

## A binational state? Here?

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Since the division of the land into two viable states is no longer possible, there is no choice - for anyone who believes in equality - but to support a democratic binational state from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, claims Meron Benvenisti (Haaretz, January 22).

In my opinion, exactly the opposite is true: Since it is clear that the state Benvenisti recommends instead of Israel will not be a binational democracy, anyone who believes in equality (as opposed to someone who believes in the need to surrender to Arab nationalism) must adhere to the principle of two states for two peoples. This solution is definitely possible if both sides really want it. Yes, the Palestinian side too, whose contribution to the present situation Benvenisti is careful to not examine.

The "one state" under discussion would be a state with a solid Arab-Muslim majority (which would quickly be created by taking advantage of the right of return) in the heart of the Arab-Muslim world. To believe that this state would really be binational you have to assume that the Arab-Palestinian people would agree, over the long haul, to be the only Arab people whose state would not have a clearly Arab character and would not be officially defined as an Arab state or as part of the Arab world.

One has to assume that Fatah and Hamas would agree to this concession - which no

Arab people has made for the benefit of the region's indigenous minorities - for the benefit of the Zionist "foreign implant," whose very presence in the region is considered a colonialist invasion.

To understand how absurd this scenario is, there isn't even any need to ask tough questions about democracy and the attitude toward minorities in the Arab world and Palestinian society. It's enough to listen to the discourse of all the significant groups in Arab and Palestinian public opinion: Even those who declare their adherence to democracy swear allegiance to Arabism.

For a binational state to exist, it's not enough for the Jews to give up a Jewish state; the Arabs have to give up an Arab state in the Palestine that would exist after the abolition of the Zionist state. A binational state is a very rare form of government in the democratic world and is nonexistent in the Middle East. There is no reason to assume that this innovation would be introduced here for the benefit of the Zionists, of all people. And nothing written in this state's constitution would be of any use in the face of the true balance of power that would be created in and around this state. We have already seen all kinds of constitutions.

Nobody has yet suggested a reasonable, egalitarian and non-chauvinistic answer to the question of why the Jewish people's desire for national independence is less legitimate than other nations' aspirations for independence. But regardless of the ideological debate on this matter, the alternative to a Jewish state, as suggested by Benvenisti, is simply non-existent. Even someone who has no interest in Jewish nationalism or in any nationalism has to be aware (if one is honest with oneself) that under the current

conditions, the continued existence of the State of Israel - with all its numerous shortcomings and tremendous advantages - is the way to guarantee maximum freedom and equality and the maximum well-being for the maximum number of people. We are not referring only to the good of the state's Jewish citizens. In effect, Benvenisti is suggesting that we do to all the Arabs in Israel something that horrifies the residents of Umm al-Fahm when it is suggested in regard to them: imposing Palestinian rule on them.

The claim that the settlements have made the occupation irreversible and that there is no escaping a binational state is based entirely on the assumption that a Jewish minority cannot exist in a Palestinian Arab state. After all, the Palestinians have no demographic problem – they are assured a large Arab majority in their state, even if the settlers, or at least some of them, remain under its sovereignty.

Why doesn't Benvenisti suggest such a solution? Apparently he does not have much confidence in the chances of honorable coexistence between an Arab majority and a Jewish minority in one state, although in the name of this ideal he suggests abolishing the State of Israel.

And indeed, there is good reason for skepticism on this issue, in view of the sad regional experience. But if there is any chance for such coexistence, it is conditional on a Jewish state existing alongside the site where this experiment would take place. And this Jewish state must be willing to absorb any Jew whose life on the outside becomes impossible (as happened to Jews all over the Arab world).

The solution is therefore a division into two states, based on the principle that a Jewish minority can exist in the Palestinian state - a principle that will do away with the landmine of the irreversibility of the occupation, which the settlement enterprise wanted to plant before both peoples.