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Community as a tactic for social change

Through out my career at Simon's Rock I have been thinking about notions of community and intimacy, and attempting to blur the boundaries between and understand the personal as political. My thesis topic combines both my topical interests in community and cooperative action and my methodological ethos of using theory and praxis in a symbiotic way. I intend to explore the idea of intimacy and community as a tactic for social change and social justice.



This involves taking on the ideas of tactic and political action- in what spheres does political action take place? My idea at its base understands a lifestyle choice to be a political action- to live an intentionally non-alienated lifestyle, to choose to build a loving and intimate community is taking a great stand against capitalism. This is not to reduce activism to a kind of “life style” politics, but to understand that the oppression and injustices of our current socio-economic system run so deeply that they effect our most personal interactions, are a part of our lives as social and emotional beings.

My exploration at this juncture is divided into two topical areas- the idea of tactic, and of community. I understand each of these terms as defining an aspect and approach to my project. The combination of these concepts meshes in my mind with an understanding of the personal as political – community addresses the “personal” aspect, and tactic is the “political”. My goal is to understand the personal/community as political/tactical, to define better what that means and what it can look like on the ground.

My interest in this topic is at its roots based in my personal experience with communal living- I grew up in a community deeply involved with the Israeli kibbutz movement, and I was active in the youth movement that founded many kibbutzes and for decades sent its members to settle in these cooperative agricultural communities. Many of my family members have lived or still live on various kibbutzes, and I spent my semester abroad living on one. Recent developments in the kibbutz movement, with a move towards small urban communes has also been important for me – I was, while on the kibbutz, a part of a smaller group of people living cooperatively. In my mind the choice to live a communal lifestyle has always seemed a natural and obviously political one, a decision I understood to be a radical one but which I always took for granted. In the fall of my sophomore year, in Social Movements, I did a study of the youth movement, focusing on various aspects of it. This thesis would provide me with space to continue to analyze and deconstruct the theories and workings of the youth movement, and to combine what I have learned from it with the things I have learned at Simon's Rock in order to create a more unified vision. While these formative personal experiences can never be far from my mind while I write about issues of community and social change, I do not want for my thesis to be a case study of my youth movement. Instead I would like to use my experiences to ground my theorizing about notions of community, intimacy, and political action.



I will begin my exploration by reading both theoretical perspectives and personal accounts of communities that exist within social movements. I think that this will allow me to understand better how to integrate my own personal work into a broader theoretical analysis, and to being my project of understanding the material reality of this kind of resistance. I understand my research not so much as a collecting of facts but as an interaction of my own ideas and experiences with the texts that I am reading.