Abstract

The urban riots that took place in French suburbs between October 27th and November 17th 2005 highlighted the circumstances of minors and young majors in problem areas in a spectacular way. The difficulties these encounter in becoming socialised, their sense of “social desperation”, the segregation and discrimination they are victims of, are part of nowadays debate on social policy. The republican model can no longer be applied rigidly and society can no longer be represented in class struggle terms only because such approaches have broadly led to underestimate other dimensions: the significance of the question of migrations, the time lag between “cultural” integration which is quite swift and “structural” integration, far slower for immigrants and their children, the existing gaps between different generations of immigrants’ children living in housing estates. The times and current difficulties undoubtedly call for the recourse to other approaches in addition to traditional ones as the latter point out “vertical” phenomena – the role of genealogical and legal dimensions, of family or institutions handing down some legacy- while assuming that everybody lives in one and the same world. These new approaches are, on the one hand, an approach that is fuelled by observation of current events and underlines gaps between contemporaries as well as between cultures, thinking patterns, fundamental principles; on the other hand, a “horizontal” point of view that stresses peer effect and the role played by urban environment.

At his 2002 Senate Board of Enquiry hearing on delinquency in young people, Thierry Baranger, President of the French Association of Magistrates for youth and family said: “It is no coincidence that a large pro-