



Sierra Leone: A Political History

David Harris

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Sierra Leone came to world attention in the 1990s when a catastrophic civil war linked to the diamond trade was reported globally. This fleeting and particular interest, however, obscured two crucial processes in this small West African state. On the one hand, while the civil war was momentous, brutal and affected all Sierra Leoneans, it was also just one element in the long and faltering attempt to build a nation and state given the country's immensely problematic pre-colonial and British colonial legacies. On the other, the aftermath of the war precipitated a huge international effort to construct a 'liberal peace', with mixed results, and thus made Sierra Leone a laboratory for post-Cold War interventions.

Sierra Leone examines 225 years of its history and fifty years of independence, placing state- society relations at the centre of an original and revealing investigation of those who have tried to rule or change Sierra Leone and its inhabitants and the responses engendered. It interweaves the historical narrative with sketches of politicians, anecdotes, the landscape and environment and key turning-points, alongside theoretical and other comparisons with the rest of Africa. It is a new contribution to the debate for those who already know Sierra Leone and a solid point of entry for those who wish to know.

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