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The armed conflict in Sierra Leone and the extreme violence of the main rebel faction - the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) - have challenged scholars and members of the international community to come up with explanations. Up to this point, though, conclusions about the nature of the war are mainly drawn from accounts of civilian victims and commentators who had access to only one side of the war. The present study addresses this currently incomplete understanding of the conflict by focusing on the direct experiences and interpretations of protagonists, paying special attention to the hitherto neglected, and often underage, cadres of the RUF. The data presented challenges the widely canvassed notion of the Sierra Leone conflict as a war motivated by 'greed, not grievance'. Rather, it points to a rural crisis expressed in terms of unresolved tensions between landowners and marginalized rural youth, further reinforced and triggered by a collapsing patrimonial state.
