German unification in 1871 not only changed the political, economic and geographical landscape of the country, it also had a significant impact on those Germans who found themselves living outside, or migrating across, the borders of the newly founded Empire. An expansion of numbers and destinations was accompanied by a gradual redefinition of migrants’ relationship with their country of origin. The process had already been evident in the preceding decades, but gained momentum after 1871. Emigrants were increasingly represented as outposts of ‘Germanness’ whose ethnic links with the mother country had to be preserved for their own and the Empire’s benefits. They symbolised Germany’s presence on the world stage and its claims to become a major ‘global player’ in at least three different ways: in economic terms, they could act as promoters or customers of German industry and trade; in cultural terms, they could disseminate a supposedly superior Germanic culture; and in political terms, they could be used to legitimise territorial claims.1

In order to exploit this potential, closer cultural and racial ties between centre and diaspora had to be constructed. The shift in nomenclature is a telling indicator. In the course of the nineteenth century the commonly used term ‘Auszwanderer’ (emigrants) was gradually replaced by ‘Auslandsdeutsche’,2 which can be loosely translated as ‘Germans living abroad’. A host of novel terms and metaphors was employed in order to express the notion of a global community of Germans bound
together by cultural and racial ties. William II spoke of the diaspora as the ‘Greater German Empire’.\(^3\) Ethnic communities were seen as body members (*Glieder*) whose noblest task it was to erect ‘an upright wall’ (*eine aufrechte Mauer*) against assimilatory processes.\(^4\) These ascriptions were first formulated within the *Reich*, but, through a transnational flow of ideas, were willingly taken up by many diaspora communities. The Kaiser’s birthday on 27 January was celebrated by ethnic communities worldwide. In St. Petersburg, for example, where attendance at patriotic festivities experienced an upsurge from the 1880s onwards, the celebrations in 1910 were introduced by Ambassador Count Pourtalès as follows:

The 27 January is upon us, our national day of celebration which unifies all German patriots, extending their warmest wishes for their *Kaiser* and for the greatness and the glory of the common fatherland […]. Ladies and gentlemen, you have been brought together by the desire to express your commitment as fatherland-loving Germans who are proud to belong to the powerful *Reich*.

Notwithstanding a homogeneity limited by persisting regional, religious, political and class differences, Germans worldwide underwent a redefinition from geographically scattered and disparate groups to an ostensibly unified transnational ‘community of spirit’. From this constructionist viewpoint, the term diaspora is appropriate despite the heterogeneity of its object of inquiry. As Tölöyan points out, ‘populations are made into nations and dispersions into diasporas’. Also, scholars increasingly appreciate that heterogeneity and ruptures are inherent characteristics of any diaspora. Ruptures do not preclude the application of the term but should, in fact, be adequately discussed within pertinent analyses.\(^6\)

Institutions and organisations acted as facilitators for the creation of transnational ethnic networks. The Prussian State Church encouraged

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\(^3\) Quoted in Hoeniger, *Deutschtum*, iii.

