



# Girls in Conflict Zones: Challenging Discourse and Representations

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# INTRODUCTION

- ✿ Global Realities of Children & Armed Conflict
- ✿ Representations and Discourses of Child Soldiers
- ✿ Girls Soldiers in Sierra Leone:  
Gender-based violence, Insecurity and Victimization
- ✿ Negotiating (In)security:  
Girls' Agency, Resourcefulness and Resistance

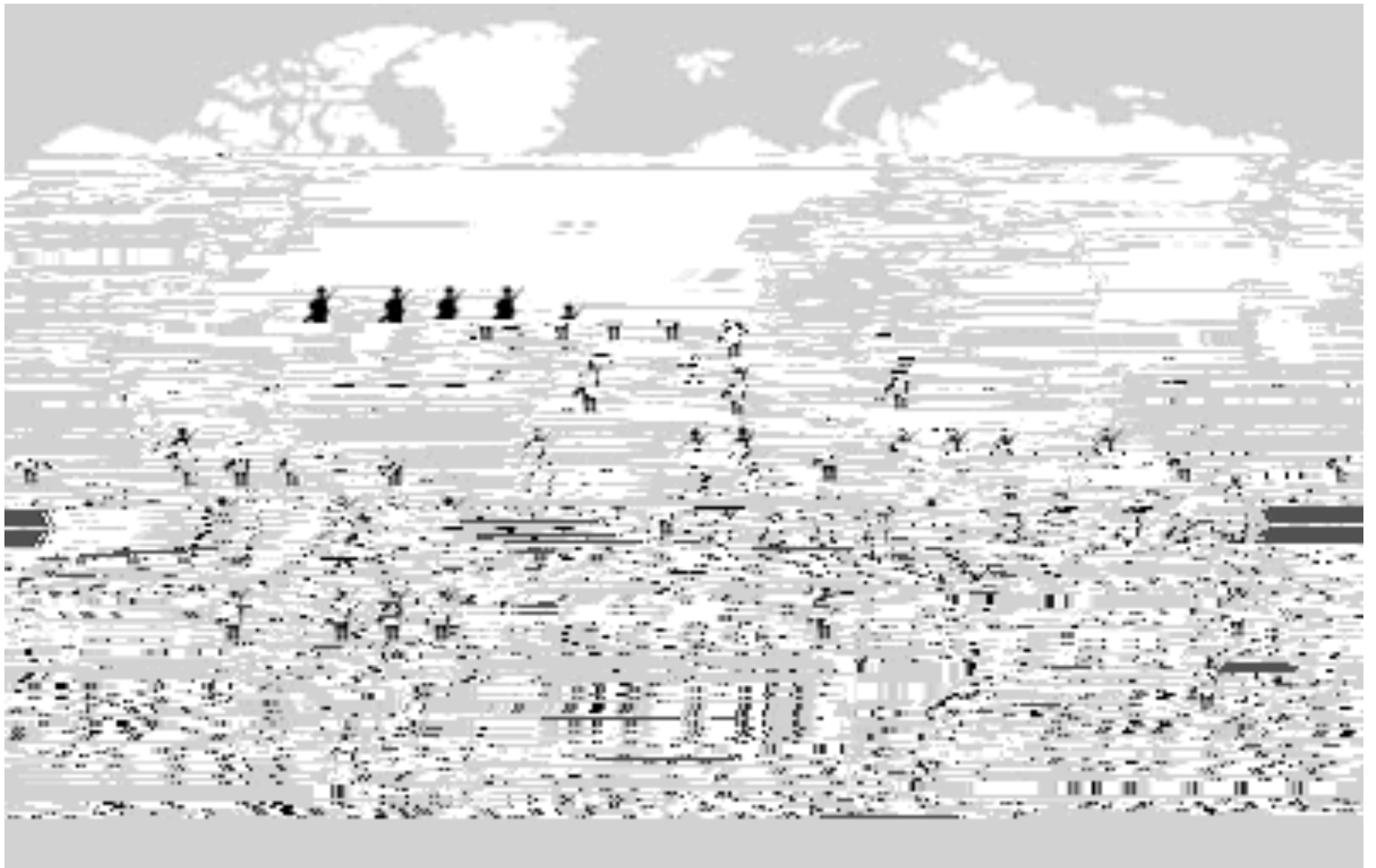
# Children & Armed Conflict: Protective Instruments

- CRC - Article 38 *Children have the right to protection in times of war.*
- *Optional Protocol (2000)*
- *Other protective measures...*

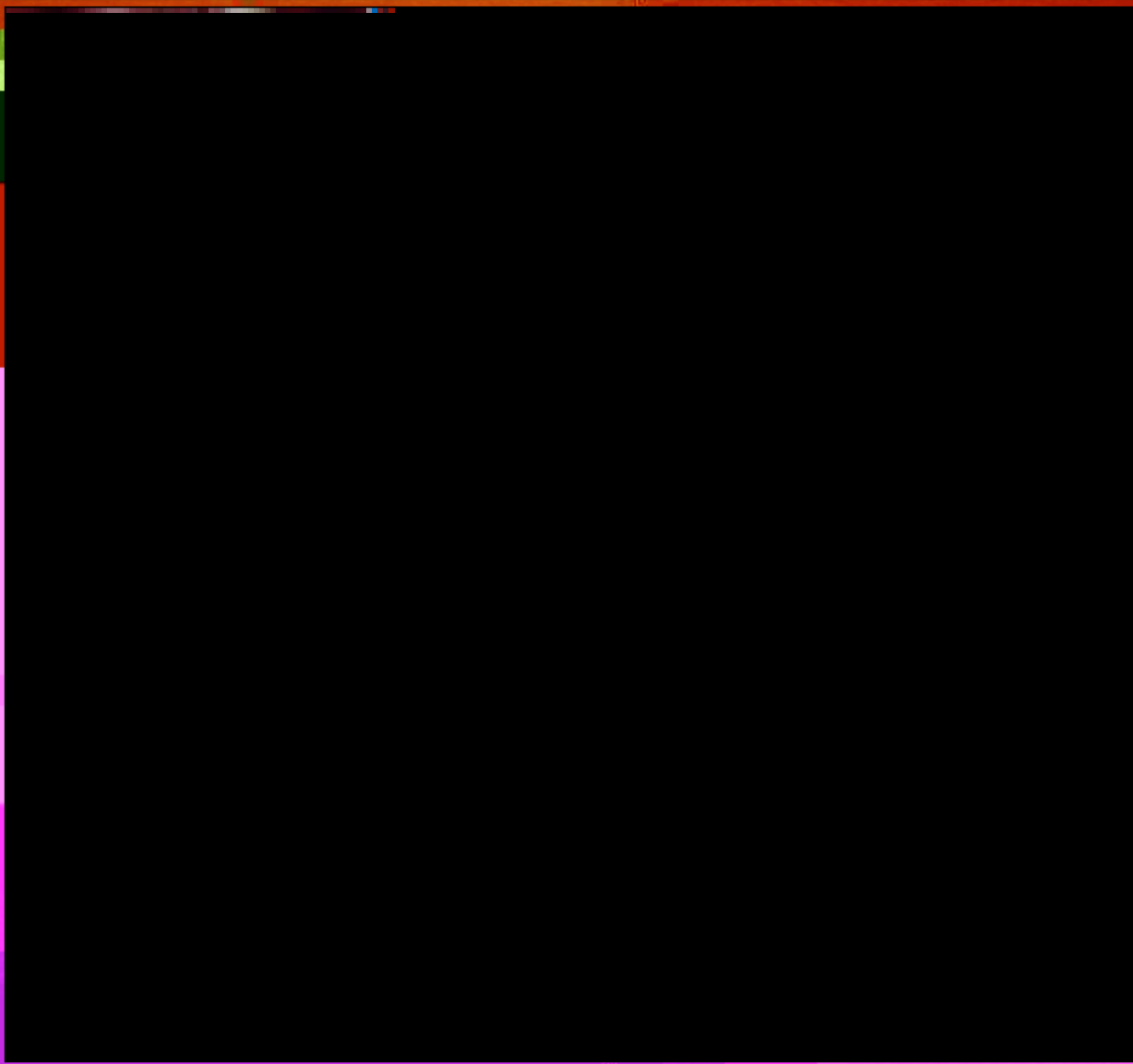
# And Yet.....

- 2 million children have been killed during war
- 6 million rendered permanently disabled
- Girls subjected to wartime sexual violence
- Schools/hospitals becoming targets of violence
- 20 million children are refugees/displaced
- Landmines claim lives of 10,000 children/year
- Growing trend of transnational trafficking of children from conflict zones

# Global Realities of Child Soldiers



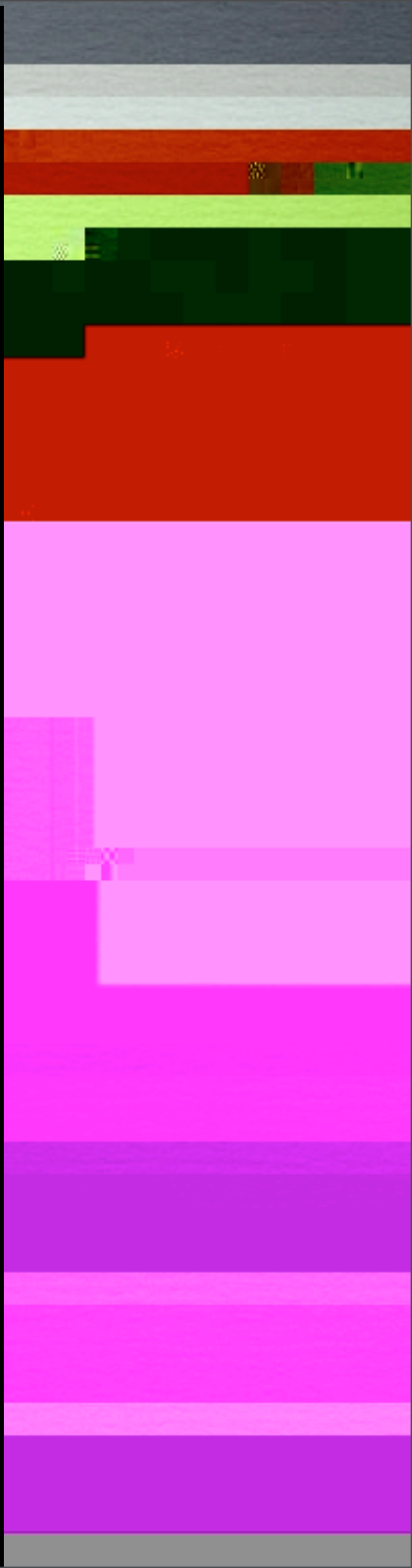
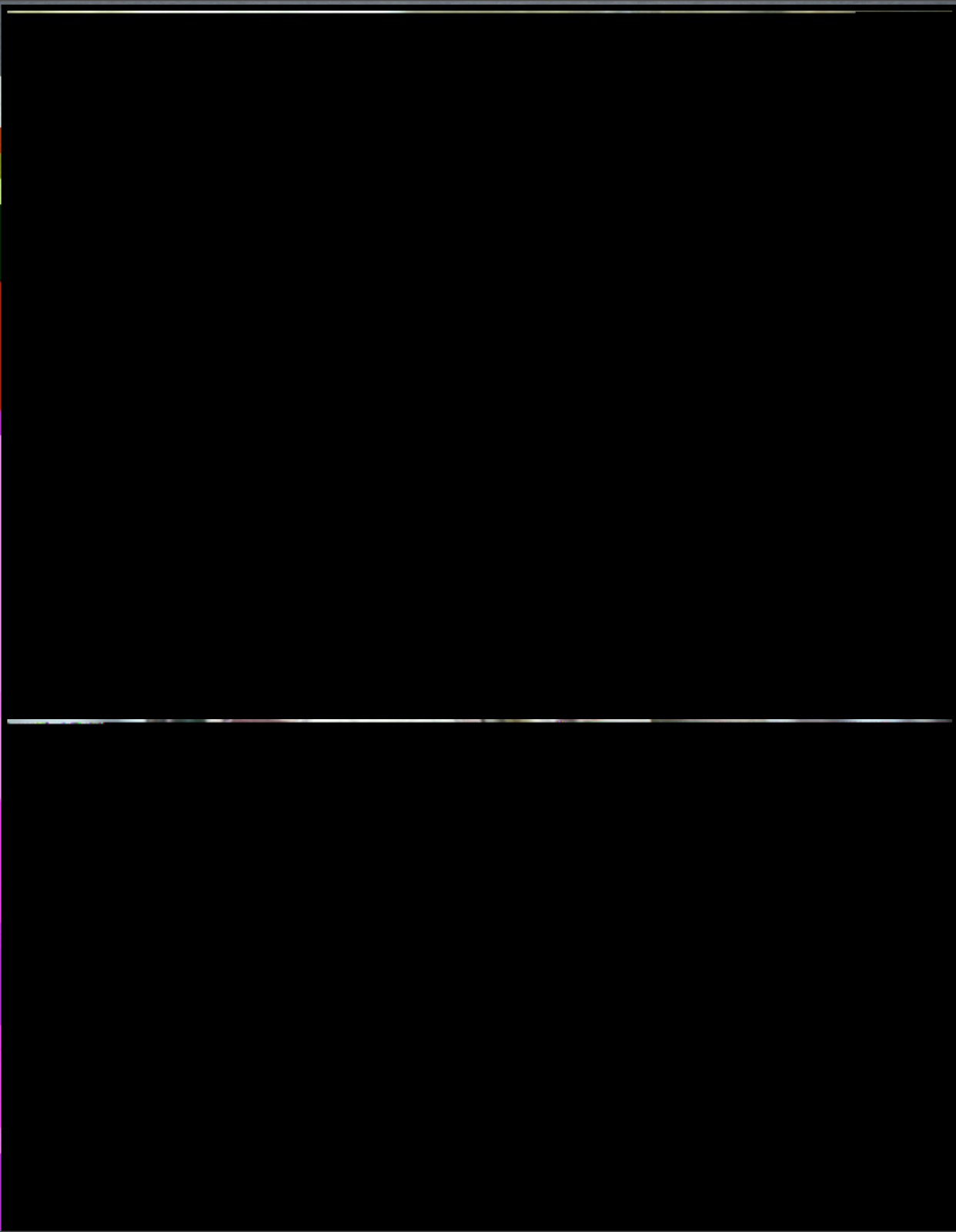




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# Gender & Invisibility

Where are the circles? WHERE

Sex & gender differences of



# Methodology



# Methodology

- ① Research partnership - Defence for Children International, Sierra Leone
- ② Former child soldiers part of the research team

# Girls' Recruitment & Initiation into the World of Armed Conflict

- Abduction
- Roles (Domestic/Supporting work, Sexual Slavery, Combat)
- Training (Military, Ideological)

# Culture of Violence



# Culture of Violence



# Forms of Insecurity: Sexual Violence

“Rape was just normal with the group...When I was newly captured, I was raped...I was too small to be raped...I cried and pleaded with the man to let go of me. He didn't. He went right on and did exactly as he wanted...That night I cried and cried...I was bleeding profusely...For a whole week I sat and grieved” .



# Forms of Insecurity: Small Arms & Violence

“I was not happy about it [having to use guns. It was scary for me because I feared guns a lot”.

“It was not the place for a little girls to hold a gun. I was so bitter...I wanted an educa

# Negotiating (In)Security: Girls' Agency & Resistance



# Negotiating (In)Security: Perpetrating Acts of Violence

“I would tie people up, kill, and loot people’s property...I had to survive and some of the ways to do it was to get involved in those violent acts”.

“Very violent and obedient soldiers were given positions as commanders. You needed to show enthusiasm, be very active during combat and also captured a lot of people, including children. This contributed to my elevation to the status as a commander”.

# Negotiating (In)Security: 'Marriage' to a Powerful Commander

"When one of the commanders proposed love to you, sometimes you had to accept even if you really were not willing to cooperate. This was preferable to being gang-raped".

"The girls who were serving as wives were treated and according to the rank and status of their husbands...At the beginning I was raped daily...but later an officer had a special interest in me. He then protected me against others and never allowed others to use me. He continued to rape me alone and less frequently".

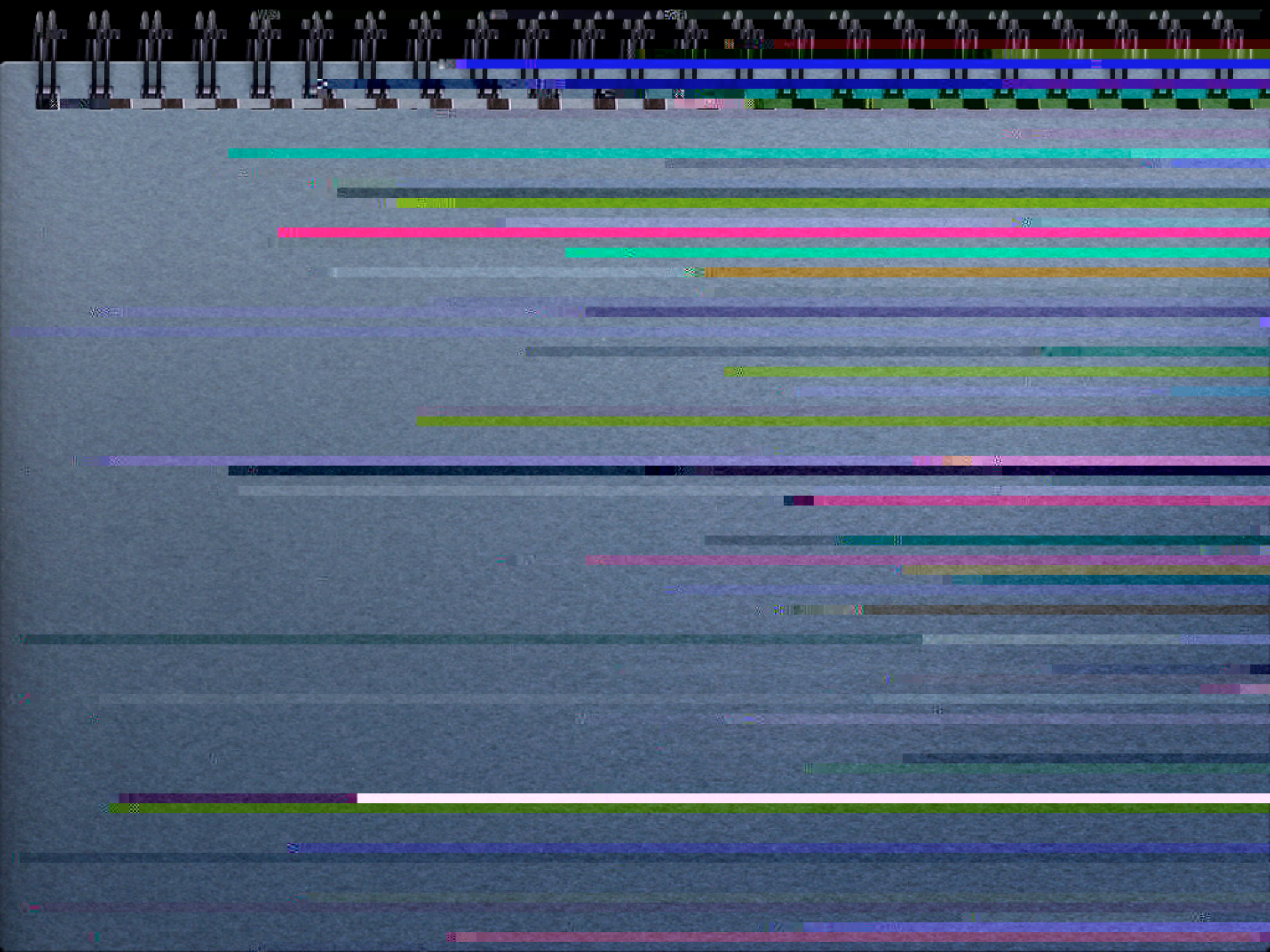
# Resistance

"I stabbed one guy to death - he was alwa

# Collective Resistance

“I was about ten years old at the time...several of us small children sat together and planned our escape...We decided that when and if we were attacked by the government forces, we would not go with the rebel group, but we will go with the government forces. Everybody knew about the plan so when the government forces did attack, we ran away”.







# Girls' Post-Conflict Experiences

- Guilt and Shame
- Rejection and Stigma
- Post-Conflict DDR
- Educational & Economic Marginalization



# In Summary...

- At all stages of conflict girls tend to be rendered invisible and marginalized.
- Girls are fundamental to the war machine.
- Girls must contend with overwhelming experiences of victimization, perpetration, and insecurity.
- Girls are not simply silent victims, but active agents and resisters during conflict.

# Conclusion

- Girls as Agents of Change:  
Moving Beyond Victimhood