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“Islamism” is not a scientific reality

“Islamism”, a political catchphrase used in public discourse, has no basis in any scientific reality. Without being clearly defined, the term has been the subject of a number of often impassioned position statements, editorials and petitions. The CNRS firmly condemns those who try to take advantage of the concept to question academic freedom, which is vital to the scientific process and the advancement of knowledge, or to stigmatise certain scientific communities. In particular, the CNRS denounces the attempts to delegitimise various fields of research, such as postcolonial studies, intersectional studies or research on the term “race”, or any other area of knowledge.

As concerns social issues, the role of the CNRS, and more generally the role of public research, is to provide scientific insight and collective expertise based on the findings of fundamental research in order to enable everyone to formulate their own opinions and make informed decisions. This insight must take into account any scientific controversies that might arise, as these are useful and conducive to progress provided that they are debated with an open mind and an attitude of respect.

The current controversy on “Islamism”, with its accompanying political exploitation, is emblematic of a regrettable weaponisation of science. Not the first nor the last situation of this type, it concerns sectors beyond the humanities and social sciences. And yet, there are other ways to move forward, through the broadening of research, the explanation of methodologies and the sharing of research results. This is also the mission of the CNRS.

It is in this spirit that the CNRS will be able to contribute to conducting the study requested by the Minister of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, with the goal of providing scientific insight in the fields of research concerned. This endeavour would be in keeping with analyses already carried out based on the report “Recherches sur les radicalisations, les formes de violence qui en résultent et la manière dont les sociétés les préviennent et s’en protègent” (“Research on radicalisation, the resulting forms of violence and how societies prevent them and protect themselves from them”) released in 2016 by Athena, an alliance uniting all academic forces in the humanities and social sciences in France’s higher education and research institutions, or the report “Les sciences humaines et sociales face à la première vague de la pandémie de Covid-19 – Enjeux et formes de la recherche” (“Facing the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic: Report on the orientations and modes of research in the humanities and social sciences”) released by the CNRS in 2020.

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