

Foreword

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At a seminar the historian Suranjan Das from the University of Kolkata (Calcutta) remarked how interesting it would be to look at the re-writing of school history books as is sometimes undertaken in South Asia from clear ideological viewpoints. In order to compare India and Pakistan he suggested putting on a conference in Paris at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.

That event has so far not materialized. But the fact that such a suggestion could be made shows that one of the strands of the MSH's activity – giving an international dimension to social science research by promoting in particular south-to-south dialogue – was fully recognized in its specificity and considered a *fait accompli*. It is that dimension, aiming to enrich scientific research with new paradigms emerging from the interaction among research carried out in different countries, which was key for organizing the conference that resulted in the papers published here.

The international conference *Conflict, Law and Constitutionalism* took place at the MSH from 16 to 18 February 2005. The key issues were as follows. As regards content, the plan was to give some in-depth comparative thought to the institutional management of social and political crisis and violence, not so much in the area of law as in developing the legal framework – the very concept of the legal state. Calling for the most part on political science specialists, philosophers, historians, there was also an issue of disciplines that meant bringing the study of law – in its relationship with inequalities, violence and the exercise of power – back into the social science area in accordance with a clear trend of the last few years (Perron, 2004). And finally, with regard to the dynamic of exchange between universities, it was about bringing together specialists from different parts of the world. Dialogue with French researchers was sought in particular in the session discussions, which had been prepared in advance by two discussants. The meeting also aimed in the longer term to set up an international network of collaboration, which encouraged several participants in the Paris conference to give papers at a conference organized by R. Samaddar (*What is Autonomy?*) in Kolkata in July 2005.

In itself holding the *Conflicts, Law and Constitutionalism* conference typifies the

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strategy adopted. On the one hand Ranabir Samaddar, a specialist in political science who has long worked on human rights, violence and refugees (Samaddar, 2003, 2004), and who heads a research centre in Kolkata, was at the heart of a network of researchers in both South Asia and Europe, having been in particular involved in a project in the MSH's International Advanced Study Programme on the topic of partition (India/Pakistan, former Yugoslavia: Bianchini et al., 2004). On the other hand, as director of the India and South Asia programme, I was concerned to increase cooperation in the legal area as seen from the social science standpoint – a scientific direction that was supported by the then administrator Maurice Aymard and the MSH's international evaluation committee. While the project's scientific cohesion was ensured by Ranabir Samaddar and the network of contacts was able to rely on the assistance of Rada Iveković, a philosopher and member of the International College of Philosophy (who had taken part in the previous project on partition), Franco-Indian cooperation acted as a 'spinal column' and structured the whole project. It was able to count on the support of colleagues in charge of other MSH international programmes (Françoise Daucé for Russia and the CIS countries, Dominique Fournier for Latin America). And so researchers from 11 nationalities, from South Asia, Europe, Russia, North Africa and Latin America, were able to meet and compare their experiences.

The publication of papers from that conference in *Diogenes*, first in French then in English and Arabic, seems like the logical extension of that strategy. It opens up to an even wider international audience the discussion that was started there, and by this very fact, I believe, should encourage people to develop the debate further.

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Translated from the French by Jean Burrell

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