PART I

CHARTING THE HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE
AND THEORETICAL FRONTIERS
OF DIASPORA NATIONALISMS
DIASPORAS AND HOMELANDS IN HISTORY: 
THE CASE OF THE CLASSIC DIASPORAS

Anthony D. Smith

There are vast literatures on nationalism and on diasporas, but the subject of diaspora nationalisms has perhaps received less attention. It too comprises a large field—historical, cultural, economic, political and geographical. But here I want to focus on some of the historical roots of diaspora nationalisms, and attempt to show how much they were indebted to pre-modern cultural resources, or were even perhaps prefigured by pre-modern ethnic homeland memories and attachments. I must emphasize that I am approaching this large topic from the direction of nationalism, leaving to others far more competent than myself to consider in more detail the other, diaspora, half of our theme. As a result, I will treat the diaspora case as a distinct type of ethnic nationalism, one that can be analytically separated from other types, and I omit reference to other related types like secession or irredentism. Similarly, I have found it necessary to limit the scope of enquiry to classic diaspora nationalisms, that is, to an exploration of the bases and resources of the nationalisms of the classic diasporas—the Greeks, the Armenians and the Jews. If I lay particular emphasis on the latter, it is surely because of the exemplary role model of homeland attachments and aspirations for restoration which the diaspora Jews furnished to those that came after them, as so many have done, for good or ill.

It is impossible to say anything about the subjects of ethnicity and nationalism without defining some key terms. So I shall start with a few ideal-typical definitions, always recalling that these are among the most contentious concepts in the human sciences.

By nationalism, then, I mean an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a human population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’. Nation, in turn, I would now define as a named and self-defined human community whose members cultivate shared myths, memories, values, symbols and traditions, who reside in and are attached to an historic territory or ‘homeland’, create and disseminate a distinctive public culture, and observe common laws and customs.