

‘The Country is the People. National Identity and Angolan Immigrants in Rundu, Namibia’

Inge Brinkman¹

¹ African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands

ibrinkman@ascleiden.nl

This paper will start with an understatement: national identity among Angolan immigrants in Rundu, Northern Namibia is complex. In most studies national identity is assumed to be singular and difficult to change. Also in Angolan, Zambian and Namibian bureaucracy, people are meant to have just one national identity and they are not encouraged to make any changes therein. For many Angolan people currently resident in Rundu, Namibia, however, such simplicity denies their personal history. They have lived in South-East Angola, Western Zambia and Northern Namibia amongst people of their own kith and kin, and feel that they have rights and obligations in all three contexts. They conceive of a nation as people: ‘the country is the people’ is a widespread saying in the local language.

Of course, people are sharply aware of the consequences of state bureaucracy: only through a Namibian ID they may be able to secure a work permit, access to education and land, and the possibility to travel in a legal manner. When there is a possibility for Angolan immigrants to acquire the Namibian nationality, most will seize the opportunity and change their nationality to the Namibian. For rather a number of the Angolan immigrants, however, there exists a discrepancy between ‘heartfelt and handheld’ national identity (Bakewell 2007). Some of the younger generation do indeed feel they are fully Namibian, so sometimes there are varying identity categories within one family.

In this paper, these varying identity categories and the changes therein will be explored in the case of Angolan immigrants in Rundu, Namibia (1960s-present).

- Bakewell, Oliver, 'The Meaning and Use of Identity Papers: handheld and heartfelt nationality in the borderlands of North-West Zambia', (IMI Working Paper 5. International Migration Institute, Oxford 2007).

- Brinkman, Inge, ‘Violence, exile and ethnicity: Nyemba refugees in Kaisosi and Kehemu (Rundu, Namibia)’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 25, 3 (1999) pp. 417-439.