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**WEAK AND TRAUMATIZED:
AN EXAMINATION OF CHILD SOLDIERS
AFTER *LUMBANGA***

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ABSTRACT

The global focus on recruitment and use of child soldiers is dominated by a highly normative, rather than evidence-based, rhetoric advocating for the vulnerable and traumatized child victim. Against the Western conceptualisation of the ‘sheltered’ childhood characterised by dependency and innocence, child soldiers are considered to be robbed of a ‘normal’ childhood with little, if any, regard to their agency and potential role as social actors. Through an analysis of *The Prosecutor v. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo*, this thesis will examine the most current international legal discourse on the conceptualisation of child soldiers for the purpose of determining how child soldiers were portrayed during the trial and whether the decisions by the International Criminal Court perpetuate the one dimensional, highly victimised portrayal of child soldiers. The dominant child soldier narrative of infantilised or traumatized children often materialises throughout the trial proceedings, and the Court’s general lack of a challenge in its decision represents an advancement for the narrative in many ways. The infantilisation of child soldiers by the international community has grave implications on the general understandings and realities of child soldiers, their agency and participation in reintegration processes.

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