



## Centralised State Power Identity Crisis and Conflict In Africa

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The paper looks at the role that the centralised state power in Africa with a specific focus on Zambia has played in the heightened identity crisis among its citizens and the subsequent political conflicts. This is despite the fact that the need for strong national identity essential for national integration had been advanced as one of the major justification for centralised state power in several African countries at the time they were getting political independence. Ethnicity, which the African leaders committed themselves to fight in the creation of new nations, is even more pronounced today than they were at the time of independence.

The central argument of the paper is that the centralized nature of the most African political system is at the root of the heightened ethnic identity at the expense of sense of national identity. This is in large part because leaders that took over state power who were supposed to be the rallying point of national identity and thus national unity instead had tended to identify themselves with their ethnic group and in the process often disadvantaging other ethnic groups. This in turn created a feeling of marginalization and exclusion by such groups and in the process undermining their sense of national identity in preference for stronger ethnic identity. This has manifested itself in strong ethnic competition at election times and at times in civil wars among other manifestations. Thus instead of being a positive influence, the retention of centralised state structure has become the source of accelerated “tribalism” in most African countries.

Several strategies have been adopted to manage conflicts and minimize future conflicts by countries that had faced serious conflicts or have potential to have serious conflicts. One such is the worldwide increasing demands for the devolution of powers both in terms reducing the excessive powers of the chief executives and away from the centre as a way of reducing political exclusion by the groups that feel excluded and enhancing their sense of national identity. In trying to look at strategies of transforming political conflict into some form of peaceful coexistence the paper, therefore, examines the efficacy of devolution as a strategy in Zambia and Africa in general in reducing political conflict and in enhancing sense of national identity and national unity.