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The 'Mauros' who could not stay

Published on : 11 November 2011 - 1:21pm | By [Lula Ahrens](#) (Photo: [David Ahrens](#))

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Angolan asylum seeker Mauro Manuel (18) has been granted permission to remain in the Netherlands temporarily on a student visa. Mauro has been living in Holland since he was 10 years old, but faces deportation because he is no longer underage. Hundreds of other would-be refugees like Mauro have been forced to return to Angola in recent years. Their stories range from tragic to successful, as our correspondent in Luanda reports.

Amalia (17) and Tucha (19) are sisters. They lived in the Netherlands for five years before being forcibly returned to Angola in 2010.

"A group of policemen entered our bedroom in the middle of the night," Amalia told me in a desperate voice, as if it had all happened yesterday. "They said: 'Pack your stuff.' I said: 'Why, why, why? I'm not yet 18!' But they grabbed us and put us on a plane. Five people accompanied us; I don't know who they were. I just cried and cried."

Killed and raped

The sisters fled to the Netherlands in 2005 in fear of their lives. "My father was politically active in a separatist movement. When he wanted to quit, his colleagues killed him and raped my sister." Amalia says "an American man" brought them to Holland, and then disappeared.

Amalia and Tucha both went to high school in the city of Eindhoven, but were not able to complete their studies. And now they are stuck without Angolan passports because they "didn't have enough money to get one". Amalia says that the Red Cross promised to find their relatives long ago, but have not yet done so.

"They always tell us to wait, wait, because others have to wait too. We don't even know whether our mother is still alive."

The sisters live in an old lady's one-bedroom house together with the owner and her five children.

"The room we rented the first three months belonged to her. When we ran out of money, we had nowhere to go. She let us live with her us ever since, for free."

They have to "fight" every day to get enough food, Amalia says. Tucha braids hair on the street. It's their only source of income. Their dream is to go back to the Netherlands.

More opportunities

At the other end of the scale, there is Engracia (33). She lived in the Dutch cities of Rotterdam and Den Bosch for 14 years. She graduated successfully from high school and completed her training as a secretary, while receiving some financial support from her brother in Angola. Engracia returned to Angola in 2007 after she was officially denied a residence permit.

Engracia sounds cheerful and confident as she tells me her story over the phone:

"I went back voluntarily and was supported by the [Dutch Refugee Council](#). They bought me a one-way ticket and gave me 2000 euros in financial assistance. But it's my middle-class family members and friends in Angola who have helped me find work and a place to live."

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Beautiful country

"Via a friend, I found a job as a secretary at Dutch offshore company Heerema. I now work for Gesmar Swiss Angola, an offshore company, as an HR assistant."

"When I arrived in Angola in 2007, I was shocked by the poverty and extreme traffic jams. Nevertheless, it's good to be back. Angola is a beautiful country. And there are more career opportunities here for educated people, because Angola is recovering from its 27-year civil war [1975-2002]."

Struggle for acceptance

Engracia's experience is in line with research on Angolan returnees carried out by teaching assistant Jessica van de Weerd. She concluded that their reintegration depends mostly on family contact and the family's economic position.

But Van de Weerd also found that some of those who fled to the Netherlands as children had serious problems returning to Angola. The relationships with parents and family could be seriously weakened and it was sometimes difficult to win acceptance.

"People don't understand why their migration failed. Returnees are often called spoilt because they were not in Angola during the toughest first years after the end of the civil war."

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Anonymous
 11 November 2011 - 4:22pm / Nigeria [reply](#)
 Thank you, RNW, for giving Mauro a hope! You fought for that guy!

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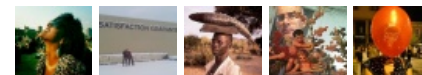
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