

Josep Masabeu i Tierno, **La República del Raval. Fines de cohesió social**,  
Fundació Raval Solidari, Barcelone, 2010, 123 pp.

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Abstract: Josep Masabeu i Tierno, PhD in Pedagogy, has set up a cultural and educational centre, called Braval, in a troubled neighborhood in Barcelone, El Raval, which has become a paradigmatic place where immigrant children from different cultures, religions and languages learn how to live together, to integrate themselves, to achieve a more prosperous, civilized, ethical Catalonia within a Europe which belongs to citizens, not to merchants or financial plutocrats. With the greatest respect to the religion, language and culture of their original countries, Braval is proud to be an example of the application of the Catholic Church's social doctrine in XXIst century areas and specific realities with proletarian groups from Morocco, India, Ecuador, China, Bolivia, Romania, the Philippines, Bangladesh, etc., where social exclusion is fought and the incorporation into the workplace is promoted.

Key words: Braval, Raval, Josep Masabeu, Núria Gispert Feliu, Juan Pablo Garrido, Rubén Mestre, Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, Solidarity, Immigration, Solidarity Economy, Multiculturalism.

Josep Masabeu i Tierno is a recognized promoter of initiatives in which the implementation of social policies is clear. He studied Educational Science at the University of Barcelone and holds a PhD in Pedagogy. He was also a councillor in Gerona City Council representing *Convergència Democràtica i Unió* political party, having been put forward by *Unió Democràtica de Catalunya*, a Christian Democratic and Republican party, founded in 1932 by Manuel Carrasco Formiguera (1890-1938), who, as is widely known, left a widow, Pilar Azemar Puig de la Bellacasa, and eight children after having been executed, following Francisco Franco's orders, on 9th April, 1938. Masabeu is the founder, as well as the brains, of an unprecedented social initiative for the care of young immigrants in El Raval neighborhood in Barcelone, which has 47% of immigrant population who live in conditions of severe deprivation. Masabeu founded Braval in 1998 for the care of this immigrant, mostly foreign, population, in an attempt to provide them with options for their human, intellectual and subsequent university education so as to improve their employability and, consequently, their living conditions.

The book has been prefaced by Núria Gispert i Feliu, president of Caritas Spain until 2004 and, before that, of Caritas Barcelone, and who had previously been councillor representing *PSC-PSOE* political party in Barcelone City Council for sixteen years. Gispert is a woman who has devoted many years of her long life (born in 1936) to philanthropy related to associationism, to the care for the needy and to the pursuit of social cohesion. She has a deeply rooted, but peaceful, social conscience, for she is not a Rosa Luxemburg (1871-1919) or a Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1759-1799).

Núria Gispert states that, following her retirement six years ago, she started attending some meetings in the form of debates on immigration, which are held monthly in Braval. In 2010, when the book was published, the number of meetings held since 2005 had reached 41 and 190 experts had taken part in them. Among social policies those which should be applied to immigration are highly suggestive, and Braval is, undoubtedly, managing to become the spearhead regarding solutions to improve conditions for immigrants in Catalonia and the rest of the Spanish State with these interdisciplinary debates. These debates are coordinated by Masabeu, Braval president, and Núria Gispert, who are always joined by Braval programme director, Rubén Mestre, and Braval managing director, Juan Pablo Garrido, who at the time suffered the existing hard immigration policies in North America, where he studied the final year of high school and a Bachelor of Arts in Montreal (Canada), complementing it with a MA in Medieval History at the University of Toronto. Upon completion of these studies and having already been awarded these two Canadian degrees, he was expelled from the country and had to return to Spain. It should be added that Garrido, who was born in Madrid, is fluent in written and spoken English, French and Catalan. Therefore, he is a person with top professional experience who has suffered in his own flesh the brutality of immigration laws in Canada and in the United States, which are full of social and cultural prejudice. Moreover, many personalities have attended these cultured meetings and symposia, held in Braval, such as: many entrepreneurs from the Catalan business sphere; personalities from representative social

organisations, such as the corporation bringing together Catalan entrepreneurs, the Family Business Consulting in Barcelone, the San Isidro Agricultural Institute; Telefónica Internacional chief executive officer, Iñaki Urdangarín; representatives of various media, and almost all Catalan newspapers, radio and television stations; prominent members of foundations and associations that promote solidarity; the president of Latin Women without Borders; the honorable ex president of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol; lawyers; doctors; CC.OO. and UGT trade union representatives; lecturers from the University of Barcelone, Autonomous University of Barcelone, Gerona University, Pompeu Fabra University, International University of Catalonia, Ramon Llull University; and, practically all of the Generalitat authorities related to immigration, prison services, social welfare, vocational training and citizen participation. Politicians from Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, Partido Popular and PSC-PSOE have also attended these symposia. Masabeu poses some problems caused by the fact that Spain has become, after Germany, the country with the highest immigration rate in Europe, but, unlike Britain, France and Germany itself, immigration only started twelve years ago in our country and it now amounts to 12% of the Spanish population. Nevertheless, there has been a recent decline in immigration and some immigrants have returned to their home countries because of the economic crisis and, in particular, as a result of unemployment. According to the National Statistics Institute the first decade of the XXIst century closed with 5,598,691 foreigners registered in Spain (p. 20). On the other hand, the Spanish Immigration Law has undergone four amendments. Even if immigration has helped the growth of the Spanish Gross Domestic Product, the situation has changed dramatically today and, between 2012 and 2020, a substantial reduction has been forecast regarding the immigrant population in the Spanish State, which will have a considerable impact in Catalonia.

Indeed, the arrival of nearly a million immigrants in Catalonia between 2000 and 2010 has caused a major transformation in the Catalan social fabric. However, the main problem is not immigration but unemployment, which has hit Catalonia and its immigrant population. Furthermore, whenever there is a crisis, social cohesion is much more difficult to consolidate and solidarity actions are rarely implemented. Youth unemployment rate in the foreign population reached 44% in 2010 (p. 23). In accordance with the doctrine of Social Policy, Masabeu describes the four stages of the so-called immigrants' adaptation process as follows: i) «Survival: anything at any price»; ii) «Settling down: looking for a home»; iii) «Regrouping: bringing the husband or the wife and children and, later, the rest of the family»; and, iv) «Returning to their origins: trying to do here what the used to do back home» (p. 31). During the first three stages they seek to benefit from care services provided by public, private, state, autonomous regions, municipalities institutions, Cáritas, food banks, and other organizations, which are generally promoted by the Catholic Church. As for what Masabeu calls "Returning to their origins", it is in that fourth stage where major problems arise. Josep Masabeu is against referring to "integration" rather than to "settling down" regarding immigrants. In this settling down schools seem to be the main element and they have become spaces which offer real opportunities for intercultural coexistence among people from many countries, speaking different and numerous languages as well as professing different religions. Adaptation and assimilation are not easy and it has been proved in Catalonia that the proposal to incorporate a model of secularism, as is the case in the French Republic, does not seem to work nor is it appropriate (p. 33). Neither has the multicultural model worked in some countries where it has been experienced, as is Germany's case, nor the North American melting pot system is right for Spain. Masabeu suggests the model that should be implemented must combine multiculturalism and ethical uniformity in universal rights (p. 35). Masabeu's proposal regarding the building of coexistence spaces has materialized in Braval Centre, in El Raval neighborhood in Barcelone, where young people from different countries, religions, customs, and social practices find a place to coexist. Respect to others should be promoted, in particular as regards their beliefs, but without imposing one's views on others. Other religions should be respected, but, obviously, no one should be forced to hide being a Catholic, a Buddhist, an Orthodox or a Muslim. However, as expected, the greatest difficulties can be observed in the case of Muslims, especially those belonging to fundamentalist sectors. However, Josep Masabeu pointed out two obvious reasons for this: firstly, «Religions must be an instrument of peace» (p. 47); and, secondly, «Mutual respect regarding religious freedom is the key to the coexistence of Christians and Muslims» (p. 47). In this sense, Masabeu noted a very well known fact which is that the situation for Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox Christians in Muslim majority countries is downright difficult. Pope Benedict XVI himself has had several occasions to remind us of it and, as a matter of fact, he delivered a speech in the University of Regensburg main lecture hall, on 12th September 2006, in which he highlighted this fact, taking an example from the late XIVth and early XVth centuries, which resulted in a real media scandal because of a misinterpretation of what Ratzinger had actually said in Regensburg. But let's see the actual text in English: «I was reminded of all this recently, when I read the edition by Professor Theodore Khoury (Münster) of part of the

dialogue carried on – perhaps in 1391 in the winter barracks near Ankara – by the erudite Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity and Islam, and the truth of both. It was presumably the emperor himself who set down this dialogue, during the siege of Constantinople between 1394 and 1402; and this would explain why his arguments are given in greater detail than those of his Persian interlocutor. The dialogue ranges widely over the structures of faith contained in the Bible and in the Qur'an, and deals especially with the image of God and of man, while necessarily returning repeatedly to the relationship between – as they were called – three “Laws” or “rules of life”: the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur'an. It is not my intention to discuss this question in the present lecture; here I would like to discuss only one point – itself rather marginal to the dialogue as a whole – which, in the context of the issue of “faith and reason”, I found interesting and which can serve as the starting-point for my reflections on this issue. In the seventh conversation (διάλεξις - controversy) edited by Professor Houry, the emperor touches on the theme of the holy war. The emperor must have known that surah 2, 256 reads: “There is no compulsion in religion”. According to some of the experts, this is probably one of the suras of the early period, when Mohammed was still powerless and under threat. But naturally the emperor also knew the instructions, developed later and recorded in the Qur'an, concerning holy war. Without descending to details, such as the difference in treatment accorded to those who have the “Book” and the “infidels”, he addresses his interlocutor with a startling brusqueness, a brusqueness that we find unacceptable, on the central question about the relationship between religion and violence in general, saying: “Show me just what Mohammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.” The emperor, after having expressed himself so forcefully, goes on to explain in detail the reasons why spreading the faith through violence is something unreasonable. Violence is incompatible with the nature of God and the nature of the soul. “God”, he says, “is not pleased by blood – and not acting reasonably (σὺν λόγῳ) is contrary to God's nature. Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and to reason properly, without violence and threats... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons of any kind, or any other means of threatening a person with death...”». Pope Benedict XVI himself added a short comment on this text days later, on its third note, where he pointed out: «In the Muslim world, this quotation has unfortunately been taken as an expression of my personal position, thus arousing understandable indignation. I hope that the reader of my text can see immediately that this sentence does not express my personal view of the Qur'an, for which I have the respect due to the holy book of a great religion. In quoting the text of the Emperor Manuel II, I intended solely to draw out the essential relationship between faith and reason. On this point I am in agreement with Manuel II, but without endorsing his polemic.»<sup>2</sup>

Masabeu then provides a whole set of data which highlights the high level of failure taking place in both secondary and university education in Spain. For him, «immigration and education are a partnership which demands full attention and all available resources from government, industry entities and all social actors involved» (p. 56). School failure of immigrants in Catalonia, where Asian immigrants reach 57%, double the percentage of the Spanish population's. However, there are some examples of the opposite, such as the Pi i Margall public school in Madrid, where there are students from twenty different nationalities and, in spite of this, a high school performance is achieved (p. 59). From page 69, Josep Masabeu focuses his study on Braval's experience, which is located in a suburb of Barcelona with an area of 1.1 km<sup>2</sup>, with a population density of 43,140 per square kilometer, while the average in Barcelona is 16,164 per km<sup>2</sup> (p. 70). The average immigration rate in Spain in 2010 was 12% of the population, while in El Raval it was 47%. The largest amount of immigrants comes from Pakistan, who is followed in number by those from the Philippines and, then, from Bangladesh, Morocco, Italy, India, Ecuador, France, Bolivia, Dominican Republic, Germany, Argentina, Britain, Colombia, China, Brazil and Romania (p. 71). Infrastructure in El Raval is decaying as regards many houses, where the sanitation system is in very bad condition, in many cases, lacking hot water. The population has an unemployment rate of 30% and their professions are usually what is known as low profile (pp. 71-72). It is in this location and with this population where Braval is situated and operates in the field of solidarity, and non-profit development. The centre was declared a public interest organization by the Department of Justice of the Generalitat of Catalonia. Its legal form is that of an association with a board of directors. Braval was set up in 1998 and it can be said that it consolidated in 2002. In a neighborhood which is full of dysfunctional families, with a high unemployment rate, maladjustment, insecurity, violence, and poor school performance, while, at the same time, a lack of extracurricular activities, Braval has set out, over the past decade and a half, to achieve three things: i) Promoting social cohesion, by a) «building bridges to generate a multi-ethnic coexistence», b) «promoting the values of social harmony and personal training», c) «intertwining of cultures», and d) «removing barriers»; ii) Increasing work

against social exclusion and, at the same time, preventing any possible social exclusion by means of a) «increasing the cultural, professional and social standards», b) «developing the values of personal growth», c) «providing motivation and social and educational support», and d) «complementing the work of schools»; and, iii) Laying the foundations for a real progressive incorporation of immigrants into Catalan society, by a) «paying specific attention to the new reality», b) «improving expectations by providing opportunities», and c) «their incorporation into the workplace» (p. 75). Braval has fostered a multi-ethnic Sports programme and an Educational support center which completes the instruction received in both public and private schools. There are also Spanish and Catalan languages programmes in order to achieve the adaptation of immigrants and to make their schooling easier, in some cases, or their incorporation into the workplace, in other. Each year, during the month of July, from 9.00 am to 17.30 pm, Braval organizes activities for children aged 7-14, with the help of volunteering monitors from Barcelone, Zaragoza, Valladolid, Oviedo, Seville and Madrid, such as: various sports activities; visits to parks, museums, botanical gardens, zoos and public institutions; excursions, artistic sightseeing tours to monuments in Barcelone; craft, video, origami and robotics workshops; and, elementary level English, Catalan, Spanish, computing and music lessons, which are complemented by various recreational activities, such as watching films (pp. 85-86). Braval also organizes other activities, which include sports tournaments and camps, during Easter school holidays.

Braval has been awarded grants by the King Baudouin Foundation in Belgium for its multi-ethnic Sports programme against racism in football. Braval's social volunteers, as mentioned above, come from various locations in Spain during the month of July, and they come from Barcelone during the remaining months of the year. These volunteers are generally young professionals, university, high school and year one and two vocational training students. They belong to diverse social backgrounds, and have different ideas and religious beliefs. The opening of Braval's new facilities, when it had been developing its activities since 1998, took place on 5th June 2002, and was attended by the then president of the Generalitat of Catalonia, Jordi Pujol i Soley, and the then Cardinal Archbishop of Barcelone, Ricard Maria Carles. Other authorities were present, such as the Moroccan consul in Barcelone. Raval Solidari Foundation is the entity that sponsors Braval (p. 103). It has been awarded subsidies and grants by the Generalitat of Catalonia, Barcelone City Council, foundations, savings banks, companies, etc. Registration fees of participants in its activities are merely symbolic, since they only cover 7% of Braval's annual running resources. Braval won the Pelfort i Xinxó Award in 2009, which is awarded by the Sociedad Económica Barcelonesa de Amigos del País to private entities that promote social integration and social policies. In 2010 Braval was awarded the International Prize to Solidarity in Sports, organized by the Sport, Culture and Development Association. This award is international and is intended to go «anywhere in the world» to recognize and reward «the work of those individuals and organizations that constitute an example of generosity to help solve, by exploiting the great potential of sports, the problems of poverty, injustice, hunger, neglect, discrimination, disease and ignorance, especially among children and young people» (p. 108).

Josep Masabeu i Tierno's final reflections, apart from other considerations on international politics regarding immigration, which are superseded by the European Union or the member states governments' decisions, are concerned with daily issues which are exactly where Braval contributes the most and which include the following five priorities, according to Masabeu: i) «Defining a common denominator of principles, shared by all, on how to build the rights and duties of society» (p. 122); ii) «Preserving the rights of the host community. Catalan culture is based on Christianity and, leaving religious considerations aside, it sets the calendar, the language, the art, the law, the landscape, traditions, festivals. Immigrants have to respect their host country's traditions, symbols, culture, and religion» (p. 122); iii) «Establishing criteria different from zoning in immigrants' schooling»; iv) «Determining the requirements by which young people at the age of 16 may automatically have access to work after a few years of schooling» (p. 123); and, v) «Promoting and encouraging the participation of immigrants in the "standardized" social fabric so as to facilitate and fund activities for immigrant groups» (p. 123). Braval remains as a clear example of what the implementation of what the French call Social and Solidarity Economics (Social Policy) and cooperation to marginal social groups in a Barcelone neighborhood involves. Josep Masabeu, Juan Pablo Garrido and Rubén Mestre's initiative is exemplary from every point of view one takes it into account, and it has had a response and a recognition by public opinion and Catalan citizens which will make it worthy of the highest honors and awards in the future. It also represents a paradigm of Catholic Social Policy on immigration, which can be exported to other places where similar multiracial and multicultural urban proletariat situations exist, in cities that also have neighborhoods with very high standard of living. [Recibida el 7 de septiembre de 2011].

1 Unless otherwise stated, English translations of quotations are ours.

2 Benedict XVI, Faith, Reason and the University. Memories and Reflections, Regensburg, 12th September 2006. [On line: [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speech/es/2006/september/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060912\\_university-regensburg\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speech/es/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg_en.html)]. Original English version of the speech.