

Manifesto for an Open Future: Death, Loss, and the Birth of a New Political Imagination

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On October 7, 2023, Jewish Israelis, especially those identified with the Zionist left, woke up to a new reality. Not only was their state not there to protect them, but it also continued to prioritize colonization and ethnic cleansing over returning the hostages. As the war and destruction in Gaza progressed, many in the Zionist left found themselves grappling with the feeling that the state as they knew it, the ethos they grew up with, had died. Alongside grief and pain, could there be liberating potential in this death? I suggest that accepting the death of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, as imagined by the Zionist left, can open space for a new political imagination that transcends the boundaries of existing cultural imagination.

Beyond Hope and Despair

In her book published in October 2023, cultural researcher Michal Givoni describes the growing feeling in the Zionist left over the previous decade of living in a deadlock. Givoni refers to the feeling that there is no hope for the vision of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state and for the two-state solution. However, Givoni argues that the absence of hope is not necessarily a gloomy acceptance of the absence of a future. On the contrary, she argues that hopelessness may bring openness to diverse futures, made possible only when one gives up the desire for a specific "hoped-for" scenario.

But since October 2023, the situation in Israel has gone beyond "hopelessness." Within the endless war and with the government's persistent insistence on prioritizing revenge and territorial conquest over the lives of hostages and rehabilitation, it already seems that we are not living in the same country. In our current state, Israel has a different ethos and consequently different visions for the future than those outlined for it, for better or worse, by the Zionist left. Values of democracy or recognition of Palestinians' right to national self-determination are gradually losing their hold in the Jewish-Israeli public. With them, those visions of the Zionist left have also changed, now seeming light-years away from our situation. Recognizing their decline may evoke sadness or grief in those who grew up with them or who feel some moral debt to the generations before us who dreamed and strived to establish a good and just place here. But recognizing the death of yesterday's Zionist left in Israel is not necessarily just a negative thing. As various anthropologists and philosophers have shown us, the death of an idea can also enable liberating potential.

New Imagination from Death

Environmental thinker Roy Scranton suggests that the correct response to contemporary climate anxiety is to learn to die as individuals and as civilizations. Scranton draws from his experience as an American soldier in Iraq, where he dealt with his fears through daily Samurai death meditation, imagining his own death. Imagining the death of Israel as we knew it can be a useful first step in trying to cope with the

situation we are in. This imagination is not general and abstract, but rather a detailed thought exercise of the different ways in which Israel has changed its face. An imagination that allows us to slowly internalize the new situation we are in, and the possibilities that might be revealed in it.

At this point, it is useful to recall the words of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas offers a reversal of the Heideggerian perspective on death. While Heidegger saw death as absolute nothingness, Levinas argues that death appears to the other as a negation of his possibilities of existence. As such, death itself invites the subject to consider the infinity of possibilities of existence. In this sense, death is not nothingness, but an invitation to the "infinite," that which cannot be reduced to defined categories and language, and cannot be reduced to the limited cultural imagination of the subject. According to this line of thinking, the death of Israel as we knew it can summon possibilities we have not noticed so far, can open space for a new political imagination. The question then becomes: what will this imagination look like?

The new political imagination will be characterized first and foremost by a willingness to give up on magic solutions and familiar narratives. Instead of clinging to the two-state solution or the vision of a Jewish-democratic state, the new imagination will be ready to examine more complex political structures - confederations, federations, bi-national states, or even entirely new models of political organization that are not based on the modern nation-state.

This imagination will go beyond accepted dichotomies of left-right, Jewish-Arab, religious-secular, and will seek new ways to define identities and relationships between them. It will be based on a deep understanding of repressed histories - like the history of Arab Jews, of Palestinians, and of the relationships between them before the establishment of the state.

How Will Imagination Translate into Reality-Changing Actions?

One way to develop a new political imagination is through deliberate cultivation of political imagination. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's research with designers and urban planners demonstrates this point. For those designers and planners, the ability to break the boundaries of imagination for shared urban spaces involved finding ways to think differently about the same space, for example through conversations with marginalized populations who until then had not been listened to in planning processes. Expanding the boundaries of collective imagination did not happen by itself, but through continuous and strenuous work. Political imagination is like a muscle, or a skill, that needs to be developed.

These lessons seem to be learned now in Israel as well, with the growth of a trend of political imagination workshops. These are workshops that try to allow people to jump over the barrier of ability to imagine through various exercises and methods, mainly from the fields of writing and design. These workshops challenge participants to think beyond familiar political frameworks, and to imagine new political arrangements that do not rely on existing paradigms. They create a safe space for liberating the imagination of life here, including the type of regime, borders, and social, romantic, and economic relationships that will be formed between people. In other words, these are workshops that encourage

participants to develop a new political vision that is not bound by the limitations of conventional political realism.

Beyond workshops, translating political imagination into action includes creating new coalitions that cross traditional boundaries, or strengthening existing partnerships. A central emphasis here can and should be on solidarity-based connections, meaning human brotherhood, between women and men whose fates are intertwined. In fact, it's about expanding and persisting in establishing alternative organizations or spaces that demonstrate the possibilities of shared living, and developing a new political discourse that opposes the existing one. Examples include initiatives such as "Friends of Walajeh," the Jerusalem art space "Feelabit," "Mizrahi-Citizen Collective," and "Sindyanna of Galilee," which are already working to create alternative political spaces.

Finally, another surprising aspect of the new political imagination is related to the role of love and passion. Love relationships, in their various forms, demonstrate to us the capabilities of human beings to rise above conventional frameworks and create different ways of life. From a multi-period and multi-cultural anthropological perspective, we find that in fact, the rigid normative models of family life or couplehood are barely maintained in full. In fact, people have always lived outside the accepted imagination of how family or couplehood should look, even if they did not talk about it externally. Similarly, one can translate the same daring to imagine beyond accepted frameworks to the national and political space. And here, too, it is appropriate to return to Levinas, who argued that love and love relationships with the other are what allow the subject to go beyond death and reach the infinite possibilities of existence. Our ability to dare and live beyond the boundaries of imagination in love relationships proves to us the possibility of the thing, and the leap of the way and the passion that is sometimes required, to dare to take this step.

How Will the New Imagination Influence the Organization of Political Spaces?

An open future does not mean intellectual nihilism, or passive waiting for what will happen in the world. An open future is the ability to think beyond scenarios we would hope would happen because they seem more possible to us. To this end, I will share here the first steps I am taking in trying to adopt a way of thinking of an open future despite the inherent paradox in trying to outline an open future, an attempt that from the outset closes certain possibilities.

For me, the influence of the new political imagination on the organization of political spaces will be multi-dimensional. First, it will lead to a change in the perception of political identity. Instead of monolithic and exclusionary identities, the new imagination will allow for hybrid and complex identities that recognize multiple affiliations. Second, the new imagination will influence the organization of physical space. Instead of rigid territorial separation, it may offer models of spatial sharing, more open borders, and joint management of resources. Third, it will lead to the creation of new political institutions that are not based on ethnic or religious supremacy, but on values of equality, justice, and mutual respect. These institutions can begin as non-governmental alternatives, but will gradually crystallize into models of governance that will challenge existing structures. Fourth, the new political imagination will change political discourse.

Instead of a discourse of ongoing conflict and clashing historical rights, it will foster a discourse of shared responsibility, mutual recognition, and reconciliation.

Beyond Hope - Towards New Political Action

The manifesto I present here for an open future is not a hopeful proposal in the traditional sense. What might be found in this domain is not necessarily the scenario we would want to happen. However, this is perhaps a way to build political agency on a path different from the existing one.

The process described here requires intellectual and emotional courage. It requires a willingness to deal with grief over the death of the old vision, and a willingness to dwell in a space of uncertainty. It also requires openness to thinking that goes beyond accepted paradigms, and a willingness to imagine political possibilities that are currently perceived as impossible. If we succeed in developing this new political imagination, perhaps we can create a political reality that is not based on control, separation, and occupation, but on partnership, equality, and mutual respect. This is not hope in the simple sense, but a commitment to a process whose results are not known in advance. And yet, there is, ironically, something very hopeful about it.