Toward the end of Sierra Leone’s 11-year civil war, a group of (mostly) displaced Christian youth put on a Pentecostal church play in the capital city, Freetown. They performed “God’s Time is the Best,” a play written by Matthew, President of the Youth Ministry of the Gospel Prayer Ministries Church (“GP Ministries”), at the church’s main branch in a Western suburb of Freetown as an Easter fund-raiser in April 2001. I viewed the videotape of the play with Matthew three months later, sitting in the unfinished cement church one Monday afternoon. When other performers from the play walked by they sat down to join us, greeting each other with the names of “their” characters: “Nancy!” “Job!” “Mami Yeno!”

Nancy, the play’s main female character, is a popular, attractive, young Pentecostal woman who has had several attentive boyfriends. She is delighted to accept a proposal of marriage from “Mr. Job,” who is also young, popular, attractive, and Pentecostal, with a white-collar job.

With Job’s employment, his professional status, his imminent marriage, and his morally upright life, he represents a fantasy figure for GP Ministries youth, for whom both a professional position and marriage are distant ideals in war-torn Sierra Leone. Most of them, Matthew included, were displaced for several years in the country’s 11-year war, have lost several family members to the violence, and live a constant struggle to feed, clothe, shelter, and educate themselves.

Sierra Leone’s recent conflict displaced the majority of this country’s population and killed tens of thousands. It was characterized by the targeting of children and youth as combatants, widespread sexual violence, forced labor, and the use of mutilation (including amputation) and torture by all armed groups in the conflict. Its
particular violence raises the question of how people recover from such devastation. If anthropology has increasingly become the study of instability, disintegration, and conflict (Warren 2002:381), it has had less to say about the ways in which people in conditions of violence and political flux reweave their lives. I wish to contribute here to an emerging literature on the anthropology of social repair (e.g., Das et al., 2001; Jackson 2002; Nordstrom 1997; Theidon 2006), and to locate such reconstructive work within processes of memory. As I explored in my earlier work on memories of the slave trade (Shaw 2002), and as Cole (2001) argues in relation to memories of colonial violence, a focus on memory enables us to examine how political transitions and translocal processes are realized as lived experience.

In the aftermath of the Sierra Leone conflict, people were encouraged to narrate their memories of violent events to the staff of humanitarian organizations, journalists, human rights activists, and the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC in particular carried a genealogy of memory from Latin American truth commissions of the 1980s and South Africa’s TRC of 1995–98, where, following histories of covert forms of political violence (torture, disappearances, death squads, and official denials), personal memories of violence became a means of voice, redemption, and moral accountability (Cole 1998:626). We can trace this genealogy of memory further, through the use of memory as a weapon against Holocaust denial, Western psychiatric concepts of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the therapeutic efficacy of verbally recapitulating traumatic events, psychoanalytic ideas about the dangers of repressed memories, legal practices of evidence and witnessing, Enlightenment concepts of the rationalizing power of language as a tool against violence (Linke 2002:260), and the development of confession as a universal discipline in the church (Asad 1993:95–97). Through this genealogy, explicit verbal recounting has become such an exemplary mode of memory that its link with healing and empowerment appears “natural.” Yet the work of memory in other places and times may draw on different genealogies. Communities in southern Mozambique, for example, have viewed the recounting of violence from their civil war as opening the door to attack by spirits of those who were killed, seeking instead to exteriorize past violence through ritual (Honwana 1997). In South Africa’s TRC, moreover, the equation of testimony with voice failed to confront women’s experiences and expression, while the pressure to force open protected areas of memory was often at odds with local strategies of social recovery (Ross 2003).

Whereas, in TRCs, realist and “objective” memories of violence are the only valid stories recognized, direct representations of Sierra Leone’s war scarcely figure at all in “God’s Time is the Best,” and the same is true of every other GP youth play I know. “The more you portray this kind of thing, the more you encourage it,” Matthew replied.
when I asked him why the war seemed largely absent from either his plays or those of his friends. Although GP youth talked freely about their own experiences of the war during private interviews with me, they did not normally narrate or discuss these memories in public, preferring, they said—like most Sierra Leoneans I know—to “forget” them. By this they did not mean that they had lost their personal memories of violence, but that they chose not to “encourage” the return of violence by giving it a public reality.

This reluctance to reproduce the war by discussing it publicly was a response I encountered again and again, both in Freetown and in the rural provinces. Parents often told their children not to talk of the war outside the home, and in many families and communities people attempted to reintegrate ex-combatants through social and ritual practices that created a new beginning by “unmaking” the violent past. When Sierra Leone’s TRC was inaugurated, there was widespread concern about the potential dangers of public testimonies that could reactivate that past, disrupt processes of reintegration, and perhaps incite retaliation (Shaw 2005). Although almost 8,000 people gave statements to the TRC, it was sometimes difficult to find people willing to testify before the commission’s district hearings. Many of those who did so internalized the commission’s message that “clearing their chest” would help them, but in so doing they also transformed this message by integrating it with local concepts of healing as forgetting (“The TRC helped me to forget”).

For the GP youth I knew, “forgetting” enabled a different re-membering of the violence. If, as Jackson argues (2002:59), re-presenting violent events as a story enables people to manage memories of violence, subverting the power of those events to control their experience of self and world, such narration cannot necessarily be equated with an “objective” rendition of events. For narratives do not merely represent suffering; they mold and shape it, recontextualizing intolerable experiences and producing new ways of remembering and forgetting (Das and Kleinman 2001:3–8; Jackson 2002). As Warren (1993) and Perera (2001) have demonstrated for Guatemala and Sri Lanka, respectively, experiences of political violence may be relocated to the distant past, transmuted into stories of spirits, ghosts, and shape-shifters, or revoiced through spirit possession as a means of making moral memory.

In Sierra Leone, a long history of successive layers of violence from the slave trade through the colonial “legitimate trade” to recent applications of postcolonial power has fostered discursive strategies of indirection and secrecy as a means of living in the presence of violence (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). To rebuild a life from an uninhabitable past and to refashion a meaningful present, memories of both old and new violence in Sierra Leone require a relanguaging, a renarration in a different form.
Genealogies: violence, memory, christianity, and class in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is a small West African country with a population of approximately six million people, most of whom are under 18. A genealogy of violence and memory here must begin with over three centuries of integration into the Atlantic system, during which, through increasing warfare and raids, people—especially youth—became “commodities” in both the Atlantic slave trade and the internal slave trade that developed in tandem. During the 19th century, the British Crown Colony of Sierra Leone, created in Freetown in 1808, sought to replace the Atlantic trade with a “Legitimate Trade” in (mostly) palm and forest products. Because production and transport of these “legitimate” goods required additional labor, however, slave raiding and wars (over access to river transport) actually increased until the British imposed a Protectorate over the Colony’s “hinterland” in 1896. Those who lived in this habitus of war and disappearance developed elaborate practices of concealment that included verbal indirection and secrecy (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2000).

In the late 20th century, the violence of the slave trade and the “Legitimate Trade” was subject to “directed forgetting” and rarely formed part of discursive verbal memory, but was displaced to such nondiscursive forms as landscape, ritual practice, and visionary experience (Shaw 2002). This memory work of “forgetting” violence (this time, that of the civil war) discursively but re-membering it indirectly is further developed through Pentecostal practices of spiritual warfare.

Both Christianity and class in contemporary Sierra Leone have their roots in late 18th century Freetown, founded as a (Christian) settlement of freed slaves from North America and the Caribbean (and “Black Poor” from London) in 1787. Freetown’s inhabitants, known as “Creoles” (later “Krio”), were notable for their educational achievements, and education came to occupy a central place in Sierra Leone’s history and identity. Until the 20th century most of the hinterland practiced combinations of local ritual practices and Islam, which had spread from the north since at least the 17th century. When the Protectorate was imposed, the British allowed Christian missionaries to open schools in the south but not the more Islamized north, because they regarded Islam as a “civilizing” influence. These regional inequalities of access to Western education—both between Freetown and “upcountry” and between south and north—have been reproduced as enduring structural features in Sierra Leone.

Toward independence in 1961, the British channeled political power to the south, and postcolonial politics has since been characterized by regional power struggles between north and south. The Krio in Freetown remained dominant in the professions, but widespread practices of migration, cultural borrowing, multilingualism, fostering, intermarriage, religious pluralism, and flexible religious identities have increased the access of those “upcountry” to Western education and the professions. Although Muslim or Christian identities predominate in particular areas, flexible religious identities and practices make it impossible to divide Sierra Leone into discrete percentages of Muslims, Christians, and those who use local ritual forms. Pentecostal leaders and the youth of GP Ministries reject such personal religious pluralism as signs of demonic influence, however.

Middle-class aspirations have been shaped by images of “progress” away from manual labor through education. Conceptions of upward mobility are symbolized especially through images of commodities—“modern” furnishings and utilities, cellphones, “respectable” dress (African or Western), and “fine” cars, and for some (but not Pentecostals) by the frequenting of expensive restaurants and night clubs. Even before the war, however, economic decline meant that most of these symbols of “the good life” were unattainable even for those with a good education and white-collar jobs—teachers, clerks, and civil servants. After the war, the only opportunities for such “advancement” were through jobs with international NGOs and the United Nations.
Job and Nancy marry in a Pentecostal church. Afterward, Nancy’s friends tell her that this church will help her have children.

Why, given all the possible forms in which violent memories might be renarrated, do these youth choose these plays? Their context is that of the “Pentecostal explosion” that swept across Africa in the 1980s (Gifford 1994), initially from North America. What we know as Pentecostal (or neo-Pentecostal, or charismatic) Christianity was developed primarily by media evangelists in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, who preached the faith gospel of health and wealth, also known as the gospel of prosperity, during a time of rising living standards and a burgeoning “self-help” movement (Gifford 1994:514; 2001:63). Later, nondenominational radio evangelist Derek Prince promoted another movement called the deliverance ministry, the aim of which was to cast out demons that create problems in people’s lives and relationships. This ministry, the success of which soared in the 1970s, was characterized by “spiritual warfare”: a war of the spirit between God and the Devil, Christians and demons, light and darkness, to which born-again Christians are recruited as warriors armed with faith, prayer, and righteousness. Spiritual warfare has its origins in the bible (esp. Ephesians 6:10–12), but it became especially apt to Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in the United States during the 1970s, when the Cold War and its moral dualism of Christian civilization pitted against atheistic Communism shaped the nation’s imaginary (Gifford 1994:516), and when military defeat in Vietnam combined with the growth of feminism and gay rights made both nation and family appear under attack by “unchristian forces” (Bastian n.d.:21).

Spiritual warfare and the gospel of prosperity became part of Africa’s Pentecostal wave a decade later, when, at the end of the Cold War, many postcolonial African leaders found themselves abandoned by their former Western patrons. With the collapse of their governments, NGOs and missionaries rushed in. Many of these missionaries were from North America, and were linked to Pentecostal or Charismatic Christianity (Gifford 1994:513–516). Pentecostalism had been present in Africa before this, but the late 1980s saw an unprecedented expansion. In many parts of Africa—including Sierra Leone—these churches have attracted young, aspiring middle-class migrants in towns and cities, connecting them to an urban-oriented world of education, upward social mobility, and global linkages (e.g., Gifford 1994; Meyer 1998). Despite Pentecostalism’s North American origins, Pentecostal churches in Africa have typically been locally run. As Robbins (2004) argues, the hugely successful globalization of Pentecostalism is characterized both by the spread of a fairly stable package of concepts and practices—such as the idea of being “born again,” the importance of proselytizing, and such “gifts of the Holy Spirit” as speaking in tongues, and healing—and by its capacity to adapt itself to local social concerns and cosmologies. Its adaptability derives
especially from the deliverance ministry, in which the fight between good and evil is easily translated into a myriad of local issues (Robbins 2004).

This simultaneous homogenization and vernacularization is especially clear in the deliverance ministry within Africa, which has been retooled through sermons, broadcasts, pamphlets, and burgeoning “cassette cultures” (Bastian n.d.; Hackett 1998; Oha 2000). Through it, deities and spirits from African cosmologies were incorporated into Pentecostal ideas and practice by recasting them as demons and waging spiritual warfare against them (e.g., Meyer 1994). The struggle against these demonized spirits easily became an idiom for multiple local concerns, thereby enabling Pentecostalism to address these concerns in a directly relevant language. “This openness to local spiritual languages,” argues Robbins, “allows P/c [Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity] to . . . mean different things in different places . . . yet even as it absorbs local content, P/c dualism also maintains its globally recognizable shape as a struggle between the divine and the demonic” (Robbins 2004:129).

In Nigeria and Ghana, the deliverance ministry was made to speak to two concerns. First, it enabled migrants to the cities to distance themselves from their non-Pentecostal (“pagan”) rural kin and to resist their requests for financial assistance (Meyer 1998). Second, although Pentecostals’ own economic successes were signs of divine blessing, the money and power accumulated mysteriously by “big men” were often regarded as having a demonic source. Rapacious postcolonial politicians in particular were the subjects of conjecture about secret dealings with immoral spiritual forces (e.g., Marshall-Fratini 1998; Meyer 1995).

When Nigeria intervened in Sierra Leone’s conflict in 1998, Nigerian troops spread the paradigm of spiritual warfare, which proliferated as Sierra Leonian Pentecostals used it to address their experience of the civil war (See Figure 1). By 2001, GP Ministries youth were not only reworking their memories of violence through the lens of spiritual warfare, but also reworking spiritual warfare itself through their techniques of religious imagination, fighting an invisible battle to transform both themselves and Sierra Leone.

After the wedding. Nancy moves in with her new husband and her mother-in-law, Mami Yeno.

In contrast to Job in his relatively spacious accommodations, with only three people to a house, the youth of GP Ministries share what are usually very cramped quarters with friends or relatives in the area (“Seven people in a room! There are so many of us, we are choking”). Those who have nowhere to stay live in the church itself, sleeping either on narrow wooden benches or on chairs pushed together in a pan bodi (corrugated iron) building next to it, with their possessions slung over a wooden rafter. They perform tasks such as cleaning the church, and usually receive one meal a
Sierra Leoneans who have survived the ravages of their country’s recent civil war come to Pentecostal churches and centers like this one in Freetown in search of ways to heal the traumas of violence and displacement. With a deliverance ministry that promises both a way to shed problems like addiction and a new sense of belonging, these churches appeal in particular to young people who have been displaced by the conflict. Photo by Rosalind Shaw.

day from donations. Some are taken in by adult members of the church, while others crowd into low-rent rooms nearby. They do odd jobs—usually washing and ironing clothes for neighbors—in exchange for food. Matthew, the president of GP Youth, lives with a friend and, unlike most other church youth, earns a small income through tailoring. As in many other parts of Africa (Sommers 2001), displacement is gendered in Sierra Leone: women and children tend to stay in camps to gain access to the resources there, while young men settle and find work in cities. Twenty miles outside Freetown, in the Waterloo Displaced Camp, women predominate. GP Ministries has a branch there, with an active and mostly female youth contingent that plays a leadership role in several church groups. But in the Freetown branch of GP, where displaced youth are self-settled, well over two-thirds of these displaced youth are young men.

GP Ministries was founded in 1988 in Kono, the diamond district, but was relocated to Freetown during the war. Many of its members are middle class, but most are impoverished following the war. Although donations enabled the construction of a fairly large church, no Mercedes-Benzes or SUVs—signs of affluent congregants—graced the church on Sundays. The church’s founder occasionally sent money from the United Kingdom, to which he had fled after the AFRC coup of 1997, but there appears to be no other support from abroad. Neither does the church have obvious political ties.
PENTECOSTAL MEMORY IN SIERRA LEONE

in Sierra Leone: Although the pastors told me that they liked Sierra Leone’s president Tejan-Kabbah, I heard no statements of support for him or his government in the church services I attended.

Although most churches I knew in Freetown housed or had programs for displaced people, displaced youth seem to be drawn to Pentecostal churches in particular. In Sierra Leone, as in many other parts of Africa, these churches hold a particular attraction for (and actively seek to recruit) migrant, refugee, and displaced youth (Sommers 2003). In GP Ministries’ main branch, over two-thirds of the 50-odd members of the Youth Ministry were internally displaced by the war, usually for between three and ten years. Some GP youth were already “born again” before they joined this church, and about half were recruited when the Youth Mission visited their homes. Pentecostal churches like GP Ministries have become nodal points for communities of youth, providing not only networks and support systems, but also (like Pentecostal churches elsewhere) opportunities to develop public leadership skills (see Robbins 2004:130). GP Ministries is run not only by its four pastors but also by a group of lay “Church Elders” and lay leaders of such groups as the Intercessory Prayer Group, the Women’s Group, and the GP Youth. No specialized education is required for lay leadership: one prominent member of GP Youth was the leader of the Intercessory Prayer Group, while another became a pastor-in-training. But just as significant, I argue, is the opportunity offered for displaced youth to reshape their experience, memory, and aspirations, making these speak directly to Sierra Leone’s civil conflict, its aftermath, and their own predicament.

Job is employed by an NGO, giving him not only educated, middle-class respectability but also reliable earning power.

Although Freetown became crowded with displaced Sierra Leoneans during the war, it also hosted another migrant population. After the 1999 Lome Peace Accord, a flood of expatriates arrived belonging to the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) and dozens of international donors, agencies, and NGOs. Until the Lome Accord, Freetown had been characterized by overt signs of disconnection from global flows—lack of paid work, petrol shortages, and continuous electrical blackouts. But outside formal state channels, what Nordstrom (2004) calls a global “economy of shadows” had been an intrinsic part of the war from the beginning, most notably in the international flows of Sierra Leone’s diamonds and their exchange for weapons, drugs, and other commodities of war (e.g., Richards 1996; Smillie et al. 2000). Since the Lome Accord, however, the influx of international organizations has pumped money into the formal sector, expanding Freetown’s formal job and business opportunities as well as its pool of consumers, and fuelling a boom in mobile phone companies, supermarkets,
Conflict in Sierra Leone  Sierra Leone’s civil war (officially 1991–2002) was a low-intensity conflict fought at the local level but sustained by external actors. One of its roots grew in neighboring Liberia during the Cold War, when the United States flooded its African client states with military aid, creating a huge reservoir of arms in mid-1980s Liberia that were used in insurgencies from 1986 onward (Moran 2006:20–21). Another root lay in the global capitalist processes through which flows of mineral and natural resources from war-torn countries to trading partners in “developed” countries enriched warlords and fed conflicts. Thus during Liberia’s first civil war (1989–96), the warlord Charles Taylor sought access to Sierra Leone’s diamonds. He was, in addition, angered by the Sierra Leone government’s provision of a base for the operations of the (mostly Nigerian) Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in Liberia. He therefore armed and supported Foday Sankoh, future leader of Sierra Leone’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF). And meanwhile, a third root had grown in Sierra Leone, where after the long “kleptocratic” rule of the All People’s Congress (APC) government (1968–1992), alienated youth joined the RUF.

The RUF espoused a revolutionary ideology, but attacked civilians. They controlled parts of the diamond area and funded the conflict through the international diamond trade. When the army failed to halt them, a civilian militia, the Kamajo (later the Civil Defense Forces [CDF]), formed in the south and east. After President Tejan-Kabbah’s election in 1996, his government armed the Kamajo. But in 1997, the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) ousted him in a coup and invited the RUF to join them. After nine months they were driven out of Freetown by ECOMOG troops. But in retaliation they launched their devastating “Operation Every Living Thing” in the provinces, carrying it back to Freetown in 1999 before ECOMOG again expelled them.

All combatant groups used child soldiers, abduction, sexual violence, and mutilation (amputation in the case of the AFRC and RUF). ECOMOG troops, in turn, summarily executed civilians. After the 1999 Lome Peace Accord and the official end of the conflict in early 2002, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inaugurated to promote accountability and reconciliation, while the Special Court for Sierra Leone began to prosecute those most responsible for war crimes and human rights violations in early 2003.
These organizations are, however, making an impact on the lives of young people in another way. First the Nigerian Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops, then the UN peacekeepers, who are paid in dollars, quickly gained a reputation for using their spending power to acquire young teenaged schoolgirls as girlfriends, buying them clothes and mobile phones, and taking them out to the beach restaurants, hotels, and night clubs that ordinary Sierra Leoneans cannot afford. This is just the tip of the iceberg: a huge economy of sex has exploded as an inextricable part of the conflict and the humanitarian intervention that followed it (UNHCR and Save the Children UK 2002). This economy of sex forms a prominent part of the landscape on which Pentecostal churches wage spiritual warfare. Through the figure of Job, Matthew’s play taps into the demonstrated power of men in humanitarian organizations over young women’s sexual availability, but reconfigures this power within the moral space of Pentecostal marriage.

Every morning Nancy makes Job breakfast before he leaves for work in a pressed shirt and tie. Marriage, sexuality, and parenting constitute a large tract of the treacherous terrain on which spiritual warfare is fought (Bastian n.d.; Oha 2000). Both in the United States and in Africa, Pentecostal churches have sought to control and regulate this terrain, structuring their members’ lives through church teachings, books, pamphlets, audiotapes, and seminars (Ojo 1997). GP Ministries periodically hold “Couples’ Seminars,” in which the pastors teach about the divinely ordained nature of marriage, the properly chaste conduct of unmarried couples, the importance of monogamy and fidelity, the propriety of wifely obedience to the husband, and the necessity of the husband’s love for his wife.

Job appears to be able to support Nancy, himself, and perhaps Mami Yeno as well on his NGO salary. This would be extremely unlikely in Freetown, where all women, whether in Pentecostal, middle-class marriages or not, earn an income of their own. But Matthew’s play, remember, is a Pentecostal fantasy. Job’s marriage, professional employment, and economic autonomy represent a fantasy not only about adulthood, but also about middle-class adulthood. This is virtually unattainable for this group of young people whose status as dependent youth has been prolonged indefinitely by the war.

Nancy, a spirited, intelligent, and exemplary young wife located primarily in the home, likewise represents a fantasy—but in this case a male rather than female fantasy. Like the male youth, all the women I knew in the youth group told me that they wanted to complete their secondary education and earn an income. When I asked what they hoped and prayed for, they replied: “For schooling”; “To go through my
education. Learn a job”; “To do a diploma course”; “To learn hotel management”; or “To be a nurse.” Even if they were to find a husband like Job, they told me, it would be foolish not to earn a separate income, both for their security and for their power within the marriage.

After three years of marriage, Nancy is still not pregnant. This is a source of conflict between Nancy and her mother-in-law, Mami Yeno, who makes Nancy’s life as miserable as possible. Job takes Nancy’s part, explaining to his mother that children come from God: when God wishes to send them a child, Nancy will become pregnant. But Mami Yeno is not convinced, and hatches plots to break up the marriage.

Nancy and Job’s marriage is exemplary in all ways but one: their living arrangements. In urban, middle-class marriages, sharing a home with the husband’s mother is usually regarded as less than ideal. Because of her moral authority over and close bonds with her son, the husband’s mother is often viewed as an agent of marital discord; in some West African Pentecostal teachings, she may even become a potentially demonic threat to Pentecostal Christian marriages (Bastian n.d.:26 n. 13). Although Mami Yeno has a son with the biblical name of “Job,” she herself has a name that GP youth associated with the rural “upcountry.” As shown below, Mami Yeno exceeds all expectations of the demonic mother-in-law stereotype.

In the deliverance ministry in Nigerian and Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, the figure of the sinister rural relative is often made to address the conflicting demands of kinship and individual entrepreneurship. For Ghanaian and Nigerian urban migrants, argues Meyer (1998), this figure authorizes a reduction in the pressure that migrants feel to share their earnings from the city with their rural kin. But the deliverance ministry, famously adaptable to local contexts, may take quite different forms elsewhere in Africa: according to Englund (2004), poor urban Malawian born-again Christians remain close to their rural relatives and regard ties to their rural homes as essential.

As among these Malawian Pentecostals, disowning a relative is extremely rare in GP Ministries. Here there is no conflict between kinship and entrepreneurship: displaced GP youth do not earn wages, and seek help to eat, clothe themselves, and pay their school fees from anyone who has resources. Although GP pastors occasionally attribute church members’ health problems to their families’ participation in rural cult associations, they do not encourage members to cut kinship ties that have already been torn by the violence. Such kinship ties that remain are precious when several members of their immediate family may be lost, killed, living in a camp far away, settled elsewhere with other relatives, or without the resources, even if physically present, to support others. Significantly, Mami Yeno is not cut off but redeemed at the play’s conclusion. Like members of African Pentecostal churches elsewhere, GP youth have created a
parallel “family” support network. Those few who have families with land in Freetown help to shelter displaced GP friends: Vincent, for example, has built two rooms with Robert, whom Vincent calls “my Christian brother,” on Robert’s mother’s land, and maintains the property in lieu of rent. Church Elders sometimes take in GP youth: “Auntie Amie,” for instance, houses four “boys” in a tiny room in her small bungalow, and feeds them in exchange for chores. And the pastors, GP youth told me, “are our Papas” who look after the spiritual and physical welfare of their young congregants.

Yet the youths’ position within these fictive kinship structures is that of dependent children. Just as Nancy is unable to become a mother, they are unable to make the transition to adulthood, which in Sierra Leone is understood as a gradual passage from being a dependent to having dependents through marriage, parenthood, and access to economic resources. For GP youth, the key to adulthood is secondary and further education, which they hope will enable them to find employment like Job’s. Most are enrolled in secondary schools in the area, and benefit from the occasional scholarship received from “big people” through the church, but often express frustration at having the potential for a middle-class future, but few opportunities to achieve it. Paul, the Secretary-General of the Youth, told me of his thoughts during the war: “I thought, ‘My future will be miserable if the war doesn’t end.’ I wanted to go overseas to try there, if the war didn’t end. I had a broken heart. You can think too much. I thought, ‘There’s no work, there’s no money—how will I survive?’ ”

Yet as bad as this situation was and still is, some have found opportunities in displacement. As Malkki (1995) argues, we should not view forced migration as invariably a rupture from an idealized “normal” life: Sierra Leone has not been a good place for youth for a long time. We need to look not only at displacement, but also at these youths’ emplacement: many of them see this emplacement as enhancing their opportunities for education, despite the unending struggle to pay school fees and buy clothes. Those who had been separated from their parents told me that although they wanted to find their parents again, they would prefer to continue living in Freetown (“Education is better here; I want to stay”; “I want to contact my parents again, but I want to go to school here”). Many have very specific aspirations—like Matthew, who currently gets a small income through tailoring work, struggles to finish school and sit his exams, and wants to go on to study business administration. He told me of a dream he once had: “I’m in a working place—a very fine place. A business place, an office—a very big office. I see the office chair and desk. I have my phone, I have my computer.”

Job’s NGO sends him “upcountry” to the northern town of Makeni. He has to leave immediately. Unable to return home to tell Nancy where he is going, he mails a letter to her before he leaves. At the time of the play’s performance in April 2001, Makeni was
the headquarters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. UN peacekeepers had just begun to deploy in the town, however, and NGOs were making a tentative entry to assess the needs of the civilians who had remained there. We do not learn what Job does in Makeni. He travels from Freetown, presumably in a fast new NGO vehicle with a driver that is routinely waved through the many UN roadblocks that interrupted the road to Makeni in 2001, and presumably to render humanitarian assistance. Many of Matthew’s friends among the GP Ministries youth had, in fact, stayed in Makeni for a while after fleeing from the east, until the arrival of the rebels in Makeni in 1998 displaced them yet again. At that time, they were forced to make their way to Freetown, where many of them initially sought assistance in the Waterloo Displaced Camp outside the city. By visiting Makeni in his professional capacity, then, Job reverses not only the speed and direction of the journey but also the power and capacity of many GP youth. This is the only allusion in Matthew’s play to the war that has been the cause of his and his friends’ displacement.

Most displaced GP Ministries youth—including Matthew—came from Kono, the diamond district in the East, which became a zone for fighting and plunder for combatants from all sides soon after the war began in 1991. All parts of Sierra Leone were attacked during the war. But in some parts of the country (which changed throughout the war), for some of the time, the intermittent nature of a low-intensity conflict meant that people could live in their homes and (in rural areas) cultivate their farms. The diamond areas of the East and Southeast were permanently occupied and fought over by combatant groups, however, which meant massive civilian displacement. Many youth have witnessed the death of a parent, a sibling, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, at the hands of one of the combatant groups. Many also became separated from their families during the fighting. And many of the youth have experienced several cycles of displacement. Mark described his own displacement experiences to me:

They [the RUF] drove us from Koidu town [in 1998]. They killed my uncle. I went to Guinea, with my mother and father, for several months. The Guineans threatened us; they told us we were rebels. The army drove everyone out of the camp. Everyone scattered. The Guinean soldiers beat me and locked me up with other young boys for three days. The Sierra Leone government sent a helicopter to repatriate people. They took me to Lungi [the international airport]. Then I stayed in the stadium [in Freetown]. I met one man who brought me to this church.

All the displaced GP youth spent weeks or months living in the bush. Often, a meager diet of wild yams, cassava, and bananas, exposure to cold and rain, and walking long distances across difficult terrain killed the more vulnerable family members—
baby brothers and sisters, grandparents, the sick or wounded. Agnes, who was 15 when she fled from Kono in 1996, lost her mother in childbirth under these circumstances:

I ran from Kono with my father and the rest of my family. My mother was there. . . . She gave birth—she was pregnant. After one week, she died, and left the young baby. He died too, and my five-year-old brother. He got sick. We were in the bush for time—many months. We ate cassava, bananas. It’s not easy. You fight for yourself.

Some of those who fled were captured by the RUF rebels. The rebels forced adults to work for them, often making them carry backbreaking loads over long distances with little food; they conscripted young boys as fighters and diamond diggers; and they took many young girls, raping and often impregnating them, making them perform domestic work, taking them as concubines, and sometimes training them to fight.

Agnes, the young woman whose mother and two baby brothers died in the bush, was captured, together with what was left of her family:

We carried loads for the RUF. We beat rice. We cooked for them. We worked for them for six months. The rebels fed us very little. They did things that were not fine. They fought among themselves and we escaped; we walked to Makeni. This was 1998. We stayed for two months; my father worked in peoples’ farms to get money. Then the RUF came and we left; we got lifts to Freetown, and went to the Waterloo camp.

There is a strong likelihood that Agnes was referring to sexual assault when she stated that the rebels, “did things that were not fine.” I return to Agnes later. Whether or not they are displaced, all the GP Ministries youth I met are “war-affected.” Many of them describe having been in a state similar to that which Perera, writing about Sri Lanka, describes as “the shadow of death . . . a space that, once one has entered, one may or may not exit” (2001:164). All the GP youth I knew struggled against insistent memories of death and violence, dreaming about it, anticipating its return: “I still remember January 6th, 1999 [the RUF/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council [AFRC] invasion of Freetown]. My mind can go back to past events.” “I didn’t sleep with all my heart. My whole body felt downcast. I replayed it in my mind frequently.” Simply recounting such events, however, did not enable these youth to weaken the power of “the shadow of death” over them.

When Job leaves unexpectedly for Makeni, Mami Yeno intercepts his letter to Nancy, telling her that he no longer wants her, and throws her out of the house. This tactic fails: when Job returns, he and Nancy reconcile. Mami Yeno then consults a “mori-man” (a Muslim ritual
specialist) to split the couple up. This too fails: Job and Nancy’s “born-again” condition protects them. And finally, after praying to God for a child, Nancy becomes pregnant. But Mami Yeno is now so enraged that she returns to the mori-man, asking him to kill Nancy and her own unborn grandchild. As this sinister specialist prepares the medicine to kill Nancy and her child, Nancy goes to the church she belongs to and tells the pastor of her problems with her mother-in-law. Because this pastor prays over her and gives her advice, the lethal medicine fails to work: God is by Nancy’s side, protecting her. Eventually, she goes into labor; she goes to the hospital with Job, where nurses and doctors take her blood pressure and give her medical tests. Mami Yeno returns to the mori-man and his shrieking assistant: “Let the woman die in childbirth,” she demands. The mori-man sends a “demonic agent,” a masked cult association spirit (a “devil”) whose body is clad in red and white ritual cloth.

The “demonic agent” sent by Mami Yeno’s mori-man is a familiar figure in West African Pentecostal narratives. As is common in the deliverance ministry, a local spirit—here one of the masked cult association spirits—is translated into Pentecostal cosmology as a diabolic entity (see Meyer 1994). It is a denizen of the “Underworld,” a key concept in Sierra Leonean Pentecostal culture, denoting a hidden region under the earth or in the ocean that is ruled over by Satan or his demons. I had heard no mention of the Underworld during any of my visits to Sierra Leone up to 1992, but when I returned in June and July 2001, I found that it had become part of a widespread cosmology of spiritual warfare that not only suffuses Pentecostal communities in Freetown, but also extends beyond them. I do not know if the concept of Underworld is a specifically Sierra Leonean development: it does not appear to have comparable significance in Nigerian Pentecostalism, although it may well derive from the account of “Underworld Laboratories” in an influential Nigerian deliverance ministry pamphlet, Emmanuel Eni’s *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* (1987:20). But although for Eni these are specifically undersea laboratories in the marine queendom of the great demon Mami Wata or the Queen of the Coast (Bastian n.d.), in Sierra Leone the Underworld includes but extends beyond Mami Wata’s realm: it is the indefinite space of all demonic activity. And as I show, it has been shaped and wrought by Sierra Leone’s long years of war.

Images of the Underworld and of its intervention in our own world may be viewed in popular Pentecostal videos (see Figure 2), most of which are produced in Nigeria and Ghana by businessmen and entrepreneurial artists (Haynes and Okome 2000:55–56) who are not necessarily Pentecostal themselves. With such titles as “Married to a Witch” and “The Wrath of God,” these videos feature dramas of spiritual conflict between God and the Devil, Light and Darkness, as played out in the lives of born-again Christians and “animists” who, like Nancy and Mami Yeno, battle each other with weapons of prayer and “magic.” In Freetown’s city center, these videos sell for the equivalent of $10 at roadside kiosks; they are shown in small “pan bodi”
FIGURE 2. Pentecostal videos produced in Nigeria such as this one dramatize the struggle between good and evil. Pentecostal Christians in Sierra Leone interpret them as making manifest an “Underworld” in which all demonic activity takes place. Young people who view them in video centers and churches praise them for offering a depiction of a well-defined moral order that stands in sharp contrast to the chaos they experienced during Sierra Leone’s civil war. Photo by Rosalind Shaw.
video centers, played in private homes, and circulate among friends with access to a VCR. One such video was played at a GP Ministries youth group meeting after the first Sunday service I attended. It turned out that these were the movies of choice for almost all the GP youth I got to know.

Many of the youth said that they found these videos “educational,” conveying an effective moral knowledge of how to live in the world (“you can learn lessons”; “they point to me how to live a good life from evil”). Through these videos, more specifically, the hidden operations of the Underworld are revealed for viewers’ edification and guidance (“you can see the Underworld in Nigerian films”; “they expose the Underworld”; “they expose the kingdom of Darkness”). Paul, the Secretary-General of the Youth, told me: “I like Nigerian films that expose the camp of the Devil. And that portray Christ. I love to watch those—more than going to football! Those films define theology, somehow.”

Especially telling were comments from several youth that although they enjoyed these Nigerian films, they could no longer watch “violent films,” by which they meant Chinese martial arts films, and what they call “agent” films of the “Rambo” and “Terminator” kind. “I like Nigerian ‘Darkness’ films, ‘Christian defeats Underworld,’ ” said Isaac, “I like that! But I don’t like violent films.” And Joshua recalled, “I used to like Chinese [martial arts] films before the war, but now they are too violent. I don’t like to see fighting. I like to see Christian films—something educational.” By drawing an implied contrast between the Nigerian videos and “violent films,” the GP Ministries youth drew attention to an important quality of Pentecostal videos. These videos do, in fact, include action and imagery that Western audiences would consider violent or disturbing: vivid scenes of death and killing, and often blood and gore, are standard fare of spiritual warfare plots. But these scenes form part of an overarching narrative of a battle between good and evil in which born-again Christians—often, in fact, young born-again Christians like Nancy and Job—use the power of prayer to overcome the forces of Darkness.

Because, as I was constantly told, “whatever happens physically must also happen spiritually,” terrible acts of violence are the material outcomes of evil spiritual actions, and as such they can be fought with prayer, disconnected from their demonic power source. Although the youth I knew are well aware that the Pentecostal videos were fiction, these videos confirmed what they regarded as a deeper truth about the nature of the world they inhabit. As born-again Christians, the violence they have all experienced has become the manifestation of underlying forces against which they feel they—or, through them, God—can take action.

For many people in Freetown, the Underworld is indelibly associated with Nigerian troops. In February 1998, Nigerian ECOMOG troops drove out the AFRC junta that had overthrown the government the previous May, joined forces with the RUF
rebels, and inaugurated a ten-month reign of terror and hunger in the city. Freetown’s civilians were grateful that the Nigerian troops were risking their lives (and several hundreds had, in fact, lost their lives) to save Sierra Leonean civilians and to liberate Freetown. But ECOMOG’s presence turned out to be a mixed blessing “Before UNAMSIL, ECOMOG soldiers were here,” a resident of one of the Western suburbs of the city recalled; “most of them were cruel and wicked, and were womanizers. They introduced most of these young girls into this immorality, because they have dollars.” Then, less than a year after the ECOMOG intervention, on January 6, 1999, ex-AFRC soldiers and RUF rebels managed to get past ECOMOG troops guarding the city. The ex-soldiers and rebels took revenge on Freetown’s civilians and the Nigerian soldiers, forcing people to act as human shields, abducting and mutilating hundreds of civilians, and burning down a large part of Freetown’s densely populated East End. In many instances ex-AFRC and RUF fighters locked those who did not comply inside their homes, torched their houses, and shot or stoned them when they tried to escape their burning buildings. After three weeks, ECOMOG troops drove the rebels and ex-soldiers from the city—but again, only with the loss of hundreds of Sierra Leonean and Nigerian lives. In their efforts to flush out the rebels in January 1999, many frightened and angry ECOMOG soldiers carried out numerous summary executions of civilians.

It was in this context of regional military intervention that Nigerian Pentecostal videos and audiocassette began to circulate in Freetown. Several people in GP Ministries described the Nigerian troops as the source of not only the tapes but also the Underworld depicted in the tapes (“they brought this Underworld”). Some claimed that the ECOMOG troops embodied the Underworld’s demonic nature in their acts of brutality, their January 1999 killings, and their seduction of young schoolgirls. Frances, a young pastor in training, implied that the videos had spread both the idea of the Underworld, and the Underworld itself: “After the Nigerian soldiers came, the films came; they indoctrinate people about the Underworld. So the Underworld is rampant now.” “Is this a good thing or a bad thing?” I asked. “The films are a good thing,” Frances replied, “they educate people about living an upright Christian life.” Like the ECOMOG soldiers who both killed civilians and protected them, Frances saw the videos as plunging Freetown into participation in the Underworld, yet also as offering a model for the Underworld’s defeat.

Yet the Underworld is not only made to reflect back on those who brought its electronic images to Sierra Leone. It is also used to reimagine—and thereby confront—the rebel war itself. Several GP Ministries youth perceived the war as having arisen out of Sierra Leone’s moral and spiritual condition. Because of the corruption of Sierra Leonean politicians and businessmen, the human sacrifice that many politicians are rumored to have carried out to win elections, and what the youth called the “animism”
of people in the provinces (especially their cult associations or “secret societies”), Satan’s spiritual victory in the country had manifested itself in the civil war. Matthew told me: “The secret societies, they waste a lot of blood. It’s a demonic business. God doesn’t want them. People don’t like God in this country. People were in night clubs until two or three in the morning. Now, during the war, they realize these societies don’t help them from the rebels. They turn to God now.”

Satan and his demons caused the war in order to feed on human blood, which is both their food and the currency they accumulate in an Underworld “blood bank.” As Frances put it:

The Underworld has to operate on legal grounds. So human sacrifice was one of these legal grounds for Satan to enter. All this contributes to the war. The things you see in Nigerian films happen here. Satan needs to get access to blood. People are involved in wicked activities. So when the war comes, Satan stores the blood. They feed on it, because blood is shed every day. They store it in a spiritual kingdom that belongs to Satan, that we can’t see with our eyes.

The Underworld, then, is an international entity—a kind of demonic counterpart to the United Nations—that erupts into all countries that give it “legal grounds” for such intervention. One of those “legal grounds” is the corruption and greed of the country’s politicians, whose rapacity is conveyed in popular rumors of their evil ritual practices.

Paul, the Secretary-General of the Youth, also described the Underworld in terms of an international body whose head—Satan—travels to meetings with his “agents” in a particular country. Telling me of a testimony in church of a man who experienced descent into the Underworld while in a coma, Paul interpreted this testimony as evidence for the Underworld’s intervention in Sierra Leone:

On that day, Satan was in Sierra Leone, having a meeting with the Underworld agents. Maybe their blood bank was empty. They set traps—car accidents and war. They live on blood and urine, and human flesh. The rebels and the Kamajos are connected to this Underworld. You can’t put on those sebes (amulets) they wear and come to church.

All sides in the conflict have committed atrocities, and thus participate in an international Underworld. In a war funded by illicit transnational flows of diamonds, the Underworld with its international “blood bank” (a World Bank of blood, perhaps?) gives vivid form both to the war’s moral ambiguities and to its hidden global articulations. As Marshall-Fratini (1998:100) argues for Nigeria, the Pentecostal discourse of the demonic may be understood as a critique of government. Among these Freetown
Pentecostals, in addition, the indeterminate international imagery of the Underworld also captures and comments on global “shadows of war” (Nordstrom 2004) that extend far beyond the state.

Through their images of the Underworld, then, Freetown Pentecostals have refashioned the deliverance ministry to address their experience and critical understandings of the war. And through this retooled deliverance ministry, GP Ministries youth use spiritual warfare to participate imaginatively in a struggle against the conflict. At a checkpoint in January 1999, for instance, Foday witnessed a terrible sight: members of the Kamajo militia dismembered a man accused of being an AFRC soldier while he was still alive. Foday interpreted the actions of these Kamajos in terms of Pentecostal accounts of blood-drinking demons of the Underworld. Later, he told a friend: “This war will never come to an end because you can’t fight evil with evil. What I saw today was the work of the Devil. The government is taking up with the Kamajos, and they are unclean. So we should take up the spiritual fight.” I always prayed for peace in my prayers. And now we can already smell the peace.” The Underworld erupted into Sierra Leone through the war that has displaced most of the GP youth and subjected all of them to horrors that still threaten to engulf them years later. But, as the Pentecostal videos confirm, through the power of prayer they can transform the fighting into a spiritual battle in which they have the capacity to wage war on the source of war itself (cf. Nordstrom 1997).

Meanwhile, the pastor hears that Nancy is in labor, gathers some church members, and heads toward the hospital, praying for Nancy’s safe delivery. When the demonic agent approaches Nancy’s hospital bed and tries to attack her, she cries out “Jesus!” It screeches, recoils, and flees. When the pastor reaches the hospital, he encounters Mami Yeno in a distraught state and begins to pray over her. She screams and falls to the ground as the Holy Spirit enters her. When she regains consciousness, she is transformed; she realizes that only God—not the mori-man—can solve problems. After Nancy safely gives birth to her baby, Mami Yeno goes to her hospital bed and confesses that it was she who hired the mori-man and his demonic agent. Nancy and Job forgive her. They become a happy family at last.

As in many Pentecostal videos, Matthew’s drama reaches its climax with an exorcism. Through prayer used as a weapon of spiritual warfare, the Holy Spirit enters, an evil force is expelled, and a person or situation is entirely transformed. Such exorcism cuts through the plot’s demonic entanglements and enables a resolution: evil “animist” relatives die (or, in the case of Mami Yeno, see the light as a new convert); sick Christians rise healed from their beds; relationships are renewed as born-again bonds; social time flows again; births and weddings are completed; careers progress; success replaces despair.
This transformative combat is built into Pentecostal church services. Sometimes it forms the explicit topic of a sermon, as it did during a service in GP Ministries I attended in July 2002 given by Pastor Braima. Striding up and down the church, stopping to point at members of the congregation, making chopping movements with his right hand, and stamping his feet to embody the trampling of evil, he shouted into his microphone:

The Bible says we need to fight! Deuteronomy 2:24. Against rulers of Darkness. Let’s all say, “Fire to fire!” (Congregation: “Fire to fire!”) May the Lord teach you how to fight today! Let me tell you, the Devil is fighting a losing battle. You want to possess your prosperity, your health, your marriage, but no time for fight, no time for prayer, no time for Bible Study, no time for service—you will not! You need to fight! We are engaged in a battle. You need to stand up! Rise up! . . . Find your hidden demons that cause sickness! They are agents of Darkness. But today, their power is going to be destroyed. If you touch peace, it is yours! If you touch prosperity, it is yours! You are going to possess it!

Spiritual warfare is also a standard feature of Intercessory Prayer with which all GP Ministries services begin, in which everyone uses their own words and gestures to pray for a common goal. When the prayer leader announces the object of prayer—“let’s pray for peace,” for instance—each person loudly declaims his or her own prayers, moving, swaying, pacing back and forth, shaking a fist, addressing the wall with hands raised, or holding up a finger as if making a point to an invisible presence. A cacophony of voices fills the building as participants imaginatively participate in the political events of the world, asking for God’s intervention. This kind of prayer is also the “work” of the Intercessory Prayer Group that meets in the church twice a week. Its members first use prayer to drive demonic forces from the space of the church, then extend their prayers’ power over a wider space: “We pray for the presence of God. We pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit. We declare this place a danger zone for the Devil. Let’s pray for the country.” As in Pentecostal drama, intercessory prayer is a means of fighting the evil forces that manifest themselves in disastrous and deleterious events.

Healing is framed in terms of similar understandings of exorcism. In GP Ministries’ services, the pastors have an “Altar Call” for particular groups of people, inviting those, for example, who are depressed, who are jobless, or who have lost someone in the war, to form lines at the front of the church. The pastors walk up and down, pronouncing prayers, touching people and stopping to lay hands on them, while the rest of the congregation stretch out their hands, broadcasting prayers and blessings through the air. Some of those who are prayed over fall to the ground like Mami Yeno, writhing under the power of the evil spirit that controls them. The pastors kneel over them,
touching their heads and praying until the struggle stops. Individuals who come for one-on-one healing sessions outside church services are prayed over in the same way.

Participation in spiritual warfare through these forms of prayer, through sermons, and through narratives such as those in Nigerian videos and Matthew’s play generates ways of seeing, ways of suffering, and ways of healing for GP Ministries youth (cf. Weiss 2005). These youth often spoke of healing in terms of a “forgetting” of terror and pain: “This church, and the preaching, encourage me,” Mark told me, “then I forget a little and take courage.” Mark and others described their remembering of horrifying events as a passive condition of affliction, an attack by active thoughts and dreams that terrified and bereaved them over and over again, and from which they had been unable to detach themselves. What they described as forgetting was not a loss of their personal memories, but a process that Cole (2001), in her study of colonial memory in a Betsimisaraka community in Madagascar, terms “directed forgetting.” Because memory is not the mere retrieval of information, but connects the rememberer to the person or event remembered, Betsimisaraka who lived through colonial violence do not wish to call that violence back through memory, seeking instead to replace it with ancestral memory through the performance of sacrifice (Cole 2001).

Likewise, GP youth replace their memories of war by “remembering” the Holy Spirit through exorcism. Joshua described what amounts to an exorcism of his recurring visual images of violence: “Pastor Braima prayed over me many times because of the things I’ve seen; to make the bad things come out.” (“Did it work?”) “Yes.” Agnes, whose story of capture by and escape from the rebels we heard earlier, initially suffered from insistent memories of her capture: “When I lay down I was afraid, I asked the pastor to pray for me. After that I never experienced that again. I remembered how I lived with the rebels; that made me afraid at night. I felt better after. Not afraid. I just felt cool.” Her friend Teresa used to have nightmares in which she was attacked by a “night husband”—a spirit who comes to have sex with a woman in her dreams: “When I came from Kenema I saw a night husband. It held me, and we fought. It tried to have sex with me, but it wasn’t able to. The pastor prayed for me. It didn’t come to me again. I felt relief. I felt peace within myself.” And Margaret, a 19 year old who, together with her cousin Salematu, had had to live in the bush for two months after a rebel attack, described their healing from that experience as the exorcism of a bad spirit that had entered them in the bush. “When we first came,” she said, “Pastor Jalloh and Pastor Braima prayed over us to bind the bad spirit. When they prayed over us, our lives changed. It felt like the Holy Spirit came inside and the bad spirit went out.”

Thus, insistent fears, bad dreams, and memories of violence that replay again and again are interpreted as deriving from an external, demonic force beyond the sufferer. “Seeing bad things produces a shock to the person . . . and affects him spiritually,”
Pastor Abdulai told me when I asked how he healed people damaged by the war. “We need to pray against the spirit that reminds him of this event,” he explained; “Satan sends a spirit to torment people. So we can make this spirit come out... We can touch them to make the Holy Spirit come inside.” Like the war itself, then, the torment of incessant memories has an Underworld source. But as with the war, those afflicted can recover their capacity to act by fighting it spiritually and thereby rendering it external to themselves.

For these youth, healing is not only an act performed on them by the pastor, but also an ongoing “fight” in which they learn to participate themselves. When I asked members of GP youth if their fears and nightmares had recurred after a pastor had healed them, most replied that although these did still trouble them, they had learned to work on them through prayer. Agnes said that she sometimes dreams about being captured again: “A person holds me, like a rebel, in the bush, giving me something to drink—poison. I pray in the morning, and I pray in the dream.” Yusuf, whose family’s house on Kissy Road in Freetown’s East End was burned down by the rebels in early 1999, said: “I can think-think about what happened in Kissy Road. Pastor Braima prayed for me. So I don’t think-think about Kissy Road too much. I don’t do it so much now. I got frightened easily at first, but not now. I open the Bible and pray.” To “think-think” (tink-tink) is to be overcome by thoughts, which eased when Yusuf used prayer and the bible as techniques of directed forgetting that connected his thoughts to a different spiritual source. John, who does not know what happened to his parents since being separated from them during a rebel attack in 1996, described a similar process: “When I remember my parents, something tells me to pray, and I get my courage back. When I think too much, I pray, and then I sleep.” And Stephen told me: “When I remember what happened to me in the past, they [the pastors] pray over me and I don’t remember again. I felt bad, because they were killing people all around me. But when Pastor Braima prayed over me, I felt lifted up. Now when I feel bad again, I read the Bible and pray.”

By renarrating such memories and by struggling against their Underworld source through prayer, bible reading, and dramas (dramas that do not merely parallel Sierra Leone’s war but recontextualize it), GP Ministries youth can “forget” them, transforming demonic memory into Pentecostal memory. Memories of war that have shaped the lives of these youth are themselves reshaped through the reconfigured deliverance concept of the Underworld—a concept that, by melding a globalized space of geopolitical evil with a personal memory space of the depths of terror, enables displaced Pentecostal youth to fight both of these in their terms. Through participation in the narratives available in Nigerian videos and church sermons, and enacted in the practices of healing, drama, and prayer, these youth create their own
Pentecostal stories of a battle between the Holy Spirit and the Underworld—not only in plays like Matthew’s, but also in their own lives.

After violence, Perera writes, “the relative silence of those who have suffered the most needs to be taken into account” (2001:159). But there are different kinds of silence. The silences of those who live under political repression, of a torture survivor in the face of incommunicable pain, of a WWII veteran who cannot tell his family of his wartime experiences, of communities in southern Mozambique that risk spiritual attack if they talk about the war, of Betsimisaraka about colonial violence, of women in South Africa’s TRC who wish to tell their stories on their own terms, and of survivors of Sierra Leone’s conflict who urge others to “forgive and forget” are the outcomes of disparate processes of social memory and forgetting. But in the work of Sierra Leone’s TRC, all postviolence survivors’ silences were treated as essentially similar to the first two, and as a condition to be overcome through the narration of “objective” memories of harm.

Simply recounting their experiences of violence in a direct, literal manner does not enable GP youth to weaken the dominion of such experiences, however. By “forgetting” the war as a direct realist account and relocating it to an Underworld that can be fought through prayer and exorcism in their refashioned deliverance ministry, GP youth seek to displace their war memories by the Holy Spirit. And by thus renarrating the war through prayer, video viewing, and plays, they learn new forms of forgetting, turning demonic memory into Pentecostal memory. This does not mean that they cease to suffer and to remember. Neither does it mean that they become autonomous authors of their own thoughts and feelings. But they learn to experience their memories in ways that enable them to be worked on, fought, and transformed in the very same way that Sierra Leone’s war can itself be worked on, fought, and transformed.

The displacement of harrowing experiences from the past into other, transmuted forms is often viewed as synonymous with repression or false consciousness. But just as the physical displacement of GP youth is not an entirely negative condition, their displacement of violent memory is enabling rather than constraining. From the silence surrounding the civil war in their plays, they retrieve a different kind of memory and voice, creating a moral life course in which they are much more than weak dependents.

ABSTRACT

In this article, I seek to locate the anthropology of social recovery within the work of memory. Following a decade of violent armed conflict in Sierra Leone, displaced youth in a Pentecostal church write and perform plays that are silent on the subject of the war, but renarrate it in the idiom of spiritual warfare against a subterranean demonic realm known as the Underworld. Ideas of the Underworld are part of a local retooling of the Pentecostal...
deliverance ministry to address Sierra Leone’s years of war. Through their struggle against the Underworld, these Pentecostal youth reimagine Sierra Leone’s war, reshaping experiences of violence that have shaped them and thereby transforming demonic memory into Pentecostal memory. Just as their own physical displacement is not an entirely negative condition, their displacement of violent memory is enabling rather than repressive. By “forgetting” the war as a direct realist account and reworking it through the lens of the Underworld, they use war itself to re-member their lives. Although they do not lose their memories of terror and violence, they learn to transform these in ways that allow them to create a moral life course in which they are much more than weak dependents.

**Keywords:** violence, recovery, memory, Pentecostalism, Sierra Leone

**NOTES**

**Acknowledgments.** The field research in Freetown on which this article is based was conducted June–July 2001 and July–August 2002. I gratefully acknowledge funding by the Mellon-MIT Program for Refugees and Forced Migration (2001), Tufts University’s Faculty Research Awards Committee (2001 and 2002), and the Marion and Jasper Whiting Foundation (2002). I am also grateful for a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellowship at the U.S. Institute of Peace (2003–04), during which part of this article was written. I would like to thank Mark Auslander, Misty Bastian, Brad Weiss, and the anonymous reviewers and editors of *Cultural Anthropology* for their comments on drafts of this article.

1. All names in this article, including that of the play and the church, have been changed.
2. Displacement figures on Sierra Leone typically do not include those who left their homes to hide in the bush.
3. In Harrell-Bond’s 1960s study of professional marriage in Freetown, over 70 percent of the women she surveyed (and 28% of the men) viewed the man’s mother as a source of marital conflict, and strongly favored maintaining separate homes (1975:234–240).
4. According to Physicians for Human Rights, with UNAMSIL, 53 percent of girls and women who experienced sexual violence during the war reported face-to-face contact with the RUF (2002:48).
5. I am grateful to Misty Bastian for this suggestion.
6. This is also the way in which many youth characterized Rambo films in the mid-1990s. As Richards argues, “what they mean by this is that the films they see provide a stimulus to the imagination to tackle problems within their own world” (1996:109).
7. Following the Lome Peace Accord of 1999, many former ECOMOG soldiers became incorporated as peacekeepers into the UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).

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