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Preferred Citation: Cashin, Alison and Jirsa, Jakub. 2004. Preface. In *Thinking Together. Proceedings of the IWM Junior Fellows' Conference, Winter 2003*, ed. A. Cashin and J. Jirsa, Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows' Conferences, Vol. 16.



## Preface

Alison Cashin and Jakub Jirsa

The period of time during which the following essays were composed at the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM) – July to December 2003 – was marked by new divisions within the world and within its cultural and intellectual components: the U.S., Israel, the new Europe and the old Europe (characteristically enough, this division excludes and hides more than it includes and shows).

The Fellows, Visiting fellows, and Junior fellows at the IWM represented all of the “blocks” of that time. The following collection of papers delivered at the Junior Visiting Fellows' Conference at the Institute covers an equally wide range of topics: sociology, philosophy, ethnology, political science. Leading intellectuals from each of these “bloc(k)s” tried to demonstrate its uniqueness, discover its roots, and prove its relevance.

Indeed, there is little discernible internal connection among the contributions. But there is a certain feature that underlies this volume and all of its component articles.

The half a year of our research conducted under one roof demonstrated the positivistic principle that scientific inquiry and the search for the truth joins all divided, as well as the more humanistic rule that common work and life leads to the best mutual understanding. An understanding does not mean leveling differences or inequalities. To understand can mean both accepting and denying, but these attitudes are taken face to face. Understanding (and hence knowing) means having

something in front of us – in both its difference from us and in relation to ourselves.

Not more than a year afterwards, it seems that the rhetoric of these distinctions and divisions has become a distant past – in part because they were artificial inventions, in part due to pragmatic reasons of *Realpolitik*.

Last but not least, the conference papers in this volume express grateful thanks to all individuals and institutions that enabled the fruitful half-year of research. Bringing together people from different parts of the world, different specializations and different schools has value both in its outcomes and in itself. It can only be hoped that such projects will continue and find support in the future.