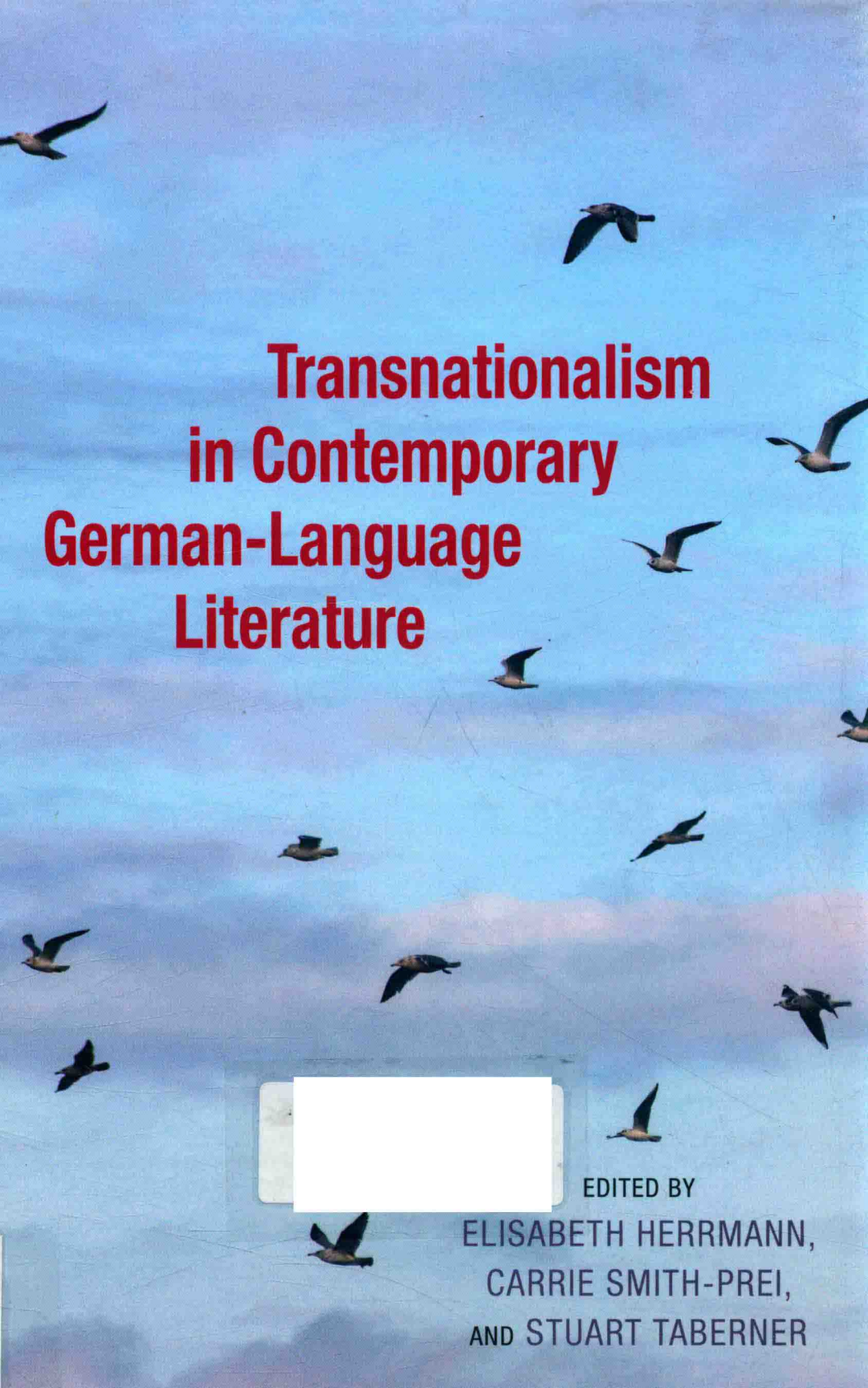

Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature

EDITED BY

ELISABETH HERRMANN,
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This volume expands the shared readings, inspiring discussions, and intellectual exchange that developed in the course of the seminar. The editors of this volume would like to thank all our participants. This exchange happened because the German Studies Association offered, for the first time at its 2013 conference, extended seminars series as a forum for bringing together scholars working on the same topic. We are grateful to the GSA for this innovative initiative.

A very special thank-you is owed to German-Bulgarian author Ilija Trojanow, who participated in the seminar in Denver as a special guest and active contributor. Ilija Trojanow was prevented from traveling to the United States in person—the authorities' refusal to grant him permission to enter caused controversy in both the United States and Europe—but he was able to participate via Skype. This form of participation, and the reasons for it, in itself demonstrates both the possibilities and limitations of transnationalism.

An impression of Ilija Trojanow's contribution to the seminar may be gained from the transcription of an interview conducted by the editors a few weeks after the GSA conference in Denver that appears at the end of the volume.

We were able to invite Ilija Trojanow to participate in our discussions thanks to the generous financial support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the GSA. We are grateful to Sebastian Fohrbeck, at that time director of the DAAD, DAAD Senior Program Officer Michael Thomanek, the executive director of the GSA David Barclay, Suzanne Marchand, at that time president of the GSA, and Irene Kacandes, at that time vice-president of the GSA.

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Introduction: Contemporary German-Language Literature and Transnationalism

Elisabeth Herrmann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner

TRANSNATIONALISM IS "not new and has been around since ancient times," Michael Howard reminds us.[1] Yet in the contemporary era the "ties, interactions, exchange and mobility" that connect across and between nations, Steven Vertovec argues, "function intensively and in real time while being spread throughout the world."[2] Economic globalization, instantaneous electronic media, and the movement of millions around the globe today appear to be rendering national borders—and the cultures, polities, and frameworks of understanding that they are imagined to contain—more porous than ever before.

Transnationalism—understood in this volume as a plurality of intersecting, and crosscutting flows of products, ideas, and people back and forth over borders—presents a number of challenges to scholars working in the humanities and social sciences. How are they to conceptualize transnationalism beyond the conventional focus on the experience of those "minority" individuals or groups who span two or more cultures as migrants, refugees, or exiles? That is, how can they move beyond a focus on diasporic formations, hybridity, or notions of center and periphery in order to theorize how contemporary transnationalism's characteristic multidirectionality and saturation of all aspects of everyday life, from consumption to culture, impacts *everyone*, whether "settled" residents of a given national space or transient "guests"? How can they best conceptualize the nation's continued salience—the persistence of the nation in trans*nation*alism—for its citizens, and for those it refuses to accept as such? And how are they to rethink the nation's continued centrality to persistent global imbalances in economic, geopolitical, and military power, even as transnationalism appears to weaken that nation's claim to be *sovereign*?

For literary scholars, specifically, the reality of contemporary transnationalism prompts us to think more closely about the ways fiction written in a particular time and in a particular place—in the context of this volume, in the German-speaking countries—connects to, circulates through, and is rechanneled by *global* patternings and *global* debates on identity,

mobility, hospitality, universalism, self-forming, and cosmopolitanism. It is only by holding nation and world in tension with one another, we—the editors of this volume—would argue, that we can avoid the "methodological nationalism" (to adopt Ulrich Beck's term)[3] that for too long plagued literary studies, while also avoiding the opposite trap of idealizing (or demonizing) the global as abstracted from the very real borders that still define and divide us as much as they may suggest new opportunities and experiences, refuge or protection, or at least the expectation of a warm welcome. Transnationalism as a system of plurality and encounter with the other rather than one of homogeneity and standardization may be best described in its connection and contrast to globalization.

Globalization and Transnationalism

It is no coincidence that the *transnational turn* in literary studies—as in the social sciences and humanities more generally—has taken place against the backdrop of globalization. In 1999, John Tomlinson described globalization as being characterized by a "rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies."[4] It certainly appears to be at the very least a necessary precondition for the intensive cross-border flows of people, goods, and ideas that the term transnationalism, on the face of it, would seem to connote. As David Harvey notes, "There has undoubtedly been a deepening as well as a widening of these transnational connections during the phase of neoliberal globalization, and it is vital that these connectivities be acknowledged."[5] Yet transnationalism is not simply a subcategory of—or a synonym for—globalization, just as neither are wholly novel or even entirely recent phenomena. There are important distinctions between what is denoted by the terms *globalization* and *transnationalism*, with important consequences.

To begin with, globalization was most often understood in the 1990s as a *homogenizing* tendency. In an essay of 1998, Fredric Jameson described globalization as a "most ambiguous ideological concept," but in the wake of the apparent triumph of neoliberalism after the end of the Cold War, it is likely that most of his readers would have understood it to be the "worldwide Americanization or standardization of culture, the destruction of local differences, the massification of all the peoples on the planet" rather than the "multiple heterogeneities" of a postmodern culture.[6] On those occasions that the word "transnational"—not yet "transnationalism"—appears in the work of globalization theorists, it most often simply describes globalization's *reach* rather than having any particular conceptual force of its own. In his seminal work, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996), Arjun Appadurai argues that "these sodalities are often transnational, even postnational, and they frequently operate beyond the boundaries of the nation."[7]

The recent shift from the adjective *transnational* to the noun *transnationalism* usefully complicates theories of globalization in ways that reflect actual developments in planetary power relations, economics, and culture in the twenty-first century. The term *transnational* de-emphasizes the center-periphery model that was generally at least implicit in most theorizations of globalization in the 1990s. With transnationalism, by contrast, scholars can begin to conceptualize the emerging multipolarity of the twenty-first century—the United States and the West more generally will not dictate global fashions—*and* the multidirectionality of cross-border flows of people, goods, and ideas. Today, in short, global interactions and intersections are more distributed, diffuse, and diverse than they ever were before. Power, people, and finance now flow intra- and interregionally, cutting across and partially superseding imperial and postimperial circulations. This flow is not only between the wealthy nations of the northern hemisphere, as it has been for many centuries, but also east to west, south to north, and south to south, even as the "first world," as it was once was known, still enjoys, in absolute terms, the highest standard of living. Paul Jay hints at this multipolarity and multidirectionality—the "complex back-and-forth flows of people and cultural forms"[8]—but in absorbing them back into his redefinition of globalization, he relativizes the novelty of his focus on *transnationalism* as well as the consequences and the significance of transnationalism's more diffuse patterns of circulation. Appadurai's suggestion in his 1996 book that "the United States is no longer the puppeteer of a world system of images but is only one node of a complex transnational construction of imaginary landscapes" is more prescient, although even here his presumption of a "globalized, deterritorialized world"[9] may nowadays appear to overstate the case for some kind of really existing, if chaotic, "world imperium."

Literary scholars working with concepts of globalization and transnationalism have been most influenced by postcolonial studies—for instance, Appadurai, Homi Bhabha, and James Clifford—and they tend to be most interested in what have typically been described as minority, exogenous, or diasporic authors. Indeed, *minority writer* and *transnational writer* are often used interchangeably to describe, say, German-language authors of Turkish provenance or Chicano and Chicana authors. Just as globalization has been equated with neocolonialism, so has transnationalism, at least in the literary context, generally been associated with those writers who are most obviously "marked" by colonial and neocolonial histories and relations. In their book *Minor Transnationalism*, for example, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih argue for a "transnationalism from below" and make the case for "an awareness and recognition of the creative interventions that networks of minoritized cultures produce within and across national boundaries."[10] Similar arguments are advanced by postcolonial thinkers, such as Pheng Cheah,[11] and by scholars interested

in the recent growth of transnational networks of social activism, for example Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow.[12] This interest in the formerly colonized and in minorities and migrants, of course, mirrors the conventional association in the social sciences in recent years of the words *transnational* and *transnationalism* with diasporic networks, that is, with what Kachig Tölölyan has called the "exemplary communities of the transnational moment."[13]

The contention of this volume, however, is that using transnationalism as an analytical tool prompts us to shift our focus away from the movement of *some*—migrants, refugees, exiles, or trafficked people—across borders toward the implication of *all*. Indeed, the intensity and multidirectionality of transnationalism imply that *all* are impacted by the flows of people, products, and ideas across borders, including those who do not themselves move. The residents of so-called developed nations, for example, are not simply the privileged consumers of goods and services produced elsewhere—in the colonies and postcolonies—or the passive consumers of globalized culture. Rather, the daily experience of all kinds of otherness, difference, and plurality makes evident the urgency of issues of belonging, inclusion and exclusion, citizenship, forced and unforced movement, status and privilege.

Integral to this argument is the matter of positionality. The fact that *all* are implicated in transnationalism does not mean that all experience it in the same way. Refugees, undocumented persons, sex workers and trafficked women, legal migrants, naturalized citizens, and citizens "by birth" all experience differing degrees of precarity in relation to the rules and regulations that govern residence and mobility. As Regina Römhild argues, transnationalism means that "the ideal of fixed territories of culture turns into a fiction, and mobility becomes the common ground for the proliferation of diasporic life-worlds, cultures and identities."[14] But the fact that more people than ever before are mobile does not mean that all are impacted in the same way, or *equally*. The editors and contributors to this volume, for example, are scholars working in Europe, Canada, and the United States—traveling easily between those two continents—whose experience of transnationalism is, self-evidently, quite different from the experience of those who lack the "right" papers.

Using the term *transnationalism* in order to further specify the impact that globalization has on daily life draws attention to the perhaps surprising prominence of the nation in the present day, though it is probably the case that the nation never stopped mattering to countries that only gained their independence in the twentieth century, where the nation has been the primary means of social consolidation, self-projection, education, and welfare. At the same time it might be safe to assume that people in the West have once again become concerned with the nation only because the "integrity" of their own nations now appears to be less secure. Financial

crisis, changing demography, and geopolitical shifts have created a sense of vulnerability at the level of the nation that to a certain extent at least may have closed the gap between "the West and the rest."[15]

The term *transnationalism* makes it possible to conceptualize the continued importance of the nation as the organizing unit of global affairs *and* the continued significance—indeed increased significance—of borders in a world in which the ease, or difficulty, of border crossing defines not only products but also people. In his 1994 book *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha spoke of the imminent death of the nation,[16] just as Appadurai argued that globalization meant that "states throughout the world are under siege."[17] Other scholars, such as Michael Kearney, were perhaps prescient in emphasizing even in the mid-1990s—during the heyday of globalization theory—the distinction between global processes that are somewhat independent of nation-states and transnational processes that, by definition, take place in relation to particular national places and pasts.[18] Nowadays—that is post-9/11 and post-economic-crisis of 2008—scholars are, in fact, more likely to point to the role nations play in controlling whether and how people travel, who may settle where, whether rights are to be extended, denied or revoked, and when and in what ways citizens may be surveilled, and by whom, and what kind of data are circulated within and beyond national borders.[19] Eric Cazdyn and Imre Szeman, for example, argue in *After Globalization* (2011) that the 2008 financial crisis has exposed globalization as an ideological fiction that only "naturalizes" (US, or neoliberal) capitalism as an irresistible and irreversible new world order.[20] The real change, as Grace Darlene Skogstad suggests, is not that nations have diminished in significance—even if they are no longer as sovereign as they once were—but that the reality of transnationalism now saturates domestic discourses, for example, on the subject of citizenship as well as personal data and privacy, that were once thought to be relatively insulated.[21]

Germany as Exemplary Transnational Space

Germany makes an interesting example when exploring transnational spaces in our current time. The country is today a dynamic export-driven economy that boasts a significant balance of payments surplus with its trading partners. Germany is present around the world. It is China's number one trading partner in the EU, and China is the top foreign investment destination for German companies.[22] Germany is far more important to India than its erstwhile colonial master, Great Britain, much to the chagrin of Prime Minister David Cameron.[23] Germany is also increasingly visible in the regulation of global affairs. Its refusal to become involved in the Western intervention in Libya's civil war in 2011 was a throwback to a previous era of military self-restraint that continues

to be regretted by large sections of its foreign policy elite. Modern-day Germany is certainly not gung ho for military action, but engagements in Kosovo, Afghanistan, off the Horn of Africa, Lebanon, the two Sudans, Uganda, Congo, and elsewhere, suggest that Helmut Kohl's salami tactics, continued by the SPD, have succeeded in accustoming Germans to at least a limited projection of German military power.[24] Just as striking, in the wake of the near collapse of the financial markets in 2008 and during the ensuing Eurozone crisis, has been—notwithstanding its vital role in keeping the Eurozone and indeed the EU together[25]—the Federal Republic's more assertive insistence upon its national self-interest, suggesting that its traditional postwar commitment to multilateralism and values-led foreign policy is now buttressed by a more pragmatic stance.[26]

However, Germany's intensified postmillennial international and foreign policy engagement is only part of the story. Transnationalism, and its significance today as constitutive of individuals' daily experience, prompts us to consider not just how the Federal Republic is more present in the world than it once was in the days of its preunification semisovereignty,[27] but also how the world is now more present in Germany. Here, changing demography is key. In the 2011 census, just over 12% of residents in the Federal Republic were residents without German citizenship,[28] but, as important, there were 2.3 million families with a child under 18 where at least one parent had a migration background. That means around 29% of the total of 8.1 million such families.[29] Overall, 20% of people with German citizenship have a familial connection to another country, rising to 25% of those under 25.[30] Moreover, the number of new arrivals has exceeded the number of departures of other nationals, sometimes by a factor of two, in every year since 1991, with very large inflows particularly in the early to mid-1990s—the time of the Balkans wars—of asylum seekers,[31] but also of Jews from the former Soviet Union. In the same period, and indeed until the early 2000s, very large numbers of ethnic Germans—just under a quarter of a million a year from 1991 to 1995—from across the formerly communist states of Eastern Europe were "repatriated" to Germany, a country that the overwhelming majority of them had never before seen.[32] Many Germans seem to be quite unaware of these numbers, reflecting their strong reluctance to accept the fact that they live in an immigration country.

Today's Germany is demographically—and not just politically or culturally—a very different place from the preunification Federal Republic, and certainly from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). It is not simply that the number of people with a migration background has increased. Germany's new residents are far more diverse than ever before. They are not just Turkish, but come from other EU countries, as well as Russia, Bosnia, Serbia, North Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia, and many others besides. Indeed, certain cities

are experiencing the emergence of what Steven Vertovec recently called "super-diversity,"[33] or what Azade Seyhan has called "paranational communities."[34] These new residents are younger, on average, than "settled" Germans, whose low birthrate[35] also means that large-scale immigration is essential if the country's population is not to fall dramatically—perhaps by as much as a fifth by 2060[36]—and the economy is to continue to maintain a high standard of living.

This volume argues that the developments described above make Germany today what might be termed an "exemplary transnational space." Certainly, the reality of transnationalism permeates domestic debates to an extent that would have been unthinkable in the rather enclosed provinciality of the preunification Federal Republic (and East Germany).[37] The ferocity of the *Historikerstreit*—a decidedly high-brow debate of the mid-1980s on the significance of the Nazi past for German identity[38]—might thus appear rather parochial, as indeed do many of the "memory contests"[39] even of the 1990s. As can easily be observed, the Nazi past is now more likely to be reworked in a rather stylized and fictionalized form in film and literature to appeal to a transnational interest in this aspect of German history, which is often utilized to demonstrate the inconceivability of evil.[40]

More pressing in today's Federal Republic are recent controversies relating to the supposed *Überfremdung* ("swamping") of German society, German *Leitkultur* (the preeminence of German culture), Frank Schirrmacher's *Das Methusalem-Komplott* (The Methusalem Conspiracy, 2004) and Thilo Sarrazin's *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany Is Doing Away with Itself, 2010), both of which warned of the aging of "native" Germans and an islamification of Germany through immigration. Or, Germany's incipient euroskepticism in the wake of the Eurozone crisis might be cited: the emergence of the euro-critical political party *Alternative for Germany*; the country's recent wavering between "principled" (post-Holocaust) and "realist" (self-interested) positions on domestic and external affairs (e.g., political asylum, or relations with China), or, more generally, its struggle to reconcile its traditional, postwar reflexive multilateralism with its sense of increased vulnerability within what Ulrich Beck has termed the "world risk society."[41]

German-Language Literature and Transnationalism

As implied in the discussion above of the way transnationalism impacts on *all*, German-language writers engaging with the theme emerge from "minority" *and* "majority" backgrounds. They work with, through, and against Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and many other backgrounds and heritages, and bring many and various histories of settlement and migration to bear. Although the writer's background is important and does impact

the writing, the adjective "transnational" may be better applied to *texts* dealing with a contemporary phenomenon rather than solely to *authors* who happen to have a migration background.[42]

In contemporary German-language fiction, there are a large number of grittily realist works that deal with transnationalism's impact on the lives of the undocumented, the trafficked, and the exploited. Here, the Hungarian-German writer Terézia Mora's *Alle Tage* (*Day in, Day Out*, 2004) is perhaps the best known. Mora's novel also stands out for its inclusion of elements of magical realism that punctuate its depiction of everyday violence.[43] Other authors from a variety of backgrounds depict the lack of hospitality that "unwanted" border crossers encounter. Alongside these avowedly socially-engaged texts, there is a plethora of more fanciful, diverting, or experimental works in which transnationalism is linked to mobility and self-realization, for example in Feridun Zaimoglu's *Hinterland* (2009), or the reconfiguration of personal and national identity (e.g., Felicitas Hoppe's self-naming novel *Hoppe* from 2012), or of sexual identity, such as in Antje Rávic Strubel's 2001 *Offene Blende* (Open Shutter) and 2002 *Fremd Gehen* (Going Strange). Indeed, conventionally *trans*gressive sexual identities are frequently associated with the *trans* in "transnationalism," for example in Sibylle Berg's *Vielen Dank für das Leben* (Thanks for Life, 2012), which features a globe-trotting hermaphrodite (as does Ulrike Draesner's 2002 *Mitgift* [Dowry]),[44] and in many of the texts discussed in this volume. To appropriate Jack Halberstam's striking phrase,[45] it seems that transnationals often exist "in *a queer time and place*" characterized by their "unnatural" sexuality, "promiscuous" multilingualism, or refusal to be fixed and defined. Finally, there are a surprising number of more or less historical novels that "rediscover" the age of Enlightenment, the age of European exploration, or the age of European empire as previous instances of transnationalism, which allow authors to reflect on present-day developments. It is in this context that several chapters in this volume focus on Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt* (Measuring the World, 2005), Ilija Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler* (The Collector of Worlds, 2006), and Christian Kracht's *Imperium* (Empire, 2012). In each of these novels too, *trans*gressive sexuality is related to the apparent threat posed by "queer transnationals."

It perhaps goes without saying that a key concern running through contemporary German-language literary works focused on transnationalism is the (productive or disruptive) tension between the particular and the universal. Whether postimperial, realist, fanciful or fantastical, socially engaged or gender oriented, almost all such texts implicitly or explicitly thematize their authors' awareness that—in our transnational era especially—fiction too is a product that circulates back and forth across borders, absorbing or rejecting other cultural influences and constantly restating, challenging, or reconfiguring nation *and* world. This

self-awareness of their own mobility—their own transnationalism—may even frame some contemporary German-language works as *world literature*, if world literature is conceived of as a theoretical concept that connects *worldliness* to mobility and cosmopolitan ideals, rather than simply as an expression for literature translated into other languages or for works that are considered the most outstanding examples of each national culture (*the classics* and *the masterpieces*). This discussion of recent German-language literature as world literature is adumbrated in the chapters in this volume by Elisabeth Herrmann, Stuart Taberner, and Claudia Breger insofar as it clearly connects to transnationalism, but it is a theme that urgently requires further research in its own right.[46]

The book opens with three wide-ranging, theoretically focused essays that map the *contexts* of the discussion of contemporary German-language literature in relation to transnationalism. Using fictional works as well as theoretical reflections by authors of different national and transnational backgrounds as examples—Ilija Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler*, Daniel Kehlmann's *Die Vermessung der Welt*, Christian Kracht's *Imperium*, Felicitas Hoppe's *Hoppe*, and Dan Vyleta's mystery series *Pavel & I* (2008), *The Quiet Twin* (2008), and *The Crooked Maid* (2013)—Elisabeth Herrmann drafts concepts of literary mobility, transnationalism, and world literature that enable us to analyze the changing conditions and features of literature in times of globalization, as well as to redefine the term *contemporary German literature* for the twenty-first century against the backdrop of transnationalism. In Stuart Taberner's contribution, transnationalism is considered in relation to the renewed interest in cosmopolitanism in recent years on the part of both scholars and writers—Taberner examines a number of contemporary German-language texts as part of a broader societal and indeed global conversation on the question of how, in an age defined by transnational contact, we can live ethically and harmoniously with "others." Closing part 1, Carrie Smith-Prei examines how the affective turn, as it has been theorized across the humanities and social sciences, opens up a manner of engaging with the literary appearance of sexuality and corporeality when thought transnationally. In chapter 3, she pursues affect in terms of emotional aesthetics, biopower, and technology to highlight the importance of the political in theorizing transnational literature. Finally, this chapter suggests that affect allows for a categorization of transnational contemporary literature as a literature of the present. Together, the chapters in part 1 provide a detailed overview of and intervention into some of the key debates on transnationalism and literature, both in the German context and globally.

The chapters in part 2 illuminate, complicate, and expand on these theoretical considerations through extended analyses of individual *texts*. They thus provide detailed discussions of the debates outlined in the introduction and particularly in the three opening essays in part 1. More

specifically, these chapters circle around a number of key themes: the place of literature written in German within the global circulation of cultures and within "world literature"; the "fascination" of transnational experience by writers from both "majority" and "minority" backgrounds; and challenges to Western ideologies of gender and queerness as a normalizing factor in relation to nation, culture, race, ethnicity, and class.

The first three chapters of part 2 engage specifically with transnationalism's theoretical basis through a critical engagement with mobility, national mythologies, and cosmopolitanism as well as a reconsideration of transnationalism and the contemporary. Katharina Gerstenberger examines Thomas von Steinaecker's 2012 novel *Das Jahr, in dem ich aufhörte, mir Sorgen zu machen, und anfing zu träumen* (The Year in Which I Stopped Worrying and Began Dreaming) and Kathrin Röggla's 2010 short story "das recherchegespenst" (The Research Ghost) for their engagement with the lived realities of transnationalism and interaction with national and individual identity in a global world. She does so through the issue of mobility in particular. She argues that these texts are particularly appropriate for engaging with the contemporary moment for the manner in which transnationalism is a marker of the present, an aspect that she urges us to engage with critically; transnationalism, so the texts propose, is not an easy alternative to national narratives of the recent past. Claudia Breger also engages critically with transnationalism through an examination of Christian Kracht's *Imperium* and Teju Cole's *Open City* (2012). Through a development of her understanding of transnationalism as a methodological approach that highlights a critique of nationalism and its mythologies, Breger discusses how the transnational dimensions of Kracht's novel fall short due to the production of what she calls a colonial loop. She places Cole's novel in stark contrast for its reference to cosmopolitanism, a term the novel complicates in transnational terms through a reference to national histories. An approach to transnationalism through critical cosmopolitanism, Breger argues, lends historical and national legacies of violence and colonialism to the humanistic and connective ethos. Christina Kraenzle also engages with the interchange between transnationalism and cosmopolitanism through an examination of Ilija Trojanow's travel writing. In chapter 6, she illuminates the fraught relationship between the two concepts in that a desire for more openness, exchange, and ethical accountability found in cosmopolitan thought often collides with national boundaries and myths that shape notions of self and other. Through an analysis of *Nomade auf vier Kontinenten* (Nomad on Four Continents, 2008) and *An den inneren Ufern Indiens* (Along the Inner Banks of India, 2003), Kraenzle draws on the long tradition of European travel writing to explore how Trojanow engages in a subversion of the genre through an experimental narrative portrayal of power relations, authority, and