

Angelica D'Alisera

Integrative Seminar

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## UNSPOKEN WORDS

Throughout history, governments and administrations have ceaselessly controlled and imposed specific principles on their societies, often suppressing individuals' ideologies and preventing determined members of these societies from having a voice and from truthfully being heard. Children, in fact, not always have an important role within communities, which consequently leads to their suppression of speech, as they are not given the chance to do so, or as they feel uncomfortable in doing so. A child's will to be heard is inevitably influenced by their economical situation, social status, and education, whether from their family or institution, and it is something that not everyone is apprised of. Hunger in third world countries, for example, makes children the most affected victims of malnutrition, hence depriving them of advanced and professional education, and often leading them to their deaths. Through the studies provided by the *American Psychological Association*, the effects of malnutrition and hunger are unveiled, as they claim that "hunger has been observed to cause depression, anxiety and withdrawal, all of which are obstructions to a child trying to focus on education."<sup>1</sup> A child's power and freedom of speech in a court, during their parents' divorce, furthermore, is eminently limited, as they have

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<sup>1</sup> "15 Important World Hunger Statistics." *The Borgen Project*. The Borgen Project. October 16, 2017. Web. November 15, 2017

Angelica D'Alisera

no saying and can't express their personal judgment and point of view on the matter.<sup>2</sup>

As a child, I was undoubtedly unaware of what was going on around me, and I was certainly oblivious about other children's situations throughout the world. Growing up in a privileged manner has given me the chance of exploring this domain, as my curiosity was mostly nourished because I feel close to children, in terms of age and generation. Throughout my early childhood, I was incredibly insecure and was always very quiet, which habitually arose questions in my mind: Why do I feel embarrassed in sharing my point of view? Why do people make me feel uncomfortable when I am too quiet? Is the way my society works and the way my parents have raised me, that is increasing my self-doubt and preventing me from being heard, or is it just me? These are questions that I have not yet fully answered, and the ones that truly gave me the motive of analyzing the role of children in society, and thus creating this memorial.

The first part of the research essay will focus on the role of children in societies through statistics and informative archives, followed by another section, which will set as a focal point children's insecurities, and how these are often directly related to their role in society. The second part will connect the first one to my visual piece of work, which will be thoroughly delineated under numerous details. The memorial will, ergo, be based on socio-economical research and personal accounts, sharply focusing on children in third-world countries, children's success with regard to education world-wide, and children's insecurities.

Children in societies have various roles, mostly depending on the country they live in and

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<sup>2</sup> Jacob Mchangama. "Europe's Freedom of Speech Fail." *Foreign Policy*. October 03, 2016. Web. November 05, 2017

Angelica D'Alisera

in what category they belong to, according to *World Economic Situation and Prospects*<sup>3</sup>; whether developed economies, economies in transition, or developing economies. One of the many aspects that differentiates these one from the other is child hunger, which, unfortunately, is still present in nine of the world's countries, such as Burundi, the Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Libya, Papua New Guinea, Somalia, Sudan, and Syria. The younger generation is, in fact, mostly affected by this condition, as statistics show that approximately 3.1 million children die of hunger each year.<sup>4</sup> Other than being subject to economical and financial difficulties, in countries like Africa and Southern and Western Asia, these individuals are also exposed to child labor. Despite being prohibited by governments in certain countries to carry out this practice, in others it is still prevailing. These practices and conditions are inevitably preventing children from receiving a deserved education, from other basic human rights, from knowing how to read or write, and thus from having the possibility of being heard around the world. The *United Nations*, veritably, exposes the truth on child education around the world, stating that over 57 million children do not attend school nor undergo an education<sup>5</sup>. Despite most of these concerns are caused by societal constraints and coercion, others are enhanced by the insecurities that develop amongst the younger generations of societies.

Children's insecurities start forming throughout adolescence, when they start questioning themselves, their identity, their sexual orientation, and their importance within the society they live in. It is impossible for a human being to fully escape the obstacles and difficulties presented

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<sup>3</sup> Carrie O'Grady. "Douglas Gordon (winner 1996)." *The Guardian*. Guardian News and Media. October 31, 2003. Web. November 08, 2017

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF. "UNICEF DATA." *Overview*. Unicef. 2011. November 15, 2017

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF. "UNICEF DATA." *Overview*. Unicef. 2011. November 15, 2017

Angelica D'Alisera

by diffidence and self-doubt, predominantly in the case of younger generations. Not all children are subject to physical and practical issues, presented previously throughout the dissertation, but also psychological and mental ones, oftentimes fueled by severe societal expectations<sup>6</sup>.

The memorial will be exposed and exhibited visually, through the use of two black canvases that both serve as blackboards, inspired by artists Cy Twombly, Douglas Gordon, and Daniel Arsham, listed in chronological order.

One of the two will present an image of three children, staring in different directions with no mouths, whilst the other will reveal words and sentences that children have kept secret throughout their lifetimes, collected by me through my younger sister and her friends, and then translated into english. I asked her classmates to write down what they felt couldn't be orally and openly exposed to their parents or even to the world because of fear of societal judgments and constraints. The use of chalk will render the piece of work worn out and tattered, to emphasize how this situation and circumstance can easily be erased and forgotten. By directing and addressing this matter to children, I believe the memorial will not only give voice to those thoughts and ideas that these individuals don't feel comfortable in openly sharing, but also raise awareness amongst children, allowing them to understand that each one of them is not alone, and there are other young ones, like them, seeking to be heard.

*Unspoken Words* approaches the issue and concern that has surrounded humanity for an enduring period of time, focusing on children's interdiction of orally exposing their opinions and

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<sup>6</sup> Jacob Mchangama. "Europe's Freedom of Speech Fail." *Foreign Policy*. Foreign Policy. October 03, 2016. November 05, 2017

Angelica D'Alisera

ideologies because of fear, apprehension, or directives. The circumstance, as analyzed and exposed throughout the paper, in fact, is strongly related to societies, and youth's role within them depending on the country they're from. The memorial would be exhibited around the city, on publicity boards, on abandoned walls, and in metro stations, in order for it to be available to the entire population, no matter the age, gender, culture, or financial situation.

One should be directly exposed to the problems that are existing at this time in our environment and surroundings, and children shouldn't be underestimated, considered inferior, or deprived of basic and fundamental human rights. Ideally the scale of the memorial would be considerably greater, so that as many children as possible would be able to participate and interact with the exhibition, and, most importantly, freely share a feeling, a word, or a belief without being distressingly judged and criticized.

Children in societies have been frequently scrutinized, but not everyone has indeed given them the opportunity of exposing themselves to the world and justly be heard. As a child's will to be heard is inevitably influenced by economical situations, social statuses, and education, one should raise awareness on the matter, and make a change where this issue originates: society.

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Angelica D'Alisera

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Angelica D'Alisera

absence-missing-death