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| **Points for Discussion** |  |

1. Binationalism is not a plan but an existing condition disguised as “military occupation” over the Territories, and a “separate entity” called the PNA.
2. When discussing Binationalism one must be aware that there are at least four types:
A consociational / ethnically based power sharing system, recognized and accommodating collective rights (Belgian model, Dayton model, N. Ireland ) usually [](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/Nov12-Binationalism-6.htm)involves cantonization or federation.

A liberal, “one man one vote”, individual rights unitary state model (post Apartheid South Africa ).

Various stages of ethnic domination over a minority (or majority) – from “majority tyranny” to Herrenvolk democracy.

Undeclared Binationalism (permanent “military occupation”).
3. All attempts to relate present Binationalism to Birth Shalom and Hashomer Hazairs' ideas of Binationalism in the Mandate period are wrong, as conditions are totally different. Similarly, it is not the Secular State advocated by the PLO.
4. Mandatory Palestine is (at least since the late 80's) one geopolitical entity and the attempts to maintain physical or conceptual separation (“partition” or “withdrawal”) are meant to postpone hard choices and ignore the monster that is Binationalism which grows relentlessly.
5. Ironically, the peace agreements with Israel 's neighbors have, by default, reinforced the integrity of Israel/Palestine as a distinct geopolitical entity. The creation of rigid international boundaries within the area of Israel / Palestine is impossible, as the “Wall” demonstrates.
6. Eventually people will realize that the struggle for political and collective rights requires a demand for civil rights. But by then the *herrenvolk*democracy will become entrenched and more difficult to eradicate.
7. Demography as a threat to a Jewish and democratic state is a scarecrow because when an Arab majority materializes the authorities will stop counting. Recent examples: Lebanon , Bosnia and others. Even today Israelis do not count Palestinians in the Territories and question the accuracy of Palestinian estimates.
8. The Jerusalem Problem cannot be resolved by sheer separation and all “solutions” based on physical partition are fantasies. Binationalism Country of Jerusalem based on federal-borough system points to the creation of the city as a capital of Federated Israel/Palestine.
9. Israel proper is a Binationalist entity as far as its ethnic composition is concerned. No two-state solution can resolve the collective status of the Palestinian-Israelis (“Israeli Arabs”). Addressing immediate issues both in the occupied territories and in Israel proper and resolving them equitably and fairly is Binationalism.
10. Acknowledging Binationalism is a realistic act, not only a normative stance.
11. Binationalism means that less emphasis should be given to borders, resolutions and roadmaps – and much more to principles like equality, dignity, mutual recognition and respect, fairness.
12. The problems of separation to two states are more complicated than a gradual devolution and the creation of “soft borders” (cantonization).
13. A two-state solution must assume close cooperation that requires joint institutions and equal decision-making input is issues like water, environment, police, economy and labor, etc. The political superstructure will resemble a confederation, more than two states. This is caused by the fact that Israel/Palestine is physically indivisible (water, communications, symbols, urban sprawl etc.).
14. Multiculturalism is not an anti-Zionist concept. Zionism is not a formula for Jewish ghettoization.
15. “Two States” has become a slogan of the Israeli right and of American neocons because Sharon has convinced them that ‘bantustanization' is the solution to the demographic problem. It looks “respectable” because the Israeli left declares it a triumph over the “Greater Israel” ideology.
16. A Binationalism process facilities constructive thinking about the future of the settlers and the attachment of Palestine to their vanished homes.
17. Binationalism might be a recipe for instability and has been unsuccessful (except in Switzerland ) but two states is not necessarily a better proposition because “nation states” coexisting in the same “patrimony” – and suffering from the old Settler-indigene syndrome – tend to sharpen nationalistic stances and foster revanchisme.
18. One should pay attention to the fact that all recent breakthroughs in the reconciliation process of intercommunal / ethnic disputes (Northern Ireland, South Africa, Bosnia) have been based on consociational, federal and autonomy arrangements, and not on partition.
19. The enormous asymmetry between the two communities will make all “final status” schemes either a diktat of the Israelis or a dead letter. A Binationalist process is open-ended and while not “resolving” the irresolvable conflict it does not take away the hopes and create conditions conducive to a solution, even one based on separation.

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| **:: Dialogue session** |  |

The topic of today's seminar was ‘bi-nationalism' introduced by Meron Benvinisti . It was attended by a number of academics both, Israeli and Palestinian, drawn from a variety of different NGO's, universities and other organizations. The speaker outlined the topic and then there was an opportunity for a detailed discussion of the issues raised. A range of opinions were expressed as summarized below.[](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov12-Text.htm#ptop)

**The Concept of ‘Bi-nationalism' – A summary of Meron Benvinisti's position**

The first key point to be stressed is that ‘bi-nationalism' is not a plan for the future or a proposed solution, but a currently existing condition. It is a *description*of the current conflict not a *prescription*. It is important to stress this point and make sure a distinction is drawn between the two. The model of the ‘bi-national condition' is meant to provide a framework in which a viable solution can be developed.

Some further points;

* The term ‘bi-national condition' is preferable to the occupier/occupied model because it captures the mutual interdependence of the two societies and their physical, economic etc. interconnection.
* When a two-state model is proposed it is presumably the case that an extensive degree of co-operation between the two entities will be envisaged (e.g. on water, security etc.). It is only a small step from there to seeing how really there is only one state in operation on this model.
* There is a huge disparity of power between the two communities and this must be acknowledged in any peace negotiations. Israel has used this disparity to its advantage in the past (as the more powerful entity) during peace talks to push for agreements that work in its favor. An equitable agreement will seek to redress this imbalance if it is to be durable.

Attempts to apply a two-state model will simply result in ‘cantonisation'. A Palestinian ‘state' would be too weak to be an equal partner to Israel and would end up simply being an appendage to Israel, reliant on that state especially economically. A two-state approach only succeeds in postponing the hard questions to a future stage. The two communities will have to come to agreements about sharing (for example) water and arable land as pressure on resources increases.

**Opposition to this model**

Several individuals at the seminar expressed dissatisfaction with this model. The following points were raised;

* A common viewpoint was that two separate states are highly desirable in the short term at least in order to achieve some kind of separation between the two communities. This is something which majority opinion on both sides is in favor of.
* A one-state model is unworkable and would lead to civil war or major internal strife of some kind (Lebanon is sited as an example). The only possibility of peace is via a separation of the two nations into their own polities.
* A two-state solution is the best approach; it has failed in the past because it has not been attempted properly, not because it is fundamentally unworkable. ‘Oslo' was flawed because it lacked an end-stage and all substantive issues were left to some unspecified future date.
* The kind of model advocated by individuals such as Meron Benvinisti is likely to prove particularly unpopular in Israel. The whole Z ionist project is based on the notion of a sovereign state that is exclusively for the Jewish people. Any kind of one-state agreement would place that in jeopardy.

In general, opponents of the ‘bi-nationalism' account focused on the unworkability of a one-state model either because it was undesirable to one or both communities, or because it would be unstable (like Lebanon). Given sufficient political will and proper leadership a two-state model can be made to work. Just as Israeli Prime Minister Begin went against public opinion with regards to dismantling settlements in the Sinai, so it will be possible to implement the kinds of changes that will make a Palestinian state possible.

**Responses to these points**

The speaker, along with other participants partly or wholly sympathetic to his viewpoint, addressed these criticisms at length.

* The idea that ‘separation' is achievable is illusory. The two communities are too intertwined for any kind of division to be possible. Attempts to remove the settlers, to take one example, are likely to be unsuccessful as they are too firmly rooted in the West Bank.
* Although it is fair to say that some of the attempts at one-state, consociational models have failed elsewhere (e.g. in Lebanon) it is also true that all recent peace deals in ethnic/intercommunal disputes have been based on some form of consociational/power sharing model. Partition has not been seen as a viable option.
* Several people pointed out that two-state models have been pursued for decades without success. What reason is there to think that future attempts will prove to be more successful? Oslo failed not because it was not properly formulated, but because it as based on the false premise that a two-state solution was possible.

The key argument is that opponents of the ‘bi-national' model are ignoring the high degree of interconnection between the two nations. A two-state model would only be possible if there was at least some degree of equality between the two communities, but given the relative powerlessness of the Palestinians such an approach would only generate future problems.

**Conclusion**

There was little agreement on the Israeli side with Meron's position. Most felt that a consociational or unitary state model would be both unworkable (because it would lead to serious internal conflict as in the case of neighboring Lebanon) or because it would be unacceptable to Israelis (because it would fatally compromise the Z ionist project, i.e. the notion of an exclusively Jewish state). On the Palestinian side there was much more sympathy with the idea of some kind of one-state solution, but a belief that in the short term at least it would be unpopular amongst ordinary Palestinians because of a strong desire for separation from the Israelis. In addition it is likely that PNA would perceive any attempt to move to a one-state model as a threat to their position. In general there seemed to be little acceptance of the notion that the two communities were not separable and that a two-state solution could not, in principle, be made to work at least in the short term, although there were some who argued that given past failures it was difficult to see how a future two-state model could be successful.