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Diaspora Politics

At Home Abroad

This book is intended to fill a gap in the study of modern ethno-national diasporas. Against the background of current trends – globalization, regionalization, democratization, the weakening of the nation-state, and massive trans-state migration – it examines the politics of historical, modern, and incipient ethno-national diasporas. It argues that in contrast to the widely accepted view, ethno-national diasporism and diasporas do not constitute a recent phenomenon. Rather, this is a long-standing phenomenon whose roots are in antiquity. Some of the existing diasporas were created in antiquity, some during the Middle Ages, and some in modern times. Essential aspects of this phenomenon are the unending cultural-social-economic struggles and especially the political struggles of these dispersed ethnic groups, permanently residing in host countries away from their homelands, to maintain their distinctive identities and connections with their homelands and other dispersed groups from the same nations. While describing and analyzing the diaspora phenomenon, the book sheds light on theoretical questions pertaining to current ethnic politics in general.

Gabriel Sheffer is Professor of Political Science at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Recipient of the Israeli Prime Minister's Prize for Political Biography, he frequently contributes to Israeli and foreign magazines and newspapers. He has published extensively on ethno-national diasporas, the Jewish diaspora, and Israeli politics and foreign policy. Among other books, he is the author of *Moshe Sharett: Biography of a Political Moderate* and editor of *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*.

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To
Naomi, Hadass, Tony, and Sigal

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Preface and Acknowledgments

My interest in ethno-national diasporism and diasporas predates the now widely recognized cultural, social, political, and economic importance of those entities. It also predates the current increased academic interest in the nature, scope, and influence of such diasporas. Thus, whereas most observers were inclined to dismiss this phenomenon as marginal, on the wane, and uninteresting, I thought differently. Now, as I have argued throughout the past two decades, it is widely recognized that no serious discussion of current national, regional, and global politics can ignore those entities and their various roles.

Initially my attention was drawn to this phenomenon while I was researching and writing about Israeli foreign policy prior to and after the establishment of the Jewish state. This was not accidental. Because the Jewish diaspora was an important factor in the development of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine prior to 1948), in the 1948 war, and in the creation of Israel and its development, Yishuv and Israeli leaders had to take it into account when shaping their foreign policies and implementing them.

Although I had been aware of the importance of ethnic considerations in politics and in the motivations of various states, especially of Israel, when they formulate and implement their foreign policies, still I was surprised to learn of the complexity of this issue and the great ambivalence shown by Israeli politicians and officials toward the Jewish diaspora.

My acquaintance with the relationship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora became more intimate when I began regularly visiting Jewish diaspora communities and following their development. During that same period, I was working on a political biography of the first Israeli

minister of foreign affairs and its second prime minister, Moshe Sharett. Though he was keenly interested in the Jewish diaspora and truly sympathetic toward that large segment of the Jewish people, still the Sharett government and successive Israeli governments had a very clear order of priorities. Already I had realized that despite repeated declarations about Israel's profound gratitude and commitment to the far-flung communities of the Jewish diaspora, actually the fulfillment of Israeli self-interests always came first. This has been known as the Israelocentric position, which in turn has substantially affected the diaspora.

My first detailed studies of homeland–diaspora relations focused on fund-raising by Jewish diaspora communities and the transfer of funds to the homeland. This has always been a very sensitive issue for all sides involved in any homeland–diaspora situation. It turns out that raising donations, transferring remittances to homelands, and making investments in homelands constitute highly intricate systems, usually involving many actors who often have divergent interests. At the core of each of these systems is a triangular relationship – among the diaspora communities, the homeland, and the host countries. More recently I have come to realize that the number of actors and interests involved is even greater and that these deserve special attention.

Those early studies led me to ponder the enormous complexity of the diaspora phenomenon and the precariousness of diaspora communities' positions in relation to their host societies, homelands, and other societal and political actors and agencies. I also began to wonder if the Jewish diaspora was indeed unique, as many had thought and wrote. It soon became clear that it was not. Looking for answers to these theoretical and practical questions only raised many further questions about this highly intricate phenomenon.

Because of my increasing interest in these issues pertaining to ethno-national diasporism, and particularly to diaspora politics, I initiated a series of meetings and a seminar with a number of outstanding scholars from Israel, Europe, and the United States that resulted in a proceedings volume published in 1986: *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*. In my Introduction to that volume I suggested that it was a first theoretical, analytical, and empirical attempt to create a new field of studies. The various contributions to that volume substantiated the overarching hypotheses that ethno-national diasporism was increasing rather than declining, that it was not a modern development but rather a long-standing historical phenomenon, that older and newer diasporas shared many features and experiences, that the Jewish diaspora was not unique,

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and that diasporism was an important topic for further research. However, despite the fact that the book sold well, for a long period thereafter there were only a few general and comparative publications in this field.

Though many colleagues have remained convinced that this is a marginal issue, I have continued to study and publish articles on various aspects of the Jewish diaspora experience and on more general topics concerning ethno-national diasporism and diaspora politics. Among other things, I have published articles elaborating my first definition of these diasporas, dealing with the emergence of new diasporas, and focusing on the radicalization of diasporas. I have also published articles on the security issues in host countries that involve diasporas, the impact of the new media and communications on diasporas, the distinction between trans-national and trans-state diasporas, and the continuing changes in the relationship between Israel and the Jewish diaspora.

Gradually the diaspora phenomenon has come to attract more attention. One of the indicators of that growing interest has been the greater number of international conferences and seminars that have been organized, some of which I have attended. The turning point for that increasing recognition came in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rapid globalization processes that followed. Those trends facilitated increasing migration, permanent settlement of migrants, and the creation of new diaspora communities, and they also contributed to attitudinal changes toward migrants and diasporas. Because of various processes that will be described and analyzed later in this book, certain core groups in older and dormant diasporas became more assertive and active in the political and socioeconomic arenas. Such developments further promoted interest in the diaspora phenomenon, and the numbers of papers, articles, and books published on these topics have increased manifold. Of great importance in furthering the development of this academic field has been Professor Khachig Tololyan's initiative and unwavering dedication to publishing the field's journal, *Diaspora*.

My decision to write this book was made only recently, because I believed that there was a lacuna that called for a general book on diaspora politics. Rather than focusing on case studies, I decided to review and use the information that could be gleaned from the vast literature on ethnicity and ethnic politics and from the numerous specific case studies of diasporas that are now available. The few more general books on the social aspects of diasporas and on the connections between migration and the appearance of diaspora communities were also helpful.

The book raises a rather long list of issues pertaining to the complex diaspora phenomenon and attempts to deal with most of them. It offers an elaborated definition of the phenomenon and sets out to analyze its various aspects. It draws some theoretical conclusions and suggests a cluster of issues that should be studied further in order to arrive at a more comprehensive theory of current diasporism.

During the years that I have been involved in the study of diasporas I have benefited considerably from cooperation with the Berlin Institute for Comparative Social Studies, and especially its director, Dr. Jochen Blaschke, and his deputy, Dr. Thomas Schwartz. Together we have made noticeable progress in initiating, conducting, and supporting research and publications in this field. Among other things, together we have organized seminars on these topics, with the participation of experienced old hands and younger scholars, and they have yielded some impressive studies on diasporism and diasporas. We would like to thank all those participants, and we look forward to continued fruitful cooperation.

I would like to thank two former students and research assistants, Dr. Michael Dahan (who co-authored one of my articles) and Mr. Shaul Shenhav, who helped with various stages of the work on this book. For their helpful comments and suggestions, thanks also go to my colleagues, Professors Abraham Ashkenazi, William Miles, Ilan Troen, Ehud Sprinzak, Robin Cohen, Jan Hjarno, Emanuel Gutmann, Ahmed Anwar, John Rex, Moshe Maoz, and Gerd Korman, as well as many others who have participated in the seminars and conferences where I have presented papers that have dealt with some of the ideas elaborated in this book. Other colleagues at The Hebrew University, especially in the Political Science Department, as well as at other Israeli and foreign universities, have also been most helpful, and I thank them all for their comments, cooperation, and suggestions.

I greatly appreciate the detailed comments made by two anonymous reviewers of the book for Cambridge University Press. Following most of their valuable suggestions, I have revised various parts of the manuscript, and I am sure that consequently this will be a better book, though for the final content of this book, I am solely responsible.

I owe special thanks to Mr. Lewis Bateman and his staff at Cambridge University Press for all that they have done to facilitate the publication of this book.

During the years that I have been engaged in diaspora studies, I have been fortunate to have received financial support from various research

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institutes and centers, especially at The Hebrew University. For this I thank the boards and directors of the Truman Institute and the Eshkol, Shain, and Smart centers for their generous financial support and cooperation.

Last but not least, I would like to express my most profound love, appreciation, and thanks to my beloved wife, Naomi, my two daughters, Hadass and Sigal, and my son-in-law, Tony, for their continuing understanding and encouragement while I was researching and writing this book.

I hope that this book will contribute to better understanding and sympathy for all those many millions of people worldwide who maintain special connections with their old homelands while striving to feel at home abroad.