



ENTANGLEMENTS
STEVEN VERTOVEC

Steven Vertovec was born in Chicago in 1957 and educated at the University of Colorado (B.A. 1979), University of California – Santa Barbara (M.A. 1982), and University of Oxford (D.Phil. 1989). Currently he is Professor of Transnational Anthropology at the University of Oxford and Director of the British Economic and Social Research Council’s Center for Migration, Policy and Society (see www.compas.ox.ac.uk). He is the author of *Hindu Trinidad*. Macmillan, 1992 and *The Hindu Diaspora*. Routledge, 2000 and editor or co-editor of several books including *The Urban Context*. Berg, 1995. *Islam in Europe*. Macmillan, 1997. *Migration and Social Cohesion*. Elgar, 1999. *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*. Elgar, 1999. *Staat – Schule – Ethnizität*. Waxmann, 2002 and *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*. Oxford University Press, 2002. His interests include migration, religious minorities, multiculturalism, and transnationalism. – Address: Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, 51 Banbury Road, Oxford, OX2 6PE, United Kingdom.

“Entanglement” seems to be the condition best describing my year’s experience at the Wissenschaftskolleg. I think of “entanglement” in two ways. One meaning is “deeply involved and networked” in a variety of intellectual activities, academic projects, social relationships, and new friendships; these forms of entanglement were highly invigorating. The other meaning for me is “ensnared in sticky cobwebs” of work and responsibility – especially outside of Berlin and back at Oxford; these forms of entanglement were mostly frustrating. In positive and negative ways, therefore, these entanglements meant that my sabbatical year was not, of course, how I dreamed it might be. Instead of being filled with long hours with my feet on the desk, gazing out the window thinking or actually getting to read

new books, it often felt like a time of frantic juggling and keeping several balls in the air at once.

My proposed agenda at Wiko was to spend a year variously wrapping up a British national research programme that I directed for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) over the previous five years (the research programme on Transnational Communities; see www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk). This was achieved, I'm glad to say, mainly by writing a substantial final report for the Research Council as well as a comprehensive public report. I also managed to write a number of academic articles drawing on the ESRC programme, including a major piece presented at a conference in Princeton (see below). At the same time as bringing that programme to a close, I have been involved in setting up a new migration research centre at Oxford, also to be funded over the next ten years by the ESRC. This has entailed writing various launch materials, as well as making staff appointments, working with administrators on contract and budget issues, negotiating with designers and architects, and mundane (but admittedly fun) stuff like choosing office furniture and computer systems. Responsibilities around the Programme wrap-up and Centre creation meant that I had to make several trips back to Oxford (at least allowing me fleetingly to see friends and buy favourite foods for the family!). In these ways, the Wiko fellowship provided an extremely valuable time and space to both end and to begin some large-scale academic enterprises.

Other professional entanglements included: ongoing doctoral supervisions (admittedly my heart sank every time one of my students sent an e-mail with a large attachment), project networks (including proposal development for the European "6th Framework" programme) and edited books (I managed to finish three of these during the year at Wiko: *Culture and Economy in the Indian Diaspora*, co-edited with Bhikhu Parekh and Gurharpal Singh, in press with Routledge; *Globalisation, Globalism, Environments and Environmentalism*, co-edited with Darrell Posey, in press with Oxford University Press; and *Civil Enculturation*, co-edited with Werner Schiffauer, Gerd Baumann and Riva Kastoryano, in press with Berghahn). Also, meetings, seminars, and lectures around Germany and elsewhere connected me with old and new colleagues. In all, throughout the year, although I felt productive, I continuously felt very hurried. My own fault of course: I should have been more rigorous in minimizing academic entanglements before coming to Berlin.

For me, during the year perhaps the most satisfactory academic work surrounded a comprehensive paper commissioned by the American Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the *International Migration Review (IMR)*. As part of a state-of-the-art

conference on migration studies at Princeton University in May 2003, I was asked to prepare a piece on transnationalism and migration (that is, on the various ways migrants maintain social, economic, and political connections with their places of origin). This paper provided the ideal opportunity to draw together many of the findings of the Transnational Communities Programme and to reflect on them in theoretical and methodological perspective. The tremendous library services of Wiko were of great use in developing this work as well. By way of helping me to sharpen my contribution, in February 2003 the Wissenschaftskolleg and the Otto and Martha Fischbeck Foundation very kindly organized for me a seminar of colleagues from Germany, Denmark, Britain, and Spain. Over one and a half days, these colleagues provided invaluable criticism and advice solely on my paper. It was a stimulating and very rewarding event – and one for which I am ever grateful. Subsequently my paper was well received at the Princeton conference, and a revised version will appear in a forthcoming special issue of *IMR* (other material from the original, very long piece will be published in the journal *Global Networks* and elsewhere).

The intellectual stimulation facilitated by the Wiko colloquia, meals, and other occasions has meant a lot to me – a kind of conceptual or mental entanglement that was enriching. This was especially the case with regard to ideas surrounding evolution, which came up in various forms. Such ideas, terms, and approaches that I was exposed to have caused me to think differently about much of my own material concerning forms of social and political change.

While the academic entanglements were rather taxing, social entanglements throughout the year were wholly revitalizing. For my family and me, these largely centred on life at Villa Walther. The large number of children this year at Wiko meant that the Villa became a giant *Wohngemeinschaft*, with friends and children feeling very comfortable in each others' apartments and the garden and on the terrace. It was surprising and pleasing to observe the ways, over the course of the year, all of our uprooted kids crossed linguistic and cultural borders, became a common gang, running around and playing together in a place that importantly provided some sense of home-away-from-home.

Echoing the feelings of my wife and me, our two children have voiced strong sentiments. They express very mixed emotions about having to leave Wiko and Berlin: happy to go back to the place where they feel most attached, but sad to leave the place they've happily experienced.