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SART 208

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Reading Response on Rebecca Solnit

I cannot begin to express how thankful I am for being assigned this piece of reading as it spoke immensely to everything I have been overwhelmingly thinking about for the past semester. Especially at this age, understanding the force of change is a new understanding for me and I am in the process of struggling between political methods and ideas. The last semester has been the closest thing I have experienced to what it means to take action. It made me reconsider my thinking of other issues as well as my thinking of the nature of our life. The Hobbsian understanding of life has made a lot of sense to me until I saw what it is like to live through a crisis. The Hobbsian human nature is a result of the status quo not the ultimate original state of being. I would have been skeptical of Solnit’s argument to a large extent if it were not for what I have seen since October. However, I now think that her analysis of what it is like to live through dark times is highly relatable.

She emphasizes how such times are not the times to despair, but to act. And I do think that despair is a reaction that makes more sense in the absence of such events. In the absence of public attention, conversation, and protesting, we ought to despair. However, during times of emergency and nationwide protest, we ought to love and support because we come to realize the power that we hold. This is exactly what I saw: people spending entire days in front of prison buildings asking for the release of protesters, groups volunteering to cover the events for free to counter the narrative of mainstream media, people donating money from abroad and even traveling in to stand with their loved ones, people feeding protesters for free, art venues that offering free shows to let people have fun during stressful times. Many initiatives and efforts were devoted to saying: we stand together against the difficulties. Since October 17th, I have seen nothing but acts of compassion, support, and utmost caring for one another.

This is not to romanticize or undermine the stress that everyone is going through because of the events. There are people that are no longer able to get by. The disruption to the lives of everyone, the adaptations, adjustments, and sacrifices that people had to make are great. Being able to push through and continue to protest despite the emotional and mental fatigue is not easy against the feeling of insignificance. There is great power that lies outside us. However, as Solnit greatly puts it, “hope is not the belief that everything was, is or will be fine;” it is an account of complexities and uncertainties, with openings.” It is to realize the difficulties and to take them as an urging force to act, to reach out, to take part in the transformation we wish for. “Hope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable,” which is to counter the view of the present as unchangeable or as easily changeable but to locate the present within a long history of change that has happened because of the action of individual people. So, even if we do not see how and when our actions are causing change (especially in the age of social media and the internet where the work of an American rapper can give great hope to a little boy in Gaza), it still matters.

She says: “ideas at first considered outrageous or ridiculous or extreme gradually become what people think they’ve always believed.” and I have seen this happen with how anti-sectarian narratives have been adopted by most people in Lebanon. She continues: “in most disasters, the majority of people are calm, resourceful, altruistic and creative.” which has been proven by the insane amount of art that has been produced for and by the events. The dark times make us find agency and meaning if we survive them. This is why if I were to make a video on the events of these times, I would situate them in a historical context by bringing in footage from the past and the present that shows details of everyday life and methods of resourcefulness.