Introduction (English version)

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Comité pour l'histoire du CNRS

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- 1 From its origin, the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS) has included in the heart of the organization research on man and society: in 1946, the CNRS was composed of eight sections, one of which was the section dedicated to « social sciences ». This section included geography, archeology, art history, history, philology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, demography, juridical and economic sciences, anthropology and ethnology. This continued the tradition of the ancestors of the CNRS, in particular the *Caisse nationale des sciences* (CNS, created in 1930) and the *Conseil supérieur de la recherche scientifique* (CSRS, created in 1933), both of which already integrated research on man and society. From 1933, the CSRS had, notably, a section « history and philology » and a section « philosophy and social sciences ».
- 2 Even if initially the means put at the disposition of specialists in the social sciences were modest, the CNRS progressively modified the landscape of research in these disciplines¹. Before the Second World War there was almost no place where a specialist in the social sciences could seriously pursue his research: some teaching positions in secondary or college education, such as librarian or archivist, occasionally permitted one to spend time on research, but always in a secondary capacity to one's principle professional activity. There was an exception that applied to several members of the Institute of France (notably the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*), but largely sociologists, historians and economists were still, above all, teachers. Only grants and fellowships (notably those of Foundations such as Rockefeller, Thiers or Kahn) offered scholars the possibility to escape their primary professional obligations. But such opportunities were temporary: they did not permit the scholar to put off indefinitely his professorial duties. The scattered and sporadic efforts this produced formed a body of work that was hardly coherent and did not assure the constitution of a true, dynamic group or the development of a scientific community in the social sciences. Even the ancestors of the CNRS offered only limited opportunities during this time: the CNS was, for example, destined to fill in the gaps in higher education but not to institute a radically distinct body of work². And the efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation, during

the two wars, to stimulate and join together the social sciences in France, ended unsuccessfully³. The profession of researcher in the social sciences still did not exist.

- 3 The installation of the CNRS, and the establishment of a founding text, or statute, specifically for each member of the CNRS⁴, progressively modified this terrain. In offering individuals the possibility to devote themselves entirely to research, to bibliographical investigation, to scientific writing, to study an area or analyze archival material, the CNRS invented and assured the professionalization of research in the social sciences. In the same manner that it is possible to be a biologist or physicist engaged solely in research, it was from this point possible to be a « researcher in the social sciences », to conduct research full-time, and to be known and paid for this work. The invention of the profession of « researcher in the social sciences » is one of the important consequences of the integration of the social and human sciences (SHS) into the organization of the CNRS.
- 4 Another major consequence of this integration of the social sciences at the CNRS concerns the disciplines themselves. Earlier, this integration only reflected university structures: the divisions and hierarchies of social scientists, which resulted from the logic of the organization of secondary education, were reproduced at the CNRS. But gradually another logic took its place: the disciplinary separations were modified and the way that the CNRS itself functioned separated the practices from the strictly university-style logic. The CNRS's tutelage thus modified the intellectual landscape in the field of the social sciences. For example, the development of sociology, and notably its institutionalization in the universities, resulted largely from the legitimacy it had acquired as a part of the CNRS and from the experience that sociologists were able to acquire through this involvement. At the end of the Second World War, there were very few chairs of sociology at the university level and none delivered a diploma specifically in that field. Its existence was uncertain. Twenty or thirty years later, sociology constituted a recognized and legitimate university discipline, with numerous teaching posts, diplomas nationwide, and hundreds, even thousands of students.
- 5 The development of the social science division of the CNRS is the reflection, but also the motor, of the development of these sciences and their role in French society after the war. In a society that required reconstruction, the sciences, and notably the social sciences, were seen as tools to accelerate social and economic reconstruction in order for the changes to be more effective, controlled, and better understood. There were, therefore, multiple more or less durable research structures, in the form of associations, institutes and organisms. The sector SHS of the CNRS is one of the actors in this history, and its development must be put in relation to the general post-war movement in favor of greater knowledge about man and society⁵. The French situation wasn't exceptional: it was only a national manifestation of a more general movement that touched all western societies⁶.
- 6 Today the social sciences constitute an independent research sector, having a statute and an institutional nature comparable to other domains of scientific research: life sciences, earth sciences, astronomy or even the mathematical sciences. With more than 300 research laboratories, more than 2 100 researchers and roughly 1 600 engineers and technicians, the department of social sciences is one of the most important departments of the CNRS⁷. One can point to the significant expenditure for personnel in the general budget of the department: as opposed to other departments, personnel expenses constitute the overwhelming majority of expenses. But the principal

characteristic of research in the social sciences certainly resides in the place and role that the universities play in the operation of this sector: university research, that is to say research conducted by professors wherever the location of their work (CNRS laboratory, university team), strongly contributes to the life and production of research in the social sciences. To the 2 100 researchers of the CNRS working on man and society, add more than 4 500 teacher-researchers from universities who work in CNRS laboratories. And one must also add to these 6 600 social scientists 11 000 teacher-researchers that are not associated with any CNRS laboratory but are able to conduct research in teams at their university. The university is the principal, but not the only site of the research done by the SHS; and this is particularly true in history and literature. This proximity with the university, the material aspect (mixed research teams) and the intellectual aspects, occasionally furnished arguments for those who would like to see researchers transferred from the CNRS to the university, those opposed to the integration of the social sciences at the heart of the CNRS. This opposition has at times received serious consideration. The first post-war director of the CNRS, Frédéric Joliot, expressed the fear that the CNRS « would underwrite novels » if the SHS researchers were included in the organization. And only did the end of the 1940s see the appointment of a adjunct-director at the CNRS who represented the social sciences. In light of these two events, it is possible to examine the existence of a real will and a true scientific policy in the position of the SHS at the CNRS: « until the 1960s, one hardly sees directors who attempt a program of research⁸ ». This was perhaps due to the specific activities of social science researchers, to the strong intermingling of the CNRS and the University in these domains, the weight of the personnel expenditures, the question of professionalism of the research is different in the cases of the SHS and the physical, biological or mathematical sciences. In any case, keeping the social sciences integrated into the CNRS and the existence of a permanent researcher at the SHS were periodically questioned and debated.

- 7 For example it suffices to recall that at the end of the 1950s, there was a plan drawn up to transfer the CNRS/SHS researchers to the University⁹... A bit later, at the beginning of the 1970s, in a report that had wide repercussions, the OCDE also suggested taking the social sciences out of the CNRS¹⁰. At the end of the 1970s, the menace came from elsewhere : the Prime Minister at the time, Raymond Barre, and his advisors proposed putting a time limit on the notion of « researcher for life » in the social sciences. In an interview with Edmond Lisle published in this journal, this threat is described in detail. The threat occurred at a particular economic, social and political juncture. It was, equally, evidence of the desire of several men to put an end to work that they considered unproductive. This threat was also the result of institutional turbulence in the social sciences following the integration of numerous new groups, the inclusion of which heavily weighed on the personnel budget of the CNRS and slowed the recruitment of promising young researchers whose university titles and scientific renown was not yet incontestable.
- 8 In looking back at the history of the social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s, E. Lisle, director of social sciences at the CNRS from 1974 to 1981, shows how these sciences played an important role for society but also how they endured turbulent times. Echoing the French situation, two testimonies evoking foreign situations, that of the United States and of Great Britain, complete our issue devoted to the « threats to the social sciences around 1980. » The American situation is presented and scrupulously analyzed by Roberta Miller, who was a member of the Social Science Research Council

from 1976 to 1981, then executive director of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) from 1981 to 1984. She describes the determination of a new administration put in place by Ronald Reagan when he was first elected president to drastically reduce budgets allocated to research in the social sciences. The community reacted strongly and, paradoxically, the threat posed by the Reagan administration reinforced the unity and solidarity of this community.

- 9 Michael Posner, chairman of the SSRC from 1979 to 1983, recounts his personal experience as he evokes the threats to the social sciences in the wake of the election of Margaret Thatcher to the post of British Prime Minister in June 1979.
- 10 On reading these documents, the most striking thing is the proximity and the simultaneity of the threats the social sciences experienced from the end of the 1970s to the early 1980s. In the United States and Great Britain, as in France, research in the social sciences was seriously debated. The particular characteristics of the debate were different, but only because of the difference in the ways in which the social sciences are institutionalized and organized in the three countries. The reasons put forth to reexamine the situation of the social sciences are equally diverse, even if their supposed politicization played an essential role, notably in the United States and England. The reactions of the social science communities were themselves very different.
- 11 This issue proposes to arouse, we hope, greater curiosity around a theme sometimes forgotten or thought secondary: the history of the place and the role of the social sciences with the organization of the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique*.

NOTES

1.O. Dumoulin, « Les sciences humaines et la préhistoire du CNRS », *Revue française de sociologie*, 26, 1985, p. 353-374.

2.J.-F. Picard, *La République des savants. La recherche française et le CNRS*, Paris, Flammarion, 1990, p. 67-68.

3.B. Mazon, « La Fondation Rockefeller et les sciences sociales en France, 1925-1940 », *Revue française de sociologie*, 1985, vol. 26, p. 311-342.

4.Notably after 1959, publication date of official decrees modifying the statutes of the CNRS and creating the profession of researcher. See J.-F. Picard, *La République...*, *op. cit.*, chapter 7.

5.On these points, see the interview with Edmond Lisle published here. See also H. Machin, « The CNRS and Social Science Research in France, » in E Lisle, H. Machin. S. Yasin, eds., *Traversing the Crisis. The Social Sciences in Britain and France*, ESRC, 1984, p. 145-239.

6.H. Machin, « *The CNRS and...* », *op. cit.*, p. 151.

7.CNRS, *Chiffres et Indicateurs*, 2000.

8.J.-F. Picard, *La République...*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

9. This project was defended in the preparation of the third Plan in 1959 ; see J.-F. Picard, *La République...*, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

10. This was the report of Stanley Hoffmann, Wassily Leontief and Henry Tajfel, *Committee for Scientific and Technological Policy. Social Science Policy, France*, OECD, September 1974. See the interview with J.-J. Salomon, « L'OCDE et les politiques scientifiques », *La Revue pour l'histoire du CNRS*, November 2000, No. 3, p. 56.