

Those of you who are familiar with the Old Testament will remember the story in the Book of Numbers about Joshua and the team of scouts sent to have a look at the land of Canaan.

Their report to Moses on their return contained two parts. The first, and the most oft quoted, was that “It is a land flowing with milk and honey.”

The second part, though, which is hardly ever mentioned, pointed out that “It is a land that devours the inhabitants thereof.”

And so it is, three and a half thousand years later, with the Balfour Declaration.

The first half of that historic sentence, so often quoted, declares that “His Majesty’s government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national homeland for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of that object.”

The second half of that sentence, rarely referred to, goes on to warn: “...it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...” .

And this is where the *Promised Lands* project comes in.

*Promised Lands* – plural, because it’s been promised twice to two different peoples – takes a contemporary look at what the Balfour Declaration euphemistically refers to as “the existing non-Jewish community” - the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Hanging on the wall in my office is a framed print of Arthur Szyk’s illuminated edition of Israel’s Declaration of Independence. In the lower right hand corner, written in Hebrew with a fountain pen, are the words “To the Passow family, from David Ben Gurion”. My parents, part of that founding generation of the modern Israeli state, hung this print in every house we lived in both in Israel, where I was born, and the United States, where I grew up. It now hangs in the house in London where my wife and I raised our own family. For many of us, Israel isn’t just a place – it’s an idea. And the truth is, today both the place and the idea are in trouble.

The *Promised Lands* project is about re-imagining Israel. Built sixty eight years ago on a foundation which enshrined Jewish ethical values, the country now faces profound existential questions which stem not so

much from outside threats as they do from its failure to keep the promises made to its own citizens in its declaration of independence. This project explores the fraught relationship between Israel and that 20% of its population who are Palestinian and who have lived with institutionalised social, political and economic discrimination as citizens in their own country.

Designed to be completed in 2017 to mark the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the photographs examine that gap between the promise made by the new state to its Palestinian citizens and what, in fact, has been delivered in the last six and a half decades.

With half of the Palestinian Israeli population under the age of 25, this generation is creating opportunities that eluded their parents and grandparents. At the ballot box, in the courtroom and in the classroom, they are making their voices heard as they demand recognition and respect in the difficult national conversation about Israel's journey through democracy. A generation that did not grow up under military rule and has had the courage to bolster its Palestinian identity, it is in a unique position to be an agent of profound change in Israeli society.

The photographs you will see were taken over the last 12 months in the cities, towns and villages that are part of the Palestinian Israeli demographic landscape – cities like Nazareth, Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Tel Aviv, Lod, Jerusalem and Beersheba, towns like Tiran and Arraba, and unrecognized Bedouin villages like Al Sira and Um al Hiran.

What the photographs are about is the rhythm of life inside what Israelis – all Israelis – call the Arab sector. Work. Education. Politics. Faith. Joy. Sorrow. Hopes. Fears. Frustrations. All of those basic building blocks of life which we all experience, but which the Palestinian Israeli has to filter through an additional layer of identity and self-examination.

The photographs ask several fundamental questions about Palestinian Israeli perceptions of their own identity: How do you express your relationship to your tradition and culture? How do you express your relationship to a place? What do you have to surrender to belong? Can you belong without surrender?

The *Promised Lands* project is a visual conversation about the Palestinian Israeli's sense of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and reflects both the achievements and the failures on the shared journey in search of a more just and inclusive society.