The conference at which the first draft of this paper was presented as a talk posed several questions concerning contemporary nationalisms; the one that most engaged me as a scholar of diasporas was: How do homeland and diaspora nationalisms differ? Most participants and many scholars acknowledge that the diversity of nations and homeland nationalisms is such that even without taking diasporic forms of nationalism into account, generalization is very difficult. As Anthony D. Smith has argued, no “law-like regularities or sweeping generalisations” are possible. The task is rendered all the more complicated when the heterogeneity of the diasporas of any one nation alone, let alone of all existing ethnonational diasporas, are taken into account.

Furthermore, in my view, even the best taxonomic efforts do not adequately convey the complexity of nationalisms that involve both homelands and their diasporas, because the experiential and phenomenological aspects of nationalism are as intense as they are, and they have thus far proved elusive to scholarship. In this essay, I hope to engage some aspects of the subjective experience of nationalism because that dimension is increasingly relevant to the ways in which homeland nationalist ideology is accepted, rejected, and conditionally enacted within diasporas. We must begin by acknowledging that whereas nationalism simultaneously empowers and burdens its adherents, whether collectives or individuals, it does so variously, multiply, differently, depending on whether they live in a nation-state, on a homeland not (yet) endowed with a nation-state, or in a diaspora made up of multiple transnational communities. “Nationalism” can enable exceptional

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1 The Conference on Diaspora Nationalisms, held at University College, London, organized by the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) and the Institute of Jewish Studies, 18–20 June, 2007 (talk delivered on Tuesday 19 June 2007).

moments of effort and upheaval in the life of the collective, but it also minutely and variously infuses the ordinary, quotidian views, actions, and self-conceptions of individuals. “Diaspora,” which stands in theory for the compressed and compressing idiom of mobile multilocality in the modern world, in practice applies to contemporary diasporas that encompass a vast range of contexts and histories, actions and stories, arrangements and undertakings, among which commitment (“loyalty”) to national and transnational entities is always a very important but not necessarily the determinative engagement.

The crude form of the argument that this essay hopes to develop is that under the pressures of transnationalism and globalization, a form of nationalism shared by homelands and diasporas that until recently was prevalent among Armenians and Jews (and, I believe but cannot linger to demonstrate, several other groups), which I call exilic nationalism, is being replaced by a new diasporic transnationalism, in which considerations of subjectivity and personal identity play a major role. After addressing some indispensable concepts, I will return to this claim.

The late scholar Joel Fineman once began a talk on narcissism and literature by stating that he had read through all of Freud’s oeuvre and concluded that each time the Master used the word “narcissism,” he inflected its meaning and added a shade of difference to the term. The same was true, he claimed, in the therapeutic literature on the topic. Therefore, Fineman concluded, “each time I give a talk involving narcissism, I redefine it.” He then proceeded to offer the definition with which he was working that day. To some, this approach to concepts is scandalous; to others, necessary, and even a good way of developing our collective discourse. I will follow Fineman’s example while speaking of “nationalism.”

Nationalisms and theories of nationalism are by now dizzyingly numerous, diverse, and, to be sure, of unequal plausibility, ranging from the venerable ethno-nationalism to functionalist and instrumental nationalisms and to the more recent forms popular with journalists, such as “resource nationalism” and “consumer nationalism.”

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