live and adapt in exile, only because I thought I could go back to my country (…). But instead of finding home I realised I had gone all that way only to say good-bye to my country, to my father and to my illusions." (Habib 1996: 101)

At the other end of the spectrum are those who maintained a realistic image of their country throughout their exile; in such cases, the emotional difficulties which usually accompany the re-entry of forced migrants are much fewer, if not inexistent. In the case of Eduardo Olivares for example, who returned to Chile after fourteen years in exile in Paris, he states that his return unfolded exactly the way he expected it to (Wright *et al.* 1998: 206-211). He never idealised his home country during exile as he always told himself that if he fled Chile, it is precisely because it wasn't perfect, and there was no reason to believe that it improved during all those years of dictatorship. He also expected that there would not be an overwhelming reception from the home population upon his return, as he knew that the latter had suffered a lot during the dictatorship and felt exiles were 'on vacation' in comparison to them. He also acknowledged the fact that return would imply some getting used to:

> "In all these years, I haven't stayed the same, other people have also changed. Your friend or your brother, however close he may be, if you cut yourself off from him for fourteen years that changes the whole relationship for both of you." (ibid.: 208)

He concludes:

> "I wasn't expecting anything and the little I have got is enough for me." (ibid.)

We can therefore conclude that not only do repatriating refugees experience their return differently depending on each individual, but also that these differences seem to vary according to how they place themselves in relation to their home country and subsequently, their propensity to idealise their 'home' during exile. Whatever the case may be, what all returnees share is the impossibility to recreate the times which preceded the events that led them to flee, as the changes that have occurred among returnees and stayees are irreversible. To reintegrate in their home country, they can only incorporate the changes into their new self and build a new sense of home. In Storti's words:

> "Reentry never truly ends. After all, people don't actually get over experiences, especially profound ones; instead they incorporate them into their character and personality and respond to all subsequent experience from the perspective of their new self." (Storti 2001: 65)

The aim of this study was not to pathologise the return process, but to show that, although each refugee's experience of return is different and involves a number of complex factors, returnees often view their repatriation not as a 'return' but as a new beginning. They should be assisted for this difficult transition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

ACKERMANN, L. (2003) 'Violence, Exile and Recovery: Reintegration of Guatemalan Refugees in the 1990s – A Biographical Approach', D. Phil. Thesis, unpublished. University of Oxford.

ALLEN, T. and MORSINK, H. (1994) *When Refugees Go Home*. Geneva: UNRISD.

ALLEN, T. and **TURTON, D.** (1996) 'Introduction' in Allen, T. (ed.) *In Search of Cool Grounds*. Geneva: UNRISD.

AL-RASHEED, M. (1994) 'The Myth of Return: Iraqi Arab and Assyrian Refugees in London', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **7**(2/3): 199-219.

AMORE, K. (2002) 'Repatriation or Deportation? When the Subjects Have no Choice', *A European Journal of International Migration and Ethnic Relations*, **39**/40/41: 153-171.

BLACK, R. and **KOSER, K.** (eds.) (1999) *The End of the Refugee Cycle?: Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*. Oxford: Berghahn.

CAMPHER, V. and **MORGAN, B.** (eds.) (1991) *Going Home: Building Peace in El Salvador: the Story of Repatriation.* London: Apex Press.

CHIMNI, B. S. (1998) 'The Geopolitics of Refugee Studies: A View from the South', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **11**(4): 350-374.

CHIMNI, B. S. (1999) 'From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation : Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems', *UNHCR Working Paper* No.2. Centre for Documentation and Research. Geneva: UNHCR.

CORNISH, F., PELTZER, K., and **MacLACHLAN, M.** (1999) 'Returning Strangers: the Children of Malawian Refugees Come 'Home'?', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **12**(3): 264-283.

DONA, G. and **BERRY, J.W.** (1999) 'Refugee Acculturation and Re-acculturation', in Ager, A. (ed) *Refugees: the Perspectives on the Experience of Forced Migration*. New York: Cassell.

DUKE, K. (1996) 'Refugee Communities in the UK: the Role of the Community Group In the Resettlement Process', The British Sociological Association Annual Conference "Worlds of the Future: ethnicity, nationalism and globalisation", University of Reading, unpublished draft, School of Sociology and Social Policy. Middlesex University.

FASIC (1981) 'A Social-psychological Study of 25 Returning Families', in FASIC (ed.) *Mental Health and Exile*, Papers arising from a seminar on mental health and Latin American Exiles. World University Service.

FRIEDMAN, M. J. and **MARSELLA, A. J.** (1996) 'Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: an Overview of the Concept', in Marsella, A.J, Friedman, M.J*., Gerrity, E. T. and Scurfield, M.R. (eds.), *Ethnocultural Aspects of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*. Washington: American Psychological Association.

GRAHAM, M. and **KHOSRAVI, S.** (1997) 'Home is Where You Make It: Repatriation And Diaspora Culture among Iranians in Sweden', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **10**(2): 115-133.

HABIB, N. (1996) 'The Search for Home', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **9**(1): 96-102.

HAMMOND, L. (1999) 'Examining the Discourse of Repatriation Toward a More Pro-Active Theory of Return Migration', in Black, R. and Koser, K. (eds.) *The End of the Refugee Cycle?: Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books.

HUDSPETH, C. (1998) ''Home': An Analysis of Space and Place', Paper I in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.St. in Forced Migration, unpublished. University of Oxford.

HVIDT, K. and **KJERTUM, B. J.** (1999) 'Reintegration: The Case of Guatemalans Repatriates', Fellows paper, Refugee Studies Programme, unpublished. University of Oxford.

JAMAL, A. (1998) 'Forced Migrants, Forged Histories: Suffering and Idealism in Exile Memory', Essay II in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.St. in Forced Migration, unpublished. University of Oxford.

KIBREAB, G. (1999) 'Revisiting the Debate on People, Place, Identity and Displacement', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **12**(4): 384-410.

_____ (2002) 'When Refugees Come Home: The Relationship Between Stayees and Returnees in Post-Conflict Eritrea', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, **20**(1): 53-80.

KJERTUM, J. (1998) 'Repatriation and Reintegration of Mayan Indians Returning to Guatemala', dissertation in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.Sc in International Development Studies, draft version. Roskilde University.

KUNZ, E. F. (1981) 'Exile and Resettlement: Refugee Theory', International Migration Review, 15(1): 42-51.

MAKANYA, S. T. (1994) 'The Desire to Return: Effects of Experiences in Exile on Refugees Repatriating to Zimbabwe in the Early 1980s', in Allen, T. and Morsink, H. (eds.) *When Refugees go Home*. Geneva: UNRISD.

MALKKI, L. (1992) 'National Geographic: the Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity among Scholars and Refugees', *Cultural Anthropology* **7**(1): 24-44.

MAJODINA, Z. (1995) 'Dealing with Difficulties of Return in South Africa : The Role Of Social Support and Coping', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **8**(2): 210-227.

MALETTA, H., SHWARCBERG, F. and SCHNEIDER, R. (1989) 'Back Home: Psychosocial Aspects of the Exiles' Return to Argentina', in Pressar, P.R. (ed) *When Borders Don't Divide: Labour Migration and Refugee Involvements in the Americas.* New York: Centre for Migration Studies.

OLSSON, A-S., RADDA BARNEN and HURST, J. (1998) *Renewing Home Country Links: The Second Journey Home: Model for Reintegration and Voluntary Return.* Stockholm: Radda Barnen, Save the Children Sweden.

ROGGE, J. R. (1994) 'Repatriation of Refugees', in Allen, T. and Morsink, H. (eds.) *When Refugees go Home.* Geneva: UNRISD.

RUSHDIE, S. (1991) *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991.* U.S.A: Granta Books in Association with Viking Penguin.

SAID, E. (2002) *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays.* Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

SORENSEN, C. (1996) 'Alebu: Eritrean Refugees Return and Restore Their Livelihoods', papers from the conference 'Reconstructing Livelihoods: Towards New Approaches to Resettlement' on 9-13 September 1996. Oxford.

STAMOU, E. (2000) 'Return 'Home'?: Repatriation, 'Reintegration', 'aid and Development': Approaching the Politics of Time and Space in Guatemala', thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the M.A. in Social Anthropology of Development. London: SOAS.

STEIN, B. (1994) 'Ad Hoc Assistance to Return Movements & Long-Term Development Programmes', in Allen, T. and Morsink, H. (eds.) *When Refugees go Home.* Geneva: UNRISD.

STORTI, C. (2001) The Art of Coming Home. London: Intercultural Press.

UNHCR (1989) 'UNHCR: 1989 Programme', *Refugees*, Special Issue, December 1988. Geneva: UNHCR.

_____ (1996) *Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection.* Geneva: UNHCR Division of International Protection.

_____ (1998) 'Going Home: Mozambique Revisited', *Refugees*, **2**(112). Geneva: UNHCR.

_____ (2002) *UNHCR Executive Committee on Voluntary Repatriation*, Global Consultations on International Protection, 4th meeting, EC/GC/02/5. Geneva: UNHCR.

UNRISD (1992) *Refugees Returning Home: Report of the Symposium for the Horn of Africa on the Social and Economic Aspects of Mass Voluntary Return Movements of*

Refugees, in Addis Ababa on 15-17 of September 1992. Geneva: UNRISD.

VAN DER VEER, G. (1998) *Counselling and Therapy with Refugees and Victims of Trauma* (2nd ed), Chichester: John Wiley and Sons.

WARNER, D. (1994) 'Voluntary Repatriation and the Meaning of Return to Home: A Critique of Liberal Mathematics', paper for the 4th IRAP Conference on 5-9 January 1994. Oxford.

WRIGHT, T. C., ONATE, R. and HODGSON, I. B. (1998) *Flight From Chile: Voices of Exile*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

ZARZOSA, H. L. (1998) 'Internal Exile, Exile and Return : A Gendered View', *Journal Of Refugee Studies*, **11**(2): 189-198.

ZETTER, R. (2000) 'Reconceptualizing the Myth of Return : Continuity and Transition Amongst the Greek-Cypriot Refugees of 1974', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, **12**(1): 1-22.

APPENDICES

A. Significant voluntary repatriations in 2000.

B. Major voluntary repatriation movements in 1999.

C. 1) Voluntary repatriation of refugees *by origin and country or territory of asylum*, 1992-2001.

   2) Voluntary repatriation of refugees *by country or territory of asylum*, 1992-2001.

   3) Voluntary repatriation of refugees *by origin*, 1992-2001.

   4) Voluntary repatriation of refugees *by region of origin,* 1992-2001.

D. Estimated annual refugee returns worldwide.

E. Refugee population and movements, 1992-2001.

F. Major returnee populations worldwide, 1997-1998 (map).

G. 1) Voluntary repatriation of refugees by origin, *1992-1996* (map).

   2) Voluntary repatriation of refugees by origin, *1997-2001* (map).

H. Population of concern to UNHCR by category, 2001.

I. Survey of returnees to Kosovo on the voluntary returns programmes.