Tribalism in Liberia, Greed in Sierra Leone: Diagnoses of conflict drivers from the diaspora in Australia

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Abstract

Liberia and Sierra Leone continue to grapple with the menacing impacts of their brutal civil wars (1989-2003). The goal of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of Liberian and Sierra Leonean diaspora communities in Australia with reference to the relationship between tribalism and conflict. Thematic content and narrative analysis techniques were used to identify and categorise patterns of responses across interviews. The major argument is that while Liberians and Sierra Leoneans differ in attributing the causes of their civil wars - with Liberians pointing to tribalism (80%) and Sierra Leoneans to greed of state actors (76%) - both communities converge on the crucial role of education in promoting patriotism and national identity. The study's findings reveal that refocusing educational systems on inculcating patriotism is essential for peace and development in both countries. The study concludes that curriculum reform, teacher training, and leadership orientation are potential solutions to foster patriotism and reduce identity conflict, and recommends that these measures be treated as a peace-and-development imperative.

Keywords: tribalism and conflict, national identity, greed and grievance, diaspora, Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in Australia.

Introduction

Liberia (1989-2003) and Sierra Leone (1991-2002) are both nations rebuilding after devastating civil wars. Consistent with patterns observed in many African conflicts, research has highlighted tribalism – the discriminatory treatment of individuals based on their tribal identity – as a significant contributor to the civil wars in both Liberia and Sierra Leone (Zenna, 2023; Osman, 2022; Moriba & Edwards, 2009; Fakondo, 2008; Dillion, 2007)**.** The objective of this paper is to explore how Liberian and Sierra Leonean diaspora communities in Australia perceive the interplay between tribalism and conflict in their countries of origin. It investigates how historical tensions between the various socio-cultural groups in these two countries created the socio-political and economic circumstances that

nurtured the environment for the civil wars. It is hoped that, benefitting from their exposure to a peaceful and stable Australia, these Liberians and Sierra Leoneans can share their insights and experiences as to what policy measures might be instituted for conflict mitigation and fostering harmony back home.

This paper begins with a concise formulation of the research question and methodology, outlining the approach used to collect and analyse data, followed by the presentation and interpretation of the empirical findings from the field. A comprehensive review of relevant literature contextualizes participant insights against established research findings. Finally, the paper synthesises the literary and empirical findings to yield actionable conclusions and recommendations for future research. This study marks a pioneering effort as the first to focus exclusively on the Liberian and Sierra Leonean diaspora communities in Australia vis-à-vis the post-conflict reconstruction process back home. The researcher's personal experience interacting with Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees in a Nigerian refugee camp in 1998 sparked interest in exploring the perspectives of these communities. This study is relevant to give participants the moral satisfaction of making an intellectual contribution to the post-conflict reconstruction, as much as it will inform policymakers, NGOs, and stakeholders of innovative approaches to the reconstruction and development efforts.

Research Question
The goal of this study was to ascertain the perceptions of Liberians and Sierra Leoneans living in Australia of the relationship between tribalism and conflict back home. Thus, the respondents were asked the following question:
To what extent, if at all, is tribalism perceived to be a major cause of conflict in your country?

Methodology and Data Collection
The dataset for this qualitative study comprises interview responses from Liberian and Sierra Leonean individuals residing across Australia. A convenience sampling method was employed, with 25 Liberians and 25 Sierra Leoneans interviewed. Table 1 below outlines the locations and number of participants involved. Thematic content analysis and narrative analysis techniques were utilised to identify, categorise, and synthesize themes and patterns within the interview responses.

Table 1:   **Research Participants Across Australian Cities**

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 encounters at social and Church events, annual celebrations commemorating events back home, as well as multicultural events in Australia. Some respondents facilitated the recruitment of friends and relatives for the interview through a snowball sampling approach, where existing participants helped identify and connect the researcher with additional potential participants. Participants 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 years and above since the wars ended 20 years ago. Participants who were 30 years old in 2022 were at least 9-10 years old by the war's end and should therefore be old enough to be able to recall their experiences. They should also be able to draw on their experiences as residents in Australia for at least 5 years.

Liberia
1.1 Data exposition and interpretation: National identity vs tribal identity in Liberia

Some 80% of the Liberian respondents believe that conflict between national identity and tribal identity is responsible for Liberia's socio-economic and political woes. Historical intertribal animosities, tribal loyalty superseding national loyalty, lack of patriotic leadership and exploitation of tribal differences by politicians were the main sub-themes. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of responses per sub-theme.

Table 2 – Responses on national identity vs tribal identity in Liberia

Theme	No of respondents (out 25)	Percentage
Historical intertribal animosities	22	84%
Tribal loyalty supersedes national loyalty	18	72%
Lack of patriotic leadership	22	88%
Politicians exploit tribal differences	18	72%
Average	**20**	**80%**

The table shows the percentage breakdown of interview responses from 25 participants on national identity vs tribal identity in Liberia. Key findings include: 88% cited lack of patriotic leadership as an issue; 84% mentioned historical intertribal animosities; 72% stated tribal loyalty supersedes national loyalty and politicians exploit tribal differences. The average response rate was 80%. Below are a few illustrative quotations from the interviews. Respondent LBM55-A lays out the bare bones of the point comprehensively in the following passage: "Tribalism became a factor because those who prosecuted the war used tribes against other tribes; the leadership of the various armed factions used young people against each other by exploiting their tribes. For example, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, when they entered Liberia, instead of targeting the government, they were targeting certain ethnic groups. The Mandingo were victims of that. Also, the then Administration of Samuel Doe used ethnicity to galvanize support within his ethnic group the Krahn, to mobilise them against other ethnic groups. The Gio and the Mano were victims of that. Then, the Gio and the Mano also mobilize themselves against the Krahn and the Mandingo, because the Mandingo were seen to be supporting the Krahn-led Administration. That is why the Mandingo, the Krahn, the Gio and the Mano were more active in the conflict than other ethnic groups. Later on, the Mandingo and the Lorma rose against each other in a revival of their historical ethnic rivalry in the north of Liberia, which is Lofa County. The Mandingo in their resistance to the Gio and Mano organized their armed faction, The United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), headed by Alhaji G.V. Kromah. The Lorma then set up their ethnic armed faction called Lorma Defence Force (LDF), which later changed to Lofa Defence Force. So, the whole war game became like a maze of tribal networks. There was no more Liberia. Only tribal identity mattered; national identity was completely erased, dead, though each group tried to have the word Liberia in their name as a disingenuous way of seeking legitimacy."

Respondent LBM45 corroborated Respondent LBM55-A opinion:

The two main tribes purposely targeted by the rebels were: The Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups. The Krahns were hunted because they were in power, headed by the mutilated President Samuel K. Doe. The Mandingos were killed because they belonged to a tribe which the rest of the country perceived to be foreigners originating from Guinea and not citizens of Liberia. Moreover, the Mandingos were perceived to have been in ethnic alliance with Krahn. The fact that the Mandingos were proficient in business and contributed immensely to the Liberian economy did not count. What counted was the perception that the Mandingos were not one of the original tribes of Liberia. The tribe comes first; the nation comes second or somewhere down the line.

Often in Africa everyone complains about the tribalism of the other groups but not about the tribalism of their tribe. Thus, for example, while the Mandingos were complaining about the tribalism of other groups in Liberia, those same tribes were pointing accusing fingers at the Mandingos. One can see this from Respondent LBF50's quote:

They're just few tribes who practice tribalism in Liberia: Mandingo, Krhan, Gio and Mano. Even here in Australia, we came from long a distance and yet we are divided on tribal lines. The Mandingo people don't want to mingle with *typical* Liberians. (Italics author's emphasis)

The juxtaposition Mandingos vs the 'typical Liberian' in Respondent LBF50's answer is significant. For Respondent LBF50, Mandingos are not (typical) Liberians. Perhaps I should have asked this respondent to explain what she meant by 'typical' Liberian. The suggestion that Mandingos are not typical Liberians seems to vindicate Respondent LBM50's lamentation that the misery of the civil war did little to improve the negative mindsets of pre-war times in most Liberians. He said: "Tribalism has been one of the biggest sicknesses in Liberia… Tribalism is worse now than it ever was before the war. If you take your survey to Liberia even today, some Liberians will tell you that other tribes (i.e. Mandingos, the Fulas) in the country are not Liberians. Minority tribes in certain counties are having their lands seized by the domineering tribes. Even now as I talk to you, in my county, the Grebo people seized the land of some Mandingo people. Imagine that someone has never known any country besides Liberia - not even his parents or grandparents ever did, because they were all born in Liberia – and yet you tell

that person that he is not a Liberian and that he should go back to his country, what do you expect him to do? The war should have taught us that if we want to eliminate some people, we will only end up destroying everybody else, including ourselves. We all belong to the land, Liberia. Let us all be Liberians, not Mandingos, Grebo, Kru, Vai or that sort of stuff."

Suggesting a way forward, Respondent LBM55-A said:
Education is the way out. Australian leaders see themselves as Australians, not as member of this or that ethnic group. But even when they identify with a particular group, that only comes after the national identity. Australia is a multiethnic country. The current Foreign Minister, Penny Wong, for instance, is a Malaysian-born Chinese. But she is not in the government working for ethnic Chinese interests in this country. Her focus is on the nation as a whole. It is all due to the nature of the orientation that their educational system gives them.

Respondent LBF57% supports this view:
People become what their educational system is designed to make them become. A communist education system grooms citizens to have communist sentiments and mentalities. A democratic school system produces democratic-minded citizens. If the school system in Liberia is refocussed on producing patriotic citizens who will place national interest above ethnic considerations, it is going to work out well.

Respondent LBM45 agrees with the above opinions, but cautioned that change may not occur overnight: "Australia, and other Western countries, where people prioritise national ideology above all considerations, did not start from where they are. It is all a culmination of a long educational process."

These narratives expose the negative impacts of tribalism on societal cohesion, political stability and economic development in Liberia, proposing education as a crucial factor in fostering national identity and mitigating ethnic divisions in the country. Highlighting the importance of prioritising national interest over ethnic considerations, respondents see Australia as a success story of a multiethnic nation that can be emulated by Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It is important to note that these respondents were either themselves direct victims of the conflict or were close relatives of direct victims. In this case, emotional trauma and embitterment may undermine objectivity. Emotionality may lead to

oversimplification of complex conflict dynamics as well as generalisation of specific personal experiences, such as blaming it all on tribalism and overlooking the possibility that tribalism itself might have been instrumentalised by more personal economic and political interests. Respondent LMB55-A seemed to acknowledge this intersectionality of conflict factors by his opening sentence i.e. "Tribalism became a factor because …" This sentence tacitly suggests that tribalism did not pull the trigger of the civil war; tribalism was only used as an instrument of mobilization (by political leaders) at a point later into the war. Furthermore, as previously noted, the inability to recruit participants from the Americo-Liberian and Krahn ethnic groups, who are the most accused in the Liberian conflict, constitutes a factor of narrative imbalance, thus limiting the generalisability of these accounts. Also, there is an apparent tendency in respondents to exaggerate the transformative power of education, neglecting complex factors of power dynamics and institutional structures that manipulate education itself. Whether the Australian example can be directly applicable to Liberia's unique political and socio-cultural contexts is another complex question.

Literature Review on Liberia's national identity vs tribal identity
The views expressed by the respondents in the above extracts corroborate the general ideas found in the literature. Aaron Weah (2019, pp. 160-1) summarised the point thus: "Liberia's sense of nationhood is fragmented, and ethnic identity appears to be much stronger than any cohesive national identity. In the Civil War and immediate post-war years, group memories became more prominent and could undermine the collective search for justice and accountability. Hence, there is a correlation between the scale of violence that occurred and the influential narratives existing today."

This kind of conflicting dual identity impedes not only inter-group harmony and cooperation, but also citizen-state relations. The following table of the ethnic topology of the Liberian war, adopted from James Shilue (2012), outlines how the rebel groups were formed along tribal fault-lines.

Table 3: Topology of factional and ethnic groups in Liberia (1989-2003)

Militia Group	Leader	Ethnic Affiliation
National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)	Charles Taylor	Americo-Liberian, Gio/Mano
Independent NPF	Prince Johnson	Gios and Mano
United Liberian Movement for Democracy	Alhaji G. V. Kromah	Mandingo and Krahn later split into ULIMO-K and J factions
Liberia Peace Council (LPC)	George Boley	Krahn
Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)	Sekou D. Konneh	Mandingo and Krahn
Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)	Thomas Nimely	Krahn
Lofa Defense Forces	Francois Massaquoi	Loma

Adopted from James Shilue, (2012, p. 1), 'Citizenship or "Autochthony" in Post-Conflict Liberia? The Perils and Challenges of Ethnic/Religious Connections Forged by War and History'. *Journal of Religion, Conflict and Peace*, Vol 5. Issues 1 and 2, Fall 2011.

One can see from Table 3 above that membership of each of the warring factions was composed of a particular tribe, or an alliance of some particular tribes, with the leader being one of them. At the same time, however, the argument for the tribal factor is diluted by the fact that sometimes members of the same tribe split across several warring factions. For example, the Gio and Mano belonged to both the NPFL and the Independent NPFL, and the Krahn were divided across three different militia groups. Tribalism was essential for mobilisation from the beginning of the war. People were being massacred by the tribe they belonged to. However, as the war progressed, especially from the moment the elephant in the room, Samuel Doe, was killed, factionalism driven by a desire for leadership and control over the natural resources in given areas degraded the tribal passions. Personal rivalries led members of the same tribe to break into separate warring factions, while new alliances were formed between tribes which had fought against each other from the beginning. This was even to the extent that a splinter group of Charles Taylor's NPFL-CRC, led by Tom Woewiyu, in 1994, could ally

with the Krahn they had so mercilessly slaughtered in the first years of the war (Outram, 1997).

The respondents' views regarding the essentiality of tribalism to the conflicts in Liberia echo the report of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC 2009). The LTRC specified 'identity conflicts' as one of the main historical sources of conflict. It states:

> Generally negative discourse encompasses 'ethnic', 'tribal', 'religious', 'cultural' conflicts, and the invariable distinctions between 'the natives', or those deemed to 'belong to Liberia', and 'those who do not belong', typically 'Americo-Liberians' and 'the Mandingos'. These categorisations are a diversion from the underlying problem; the formation of the Liberian state preceded any meaningful development of a Liberian nation, or sense of nationhood; (…). The effects continue to be felt today; public discourse is characterised by focus on what separates Liberians, as opposed to what unifies them (TRC 2009: 212)

This TRC statement positions Liberians' identity conflict in a context, ringing with the sub-theme of 'historical intertribal animosity'. Rather than any dilution or diminishment of pre-war animosities, in post-war Liberia, there is a war-generated exacerbation of identity conflict (Shilue, 2012). In a speech to her fellow Liberians in May 2011, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf tacitly accused her compatriots of hypocrisy, proclaiming the glory and supremacy of the nation in singing the national anthem whilprioritisingng the tribe over the nation in reality (Kaufmann and Ammann, 2011). This claim by President Sirleaf matches the sub-theme in respondents' observation that tribalism is incompatible with patriotism. True national identity requires of the citizen "a sense of direct relationship to the state, unmediated by participation in an ethnic, religious or other form of moral community" (Shilue, 2012, p. 1).

Tribalism/Ethnicity and religion have been at the base of identity conflict in Liberia right from the early 19th century (Dillion, 2007; Olanrewaju et al; Shilue 2012; Weah, 2019). The Americo-Liberian settlers arrived in the territory with an unapologetic pride based on their distinctive identity as cultured American Christians, too civilised to stand equal to, or even to mingle with, the unenlightened pagans they met on the land. The Americo-Liberian politics of

ostracism, which penetrated both government policies and the socio-cultural life in the country, toxified relations between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous populations. Unsurprisingly, indigenous Liberians thronged the streets in gleeful celebration when Samuel Doe, one of their own, overthrew the oppressive Americo-Liberian oligarchy on 12 April 1980. However, the indigenous peoples did not agree among themselves. It did not take long before the smiles at Doe's coup turned into tears for his fellow native Liberians as he turned his back on them in contempt, preferring his tribesmen for positions of power and privilege while unleashing tyranny over the other tribes. "His rule marked both the end of "Congo" dominance and the beginning of a new era of militarised repression;" (Stifung, 2022, p. 4). As Doe's increasingly adopted a tribal outlook with his Krahn fellows dominating every aspect of political and military life, relations between the Krans and other tribes grew more antagonistic by the day. Earlier settlers of the land repudiated later settlers' claims of belonging to the land. While the other tribes denounced the Mandingos as foreign encroachers, the overwhelmingly Muslim, relatively wealthy Mandingos belittled and vilified the other tribes as pagan, ignorant and impoverished (Olanrewaju, 2018 et al; Kaufmann and Ammann, 2013; Shilue, 2012).

Some analysts contend that the civil war in Liberia was caused by, not ethnicity/tribalism per se, but 'proto-nationalism'. Defined as "the viciously calculated manipulations of historic social differences by political elites to achieve selfish politico-economic power and affluence" (Olanrewaju et al, 2019, p. 2), proto-nationalism is a sub-identity(ethnic)-based nationalism within the borders of state-based nationalism, but in conflict with it. Despite their mutual suspicion and pejorative stereotyping, many tribes continue to live together without resort to violence until self-seeking politicians play off and instrumentalise the dormant conflicting tribal sentiments, igniting the flames of civil war. Thus, contextualising this in Liberia, the embitterment and tensions animated by the fresh wounds inflicted by the civil war were mistaken for the cause of the civil war itself (Shilue, 2012).

I once read a post on Facebook painting a picture of proto-nationalism in this vein: 'Place an army of red ants and black ants inside a can. They will all be inside there without any clash. Then take the can, shake it vigorously and put it down. The black ants and the red ants will start biting each other. Because the black ants think that it is the red ants that shook the can, while the red ants think the same of the black ants.'

Following this black-red-ants parable the trajectory of inter-tribal relations shifts in the directions chosen by politicians in pursuit of their gains (Conteh-Morgan & Kadivar, 1995). The fall-out between the two leaders Samuel Doe, a Krahn, and Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio, in the indigenous coup of 1980, transformed into a mortal enmity between the ethnic followers of the two politicians. Charles Taylor exploited the sentiments of the aggrieved tribes to launch a civil war. After the war, the same Charles Taylor, for reasons of political expediency and financial gain, abandoned the ethnic game in favour of strategic multiethnic alliances (Outram, 1997). His dramatic election campaign slogan in 1997 was: "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him." Due to the ear he won with a landslide. Thus, politicians seem to have abundant ability to activate/deactivate ethnic passions as and when it suits their purposes.

In analysing conditions in post-conflict societies, researchers identify two kinds of security viz, physical security and ontological security (Glucksam, 2018). Physical security, individual or collective, relates to one's physical survival and safety from harm to body and property. Conversely, ontological security is concerned with the protection and preservation of personal/group identity. Ontological security corresponds to collective identity based on ethno-religious and cultural indices. Because civil wars often pit different ethnic/religious/cultural groups against one another, amplifying perceptions and attitudes of otherness and reinforcing identity boundaries, post-conflict societies are often bedevilled by an augmented sense of ontological insecurity and anxiety. Unfortunately, the common mistake made by state builders in post-conflict societies is that they ignore ontological security imperatives and instead turn their focus to physical security needs only. The consequence is that the objectives of physical security become unattainable as the emotional forces of ontological insecurity continue to mount up resistance in the background (Glucksam, 2018). The purpose of truth and reconciliations is to provide a forum for hard feelings to be discharged in order to restore and consolidate ontological security. Unfortunately, the credibility of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) was questionable from the onset, with allegations of administrative bias and financial fraud. No wonder that the LTRC report has fallen into limbo and has been of minimal practical significance besides the huge resources wasted during its several years of inquiry.

One exceptional attribute of the Liberian TRC is that, of all the three dozen truth commissions that had been established around the world it was the first to involve

the diaspora in its investigations – "hundreds of Liberians in the United States, the United Kingdom, and … Ghana" were included (Foster et al, 2009, p. 11). What stands out in this context is that these diaspora communities highlighted the role of tribalism as a conflict factor in Liberia:

Statement givers saw the issue of "tribe" as critical to building a united Liberia. Statement givers had some very specific ideas about how to involve the tribes in reconciliation efforts, including forming intertribal reconciliation committees, using sports, culture, and food to bring people of different tribes together, engaging tribal elders, and ensuring that people are educated to communicate in a common language. To build a unified Liberia, the importance of religious tolerance was also raised by many statement givers, particularly Muslims. Developing wide ranging non-discrimination policies across government and the public sector was also an important theme. (Foster et al, 2009, p. 15).

Consequently, the creation and execution of policy measures to "facilitate intertribal reconciliation through activities that bring different tribes together" was one of the key recommendations in the diaspora report of the Liberian TRC (Foster, 2009, p. 25).

Sierra Leone
Data exposition and interpretation on greed and grievance in Sierra Leone
Seventy-six per cent (76%) of Sierra Leoneans in Australia attributed their civil war (1991-2002) to long-held socio-economic grievances created by the greed of state actors fighting for political power and material wealth. Political authoritarianism and civil disenfranchisement, administrative corruption and embezzlement of state resources, graduate unemployment and youth redundancy, and political exploitation of ethnic differences were the main sub-themes. Table 4 below shows the breakdown of responses per sub-theme.

Table 4 - Greed and Grievance as conflict drivers in Sierra Leone

Theme	No of respondents (out 25)	Percentage
Authoritarianism and Civil disenfranchisement	15	60%
Corruption and embezzlement	23	90%
Unemployment and youth redundancy	22	88%
Political exploitation of ethnic differences	16	64%

Average	**19**	**76%**

The table highlights various aspects of the greed and grievances spectrum in Sierra Leone, with the following key findings: 90% of respondents cited corruption and embezzlement as a conflict driver; 88% mentioned unemployment and youth redundancy; 64% referenced political exploitation of ethnic differences; 60% noted authoritarianism and civil disenfranchisement. The average response rate was 76%, indicating a strong consensus among respondents on the role of greed and grievances in driving conflict in Sierra Leone.

As one can see from the table, the Sierra Leonean diaspora in Australia are overwhelmingly agreed on the greed-cum-grievance narrative as a conflict factor in their country. They talk of how greedy politicians created a state rife with corruption and mismanagement, poverty, unemployment and a general state of economic hardship that eventually precipitated the emergence of aggrieved-greedy rebels. Respondent SLM50-A stated that:

There were numerous factors at play, but let's focus on a central issue. It was a one-party state. People felt suppressed; expressing their views could lead to marginalisation, persecution, or being labelled a political antagonist. In that kind of climate, people became too scared to voice their grievances openly, fearing arrest, imprisonment, or even loss of life. The situation during that time was dire; the cost of living was exorbitant, making life incredibly challenging. Under these circumstances, thoughts of using force to defend themselves became the only option. People were angry and frustrated, particularly the underpaid military personnel. Civilians, recognising this discontent, engaged with the military, highlighting their low pay and lack of benefits too. So, the war provided an opportunity for people who had been excluded from the loot to now get their share too. And this is where the whole saga of illegal diamond trade comes in. Poverty played a pivotal role in the unfolding of events.

Respondent SLM67, a famous Sierra Leonean musician, had a similar opinion:

Unemployment was so high, with numerous young graduates and school leavers idling on the streets. And the people in power rather exploited the vulnerability of these unemployed youth by turning them into thugs against their political opponents… It was primarily about serving the interests of the leaders and those in close proximity to them, and this was the fundamental factor that catalysed the issues and challenges we faced.

Respondent SLM50-B supports these two interviewees, asserting that the greed and corruption of state actors "created an unequal society where people lived in separate worlds. It became like a survival of the fittest situation … When you have a situation like that, it creates the perfect conditions for anything to happen." Respondent SLM51-A promoted the same viewpoint: "The national wealth wasn't being distributed fairly. Only a few individuals were benefiting, while the rest of the population suffered. Young people couldn't find job opportunities."

Respondent SLF43 highlighted the dimension of ethno-regional divisions of the problem:

The war was caused by hate borne by prejudice, misinformation, ignorance and fear of others. Unfortunately, tribalism and abuse of power are the two dominant evils. There are two dominant tribes, the Mendes and Temnes. These two tribes control the government, and not only they discriminate against each other, but also they marginalise all other tribes. No equal opportunities in terms of access to education, jobs and the like. Just by looking at your family name, people know where you come from, which tribe you belong to, and you can be denied an opportunity based on your tribal identity. There is no equality in anything; everything is based on who you know, not on what you have, not on your qualifications. So sadly, the most important qualification is the tribe and not education. Politics is like a family business, and this is intergenerational. That was the incubator of the civil war. Unfortunately, it is still going on. No improvement has been made after the war. The war did not teach us any lesson.

On his part, Respondent SLM51-A attempted to refute the tribalism-narrative:

No, no, ours was different from what happened in Rwanda. We didn't have tribes rising against each other like that. What we experienced was primarily related to the mismanagement of natural resources. The national wealth - including diamonds, gold, and minerals - wasn't being distributed fairly. Only a few individuals were benefiting, while the rest of the population didn't get their fair share. There was no tribal conflict or religious tension like what happened in other places. Our issues were rooted in economic factors. Young people who finished university or technical colleges couldn't find job opportunities. There was a growing gap between the rich and the poor, and financial hardship was common. Many youths ended up as dropouts because they couldn't continue their education. Injustice was widespread. Corruption was a major problem, and people had lost

trust in the system. The public sector, including the judiciary, police force, and civil service, was plagued by corruption.

Similar to their Liberian counterparts, the Sierra Leoneans think that an educational campaign can foster positive change. Respondent SLM50-B stated:

There is greed and corruption in all Western countries as well. The politicians here in Australia steal, but they do it cautiously. They do not steal all; they steal and leave enough for the people. So, the people are not hungry, they are not suffering, so they will not think of violence or rebellion. The leaders in Sierra Leone, on the other hand, steal everything and leave the people with nothing. So, I will say, potential leaders in Sierra Leone should come here and receive orientation from the Australian politicians on the strategies of responsible leadership, including how to steal some and leave the rest for the people, not how to steal all.

For Respondent SLM51-A, the politicians cannot be educated, because they were not unaware of the wrongs, they were committing. The campaign to foster selfless patriotism should start with school teachers. Respondent SLM51-A says:

If students watch their teachers stealing from school property, extorting money from the students themselves and their parents in return for fake pass-grades, not coming to school regularly and punctually while receiving full salary, then the students are not learning honesty and patriotism from these teachers.

Respondent SLM67's opinion is somewhat similar to that of SLM51-A:

The Australian government gives scholarships to Sierra Leonean students to come here and study in various disciplines. I think that this scholarship project should now be redirected towards teacher training. Sierra Leonean teachers should be brought here to receive training on how to be responsible teachers; teachers-by-example, not by empty words. The students in Australia watch their teachers practicing the manners and values they teach.

The opinions of SLM67 and SLM51-A sound rather ludicrous. Just like the politicians, the school teachers are not unaware of their crimes. Moreover, one would argue that, unlike the politicians who are embezzling to amass wealth, the teachers are only compelled by poverty to resort to malpractices to supplement their meagre salaries. As such, one would suggest to neglect political rulers and

turning the moral searchlight on teachers might amount to unfair victimisation of the victim.

In any case, the narratives reported above highlight the insights of Sierra Leoneans in Australia on the interplay of social, economic and political factors underlying their country's civil war and its aftermath. Greed for political power and material wealth motivated the repression of political opposition and dissenting opinion. The lack of political opposition facilitated the absence of accountability in governance, uncontrolled corruption, mismanagement and embezzlement and subsequent depletion of state resources. State bankruptcy resulted in the collapse of state institutions, socio-economic chaos and political turmoil. However, these respondents seem to have an essentially localised view of the circumstances of conflict in Sierra Leone and fail to account for external players, such as the role of the Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, who financed the rebel group Revolutionary United Front (RUF) that initiated the Sierra Leonean civil war. According to Gberie (2005), for instance, Taylor's support for the RUF was a key factor in the outbreak and escalation of the civil war, driven by Taylor's own economic and political interests. A glance through the literature can help to clarify the sentiments these research participants have expressed.

Literature on greed and grievance in Sierra Leone
Pre-war Greed and Grievance

Sierra Leone gained independence from Britain in 1961. The political and economic outlook of the country was not hopeless at independence under the first prime minister, Sir Milton Margai (Bangura, 2014). Siaka Stevens' 18-year rule (1967-1985) is generally credited as the birth-and-growth period of Sierra Leone's state-society woes. Following a few years of qualified democracy, Siaka Stevens entrenched himself in power by declaring a one-party state in 1978. Siaka's 18-year rule (1967 to 1985) was not only ruthless and draconian, regionally and ethnically divisive, but also a period of extreme economic corruption, nepotism and general administrative ineptitude (Matsumoto, 2014). Stevens turned the country into a personal domain, entrenching his family members and ethnic loyalists in all strategic political and economic positions (Young, 2012). Distribution of national resources was now based on personal loyalty to Stevens rather than any loyalty to the nation (Richards, 1996). In such a state of corruption, where political and legal accountability virtually ceased to exist, mismanagement and kleptocracy engulfed the nation. Youth unemployment soared, and the provision of basic amenities became an insurmountable challenge which the government did not attempt to address.

Stevens eventually handed power over to his military chief, Joseph Momoh. "Feeding on aid and corruption, Momoh took the country further downhill" is Dowden's (2009, p. 294) characterization of the Momoh era. The worsening state of political and administrative ineptitude in the face of overwhelming economic crises under Momoh's government fertilised the ground for Sierra Leone's eleven-year civil war. Momoh presided over a failed and collapsing state, with the UNDP ranking Sierra Leone as the least developed country in the world in 1991. The government could no longer pay salaries, and civil servants across all public sectors took to looting government facilities, "ransacking their offices, stealing all that could be stolen, selling their normally free-of-charge services" to survive (Ducasse-Rogier, 2004, p.17). No wonder that when the rebels attacked in March 1991, the collapsing army of Sierra Leone quickly melted away, leaving hungry and unarmed civilians to defend themselves. Both the government and Sierra Leonean civilians eventually had to rely on foreign peace keeping troops, the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and, later, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) for their security.

Stevens and Momoh did not only ran down the Sierra Leonean economy into unbearable hardship for the people, they went further to exploit the economically desperate youth for their political survival. Stevens, for instance, built an ethnically informed network of what came to be known as 'Lumpen youth' - a term used for organised gangs and thugs drawn from unemployed youth in Sierra Leone (Matsumoto, 2014). The Lumpen youth were used to harass and unleash terrorist violence against the regime's political opponents, a development which some analysts have cited as laying the foundations of the 'violent youth culture' that exploded and went on rampaging during the civil war (Matsumoto, 2014, p. 14). These analyses from the literature corroborate the views of the research participants about how the greed of state actors nourished the popular grievances that exploded into the war. It is also important to look at how the literature supports the views of research participants about wartime greed and grievances.

War-time Greed and Grievance
The circumstances of political and economic greed outlined above, which engendered widespread grievances in the people of Sierra Leone, left the country vulnerable and open to insurgency. The rebel group known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), supported by the Liberian warmonger Charles Taylor, invaded the country from Liberia on 23 March 1993, seizing much of the eastern

and southern territories of Sierra Leone within a year. In the countdown to his rebellion in Liberia, Charles Taylor had travelled to Sierra Leone to seek Momoh's support to launch his rebellion from Sierra Leonean soil. However, Momoh not only refused Taylor's proposed alliance but also ordered his detention and imprisonment. However, Taylor's resentment at Momoh's antagonism was not the only motive behind his support for the RUF. There were also economic reasons the RUF, which came to establish its dominion over the alluvial diamond fields of Sierra Leone, exploited the diamonds and traded them for guns from Charles Taylor (Dowden, 2009). The Sierra Leonean war, thus, became a major source of funding for Taylor's campaign in Liberia. The illicit trade in diamonds might have prolonged the war in Sierra Leone by providing funding and economic incentives for perpetrators. However, given that the RUF did not engage in diamond smuggling until after 1995 (Young, 2012; Ducasse-Rogier, 2004), it may not be accurate to list greed for diamonds as an immediate cause of the war. However, the diamond factor may be seen as a remote cause of the war in the sense that the Stevens-Momoh regime's gross mismanagement of the diamond industry, which constituted the backbone of the Sierra Leonean economy, was a fundamental factor in the economic hardship that damaged the Sierra Leonean youth who eventually provided the troops for the civil war when it broke out. The illicit diamond trade also provided economic and financial motivation momentum for the rebels to keep on fighting. As part of the international community's recognition of this fact and their efforts to end diamond-fuelled conflicts, the tripartite initiative called the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme was launched in 2003. This initiative sought to curb rebel exploitation of diamond finances by ensuring that only diamonds duly certified by legitimate state authorities gained access to the international diamond markets.

The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report supports the sentiments expressed by Sierra Leoneans in Australia. The TRC's findings suggest that the greed of state actors was more to blame for the war than the greed of the rebels:

While there were many factors, both internal and external, that explain the cause of the civil war, the Commission came to the conclusion that it was years of bad governance, endemic corruption and the denial of basic human rights that created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable … The Commission commenced its primary findings with the conclusion that the conflict and the independence period preceding it represented the most shameful years of Sierra

Leone's history. These periods reflected an extraordinary failure of leadership on the part of many of those involved in government, public life and civil society. No enlightened and visionary leaders emerged to steer the country away from the slide into chaos and bloody civil war, the Commission concluded (TRC, 2004, p. 2)

Unfortunately, there is no evidence so far that lessons have been learnt from the past – "… many of the same issues exist now that existed before the war (corruption, poverty, and ethnically dominated politics" (Shepler and Williams, 2017, p. 433). An atmosphere of political repression, restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly, as well as extrajudicial activities by security personnel, were highlighted by Amnesty International in its 2023 report on Sierra Leone.

Tribalism as a Factor in the Civil War in Sierra Leone
The one particular claim of some of the research participants that deserves a close look is the assertion that tribalism was not a cause of the civil war in Sierra Leone. This assertion aligns with the dominant viewpoint in the literature. Most analysts maintain that scramble for control of mineral wealth was the real cause of the war. Not only that these analysts not taken the factor of tribalism seriously as a cause of the war, but also, some of them tend to deny that tribalism was an issue there in the first place. In the words of Kaldor and Vincent (2006, p.9), for instance, "There was almost no veneer of ethnicity or even ideology" - because, the entire population ostensibly shared the same grievances and as a result of that, virtually every one of the opposing factions to the conflict drew its fighters/membership from all ethnic backgrounds in the country. Thus, "The causes have to be sought in the weakness of State authority in the context of globalisation" exacerbated by protracted political repression and economic woes.

I would not challenge Kaldor and Vincents' observation that factors of poor governance and economic corruption were to blame for the war in Sierra Leone. What I would dispute, however, is their assertion that ethnicity was not a considerable factor in the causes of the war. The futility of this assertion lies in the fact that it is highly deductive: It is like saying that if a pyromaniac torched a large family home and the family ran helter-skelter, then it is the fire, not the arsonist, that should be somehow held responsible for the disintegration of the family. The inter-ethnic chaos that characterized the Sierra Leonean war whereby opposing warring factions drew fighters from the same ethnic group, was a kind of, let me say, 'tribalism lost control' situation; otherwise, the war was arguably a

culmination of historical tribal politics. To start with, the British had invented Sierra Leone and then left. From the hands of the departing British colonisers, independent Sierra Leone landed straight in the hands of rival tribal interests. Let us see the outline of the episode here:

Party politics started to be characterised by ethnic and regional divisions after independence. Before independence, an important distinction was between the Creoles – or Krios, the descendants of repatriated Africans from the Caribbean, North America and England – of Freetown and the indigenous people in the hinterland. However, post-independence politics came to revolve around regional/ethnic competitions between the All People's Congress (APC), backed by Temne speakers – or, more generally, Northerners – and the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), supported largely by Mende speakers (Keen, 2005). The SLPP ruled until 1967 and produced the first and second prime ministers of Sierra Leone, Milton Margai (from 1958 to 1964) and Albert Margai (from 1964 to 1967). Since 1967, when Siaka Stevens of the APC won in an election, however, the APC came to rule the country until the 1992 coup.… Sierra Leone in effect became a one-party state under the APC and he soon centralised the state under him. Moreover, in order to keep the state under his control, he extended patronage to 'insiders' and intimidated opponents, often with violence … He nationalised the main industries, starting with the diamond industry in 1971. This was to ensure the profits accrued to himself and his 'insiders,' … (Keen, 2005, in Matsumoto, 2014, pp113-14)

It is important to highlight the fact that these two rival political parties, SLPP and APC, were ethnic-based, i.e. along the Temne-Mende ethnic divides. Tribal politicians in post-independence Sierra Leone did not stop short at merely concentrating power in the hands of certain tribes, disenfranchising rival tribes, and turning state assets into personal property. As an extension of the tribal patronage framework, Stevens also held an ethnically informed network of "Lumpen youth" - a term used for organized gangs and thugs drawn from unemployed youth in Sierra Leone - to harass and unleash terrorist violence against his political opponents, a phenomenon which some analysis have cited as laying the foundations of the "violent youth culture" that exploded and went on rampage during the civil war (Matsumoto, 2014, p. 14).

The fact of the matter is that if the forces of tribalism entrench incompetent people in power and they destroy the economy, thereby precipitating a war, we

cannot blame the war on the bad economy itself and absolve the tribalism that caused the economic destruction. That will be tantamount to mistaking the symptom for the cause itself. Economic woes may have been the trigger for the war, but (decades of tribalism were the long finger that had slowly pulled the trigger from the background; the confused cross-tribal grouping and chaos that characterised the war zone might be all but a symptom of tribalism losing control of its own begotten child. Looking at the ethnically polarised nature of the regimes that preceded the war, it would not be plausible for one to dismiss tribal resentment as an incentive for the war merely because, in the confusion that ensued, tribalism disappeared from the surface. Any such approach that totally ignores or even down-emphasises the tribal factor in the fomenting of this conflict must be ahistorical and inconsiderate of the psychological nuances of the survival mentality of human beings. In their desperate moments, human beings focus on self-preservation to the neglect of group identity or interest, even though a group mentality might have led them into that desperation.

Because researchers have generally underrated tribalism as an issue in the Sierra Leonean war, one may not expect to find any serious research findings, and I have found very little on the relationship between tribalism and the war in Sierra Leone.

For one to grasp the centrality of tribalism to the entire spectrum of life in Sierra Leone, including the civil war, one has to delve into the concept of "secret society". In general, West African nations are "secret society" entities (La Fontaine 1986, in Bayes, 2013). As links between the physical society and the world of guardian ancestors, secret societies play moral, social, judicial, political and military functions. In Sierra Leone, "membership of a secret society is a prerequisite for full tribal membership and is necessary to be considered an adult ready to marry," and therefore, "nearly everyone belongs to a secret society" (CORI 2009, in Bayes, 2013, p. 5). Against this background, politicians and administrators in Sierra Leone are members of secret societies before they become president, minister, member of parliament, director, and so on. At the initiation ceremony, one swears an oath to the secret society, an oath that cannot be violated under any circumstance, to the extent that judicial proceedings against felony - including arson - can be cut short on grounds of inviolability of "the oaths of secrecy sworn" to secret societies by the victim or the accused (Bayes, 2013, p. 7). The shadow power of secret society over political actors, even on

patterns of national leadership, in Sierra Leone may be convincingly glimpsed from the following passage:

> …it is widely rumoured that politicians strategically establish contacts with Paramount Chiefs (due to the 'traditional' authority that they command among secret society members) and join societies in order to secure votes since secret societies often govern entire regions, and every member of the society purportedly must support its leadership. For example, President Koroma supposedly joined and sponsored the *poro* society in the North before the last national election. Similarly, according to one source, "*the prominent politician Aiah Abu Koroma from Kono was publicly honored in 2007 because he had paid for the initiation of boys and girls into the Poro and Sande since the 1970s*" (CORI 2009: 4). Due to overlapping obligations of both secret societies and government positions, "*men and women winning seats in parliament and jobs in government are expected to stay loyal to their home communities and direct state resources towards these communities*". Therefore, "*the secret societies remain a fundamental, albeit unspoken, factor in these informal political pacts*" (ibid.: 3-4). (Italics is in the original). Accordingly, it is widely speculated that the hierarchy of leadership in secret societies closely reflects that of the government (Bayes, 2013, p.7).

Thus, Bayes (2013, p. 7), concluded, "non-state mechanisms such as secret societies undermine the legitimacy and coherence of the 'state-idea' and produce alternate 'power-ideas'". Indeed, how can the state have legitimacy when every member of the government owes their primary loyalty to the shadow-state of tribe, not the nation? Not only that the secret society is unforgiving, vindictive and ruthless in retribution – as compared to the pliable, dull and inconsiderate punitive apparatus of the state, and is thus feared by the superstitious politician it is also the support-base of the politician's political survival. Here, one needs to place a double-underline under the fact that secret societies are strictly tribal institutions. Consequently, the entire nation, both formal and informal structures, lives behind the mask of the shadow-state the tribe, and hence, tribalism is the undeclared political ideology of the state.

Given the foregoing, the popular assertions that ethnicity was not the most important causal factor in the civil war in Sierra Leone need to be seriously reviewed.

If the Liberian TRC was ground-breaking for being the first of its kind to involve the diaspora in its investigations, the Sierra Leonean TRC was pioneering for involving children in its inquiry. The Sierra Leonean TRC not only solicited and co-opted children's narratives and experiences as victims of the war, but also it produced a child-friendly version (i.e. one that is simplified in language and content to be easily understood by children) of its final report. The children's version of the TRC (UNICEF, 2004) should have been a golden opportunity for educating Sierra Leonean children about the evils of tribalism. Regrettably, there is practically no reference to tribalism in the document other than that it provided a "List of Ethnic Groups" of Sierra Leone ("Creole, Madingo, Fula, Mende, Gola, Sape, Kissi, Sherbro, Kono, Susu, Korando, Themne, Krim, Vai, Limba, Yalunka and Loko") on page 3. It went on to identify "corruption", not tribalism, as the Sierra Leoneans' "greatest enemy" (p. 21). Most bizarrely, perhaps, is the fact that the need to address tribalism as a national problem was not even mentioned in the list of findings and recommendations (pp. 30-41) of the document. It is all redolent of the post-independence nationalists' fallacious methods of trying to fight tribalism by pretending that it did not exist. Indeed, tribalism's importance has been underestimated by researchers and observers of the Sierra Leonean conflict, and that has dangerous implications for long-term peace and stability in the country.

Conclusion

What is clear from the foregoing analysis is that, in the minds of Sierra Leoneans in Australia, if the conflict is to be blamed on greed for wealth, that should be the greed of politicians and government officials and not that of rebel fighters. It was only in the process of their insurgency against the greed of state actors that rebel fighters discovered their opportunities for profit. In other words, greed creates grievances, which in turn breed more greed. Therefore, to avert conflict, the greed of state actors must be checked. The Liberians, on the other hand, blame tribalism for the woes of their country, though they also refer to the greed of politicians as opportunistic predators on tribal differences in conflict situations. Where the two communities agree is the pivotal role education can play to bring about positive changes in their countries. Curriculum reform centred on inculcation of patriotic sentiment in students, bilateral programs to facilitate the training of

Liberian/Sierra Leonean teachers in Australia, as well as the orientation of responsible leadership practice in Australia for future leaders of these countries are among the suggested measures for possible ways out of the low sense of patriotism that fosters identity conflict (i.e. national vs tribal) and greed. Regarding the first suggestion, the dilemma is that any curriculum reform can only yield as much good as is supported by the political will of the people in government. As for the feasibility of the last two suggestions, one can only say that, for the time being, they can be taken as food for thought for policymakers makers and other stakeholders.

Limitations of the Study

This study utilised non-probability sampling methods, which may compromise the representativeness of the findings. Furthermore, the author's lack of direct experience on ground inside Liberia and Sierra Leone may have influenced his data interpretation. Notwithstanding these limitations, I am confident that the critical approach of the qualitative methodology adopted by this study ensures the credibility and reliability of the findings.

Recommendations for further research

Drawing from the above conclusions, the following topics might be suggested for further research:

1. *The relationship between curriculum content and patriotic sentiment.* This will provide an insight into whether curriculum reform can make an effective impact in promoting patriotic sentiment and reducing identity-based conflicts.
2. *Teachers' Professionalism and Detribalization of Students in Liberia and Sierra Leone.* This will provide an insight into the role teacher Professional Development can play in promoting detribalization and social integration among students.
3. The near-universal assumption that tribalism was not the primary cause of the civil war in Sierra Leone needs to be critically reviewed in future research.

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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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