
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

**The Australian Model of Multiculturalism for Anti-tribalism Education in African Schools:
Focus on Liberia and Sierra Leone**

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| ABSTRACT

The Australian style of multiculturalism could be a remedy for chronic tribal conflicts in Africa. Ethiopia and Sudan are only the latest cases in more than 20 African countries, including Liberia and Sierra Leone, that have burst into civil wars over the last 40 years. Researchers generally view tribalism as a leading suspect in the causes of the conflicts in Africa. The overall goal of this study was to ascertain the understandings of the diaspora communities of Liberia and Sierra Leone in Australia of the relationship between tribalism, conflict and education back home. Fifty (50) participants across Australia were asked: "Drawing from your experience in Australia, how would you reform the educational systems back home to nurture and promote peace and harmony among the various citizens?" The thematic content analysis technique was used to identify patterns across the various interviews. In total, 80% of Liberians and 72% of Sierra Leoneans recommended that Liberia and Sierra Leone should consider the integration of Australian multicultural values and ideals into their school curriculums as a long-term measure towards the birth of a diversity-accommodating generation of citizens back home. This is a novel idea in the difficult battle against tribalism on the African continent. Additionally, there is no previous study of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean diaspora in Australia vis-a-vis peace-building efforts in their home countries. Thus, this study is an original academic undertaking in the scholarly debates on the subject-matter.

| KEYWORDS

Tribalism, conflict in Africa, school curriculum, Australian multiculturalism, Liberia and Sierra Leone, diaspora studies, social cohesion, cultural diversity

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Over the last few decades, Australia has taken in thousands of refugees from conflict-stricken African nations, including Liberia and Sierra Leone which were ravaged by civil wars between 1989 and 2003. Like the case of most civil wars in Africa, tribalism i.e. the unfair treatment of others on grounds of tribal identity, has been identified by researchers as a major factor in the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone (Tikumah, 2024; Moriba and Edwards, 2009; Fakondo, 2008; Dillion, 2008). The overall goal of this study is to ascertain how the diaspora communities of these two countries can harness their experience in Australia to advise policy makers on how to foster peace and stability in the midst of socio-cultural diversity back home through the medium of education. The vast majority of participants (80% of Liberians and 72% of Sierra Leoneans) recommended the integration of the values and ideals of Australian style of Multiculturalism into their school curriculums as a long-term remedy to the problem of inter-tribal animosity. To examine the suitability of the Australian style of Multiculturalism as a national compact for Liberian and Sierra Leonean schools, this study traces the steps in Australia's multicultural journey down through the decades. How did the nation that started off at independence in 1901 as a racially insulated white society end up becoming arguably one of the world's most successful multicultural nations? What are the policy strategies and measures that Australian governments across

the political spectrum have executed over the years to achieve the goal of a multicultural nation? What are the challenges that the multicultural project in Australia has had to contend with? How is multicultural education deployed in the Australian school system? Can a system that was conceived and designed to facilitate peaceful ethnic diversity be adapted to regulate human relations in a milieu of tribal diversity? The conclusion drawn is that considering the inherent similarities between ethnic prejudice and tribalism in terms of the psychological drivers of both kinds of mentalities as well as their practical impacts on individual and inter-group relations, Australian multiculturalism can indeed be appropriated to ameliorate intertribal hostilities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Liberia and Sierra Leone should, therefore consider the integration of Australian multicultural values into their school curriculums as a long-term measure to create multicultural generations of citizens. This could be a helpful pilot project for the rest of Africa.

The paper starts by stating the research question and the methodology employed to collect and analyse the data in an attempt to answer the research question. This is followed by the exposition and interpretation of the data gathered from the field. Next, the paper reviews the relevant literature to ascertain how the views of the research participants converge with, or diverge from, previous research findings. It then draws conclusions based on the conflation of the reports in the literature and the findings from the field.

This study is novel and important in that it is the first to recommend the Australian model of multiculturalism as a potential remedy to the problem of tribalism in Africa. Furthermore, it is the first of its kind, focussing on the diaspora communities of Liberia and Sierra Leone in Australia. Having already offered participants the moral satisfaction of contributing their views on promoting peace, stability and development in their home countries, this study will also present policy makers in Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as stake-holding non-governmental agencies, with a new insight into the post-war societal reconstruction and development efforts in both countries.

2. Research Question

The overall objective of this project is to establish, from the views of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans living in Australia, credible thoughts and actions that can be emulated by the rest of Africa in the difficult battle against tribalism on the continent. Based on this objective, the respondents were asked the following questions:

Drawing from your exposure to Australia, what policy strategies do you suggest for reforming the educational systems back home to nurture and promote peace among the various tribes?

3. Methodology and Data Collection

This is a data-driven qualitative study, with primary data collected from Liberians and Sierra Leoneans living across Australia. The data consists of the interview responses from participants. Thematic content analysis and narrative analysis techniques were used to identify and categorize themes and patterns across the interview records, which were then analysed and synthesized. The study aims to find out how the Liberian and Sierra Leonean individuals in Australia offer educational solutions to the problem of tribalism in their native countries, drawing upon their own exposures in Australia. To generate data for the study, 50 research participants (25 Liberians and 25 Sierra Leoneans) were interviewed. A convenience sample was used: Only those individuals who were available and willing to participate in the research project were interviewed. Table 1 below shows the various locations and number of participants involved.

Table 3.1 Research Participants Across Australia

City	Number of Participants	
	Liberians	Sierra Leoneans
Armidale	1	0
Brisbane	7	14
Canberra	2	4
Melbourne	2	0
Sydney	11	6
Perth	1	0
Uralla	0	1
Wollongong	1	0
Total number of participants	25	25

These participants were contacted through personal interactions at social events, including Church events, annual celebrations in commemoration of events back in the home country, as well as multicultural events. Some respondents facilitated recruitment of friends/relatives for interview. Some 37 (74%) out of 50 respondents were male while the remaining 13 (26%) were female. The median age of participants was 48. Participants in this research had to have lived in Liberia and Sierra Leone and experienced the civil wars (1989-2003) and be able to recall and analyse their experiences i.e. they should be aged 30+ since the wars ended 20 years ago. Participants who were 30 years old in 2022 were at least 9-10 years old by the end of the wars and should therefore be old enough to be able to recall their experiences. Also, to be in a position to draw on their experiences in Australia, participants needed to have been residents in Australia for at least 5 years.

4. Data Exposition and Interpretation

Table 4.1 below delineates the various opinions expressed by Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in Australia about how the school systems back home should be reformed to foster mutual respect and coexistence of all citizens.

Table 4.1 Suggested educational solutions to tribalism and conflict in Liberia and Sierra Leone, by the diaspora in Australia

Suggested solution	Liberian respondents	Sierra Leonean respondents
Australian model of multiculturalism	80% (20/25)	72% (18/25)
South African model of multiculturalism	04% (01/25)	04% (01/25)
Monolingualism	-----	08% (2/25)
Not sure	08% (2/25)	-----

The following few extracts from the interviews will shed some lights on Table 9.1 above. Respondent LBM44-B, asserted:

In Australia the problem is racism, not tribalism. But racism and tribalism are synonyms in different contexts. One is in the context of skin colour while the other is about ancestral lineage. But both of them are the same type of disease and can be cured by the same type of medicine. So, how the Australian governments handles the problem of racism can be used to treat the problem of tribalism in Africa. And being the major formal avenue of socialization, the school should be the cradle for building positive attitudes. The Australian school system is doing its best in this area. And we can learn from them. They have their own problems. No human system can be perfect. But still we must learn from systems that are working better than ours.

Respondent SLM32 resonates with the same idea as Respondent LBM44-B quoted above:

For me, racism and tribalism are of the same generic mindset. And for me, racism is a much bigger problem than tribalism. Because, with racism you have a clear physical distinction – one is white while the other is black or brown. In the case of tribalism, we don't really have such obvious physical distinctions between different tribes. You can't look at us in Sierra Leoneans and tell who is what tribe just by our physical looks. We all have the same colour, the same physical features. It is only when we interact that we get to know, maybe from the language, who is which tribe. So you can see, racism is more practical than tribalism. Tribalism is purely psychological. What I am trying to say is that if the Australians can use certain ideas like multiculturalism to control racism, then it should be even easier for us to use the same ideas to control tribalism in Africa.

Respondent SLM34 echoes the sentiments of Respondent SLM32:

If you look at the situation in Australia, it is more complex than our case in Sierra Leone. The Whites are vast the majority and they are the rulers of the land. Everybody else, apart from the Aborigines and the Torres Strait Islanders, came from other countries in recent decades. And they are different races, different nationalities, different languages – like it is a multiple layer of identity. In Sierra we are all the same race, we're all black; we are all native to the land, and our languages and customs all overlap. If the Australians can use these ideas of multiculturalism to make the white majority to accept and respect the people who are foreign to the land, different races with completely different languages and cultures, then it should be possible, even easier, for us in Africa to also use these ideas to make our own people who are of the same race and similar in languages and customs to embrace each other. What is required is the political will to do it, and nothing else. This is where Australia might be different from Sierra Leone. We lack the political will to unite our people.

Emphasizing that the focus of attitude-reformation efforts should be on the young, Respondent LBF57 says:

... we can borrow from the Australian system of multiculturalism to promote unity in diversity in Liberia. In short, the key lesson from Australia's model is to create a level playing field for everybody in Liberia. Discrimination, segregation should be a thing of the past. If children are raised with the spirit of harmony, the society as whole will become harmonious. The job should start at the school, and should start early.

Respondent LBF59 echoes this opinion:

Everything is learnt. Tribalism is learnt. If adults teach children to become tribalistic, they will grow up to be so. The adult generation is gone, I am not so optimistic about them. But the children can be rescued if serious efforts are made and we are honest ... Fostering a deep sense of tolerance and mutual respect is the slogan in the schools in Australia. Go to any public school and you'll see it. That is what we need in Liberia, and in Africa as a whole.

Respondent LBM53 expressed a similar thought:

The names and symbols of the 16 Liberian tribes should be on display at the entrance to all schools. And these tribes should all be shown as equals, partners for development. If you go to Australian schools you will see billboards displaying the idea of respect, love, tolerance and that sort of stuff, right from the gate. So the children are reminded about tolerance, coexistence first thing in the morning everyday when they arrive at school. That is what we need, not just talking about unity without doing anything practical to establish unity.

Respondent SLM32 agrees with the last three speakers:

Well, they say everything starts from home. Now I have got my daughter, and I will raise my daughter to be equal with everybody in this world, yes. And when my daughter goes to school, I'll expect the teachers to teach her about equality, right? That's what they do in school here. Yes, so, and that's the way things will change in Sierra Leone. You know, because now, let's say, for the older folks, maybe it will be a bit difficult, but if they implement some of these tolerance of cultural diversity ideas in the schools for the younger generations coming up ... yeah, so, I think that'll be the best way.

In the opinion of Respondent SLM62, the journey to a multicultural school environment in Sierra Leone must start, not by drawing up a multicultural school curriculum, but by training and nurturing teachers with multicultural dispositions. He said:

... We can teach the children multi-tribalism i.e. how many different tribes can live together in peace and harmony. But I will not jump to school children. It should start with teacher training. I cannot give out what I do myself not possess. Teachers who are not open-minded, who are tribalistic and hateful of others, because of their own negative childhood orientation, cannot teach children to become different in their attitudes and mentalities. So, let's work to produce multitribal-minded teachers first.

It is interesting to note the use of the word 'multi-tribalism' in SLM62's response. Could that be suggestive of an alternative term to multiculturalism in the case of Africa? Such a suggestion might not go down well with Respondent LBM54-B:

Tribal differences, including language differences, should be discouraged in our schools. Even the word 'tribe' should be removed from our school books. We can use the word 'culture' instead: 'multicultural', instead of multitribal; 'cultural diversity', instead of tribal diversity; 'cultural identity', instead of tribal identity; and so on. Because that word 'tribe' has been demonized so much, starting from colonial stereotyping. Let's abandon that word 'tribe', it is a demon, an evil word. Our children should be taught a different word, not tribe...

Respondent LBF58 echoed the view expressed by SLM62 that the task should begin with teacher-training. However, in her own opinion, such a calibre of teachers can only be trained abroad: "They need to bring people to places like Australia to train and go back and teach other people. We call it train the trainer. They should come and learn how diversity is managed here." Unfortunately, LBF58 sounds rather pessimistic, for in her imagination, even the very process of selecting the potential trainers might be tribalized: "... the leaders are not going to listen. But even if they listen, they will just pick a few people from among themselves and bring them here and they will go back and continue the status quo. Some of them will not even go back."

Respondent LBM48-B thinks of a way to avoid tribalistic teachers: The diaspora-born generations can be repatriated to staff the schools with their multicultural dispositions:

Our children are more open-minded than we are, because of the school system here, the environment of multicultural tolerance in which they have grown up. We should be thinking of facilitating how these children can take their experience back to Africa one day and help to improve our school system over there.

Respondent SLM44 agrees with LBM48-B above. For him, it is not only the schools the diaspora must take control of, but also the political platform:

But for that to happen, we those in the diaspora will need to go back home with our money, experience and passion. We need to get into political positions with our exposure and set up rules and regulations or policies to bring about change.

Respondent LBF36 does not have that much hope in the diaspora. In her opinion the diaspora communities are not detribalized enough for the task of detribalizing the populations back home:

... Even here, I feel like in our community there is a bit of tribalism going on here too. They don't really say much about it, it is black and white, you can see it ... We are not here to fight each other, or which tribe is better than which tribe ...

Some respondents stressed the view that even though schools should be the hub of multiculturalization, it will be counterproductive to ignore the adult populations in any multicultural project. SLM42B says: "... Treat everyone with equality, because that's what's affecting us in Africa. Not only the children should be taught at school, but also, the people at home. If you only teach the children at school but not the adults at home, it will not work." Respondent SLM67 agrees: "... it is all about teamwork and public enlightenment. Parents, community leaders and others must be involved as well. That is what they do in Australia." Respondent SLM46 emphasized multicultural festivals while supporting this idea of 'teamwork': "Australians do not only institutionalize multiculturalism, but they also celebrate it. You have various multicultural festivals taking place around the country every year. We don't have similar celebrations in Sierra Leone." LBM55B expressed a similar view about Liberia

Without actually suggesting any clear alternative, Respondent LBM51 vehemently rebuffed the idea of copying Australian multiculturalism should not be an option for Liberia as there is no such thing as multiculturalism in Australia for a start:

... When you arrive in Australia, they tell you this is a multicultural nation. But it is all cosmetic, pure cosmetic! Because the Law of the land is the same for everybody, it is not culturally flexible. For example, back in Africa we are allowed to spank our children when they are misbehaving ... Here we can't do that. That is multiculturalism? In Liberia we're allowed to get several wives. We can't do that here. That is Multiculturalism? Where is my culture within the equation? You're forced to go school, and you have to follow a certain Law. There is no special privilege given to migrants. In Africa our children stay with us until maturity. But over here at sixteen years they write appeal letters against us, and the government will say, 'We don't want to deal with you anymore; we will now be dealing with your daughter directly'. That made the children to become arrogant, they have no more respect for their parents; they will say, 'I am a man myself; I don't have to listen to my parent anymore'. They are nurturing the behavior of our children against us. There is no multiculturalism anywhere. How can you convince me about it? I don't know how to describe multiculturalism. It is not working; it is all cosmetic!

Respondent LBM54-B agrees with this sentiment: "As a person who grew up in Africa I have very serious moral problems with the Australian school system. I think the system goes too far in terms of regulating the relationship between parents and their children."

For Respondent SLM48, the idea of multiculturalism should not be considered for Africa. African nations should rather be thinking of how to eradicate their cacophony of dialects and become monolingual and monocultural. Respondent SLM70 agrees with this opinion, even if that entails some kind of planned tribal extinction:

... One language is the most important uniting factor. Thank God in Sierra Leone we have the Krio language, which almost everybody in the country speaks, both educated and non-educated. We can use that language as a rallying point of national unity. One language will naturally erase all tribal differences. According to what people say, there used to be certain tribes in Sierra Leone that no longer exist because their languages died. Like there was some tribe called vai. It is because of the monopoly of the English language you don't see conflicts among the different people living in Australia.

Well, one would say that the idea of a deliberate scheme of language extinction would not only be met with fury from linguists and anthropologist, but also, is too far-fetched and impracticable in the foreseeable future to worth any serious attention at the moment.

In the opinion of Respondent SLF47, Sierra Leone should consider the path of South Africa and “learn from the idea of rainbow nation” rather than looking up to the Australian form of multiculturalism. Respondent LBF39 thinks that Liberia should do the same:

If you look at other places like South Africa where the minority was in power and now it is the majority. May be that is closer. But I don't think you can compare Liberia and Australia. These are too far apart, far more complicated.

I now will explore the literature to examine the suitability of both the South African and the Australian models of multiculturalism for Liberia and Sierra Leone as recommended by the the research participants.

5. Literature Review

5.1 The South African Model

With regards to the suggestion of the South African model for diversity management in Liberia and Sierra Leone, one may begin by asking whether that has actually worked for South Africa itself in terms of creating credible levels of interracial/interethnic tolerance and harmony within the general population in that country. South Africa is famous for its apartheid system that formally ran from 1948 to 1994, with the White minority ruling over the Black majority who were subjected to the most dehumanizing policy of socio-economic and political segregation and depravity. In an attempt to recognize the cultural diversity of South Africa, the post-apartheid government gave official recognition to 12 languages, highlighting the new South Africa's appellation as the “Rainbow Nation”. However, the crucial question is whether official recognition of cultural diversity ever resulted in any meaningful degree of socio-economic and political equity for all cultures. Writing under the topic “Australian Multiculturalism: Lessons for South Africa?”, Patrick McAllister (1996) made this juxtaposition right from the start of the new South Africa:

The current metaphor for South African society is that of the ‘rainbow nation’. This is appropriate for a post-apartheid society - the rainbow consists of a variety of colours but they are blurred: as a colleague put it, ‘it’s a smudge’ - each shades into the next, none is completely distinct, and each is essential to the composition of the whole. The rainbow cannot exist without each of the colours, none of the colours or strands is dominant over the others. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, immediately conveys the idea of ‘many cultures’, each distinct from the other, and this could imply boundaries rather than continuities, logically followed by separateness and distinctiveness. This is certainly the case in Australia where, if one attends a multicultural festival, one is likely to find Greeks doing Greek folk dances and selling Greek food, Japanese demonstrating Sushi, Chinese doing a dragon dance, Scots playing bagpipes and so on (McAllister, 1996, p. 77).

Some analysts are of the view that the situation in South Africa is better described as cultural divisionism rather than multiculturalism (Bekker and Leilde, 2003). In a study entitled “Is Multiculturalism a Workable Policy in South Africa?”, Simon Bekker and Anne Leildé (2003) sought to answer the question as to whether post-apartheid South Africa has developed an effective multicultural policy, and whether the reduction in racially-related violence in that country is a dividend of such a policy. The new free South Africa in 1996 adopted a constitution that replaced the apartheid era parliamentary sovereignty with a constitutional sovereignty whereby the court was now able to deliver justice without any overriding interference from the executive arm of government as per the late apartheid era. Furthermore, the power of governance has been devolved to make provincial governments flexible and close to the people in terms of development projects as well as ethnic, linguistic and cultural understanding and inclusivity. These constitutional measures have forced racial and ethnic elites into mutual accommodation and equality of access to justice and resources. However, the new order of mutual accommodation is the privilege of the elite. The underclass of the South African population has not benefitted from these reform policies. Having been satisfied by the privileged position/status they enjoy under the new order, the elite have abandoned their former role of mobilizing and galvanizing advocacy and clamour along racial/ethnic lines as they are no longer in need of such divisive rhetoric and confrontation in pursuit of their own personal goals. Feeling alienated from the system, and having no more elite to advocate for them and lead them in racially/ethnically biased agitations for their wellbeing, the underclass has coiled into the shell of the underworld seeking expression in violent multiethnic criminal gangs. As such, while multiculturalism might be described as a success for the elite in South Africa, “For the South African underclass, multiculturalism appears to be an issue of no

consequence" (Bekker and Leildé, 2003, p. 131). Bekker and Leildé, (2003, p. 133) thus drew the grim conclusion that the apparent state of harmony perceived in South Africa is superficial – that country is actually sitting on a timebomb:

This analysis points to a more fundamental challenge facing the deeply divided society that persists in the country. The nature of elite accommodation in the society appears to exclude the underclass who, in reaction, are developing strategies of survival beyond civil society, strategies based upon sources of local sociality as well as upon anti-social behaviour. In this sense, criminal violence is a symptom of division rather than the challenge itself. The scope of multiculturalism as policy accordingly needs to embrace underclass institutions by offering them both material havens of survival and cultural badges of honour within, rather than without, emergent civil society (Bekker and Leildé, 2003, p. 133).

Recent research supports Bekker and Leildé's grim conclusions in the above quotation, highlighting the ever-widening socio-cultural disparities in the South African society, especially between the elite and the common people (Masuku, 2023). In the most recent expression of mass discontent and disillusionment with the South African system, the African National Congress (ANC) lost its parliamentary absolute majority in the July 2024 general elections for the first time since the end of apartheid 30 years ago. What is most grim about the turn of events is that ANC was forced to form a coalition government with the white-led Democratic Alliance (DA) which is widely regarded as a remnant of the apartheid regime. Is South Africa slowly moving back into apartheid?

Nevertheless, in spite of it being an isolated opinion (of only 4% of respondents), coupled with the perceptions that it has not been a success story even for South Africa itself, the South African model for Liberia and Sierra Leone might be considered for further exploration in a future study.

5.2 The Australian Model of Multiculturalism

5.2.1 The evolution of Australian multiculturalism: Challenges and resilience

At the dawn of Independence in 1901, the Australian Government promulgated the 'Immigration Restriction Act. This Act, popularly known as the 'White Australia Policy', aimed at excluding all non-European Whites from migrating to Australia. However, due to a number of political and economic imperatives, the White Australia policy was abolished in 1975 and replaced with the policy of multiculturalism under the Labour government of Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. Some subsequent governments attempted to build upon the foundation stones laid by the Whitlam administration. Others, notably the conservative government of Prime Minister John Howard (1996-2007), actively opposed the idea of cultivating cultural diversity. A degree of opposition to multiculturalism in Australia by sections of the public and the political class has never vanished. The most unapologetic antagonist of multiculturalism in Australian politics has been Pauline Hanson, a fish-and-chips shop proprietor from Queensland. In 1997, Hanson founded the One Nation, a right-wing political party with an anti-multiculturalist manifesto. In her maiden speech to Parliament, Hanson declared:

... I and most Australians want our immigration policy radically reviewed and that of multiculturalism abolished. I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians ... They have their own culture and religion, form ghettos and do not assimilate ... A truly multicultural country can never be strong or united. The world is full of failed and tragic examples, ranging from Ireland to Bosnia to Africa and, closer to home, Papua New Guinea. America and Great Britain are currently paying the price.

Notwithstanding stiff opposition and setbacks, multiculturalism has remained resilient in Australia's socio-economic and political arenas. Multiculturalism has never built a utopia for all immigrants in Australia. Nevertheless, research by the Scanlon Foundation (2016) reported that, in spite of shortcomings and challenges, the vast majority (83-86%) of Australians continued to view multiculturalism as a successful national compact. Advocates point to their belief that multiculturalism has contributed to Australia's economic development and, by allowing migrants to practice their culture, has promoted unity, peace and patriotism by encouraging migrants' integration into mainstream society. They believe also that cultural diversity encourages beneficial open-mindedness. Furthermore, Australian multiculturalism has a bright future since the Scanlon Foundation report shows that multiculturalism is particularly popular with the younger generations, with 91 percent of Australia's youth supporting.

5.2.2 The role of schools in the development of multiculturalism in Australia

It was Al Grassby, Prime Minister Whitlam's Immigration Minister, who introduced the term 'multiculturalism' into the policy vocabulary of the Australian government. Speaking at a symposium in Melbourne on 11 August 1973, under the title 'A Multicultural society for the future', Grassby argued that for a peaceful, mutually beneficial co-existence, Australians, like any

other people, need a realistic understanding of who they are as a people. This in turn entails asking themselves frank questions about their past, present and future. An attempt by one group to deny others their physical or spiritual existence eventually leads to the denial of one's own existence. The mere singing out of words of oneness and national unity cannot bring about a real sense of cohesion and cooperation among the people. There must be in place a deliberate government policy, with a firm timeline for goal-attainment, within the sublime parameters of justice, law and order. In the context of this study, three main points in Grassby's speech are noteworthy: First, Grassby underscored the important role schools have to play in fostering the multicultural order he envisaged:

Schools in migrant areas are also charged with failure to provide a curriculum that is culturally and linguistically relevant to the needs of migrant children. A recent critic characterised these schools as the 'archetypal assimilationist agency'. This could be a serious criticism in a community which is moving away from such a goal towards greater freedom of self-determination (p. 8).

Second, Grassby had discovered his inspiration for multiculturalism during an official tour of Canada and the United States in 1973 and he noted that the Canadian experience could be adapted to suit the unique socio-cultural demographics and political peculiarities of Australia: "Naturally, we cannot assume that North American experience will be directly relevant to the future interaction of the groups composing Australian society. But neither can we wait until the year 2,000 to establish what patterns are likely to develop." (p. 3). Third, Grassby noted that the road towards multiculturalization was not going to be one without bumps and ramps; it was going to be complex and winding. "Effective ameliorative measures will not be easy to conceive nor implement", he stressed, but there would be a way if there was a will (p. 9).

Next, I will look at how the Australian school curriculum deals with multicultural education.

5.2.3 Multiculturalism in the Australian school curriculum

Generally, curriculum development and implementation are the responsibilities of various state governments. Thus, the nature and direction of multicultural education in school curriculum varies across the various states. For reasons of limited space, only the two most populous and culturally diverse states, New South Wales and Victoria, are selected for analysis here.

5.2.3.1 The State of Victoria

The State of Victoria is among the most culturally diverse regions in Australia. The following passage from the State's education website captures the high degree of cultural diversity of its population as well as the crucial role schools play in the healthy management of that diversity.

Victoria is known for its multiculturalism. Victorian citizens come from more than 200 countries, speak 260 languages and follow 135 different faiths. Cultural diversity is one of Victoria's greatest assets.

Schools play a critical role in strengthening multicultural inclusion in our community by providing an environment where acceptance of diversity, knowledge of other cultures and an understanding of global and local issues can be developed ... The Intercultural Capability Curriculum enables students to explore their own and others' cultural practices and cultural diversity in Australian society ... The curriculum promotes mutual respect and social cohesion and helps students to develop vital skills for living and working in a multicultural world (Schools Victoria 2024: 1).

Recognizing that racism is the biggest challenge to the healthy maintenance of this diversity, the curriculum statement declares a zero tolerance for racism in Victorian schools while acknowledging that racism does exist and must be fought (Schools Victoria 2024: 1). It further highlights the "detrimental impacts" of racism on "mental health" and societal cohesion. Furthermore, the statement notes the link between racist orientation at home and in the mainstream community and racist attitudes in school environments and hence, the need to extend the education against racism to parents and the wider community. School management, however, has a special role to play "in preventing, identifying and responding to incidents of racism" and should therefore take "a proactive approach" to "ensure that all students are respected, valued and treated equally."

The curriculum then stipulates certain concrete measures, "a range of resources and programs" to assist schools towards the realization of the goals of multicultural education. These measures include the following:

Human rights education: Students are to be oriented from the earliest stage possible that human rights are universal, and thus the concept of human rights does not recognize racial, cultural, religious or other differences.

A. *Multicultural Inclusion:* Schools are required to work to inculcate a multicultural spirit “by providing an environment where acceptance of diversity, knowledge of other cultures and an understanding of global and local issues can be developed.”

The Student Leaders for Multicultural Inclusion (SLMI): Student leaders are selected from diverse cultural backgrounds to form an action group for the promotion of multicultural inclusion in school environments.

Annual events – celebrating cultural diversity: Schools are not only required to engage with issues of multicultural inclusion through the school curriculum, but also, they are expected to interact proactively with the wider community through extra-curricular activities and local events” aimed at fostering inter-group understanding and harmony. Such activities and events may include the following:

- sharing books and stories
- organising a film screening
- holding school assemblies and concerts celebrating the cultural diversity of the local community
- organising school poetry or essay competition
- exhibitions of student artwork.

Furthermore, the following key dates are to be marked on the school calendar, with relevant programs of celebration of multiculturalism planned:

- **Cultural Diversity Week:** held in March each year, brings Victorians together to recognise the benefits of diversity and to showcase the many cultures that have shaped our Victorian identity.
- **Harmony Day** is held on 21 March each year and celebrates Australia’s cultural diversity. Coincides with Cultural Diversity Week.
- **International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** is held on 21 March each year. It coincides with Cultural Diversity Week.
- **Refugee Week** is held in June each year. The week raises awareness about the issues affecting refugee communities and celebrates the positive contributions made by people from refugee backgrounds to Australian society.
- **World Refugee Day** is held on 20 June each year and coincides with Refugee Week.
- **Human Rights Day** is held on 10 December each year and commemorates the day in 1948 that the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

To ensure that intentions are not at variance with practice, the state government, through its ministry of education, also puts in place effective supervision, monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms throughout the schools.

Without repeating or restating similar curricular contents and policy measures already outlined above, there are also some useful elements.

5.2.3.2 NSW Government Multicultural Education Policy

The State Government’s website, *Multicultural NSW*, opens by reaffirming that multiculturalism must necessarily be a feature of the state of NSW and hence the need for the state government to institute effective policies for cultural inclusivity and healthy inter-cultural exchange cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, the state must maximize the use of school resources to foster inter-cultural harmony among its diverse residents.

A striking feature of NSW’s multicultural curriculum is the “Multicultural Perspectives Public Speaking Competition”, which aims to foster multicultural beliefs and ideals at the grassroots level. This program brings together primary school years 3-6 students to explore “ideas of multiculturalism in Australia” through competitive public-speaking avenues (The Arts Unit–NSW Govt 2023: 1). This competition has been running for 30 years, attracting about 2000 participants from primary schools across the state every year.

Thus, one can see that the school system is a major incubator for multicultural inclusion, tolerance and acceptance in Australia. This helps to develop a nation of peaceful citizens with a culture of mutual respect, a state of unity in diversity, tolerance in disagreement.

The most important question at this juncture is, in their efforts to attain the goal of nurturing peaceful citizens in a culture of mutual respect, tolerance and peaceful co-existence in the face of tribal diversity, do Liberian and Sierra Leonean schools have any leaf to borrow from the Australian multicultural school curriculum? As evidence from the interviews quoted above, the diaspora communities in Australia think that, yes, the schools in Liberia and Sierra Leone have lessons to learn from their Australian counterparts.

6. How suitable transfer to Liberia and Sierra Leone is the Australian model of multiculturalism?

The opinions of the research participants raise two questions to start with. One, is racism the main challenge to the multicultural project in Australia? Two, are racism and tribalism 'synonyms in different contexts' so that a remedy for one may serve as a remedy for the other as well? To the first question, the Australian government's multicultural policy documents as well as the literature reviewed above all indicate that, yes, the fight against racism is at the heart of the quest to foster multicultural order in Australia. Indeed, the main public agency the Australian government instituted for the purposes of public enlightenment, advocating, monitoring and evaluating the progress of multiculturalism in the country is the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), and one of the key foci of the AHRC is the National Anti-Racism Strategy for Australia (NARSA). In short, the fact that the fight against racism is a top priority for stakeholders in their quest for the consolidation of multiculturalism in Australia is clear.

With regard to the second question, as to whether racism and tribalism are synonyms in effect, my first thought was to go online with the topic 'Differences and similarities between racism and tribalism.' The following two passages are among the responses I got from my search:

(1)

"Tribalism is the attitude and practice of harbouring such a strong feeling of loyalty or bonds to one's tribe that one excludes or even demonizes those 'others' who do not belong to that group" (Nothwehr, 2008, p. 5). tribalism thus prompts one to have a positive attitude towards those who are connected to him or her through kinship, family and clan, and it de facto (directly or indirectly) alienates one from people of other tribes who are not related to him or her by blood, kinship, family or clan ... Racism is defined as "a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capabilities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race" (Merriam-Webster, 2014). this is usually coupled with the belief that the superior race has a right to dominion over others. Racism thus insinuates that all human beings do not necessarily have the same intrinsic value (Sanou 2015: 2).

(2)

Tribalism is a natural "us and them" outlook. Basically, you're more loyal towards and comfortable with people of your own race than with people of other races. This is excusable because you live in your own skin and naturally want to protect yourself and nobody is in a better position to understand your situation than you yourself. Racism is where tribalism evolves into intolerance of other races, based solely on racial differences (Baylis 2021: 1).

One sees from the first quote that both tribalism and racism emanate from one's belief in the superiority of one's own kind. The effects of both racism and tribalism manifest in the form of contempt for others. Similarly, the second passage sees racism merely as a category (perhaps a more extreme) form of tribalism. Reacting to government sanctions and public outrage over an incident of Chinese expatriates' racist behaviour towards Kenyan citizens, Demas Kiprono (2020: 1), a columnist in the *Nation* newspaper, expressed his disgust at the double standards of his fellow Kenyans. Writing under the heading 'Why tribalism and racism are just two sides of the same coin', Kiprono wonders: "Why does racism incense us so much whilst tribalism is treated like it is the way of life in Kenya? What is the difference between racism and tribalism ... Is the outrage justified or hypocritical?" Kiprono added: "Racism is prejudice, belief, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior." And tribalism operates on a similar appalling premise of bigotry.

To I determine the plausibility of adapting the Australian anti-racism strategy for combatting tribalism in Africa, I simply substituted the word 'tribalism' for the word 'racism' in the Australian Human Rights Commission's definition of racism (2012: 3) and found a clear pattern of consistency and coherence.

What is tribalism?

Tribalism can take many forms, such as jokes or comments that cause offence or hurt, sometimes unintentionally; name-calling or verbal abuse; harassment or intimidation, or commentary in the media or online that inflames hostility towards certain groups. At its most serious, tribalism can result in acts of physical abuse and violence. Tribalism can directly or indirectly exclude people from accessing services or participating in employment, education, sport and social activities. It can also occur at a systemic or institutional level through policies, conditions or practices that disadvantage certain groups. It often manifests through unconscious bias or prejudice. On a structural level, tribalism serves to perpetuate inequalities in access to power, resources and opportunities across tribal and ethnic groups. The belief that a particular tribe or ethnicity is inferior or superior to others is sometimes used to justify such inequalities.

This passage, after replacing the word racism with tribalism, makes full sense. There is no phrase or sentence in it that can be said to be inconsistent with, or uncharacteristic of, tribalism as defined by Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in Australia. There is not a single word or phrase in this passage that is implausible, after replacing the word racism with tribalism. Tribalism and racism share the commonalities of ethnic bigotry, self-glory, and contempt. Beliefs of racial superiority inspire discrimination, vilification and denial of equal opportunities in governance and cultural expression to other people, and so exactly do beliefs in tribal superiority. As such, any weapon that is capable of combatting racial bigotry should have the potential to combat tribal bigotry as well. Thus, the case of racism in Australia reasonably speaks to the case of tribalism in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the case of racism in Australia reasonably speaks to the case of tribalism in Africa. Having experienced both tribalism and racism, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans living in Australia are in a position to determine the appropriateness of the anti-racism measures in Australia for combatting tribalism in their homelands. It may be true that the settings in Australia and Liberia/Sierra Leone are not quite the same i.e. racism is the challenge in the former while tribalism is at the centre-stage in the latter. Nevertheless, considering the inherent similarities between racism and tribalism in terms of their psychological drivers, as well as their excruciating impacts on individual and inter-group relations in society, and inasmuch as we are thinking of adaption rather than simple adoption of policies, the Australian model of multiculturalism can be appropriated to ameliorate intertribal hostilities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The least that can be said is, I believe, 'There is no harm in trying!' Therefore, schools in Liberia and Sierra Leone should consider the integration of the ideals and values of the Australian model of multiculturalism into their curriculums for the purpose of combatting tribalism and fostering community cohesion and socio-cultural harmony. That aside, beyond the humanitarian gesture of taking in refugees from conflict nations in Africa, Australian authorities could help to prevent the conflicts that produce refugees by using their experience with the successful execution of multicultural policies over the decades to establish a multilateral project that would help African nations to foster the atmosphere of unity in diversity for their multitribal citizens.

8. Limitations of the study

This study used Snowball sampling and Convenience sampling, which are non-probability techniques that make it difficult for sampling error to be determined. Furthermore, these techniques may not really guarantee satisfactory level of representativeness of the research population. Besides the sampling imperfection, I have never physically been in Liberia or Sierra Leone. Neither do I at the present have any personal links or contacts in these two countries. This lack of firsthand experience on the ground in these countries implies a limitation on my access to vital information as well as my perception and understanding of issues under review. Nevertheless, considering the avid attention given to minor details and the critical approach maintained through the process of analysis of the data, it is my sincere belief that, in spite of the limitations observed, the findings of this research are credible enough to stand the test of research integrity.

9. Recommendations for Further Research

Bilateral cooperation between the Australian government and the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone will be crucial to the process of policy adaption in this case. It would be ideal for educational experts in Liberia and Sierra Leone to come and study closely the nature of the multicultural project in Australia, both in theory and practice, especially the multicultural curriculum and its implementation. Further studies on the topic could focus on how this kind of bilateral cooperation might be realized.

Declarations of interest: I declare that there is no conflict of interest involved with this publication

Ethics Clearance and Data Accessibility

This study, its methodology, process of recruitment and data collection received ethics clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of New England (UNE), Armidale NSW, with Approval ID Number HE22-207, and the data is available on UNE Cloud at: <https://hdl.handle.net/1959.11/60332>

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Biography

Issah Hassan Tikumah: Originally from Ghana, Issah Tikumah has previously undertaken research work conducting interviews with community leaders, schoolteachers and administrators in Colleges of Education in Northern Nigeria. He has taught at Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria; The University of Cape Verde; and Jean-Piaget University in Cape Verde. Tikumah has a number of books - including novels and essays - to his credit. His latest publications include *Sociological Thinking as an Educational Antidote to Tribalism in Africa* (2024) – journal article; *The Colonial Creation of Tribalism in Africa (?)* (2023) - journal article; *Africanism: Commonsense for Beginners* (2017), which compares Ghana with Australia from a socio-cultural perspective; *Refugees' Rebellion* (2015), a comedy based on his experiences in a refugee camp; and *Baptism of Orphanhood* (2013), an autobiography. For his critical writings, he was expelled from Nigeria in 2010. Tikumah has received several international scholarly nominations, including: ICORN Guest-Writer (2012); and Elsbeth-Wolffheim Scholar (2013).